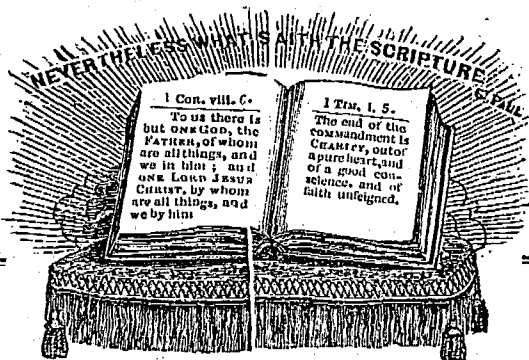


THE BIBLE



CHRISTIAN

TRUTH, HOLINESS,

LIBERTY, LOVE.

Vol. V.]

MONTREAL, OCTOBER, 1848.

[No. 10.]

WHAT IS IT TO BE AWAKE TO THE SOUL?

BY REV. DR. DEWEY.

Let us see what it is to be awake in worldly things. How clear is the vision of men when directed to their outward interests! How keenly do they discriminate, how accurately do they judge, how eagerly do they pursue! It needs no Sabbaths, no set times, to meditate on stocks, and bargains, and speculations. It needs no sermons to remind men of these things. Every sense, and member, and faculty is awake, and alive, and intensely employed, in the earnest toil and competition of life. Here are no faint impressions, no dim perceptions, no doubts, no objections, no evasions. To the worldly, it may be said—to those of the worldly who now hear me, I may say—you are all inquiring how you shall do more, and gain more; not excusing yourselves, and striving to do the least that will satisfy your own minds; not excusing yourselves, and putting off business, as you put off duty, upon your neighbour; and saying it may be proper for this, and that, and the other man, to go forward, and do business, and get gain. No, you grasp at the bare chance of worldly profit. You step manfully forward, not waiting for others, not walking timidly and doubtfully, and straining your eyes, to detect, on every side, shapes of evil and danger, as men who are half asleep. No; you are not irresolute, nor doubtful, nor cowardly about these things. You have no fear of pledges and promises, and forms of promise in business; no fear of bonds, and notes, and covenants, in transactions where the whole heart is interested. Many have not half enough fear of these things.

But, alas! how different from all this wakeful zeal and activity, and readiness, and forwardness, and courage, and manly decision, is the ordinary pursuit of religious things! Here, alas! men have doubts. They do not see things clearly. They are afraid of some evil lying in wait. They are afraid of forms and covenants, and sacramental vows. They doubt about prayer. They doubt about public worship. They question whether they shall not get just as much good at home. Above all, they doubt about religious undertakings, and efforts, and charities. It is quite a matter of speculation, they think, whether any good will be done. The case is completely reversed, from what it is in worldly things. A speculation there is a grand chance for the acquisition of goods. But in religious things, the noblest chance for infinite good to ourselves and others, is but a doubtful speculation. If there is adventure, or experiment, or speculation here, a thousand voices are raised against it; while the whole business of life is more or less a business of adventure and risk. If it is proposed to send the Gospel to China, or Hindoostan; why it is a great way off, and the people are a strange people, and the success is doubtful; but there is no difficulty in fitting out ships to send merchandise to China, or Hindoostan. If it is proposed to form an association to relieve and instruct the poor at home, the subject is surrounded with difficulties and doubts; but a company for speculation in golden mines or golden visions, can be formed without difficulty—and without prudence.

“They that sleep,” says the apostle—speaking literally—“sleep in the night.” And is there not a spiritual night brooding over the minds of thousands? There is nothing in the world so glorious as the perfection of God; there is nothing so near as his presence. And yet how many habitually walk in the sense and presence of every thing but the ever manifested and omnipresent Divinity! Eyes have they, but they see not, and ears have they, but they hear not. They see all objects; but see them not as the tokens of his power. They hear, but they hear not the voice of God. They hear every thing but those calls that are made upon the soul; the calls of blessing, and trial, and

temptation, and warning, and encouragement, that are all around them. They mark every thing in the paths of life but those directions, and commands, and exhortations, that constantly address themselves to the spiritual nature. They see not, at every step, duties, mercies, privileges, means of virtuous improvement, opportunities of usefulness, cares of the soul to be taken, cares of other men's good and true welfare, dangers admonishing them, blessed hopes beckoning them onward, heaven opening to them. They do not walk in the abiding and the living sense of these things.

