

## THE PEARL.

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THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS IN RESPECT TO SCIENCE  
AND GENERAL KNOWLEDGE.

NO 3.

In two of our former numbers we endeavoured to establish the proposition that 'Christianity not only allows but requires the acquisition of general knowledge.' In soliciting the attention of our readers to some other proofs confirmatory of this position, we shall copy from an eloquent lecture delivered before the Sheffield Mechanics' Institute, by the Rev. Thomas Allin. The title of this masterly production is "MECHANICS' INSTITUTIONS, AND THE UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION OF GENERAL KNOWLEDGE DEFENDED ON CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES."

"It must be observed, that Christianity distinctly recognizes the divine and permanent authority of those doctrines and laws recorded in the Old Testament, which have reference to the common nature and state of man, as distinguished from things arising out of local circumstances, or things typical and ceremonial, and therefore temporary; as well as those additional doctrines and laws recorded in the New Testament. Now with this fact in mind, let it be observed that, according to this record of our faith, when the first human pair came forth from their Creator's hand innocent and happy, the following announcement conveyed to them the charter of their privileges, and the rule of their conduct, respecting the world in which they were placed, and the various orders of beings by which they were surrounded: 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowls of the air, and over the cattle and the wild beasts, and over every reptile that creepeth upon the earth.\*' According to this divine announcement, the earth was made and peopled, not that it might be shared by man in common with its other inhabitants, but that he might replenish, or fill it, and subdue, or bring it under his dominion. He is here placed on the same pre-eminence in authority as in capabilities; and the universal sway for which his superior powers of reason are fitted, he is commanded to acquire: that is to say, as his well-being is the immediate end of this part of the creation, so to render it subservient to this end, is at once his duty and his privilege. But in order to do this, he must acquaint himself with the constitution and laws of nature—its adaptations and capabilities. He must understand the qualities of things, and the several purposes to which they are applicable: he must, in fact, explore the immense regions, which in earth, and air, and sea, are placed before him, in order that all their contents, with all their capabilities, may be rendered subservient to his will and promotive of his happiness. Such is the knowledge obviously necessary to universal appropriation and government. The same law, therefore, that directs to the end, authorizes the means; and by rendering such knowledge necessary to the attainment of that end, it not only allows, but requires the human race to secure it.

"For the sake of some, it may be expedient to remark, that whatever change may have taken place in the situation or capabilities of man, since the first issuing forth of the divine decree, yet so far from this charter of human privileges having been repealed, it was expressly renewed to Noah and his sons, immediately after the flood. It therefore stands the charter of our privileges, and the law of our common nature. Capabilities may have lessened, or difficulties may have multiplied; but whatever capabilities remain, are to be exerted; and whatever difficulties are surmountable, are to be encountered. The way may have become more thorny, but it is to be trod; and the hill of knowledge may present a more steep and rugged ascent, but still the highest elevation possible is to be gained. This is the proud pre-eminence to which the God of Revelation points, and which in language recognized by Christianity as obligatory and divine, he requires us to labour to attain.

"But satisfactory as this must be to every attentive and unprejudiced mind, it would be injustice to the important cause before us to leave it here: it is rather necessary that all the support which Revelation furnishes to that cause should be drawn out, and presented with all the particularity and clearness of which it is capable. We must therefore observe, that to the praise of our common nature, Revelation states, 'God, our Maker, teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven.' To the honour of Solomon, it records, that when offered a choice of temporal blessings, he solicited neither riches, nor honor, nor the life of his enemies, but wisdom and understanding. It teaches, 'That the soul be without knowledge: it is not good.' And concerning the period, in the anticipation of which, an enlightened philosophy, under the guidance of benevolence has rejoiced, when the miseries which now press so heavily on the bodies and minds of men shall be lessened, and the human condition shall be extensively improved it records, 'The eyes of them that see, shall not be dim, and the ears of

them that hear shall hearken: the heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly [or elegantly.] And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times.' The same revelation distinctly commands, 'Get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding.' A wisdom consisting principally, indeed, in the fear of the Lord; but concerning which, statements are made, that cannot, by any correct rules of interpretation, nor even by the wild system of allegorizing adopted by some pretended expositors, be limited either to theology or morals. The first passage which I have selected, I take the liberty of giving according to the rendering of Dr. Boothroyd; a man, who, though he never drank of learning's streams at a college, yet by dint of industry has raised himself to an honourable eminence in general literature, but more especially in a critical knowledge of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. 'Doth not wisdom cry aloud, and understanding raise her voice? At the top of the high places, by the way; where cross-paths meet, she standeth. At the gate-way, the entrance of the city; at the door-way, she crieth aloud, 'To you, O men,' saith she, 'I call; to you, sons of men, is my voice directed. O ye simple, learn prudence: O ye foolish, attain understanding. Hear, for I will speak of excellent things. And my lips shall utter things that are right. For my mouth shall speak truth, and falsehood be the abomination of my lips. All the words of my mouth are just; in them is nothing winding or perverse. They are all of them plain to the intelligent, and right to those who have attained knowledge. Receive my instruction rather than silver, and knowledge rather than pure gold. For wisdom is more precious than pearls, and all the objects of desire are not equal to her. I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out the knowledge of every invention. I fear Jehovah, and hate wickedness; pride, arrogance, and the way of the wicked, and the froward mouth do I hate. With me is counsel and sound wisdom, with me is prudence; with me is might. Through me kings reign, and counsellors make just decrees. Through me princes possess dominion: the nobles, and all the judges of the earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than the finest gold, and my revenue than the purest silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment. I will enrich those who love me, and their treasures I will fill. Jehovah possessed me at the beginning of his way; before his works, from the remotest period. From eternity I was anointed to reign; before the beginning, before the earth was. When there were no seas I was brought forth,—no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; when as yet he had not made the earth, or the water, or an atom of the dust of the globe. When he established the heavens, I was there. When he drew a circle around the ocean; when he established the clouds above; when he made strong the fountains of the deep; when he appointed to the sea its bounds, so that its waters should not pass their limits; when he traced out the foundations of the earth, then was I as a workman with him; and from day to day was I delighted, rejoicing continually in his presence."

