

The Monthly Advocate.

VOL. II.

APRIL, 1882.

No. 12.

THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

The great principle of religion is *faith*. The real Christian lives by faith. But this is just the governing principle of human life. The fact is that it is faith which gives form to the life of every intelligent person, and the man is a fool who lives not by faith. The difference between religion and irreligion does not turn upon the principle of action, but on the object on which that principle rests. The irreligious man believes any thing or any person but God; whereas piety has its foundation in an unwavering faith in God. The faith of the former rests on an uncertain basis, and his course fluctuates as he discovers that his confidence is misplaced. The faith of the other gives fixedness and consistency to his whole life, because God is incapable of departing from His word, and is always able to execute His purpose and His promise. It must be evident, therefore, that the really pious man occupies an immeasurably more elevated position, sustains a more consistent character, and is entitled to greater confidence than other men. It holds good then that, all other things being equal, the true Christian must be the best king, the best legislator, the best magistrate, or the best soldier. I say all other things being equal, for there is many a good Christian who is utterly unfit to hold any official position either in peace or war with honour to himself or advantage to society. When God shows who should be chosen to rule, he recognises the common sense principle that it is not enough that rulers are men fearing God, men of truth, and hating covetousness. They must be *able* men. Oliver Cromwell, whose character and memory were under a cloud for nearly two centuries, and are not yet free from the misrepresentations of ignorance and prejudice, furnishes an example of the happy combination of ability and piety. He knew men, and gathers round him men of intelligence and integrity. His Ironsides marched to victory as often as they marched to battle. Every one of them had faith in the God of armies, and in the justice of their cause. As the first magistrate Cromwell did more for England than any of the kings who preceded him. He raised her to a position among the nations of Europe, which she has not yet lost—the folly and profligacy of some subsequent rulers notwithstanding. We can only conjecture what Gustavus Adolphus might have achieved in Europe, or General Jackson in the Confederate States of America, but they occupied a false position, were sustaining an equivocal or a bad cause, and God took them from the earth.

When God would confer a substantial and a permanent blessing upon a people, He raises up men who honour Him and are honoured of Him. What kind of men these are will appear from a survey of the character of Gideon, the son of Joash. He is classed by Paul with those whose lives exemplify and illustrate the effects of faith in God.