This it would be, in some measure, to be awake to the soul. But what it would be altogether, our perceptions of the soul and its interests, are, perhaps, too dull for us to tell, or to comprehend. Well may we suspect that our standard of religious wakefulness and diligence is far too low. Well may we suspect that we do not yet know what it is to be awake to all the glorious and affecting concerns of our moral and immortal welfare; and that if we were thus once awakened, every thing in this world would appear in a new light; we should see with new eyes, we should apprehend with new senses, we should be aroused to an impression more profound and overwhelming than ever this outward world has made upon us. If, indeed, we can so strongly grasp this world; if we can so strongly apprehend, and so eagerly pursue the mere forms of things, the vanities that perish in the using, the trifles of a day; with what ardour and intensity would the soul put forth its powers, when it once laid hold on realities! If the charms of pleasure can so fascinate men, how would the beauties of virtue enrapture them! If glittering gold can so dazzle them, how would they gaze, if they saw them, upon the riches of holy truth, and life, and immortality! If the most ordinary good news can so delight them, what would the Gospel do! If earth can win and bind all their warm affections and sympathies, how would heaven bear away their thoughts to more delightful meditations, to more holy friendships, to more blessed hopes, to more ineffable visions of beauty and beatitude, than all that this world ever unfolded, or offered, to its most ardent votaries! Then would worldly desire, and love, and zeal be more than transformed; they would be regenerated to new life and power. He, upon whom this happy renewal of the soul should pass, would find that nobler energies had slept within him than he had before imagined to be a part of himself. He would come to feel that he had undervalued the gift of being. He would thank God as he never before thanked him, for the blessing of existence, and the promise of immortality.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

Religious ideas, beliefs, impressions, should be diligently transmitted. Whatever of Christian faith or feeling the parent has should be communicated to the child. Some persons seem to have scruples on this point. They say that all persons ought to form their own religious views in the exercise of their own mature reason; and that to teach them our views in their childhood is to preoccupy their minds, and hinder the free exercise of that reason in after years, and deprive it of the great right of unbiased judgment. There are many disputed points in religion, they say, and it is fairest and best to leave the young mind free to decide for itself on those matters in which no one has the right to decide for another. Let the child grow up without prejudices in favor of any particular doctrines that he may judge for himself independently, when he becomes capable of judging. This is wretchedly false reasoning, I think. You certainly cannot impart to your child any religious views different from your own. You cannot in good faith or common honesty, communicate to him as truth what you do not regard as truth. You

must teach him your own views, if any—yours or none. And not to teach him any is to neglect the period when the human mind is most susceptible of religious impressions, the period which is to after-life what the spring-time is to the harvest. There is an opportunity then, for which the child is not responsible, but for which you are responsible; which he cannot improve, and which, if you neglect it, is lost forever,—a loss which no future exercise of his reason can supply or compensate.

There is a tendency in our time to carry the idea of liberty to a most extravagant extent. The idea of authority is getting obsolete in many quarters—as if authority were always a usurpation: whereas, in many cases, it is a duty and the non-exercise of it is guilt.—The real rights of human beings are, in truth, so very sacred, that we are apt to think we cannot overstate them, cannot too jealously abstain from interference with them, cannot give anybody his own way to much. This morbid feeling about liberty and independence, which has various insane manifestations in our day, is coming to affect injuriously the relation between parents and children. Children must not be interfered with! must not be governed! Human nature is so divine, that it must not be tampered with, but left to the development of its own heavenly instincts, which are most heavenly—in fact, are divine inspirations—in their earliest days. “Heaven lies around us in our infancy,” says a great poet, and many have adopted his poetry as their philosophy. Leave young minds free, we are told—free as the mountain air. Shackle them not with your old-world notions. Fetter them not with your beliefs and habits. Let them alone, and heaven will guide them, and the God within will fashion them by a better model. You infringe their rights, you violate their sacred freedom, and stifle the celestial melody that runs through the strings of a free soul, when you undertake to curb and direct them, and overlay the divinity within them by your laws and regulations, and your world-worn ideas of things. Let them alone; leave them free. Such is the purport of some of the philosophy of the day, and the idea reaches and influences multitudes who know nothing about the philosophy of it, or whence it comes or whither it tends. I think we may see some of the fruits of this amazing deference to children in the absence of humility, of respect for elders, for religion, for anything human or divine, in which many of them are trained and are growing up. Young men and maidens, of quite tender years, have grown competent, and are taught that it is a free and very noble thing, to pass their flippant judgments on all time-hallowed truth, and sneer in tranquil superiority at all the gray-haired wisdom of the world as error and dotage.—Freedom and independence are, indeed, the choice and immeasurable blessings of our time,—liberty, both civil and religious, physical and mental, national and individual; but if the idea is to be pushed to the wild extreme which some tendencies indicate, it will render inevitable, by reaction, a sterner, darker despotism over soul and body, than the world ever saw before.