"On this fine and poetically descriptive passage, the learned and judicious translator well observes, 'Let the noble description given of the effects of wisdom, increase our regard for it. It is to be preferred to gold and rubies, and every thing the heart of man can desire. It brings us substance; what is solid and durable, and will afford us the highest and noblest delight. It directs in the government of kingdoms, churches, and families; discovers the useful arts of life, and especially ennobles, and enriches, and sanctifies the soul.' The following passages also claim our attention: 'Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly. A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth. Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge. The simple inherit folly; but the prudent are crowned with knowledge. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness. Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof. Through wisdom is a house builded; and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety. Wisdom is too high for a fool; he openeth not his mouth in the gate. For the transgression, [or by the rebellion] of a land many are the princes thereof; but by a man of understanding and knowledge, the state thereof shall be restored.' That the terms, wisdom, knowledge &c., as used in these passages, refer not only to the fear of the Lord, but also to that general information which results from the diligent exercise and extensive improvement of the intellectual powers, is too evident to require proof; as by it a house is builded, and the

chambers filled with riches—war is made—strength increased—and the deranged frame of society restored to order.

"I have only one other passage of this class to place before you; but it is one that so strongly expresses, and so finely illustrates, the advantages of intellectual culture and extended knowledge, as to deserve particular attention. 'Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness; and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.'—Then, in proof that wisdom or knowledge deserves the eulogies thus passed upon it, as being promotive of the present interests and happiness of man, Solomon adds, 'The Jehovah by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down their dew.'—Now as it surely will not be contended that it was by the knowledge of theology or morals exclusively that the heavens were first stretched out, and the foundations of the earth laid, or by which the deeps are now regulated and the clouds caused to shed down their refreshing contents upon the earth, so neither is it to this knowledge exclusively that the preceding eulogistic representation refers, but rather to that general knowledge of nature in its constitution, as well as in its physical and moral relations, which results from extensive research and high intellectual culture.

This allowed, let it be particularly remarked, that such culture and research, and the knowledge resulting from them, are thus recommended, not to some peculiarly favoured classes of the community alone, the noble or the rich,—nor to some particular country or age,—but to man, as man—a being possessing powers suited to such exercises and acquirements, and capable of deriving from them temporal advantages and intellectual pleasures. These passages, then, embody those universal principles and rules of action which Christianity recognizes, and the truth and obligation of which it supposes and confirms. By what unheard-of principles of interpretation, or by what strange process of reasoning, passages like these are to be transformed into prohibitions of general knowledge except to a highly favoured few, who may thereby acquire additional dignity to their rank, additional power over their fellows, or an augmentation of their riches, is not easy to conceive. Nor is it much more easy to understand how they are to be wrested into an approval of general ignorance. What! does Christianity intend to teach the mechanics of Sheffield, and the labouring classes of the community at large, that they are not to aspire after the acquirement of any other knowledge except religion and their particular occupation, by eulogizing the wisdom that dwells with prudence, and finds out the knowledge of every invention; by which, too, a house is builded, and the chambers filled with riches; by which successful war is made, and order restored to the body politic after rebellion had involved it in confusion? Does Christianity command ignorance of nature and her laws, by pronouncing the man happy who finds that wisdom by which Jehovah founded the earth and established the heavens, and that knowledge by which he regulates the deep, and causes the clouds to drop down the dew? If this be the divine appointment of ignorance, how may we expect the attainment of knowledge to be commanded? Or if this be an approval of ignorance, in what terms may we expect its sentence of condemnation to be pronounced?

"Christianity thus presents before us the plainest, as well as the most extensive, charter of intellectual and moral immunities. It commands us to free the mind from ignorance, as well as to purge the heart from sin. So far from encouraging barrenness of mind and brutality of manners—frowning on the refinements of civilized life—and stinting both body and spirit to the scantiest measure of present enjoyment, it stands forward as the guardian angel of knowledge and happiness. And instead of condemning the wisdom by which the power of man is increased and his empire enlarged; his manners refined, and his condition ameliorated; and to which are owing useful contrivances, good government, and salutary laws—it directs him at once to the immense treasures of nature and grace, and offers to his acceptance every thing that can give activity to the mind, of dignity to the character; peace to the conscience, or virtuous joy to the heart. This being the case, a Christian ought to be the most enlightened individual, in proportion to his circumstances and opportunities; and the readiest supporter of every institution calculated either to enlarge the views of his fellow men, or to increase their means of usefulness, or of innocent enjoyment. The Christian, therefore, however sincere, who stands forward as the foe of knowledge, or the advocate of ignorance, widely mistakes the character of his religion, the nature of his own duties, and the ultimate effect of the work in which he is engaged. And though he is not, as his enemies and the enemies of his faith would represent, a demon of darkness, clothed as an angel of light, yet he unquestionably dishonours the religion he professes, by throwing over its lovely and attracting form, the disfiguring and repelling mantle of the father of lies.

\* Boothroyd's Translation.