

## NOTES ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

## NO 3.

## THE IDEAL OF LIFE.—PERFECTION.

IT is greatly to be feared that we get into a careless, thoughtless way of using these words *Christian, Christlike, holy*, and the like; or else that we come to fancy that they belong only to a certain peculiar and distinguished class of Christians, and not to Christians in general. But what foundation is there for any such distinction? When our Lord said, "Be ye perfect," did He mean that only some of His followers were to be perfect, and not all of them? Did He mean that these words applied to Apostles and Saints and Martyrs, the foremost leaders in His army, and not to you and me, and baptized men in general, the rank and file that followed him? If God be our Father as well as theirs, then the obligation is laid upon us as truly as it is upon them.

"Be ye holy," is a command addressed indifferently to all who call upon His name. And yet there is some appearance of truth in the statement of the French Sceptic that the principles of Christianity are not in these days literally acted upon by men who live in the world; but are left to monks and nuns, and those who have visibly given up the world. I say, there is some appearance of truth in it. Should the time come when such a statement shall be altogether true, then Christianity will be pronounced to be a religion suited only for a small portion of the human race; and the next step will be to set it aside altogether as a system worn out and effete, which might have been of use in times when men were only half-civilized and uneducated, but has ceased to be applicable to our advanced civilization. So long as we pronounce the religion of Christ to be the religion of mankind, so long as we call ourselves by the Christian name, so long do we virtually accept the condition which our Lord has imposed indiscriminately upon all. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Another and perhaps even a simpler view of this necessity may be considered. Every one of us hopes to be saved. We all want to go to heaven when we die. You never knew of a person unless he was either of imperfect intellect or of infidel opinions or of grossly immoral life, who did not wish to be saved and hope to be saved. And yet many who express these desires and hopes, would think that the requirement "be ye perfect," was much too high for them even to think of. Now what is the true glory and blessedness of the heavenly state? Is it not its sinlessness, its perfection? Is it not, that there we shall be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect—that when our Lord shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is? But how can we convince ourselves, to say nothing of others, that we are desiring the perfection of heaven, unless we are desiring and striving for perfection now, here on earth? And how can we think that we are preparing for heaven unless

we are endeavouring to acquire that spirit which shall be in harmony with its sacred employments? "We may as well expect" says William Law, "to go to a heaven where Christ is not, as to go to the heaven where He is, without the spirit and temper which carried Him thither."

And here let me point out the mistake which is made by those who fancy that the requirements of Christianity is something harsh and difficult, the attainment of which may not even be thought of or endeavoured after by a Christian on earth. The case is just the reverse. Only those can have peaceful hearts who long and strive to be like Christ. The adoption of any lower standard brings not only failure, but dissatisfaction and misery. And this point I willingly put to the test of your own experience. There are persons who once deliberately adopted this standard. But they grew disappointed with themselves: they failed so often, their arrows seemed to fly so wide of the mark, that they gave it up in despair. Let me ask such persons one plain question: Are you happier now that you have adopted a lower standard, now that you are contented to do as others do than you were when you were like a wrestler in the arena, or a runner in the course? Are you more peaceful, more hopeful, more joyous in your heart of hearts? It is true, you have less of effort and of struggle, less of watchfulness and self-denial, an easier and a more careless life; but is it really happier and more peaceful? I leave the answer to your own conscience.

I address myself to those who want to be saved, who want to be Christians indeed, who want to live like Christians. It is not I who say it, but their Lord and Master. "Be ye perfect." Have no lower standard of life, and admit of none lower as allowable to a Christian. Cultivate humility of mind. Have lowly thoughts of yourself, your character, your attainments; for humility is the foundation and indispensable condition of all Christian goodness. Watch and pray. Resist temptations at the beginning. Avoid all occasions of evil, and never for a moment trifle with the counsels of your conscience. Set Jesus Christ before you as your great Example. Draw the hope of pardon from His cross; seek for the guidance and support of His Holy Spirit in your endeavours to imitate Him. Draw near to His table in faith, and with earnest, lowly, penitent preparation. Keep your eye upon the glory which is beyond, to which you hope to come, for which you desire to prepare. It is true the gate is strait, and the way is narrow; but it leadeth unto life.

And let us all remember that the only time which is available for our work is the present, and, which is even more necessary to be remembered, that the present time is as good as any other that we ever shall have, or ever could have had. "There is no falseness of our hearts," it has been well and truly said, "that that leads us into greater errors than imagining that we shall some time or other be better than we are, or need be now," or that we could have lived better lives, had our lot been cast in

different circumstances, or in a different time of the world's history. One thinks that he could have been a good Christian if he had lived in the time of Christ. Another has quite made up his mind that, after a certain time, he will adopt a very different manner of life from his present. One is saying in his heart, when I am older, when I have accomplished this business or this work, then I will try to understand what this precept of Christ requires of one. We are reminded of the answer given by Cineas to Pyrrhus, King of Epirus. When the king told him of all the conquests he intended to make, Cineas asked him what he would do when all this was accomplished. "O then," said Pyrrhus, "we will live at ease and enjoy ourselves with our friends." "Why then Sir," was the reply, "do we not now live at ease and enjoy ourselves?"

You hope to be a better Christian some future day. Why not be a better Christian this day? A few months hence, or a few years later, you determine that you will enter upon a life of greater earnestness and devotion. Why not take advantage of the present time, and begin at once? Believe me, there is no other time that you can make sure of; there probably will be no time better, or so good, even if it should come; and there is no time in which you are more certain or so certain of the aid of God's heavenly grace: "now is the accepted time: now is the day of salvation."

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## WHY SOME CLERGYMEN FAIL.

BY RICHARD FERGUSON.

NOT only does the too active and prominent co-operation of the clergyman's wife in parish work, by seriously interfering with her household duties often impair her husband's success, but from numerous other reasons such a course is highly inexpedient, and nearly always defeats its own object, as with all deference and delicacy I shall proceed to show.

Far fewer women relatively than men, possess the qualities requisite for making them leaders among their own sex. Where one woman is qualified to lead women, at least seven men are qualified to lead men, not because women as a whole are inferior in force of character, penetration, and general governing qualities to men, (as indeed we all well know,) but because men are vastly easier led than women. Such a degree of natural ability and force of character, is requisite for making a woman a leader among women, that all the individuals of this description we have met in a lifetime, may be counted on the fingers of one hand. Dozens of parishes there are that don't possess one. Hundreds of clever and even brilliant women are profoundly incapable of leading women, who, belonging to the opposite sex, would be kings among men.

The reason of female intractability is this: Every woman lives in a little world of her own, in a fragrant little Eden of unselfish hopes and aims. There is vastly more of individuality in women than in men. Women