But the rights of children! They have their rights, sacred ones, many of which the wisdom, conscience and affection of the Christian parent distinctly point out. And their foremost right is a right to that which they most need, namely, an efficient and authoritative governance and guidance on the part of those whom God and nature have set over them for their good. They have a right to a strong and wholesome authority exercised over them, mildly, without sternness or severity, yet firm and decisive, and to be put under that rational and generous bondage of wisdom and love which may save them from the bad and debasing bondage of their own reckless caprices. They have a right to the fruits of your experience and wisdom, to have them put into their minds, wrought into their convictions and ways of life; and this they can best have done, in numerous instances, not by your reasonings, nor by being left to their own instincts, but by your authority, the weight which your character has with them—by your giving them positive instruc-

tion, and laws not to be questioned. If the parent has any definite religious beliefs, impressions, and principles, the child has a right to have them instilled from the earliest period into his mind, as much as he has a right to claim daily bread at your hands.—He has a right which he cannot enforce or understand, but which the God of nature makes obvious and will vindicate,—a right to claim of those in whose hands he is placed in his helplessness that they avail themselves of that susceptible period to give him the groundwork and materials for a religious faith and feeling. Give him, transfer to him your opinions and impressions. Some of them may be erroneous: of that point he will have a right to judge, and will judge, hereafter.—He may modify those views very much, when he comes to revise them, in the legitimate exercise of his freedom in after years. Be it so. No matter for that. Though he should greatly change every opinion and impression, you will still have done a work of unspeakable value for him. If you are faithful and reasonably fortunate, you will have given him, along with your opinions and impressions, a religious bias, a spirit of faith, an early, strong, unquestioning sense of the reality of spiritual things and relations. The particular opinions & ideas may be modified, and you need not care for that. The bias, feeling spirit of faith, which underlies all religious opinions and ideas, and which is the main thing is likely to remain. And inasmuch as that feeling and spirit of faith must be for the time embodied in some opinions and ideas—let them be our own, and do not scruple to communicate your own unreservedly. There is no infringement of rights, either immediate or prospective, in doing so. It is using your rightful authority, being simply faithful to your position, and performing for your children, in the only way practicable for you, the very sacred and momentous duty of providing for them at the most favorable time a religious faith, which is likely to cling to them and bless them, through every period of life and through all changes of opinion.—George Putnam.

MANLY CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

What constitutes the manly Christian character? The foremost trait is decision of mind, supported by strength of heart. Religion is an active duty; it is not so contemplative as many suppose; it never retires to meditate, leaving any active duty undone. True, our Saviour retired to meditate and pray; but it was when the night had come, and no man could work,—when the streets of Jerusalem were still; when deep sleep was on every eye, when the mourning for a time forgot their sorrows, and the sick were relieved from their pain; then it was, that having worked the works of Him that sent him all the day, he felt at liberty to spend the night in prayer to God. He never seems to have given time to sacred thought, so long as any thing remained to do; and we fear that the reason why men are so partial to the contemplative duties of religion, is, that it is pleasant to have the heart engaged in meditation, while it is hard to keep the hands busy in the service of God. But it is true nevertheless, that all depends not on contemplations, feelings, and resolutions, but deeds. Active duty being thus important, it follows that the manly trait, decision of mind, is one of the greatest excellencies man can possess. Our Saviour himself possessed it in perfection; he was never for a moment at a loss, though surrounded by those who were proposing artful questions, and writing down his replies. Though spurs were every where spread for him, he walked through the world with confidence and security; and there never was a moment, when any hesitation, any faltering on his part, gave the least advantage to his foes. The reason was, that he had but one star to guide him; he had a single purpose in his breast, which he was