

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

THREE-RIVERS, FRIDAY 24th SEPTEMBER, 1830.

PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE.

It is matter of the deepest regret, that those whose talents qualify them to take the lead in the *periodical* literature of our country, and who bring to their tribunal to be censured or praised the books which are given forth to the world, have not more generally adopted a standard of judgment, as regards things connected with religion, less at variance with the word of God. It is no very rare circumstance to take up an article professedly devoted to Theological disquisition, and find its train of argument throughout as if harnessed to the chariot of defiance, and driving Jehu-like in the very face of the plainest declarations of Scripture. Setting aside some complimentary expressions, which seem indeed rather as burlesque on the sacred word, a learned heathen might mistake some of those profound musings for the cogitations of one who had rambled in the groves of Academus, or caught his inspiration from the lips of a Stoic or an Epicurean master. This is a sore evil under the sun; and besides its present evil consequences, we cannot view it without a feeling of serious concern for the well being of the rising generation. These periodicals of course fall into the hands of the young and inexperienced, whose intellects are but ill prepared to separate truth from the webs of sophistry in which it appears to be purposely entangled; and whose hearts are not so soberly and affectionately knit to the faith of Christ as to be alive to those insidious attempts at lowering the authority of the maxims of the gospel. The tribute of homage that is paid to those

"Combined usurpers of the throne of taste"

dazzles their eyes by a show of authority, and so imposes on their understandings as to make them regard those laboured pages as little less than oracular. Those who are not decidedly imbued with a feeling of profound veneration for the Holy Scriptures, are almost sure, at least, *not to be offended* with this spirit of *libertism*; many are pleased and amused; and some think themselves fortunate in being furnished with a stone to throw at *bigotry and priestcraft*. Yet those people would feel themselves sorely aggrieved were any one to question the purity of their Christianity, or insinuate that they still must "become as a little child" ere they can be true disciples of the Gospel. Like those who profess a *general*, but deny a *particular* providence, they have a general religion, but none that is particular. They may even deem it a vast treasure: but it is all in a solid mass, and they cannot for the life of them unpocket an *individual* penny for any *particular* purpose whatever.

The consequence of this disingenuous method is, that a standard of *human reason* is set up as the scale and dividers by which to measure and calculate the *philosophical* value of every particular in the Christian's Creed; and whatever does not square with that is counted for so much dross. The avenues to what we shall term the *Christian sensibilities* thus become hermetically sealed; and these philosophers must be actually inducted into a *new faith* before they can exhibit a single shade of temper and disposition which owes its origin exclusively to the grace of Christ. It is true that they may possess modifications of character resembling the Christian, but they are only rubbed on the outside from contact with Christian society.

We have been led into the above train of reflections by the perusal of an Article, No. 1 of the Edinburgh Review for January 1830; one of the leading sentiments of which is, that there is no such thing as a *particular providence* superintending the world of mankind. It is learnedly written; exhibits proofs of extensive reading; contains a number of very just observations; and runs through 57 pages. The argument chiefly respects the question in a *national* point of view. But as *individuals* are concerned in the matter, we shall include them in the following remarks.

Do the Reviewers believe in a *general* superintending providence? They inform us that they do. But if we understand them rightly, they think its superintendence is rather the operation of a code of *general laws*, somewhat resembling the laws impressed on the material system of the universe, and then left so to work their own course. But, does that which is general comprehend the whole or only a part of the whole? Is a *general* made up of *particulars*, or is that gen-

eral, as respects a class, which does not embrace *every one* of the class?—Does a *general* providence reach *every individual* at every moment of time, or does it not? Do the Reviewers believe that any particular part of this whole is the object of particular care, or a care that actually contemplates some particular part, and intends its preservation? Is that *providence* which has not a special and particular aim in providing for that over which a general providence is continually exercised? Let us have recourse to a familiar illustration. The British Constitution is a system of general providence to superintend generally the general interests of the whole nation. But it is not a system of *particular* providential interferences. Its business is not to take care of particular individuals on particular emergencies; but of the *whole mass* on *general* emergencies, namely; *continually*. Therefore under this general system of jurisprudential providence, no particular individual is or can be contemplated; and consequently cannot find redress for any particular grievance whatever. It is beneath the dignity of the British Constitution to turn aside from the high road of its general superintendence of the general affairs of the whole nation, and amuse itself by listening in detail to the complaints of particular individuals at particular times, and extending to them its guardian care. Or if a hostile army should land on the shores of England, the Constitution must exercise no particular act of providence for the protection of a part of the nation.

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." This certainly has the appearance of evidence for a particular providence continually watching over particular individuals, according to some specific plan. But whether we are authorized to say that God will depart from a regular scheme of superintending every particular thing, as any or every man may choose to claim singular interpositions, is not now the question: but whether that general scheme does embrace such interpositions.

Before we proceed further, however, let us endeavour to ascertain the *object* of God's particular providence over mankind. It cannot be for the sake of our interests in this world. He has given us no other rules for becoming rich and prosperous than a general command to *honest industry* and economy, things well known before the Gospel was preached; and which, in all probability, would not have been mentioned in it were not *religious duty* concerned. From these the whole world cannot depart without the sure prospect of worldly ruin, though partial trespasses continually occur. It is not his intention to make us all rich in this world, nor any of us good and happy solely by the means of riches: and therefore many times the most prudent and virtuous means entirely fail. If we lay aside private judgment, neglect "times and seasons," and look to His providence for the supply of our bodily wants, His providence will leave to us the reward of our own presumption. The same is true of the accidents and dangers of this life. In both cases, too, an *error in judgment* will be attended with the same consequences, as to *worldly success*, as if we had despised prudent management. Such errors cost many a valuable life, where there is not even a shadow of blame; when a different course might have "added to their days fifteen years." Things of this kind may be providential warnings;—namely: *it is provided* that they shall serve as admonitions to "be ready" for the closing scene of life. But we must have a practical feeling that they are in detail *particular* providences to us, or we cannot be warned by them. An unbeliever might call them chance or accident,—or the effects of natural causes. The *Christian*, however, cannot believe that God *chanced* to appoint that they should serve as warnings, and then regard them as the voice of God. This part he cannot refer to the course of nature as "established in the physical and moral world." He must refer it to the *prior* revelation of God's will respecting himself in particular, as well as all the same as he is for the Gospel generally; and without calling it a *new* revelation.

But is it any misfortune to a good Christian, whose fallible judgment may cause his death, to die at any moment? Is it better to be in this world of sorrow than "to depart and be with Christ?" Yet the lives of the Apostles were secured to them for a season by the finger of God. As a special favour to themselves amidst perils of every sort? No; but for the planting of the cross where Christ had not been named. But we think that, since the days of miracle have passed away, to pretend to mark the movements of the *hand* of providence, unless by a reference as above to the Book of Revelation, in the small particularities of life, is folly in the extreme, if not presumption. We heard a person not long since assert, that on a certain occasion God