

THE NATHANAEL CHARACTER.

It matters much what we think of Christ. It makes a difference in the life. Our opinion of other great men may not affect character in the least; our opinion of Washington, or Shakespeare, or Luther, or Plato, or Caesar, or Alexander, may or may not exert an influence upon us. But what we think of Christ, in our inmost being, must be the controlling factor in our manner of living. In reference to him especially it is true: As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Everything depends upon whether or not we believe in him, and what we believe. Many are slow to make up their minds, and their characters suffer accordingly. The determining factor in decision about Christ is not in the number of evidences showing that he is worthy of our faith and appreciation. The determining factor is largely in ourselves, the manner of men we are. What made it so easy for Nathanael on the first meeting with Jesus to form such a proper estimate of him, as appears in the exclamation: "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!" It was his own character that helped him to read the character of Jesus. We know this from the compliment paid him: "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." He was sincere, unprejudiced, and a type of Israelite which by the history and training of the nation should have been more general when Jesus came. Instead of being only in outward form and ceremony a worshipper of God, he was from the heart a worshipper and an earnest seeker after truth. When such a man saw the truth he knew it. He was ready to believe on the first evidence, his heart was open. He was not sinless, but guileless, honest and straightforward.

If any in this day are questioning the right of Christ to be their Lord and King, they would better turn their gaze inward. The less we think of Jesus the more we condemn ourselves. The slower we are to acknowledge Him the more it is clear that we are not willing to give Him the appreciation He deserves. The serious need is to feel our need of Christ. The disciple who was so quick to honor Him had gone through this experience. He had first had a conviction of sin before gaining a conviction of Christ, the Saviour of sinners. He had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and no one could be his disciple without learning that he was a sinner, without receiving a baptism for the remission of sin.

Jesus the Christ can never be rightly understood and valued at His true worth until men have done the first thing first. The early disciples, who so promptly knew and followed the Son of God, had passed through the process of repentance, and that with a sincere purpose had cleared their vision for the Christ when He appeared. Honesty of purpose in matters of religion involves a due realization of the sinfulness of sin and the penalty it merited. If you are not filled with wonder and forced to confess this infinite worth as you contemplate the superlative Christ, it is time you were filled with alarm as to your condition, your want of sincerity or your insensibility to sin. —Lutheran Observer.

The more a man knows the clearer his mind is, the greater the influence he exerts in the cause of Christ. We admit that the most ignorant man who is truly converted can win more souls to Christ than the wisest man on the earth who is without a religious experience. But when the two are united the greatest influence possible to him is within the reach of the man who has a warm heart, a clear head, an intelligent conscience, and an abundance of knowledge. —N. Y. Christian Advocate.

Let God do with me what he will; it will be either heaven itself or some beingning of it. —Mountford.

THINKING OF OTHERS.

We are all bound together by a mystical chain of solidarity. Since every man is my neighbor, I am bound to think of him and not only of myself in deciding what I may do or refrain from doing. I must abstain from lawful things if by doing them I should be likely to harm my neighbor's building up of a strong character. I can, or I believe that I can, pursue some course of conduct, engage in some enterprise, either in regard to worldly position, or in regard to my religious life. Be it so, but I have to take some one else into account. Will my example call out imitation in others, to whom it may be harmful or fatal to do as I can do with real or supposed impunity? If so, I am guilty of something very much like murder if I do not abstain. A Christian man is bound to shape his life so that no man shall be able to say of him that he was the occasion of that one's fall. He is so bound because every man is his neighbor. He is so bound because he is bound to live to the glory of God, which can never be advanced by laying stumbling-blocks in the way for feeble feet. He is bound because, unless Christ had limited himself within the bound of manhood, and had sought not his own profit or pleasure, we should have had neither life nor hope. —Alexander McLaren, D.D.

"PRESSING ON."

The gain in our lives may seem little,
The triumphs not much, over sin;
We mete not by jot and by tittle,
As daily some victory we win.

A little more patience in sorrow;
A little more courage in trial;
A little more faith for to-morrow;
A little more brave self-denial.

