

But here is the peculiar excellence of the religion of Jesus Christ, that it makes the growth in divine favor, and the excellence of human character, to consist in filling up all relative duties. When the master fulfils the law of Christ to his servant, and the servant fulfils the law of Christ to his master, they are in the moral and religious world perfect equals—perfect characters, and equally fit for the honors and bliss of heaven. But as no man or woman stands only in one relation to mankind, it behoves them to have a proper regard to all relations, in order to perfection; and as some occupy many relations, excellency of character to them is of more difficult attainment, because it calls for the discharge of so many distinct classes of duties. Hence he that is only a master, and neither a husband nor a father, and he that is both a master and a husband, and not a father, may more easily fill up the outline of his relative duties than he who is both a master, a husband, and a father. In proportion as relative duties are multiplied, both in kind and in number, this perfection of character is of more difficult attainment, and is more honorable when attained. As in the parable of the talents he who gained two, having received but two, was as fully approved as he who had gained five, with five; so he who faithfully fulfils the law of Christ in all the relations in which he stands, is as perfect a character as he who stands in many more relations, and yet fills up the measure of them all.

Some in this lax and licentious age of reason, as well as of religion, imagine that a person may be a very eminent christian, because of some rare excellence, even though he very obviously fails in some very common matters, in discharging the more ordinary relative duties. Thus sister Lavinia was very much commended by brother David, because she appeared so heavenly minded as to neglect her household affairs. She read and sung, and prayed, half the day, and often visited her christian friends the other half; and it was not until her eldest daughter, Susan, was broken down in constitution by over exertion in domestic toils, and little Jane died in consequence of an autumnal cold, occasioned by the want of stockings and apparel suited to the season, that David could be convinced that hers was not the most excellent character in the church. David, too, was regarded as a model by all the disciples in the tabernacle, because he devoted so much time to instructing the youth of the neighborhood, and attending meetings far and near; and might have to this day been regarded as a perfect model of christian character, had not his sons grown up in comparative ignorance, and fell so much below the par of the neighborhood in both common and religious education.

Edward Early was the most liberal contributor for all religious and benevolent purposes in the town of Cairo, and was most constant in attending church. His whole household was in the first order; his children well educated, his servants just as they ought to be: he was beloved by all the neighbourhood for his punctuality, generosity, and good manners; but he was never known to pray in his family, nor to spend an hour in the week in his closet, either in private reading of the scriptures or in personal devotion.