

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

THREE RIVERS, FRIDAY 18th FEBRUARY, 1851.

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ON THE USE AND VALUE OF PERSONAL EXERTION AS A MEANS OR MEDIUM OF SALVATION.

What we term *character* in a human creature, is generally, *artificial*, and produced by the modification of moral culture under the influence of moral principles. The culture may be divided into two classes, positive and negative. Good character can be formed only under the positive culture, on account of our proneness to evil, which needs continual counteraction: while this very proneness, under total neglect, or *negative* culture, will inevitably produce, in the eye of God, a *bad* character. We need not instance *education in vice*: it is too common; in fact most bad people are schooled in bad principles from their youth up, and many without a thought of better things.

The corruption of human nature, or Original Sin, is that natural proneness to do evil without reflection on it as evil; or, to serve *self* instead of a Superior. This may be small at first: but in its proneness, by proceeding from evil to evil, (Jer. ix. 3.) it is competent to any degree of moral depravity. On the contrary, a man cannot be *better*, without thought, care, and continual effort in that direction. We find a *capability* of improvement in almost every thing; and, where acted on, a *going on* unto perfection. The general method of Providence appears to be, a gradual development of certain seminal principles into life, activity, growth and maturity. We never witness a valuable member of society who has not become such by passing through these successive stages, and *himself* sustaining the labor of his own education: and this is the point on which the present observations turn. So likewise we never saw a *man of God*, that is, a good Christian, who would not tell us that he had become such by the labor of self conquest, and a constant struggle, more or less against the proneness of his heart to evil.

To establish *self-righteousness* is not our aim: the Gospel tells of none, and we are to seek for none. But yet we must *seek* the kingdom of God and his righteousness with the same diligence that we would if we had the natural ability to find it. This must be done through the plan and process of mental and moral discipline laid down in the Bible. This process is the identical one for clothing the man subject to its transforming influences with the *Christian Character*. 'Tis finely adapted for developing the lovely principle of gratitude, and for binding the affections to the Divine Benefactor with the golden chain of the most exalted love, formed by the hand and cemented by the breath of heaven. As in the Saviour mercy and truth are met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other: so in the Christian warfare the honest pride [if *pride* be the right term] of personal valor and exploit perfectly agrees with the modesty of dependance, and the consciousness of derived strength; and the instructive feeling of *zeal in the cause of self* is made to intertwine in its devoted grasp the unsullied honor of a Liege Lord. *Work* in the receiver, and *grace* in the giver, most appropriately unite under the bond of a *community of interest* in a particular course of action: for it must be conceded that, if it is a source of pleasure to a sinner to be saved, it is also a pleasure to the Lord Christ to save him: and hence this interest must suffer whenever that course of action is departed from. The Saviour is pleased to manifest an endearing interest in the welfare of his humble follower; and while he continues faithful to him that called him, he will in no wise cast him out. Yet is he stern in his own rights; and if any persevere unto final apostasy, he will "deny him before God and the holy angels." This while it cuts off all ground of excuse, practically enforces the doctrine of a future judgment; and touchingly appeals to the life and quick of the principle of *self preservation*; and nerves the arm to suffer for Christ's sake; and encourages under the pleasing as-

urance that the "light afflictions" borne in faithful and patient constancy are actually working out "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He knows he is under his Master's all-seeing eye, and he "strives lawfully" as one "whose praise is not of men but of God." This clearly demonstrates that there is a *something* concerned in the Christian warfare which, while it teaches the Christian soldier to disclaim all self-righteousness, yet freely allows him to value the triumphs of faith in some degree as if won by his own individual achievement. He is commanded to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, and to make his calling and election sure: but he is required to abjure self-dependence, and hang on the arm of eternal strength. The same interest unites both the leader and the led as the hand serves with and under the head; and the "fight of afflictions" the one endures to manifest his gratitude to Him who suffered for his sake, endears to his own heart the prize of his high calling as something won by the toils of his own arm, and the consumption of his own strength. The boon is not a gift bestowed without *meanness* to receive, estimate, and use it as the meed of well tried fidelity through scenes of trial and temptation: but it comes to the receiver as the gracious answer to tedious watchfulness and trembling anxiety—as the crown of martyrdom for constancy that would smile at the scaffold or the stake. This community of suffering with and for the Saviour induces him to regard the cause of Christ as *his own*; and the same action that evinces the sincerity of his heart and the depth of his gratitude, is both bringing him nearer the object of his ambition, and purifying and preparing his affections and faculties for its enjoyment in the presence of Him by whose own heart's blood it was purchased for him. And when the "crown of life" is presented to him that was "faithful unto death," 'tis not as the sinful lavishment of a doating father on a thankless spendthrift son; but the gratuity of a judicious foster parent to a poor adopted orphan, whom faithfulness "in a few things" had recommended as trustworthy of a large inheritance.

But let us view the reverse of this picture on the scheme which denies the existence of "unquenchable fire."—Alas! not a feature of it is to be found. Trial—chastisement—fidelity—"Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more!" Your Christian warfare—panoply—"The whole armour of God"—where, —what is it to the man who denies the "judgment of the great day?"—"From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it: but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores."—What has this remorseless spoiler done? By expunging those principles and their accompaniments from the creed of its deluded and presuming votaries, it has, at a bold stroke, cut away the very heart and soul of the Christian profession. It has thrown loose the rein on the neck of lawless passion, and surrendered all moral guidance and restraint to its unbridled controul. It has nothing to offer as the *prize* of a high and holy calling to call forth the virtuous energies of the ever active soul; and therefore presents no motive as an allurement to the affections, to win them from "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and attract and attach them to the side of piety, and enlist them in the service of the Supreme Benefactor. It suspends before the view of the supposititious believer no crown of glory as the *reward* of well-tried fidelity; but sends him forth in all the untamed strength of "the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life," to range at large on the open fields of unshackled indulgence,—to seize at pleasure, and enjoy in unbounded prodigality, without even a suspicion that "for all these things GOD will bring him into judgment." It freely allows him to make "pure religion and undefiled," his scorn and derision and the butt of profane and blasphemous wit; while yet of heaven he may boast as of an unalienable inheritance and irreversible possession.* Of this he is infallibly certain, even under the most spiteful malignity and deadly hostility towards Him from whom it is expected to come; and the venom of hell itself is suffered to overflow and deluge the soil where the seeds of grace are to be planted, and bear fruit to eternal life.—Thus the soul may be

* The writer of the above once asked a well dressed person in a stage, calling himself an *Universalist*, whether he would feel regret to see a brother a determined atheist and bitter enemy of the Gospel: to which he promptly replied: no, I should not!