A little more earnest endeavor;
A little more conquest of wrong;
A little more trusting forever;
A little more joy in the song.

Thus life makes its gains, sure and steady;
And climbs just one hill day by day;
For heaven the heart grows more ready,
With God for our friend all the way.

—William Bryant, D.D., in The Westminster of Philadelphia.

Do you say what can I do, because the light round me is like unto darkness? Climb the mast till you are above the fog which lies on the surface of the water, and you will see the sun shining on the spiritual world, and near at hand the harbor of sweet content. True, we must descend again to the travail of life, but we return assured that the sun is above the mist. —John Watson.

The stones will not always be rolled away from the sepulchrs of our dead. There are dead friends who will not come back to us. There are vanished heroes which lie without a resurrection in the crypts of the past. But there are angels seated at the head and foot of those graves, and they have blessings in store for those who come with their spices in the morning. There is nothing beautiful that has gone from us but God has left his angels at its tomb.

We never know the value of a good name until we lose it, nor the blessings of health until it is gone. There are times when the casket seems dearer than the cradle. The things that have gone from us are the things which bring the greatest tenderness to the soul. The grave does not intensify love, but it adds a holiness to it. Love is a sublimer thing because there is a new grave in the cemetery.

I have never yet known the Spirit of God to work where the Lord's people were divided. —Moody.

"I CAN" AND "I CAN'T."

There are limits to what any man can do. Simply saying, "I can," does not make a man omnipotent. Neither does the conviction that a man can do a thing always make it possible for him to do it. This is merely to admit, however, that men are men. And the limits of what men can do are not fixed limits. We have never reached yet the walls that surround us. Far beyond all that men have done stretches that which men can do. So vast is the field open to man, and so great is the power available for him, that it is possible for a great man of faith to say boldly and reverently: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." The declaration is accompanied by humble acknowledgment of contentment with his God-assigned conditions, but such contentment with what God does for him is coupled with the declaration that he can do anything for God which God wants done through him.

A man may say "I can" about any duty. If it is a duty, God stands ready to supply strength for its doing. And the divine spirit within us will assure us of this, as the familiar lines of Emerson declare:

'So night is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, 'Thou must,'
The youth replies, 'I can!'"

No duty is impossible to man. Even if a man has lost the capacity of self-control and is a drunkard, or has a mania for theft and is a kleptomaniac, or has lost the faculty for the truth and becomes a liar and a deceiver, or has a greed for gold and has become a cheat and a miser, God can enable him to say triumphantly of the duty of victory over his besetting sin, "I can."

Where we have once said, "I can," and have done what we said we could do, we are in a position to go forward and repeat the triumph over something more difficult. "Each victory helps us some other to win." Mr. Clement closes his excellent little handbook on Japan with the apt quotation of the lines from Confucius's translation of Virgil:

"These bring success, their zeal to fan;
They can because they think they can."

There is a simple reason for this. Each time we tread a path we mark it better. Every road seems a shorter and is easier the second time we travel it. Each out-putting of confident energy increases alike our energy and our confidence.

Even when we are not ready to say, "I can," we can still say, "I can try." The man who is willing to try heartily will soon gain the confidence that will make him sure that he can not only try, but succeed. How can we expect to succeed who will not try? And how do we know that we cannot until we try? There are things we are not meant to try, to fly without wings, for example; but all duties and all privileges which are meant for us, we are meant to try to do and to win. And if we try in the spirit of one who knows that through Christ he can do all that he ought and win all that is in the will of God for him, we shall succeed.

The old proverb is not true which says, "Faint heart never won fair lady." "Faint Heart" has often won her. But "Afraid to Try" never won her. "Perhaps I can't, but I can try" may be also "Faint Heart," but it can do all that can be done.

Daily Readings for Preceding Week.

MON.—Caleb's "We can" (Num. 13: 30).

TUES.—The spies' "We can't" (Num. 13: 31-33).

WED.—Saul's army (1 Sam. 17: 18-32).

THURS.—David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17: 28-32).

FRI.—Paul's "I can" (2 Cor. 12: 10).

SAT.—Jesus' promise (John 14: 10-14).