

Poetry.

THE CHILD AND THE MOURNERS

BY CHARLES MACKAY

A LITTLE child beneath a tree
Sat and chanted cheerily
A little song, a pleasant song,
Which was—she sung it all day long—
“When the wind blows the blossoms fall;
But a good God reigns over all.”

There passed a lady by the way,
Meaning in the face of day;
There were tears upon her cheek,
Grief in her heart too great to speak;
Her husband died but yester-morn,
And left her in the world forlorn.

She stopped and listened to the child
That looked to heaven, and singing, smiled;
And saw not for, her own despair—
Another lady, young and fair,
Who also passing, stopped to hear
The infant's anthem ringing clear.

For she, but few and days before,
Had lost the little babe she bore;
And grief was heavy at her soul—
As that sweet memory o'er her stole,
And showed how bright had been the Past:
The Present drear and overcast.

And has they stood beneath the tree
Listening, soothed and placidly,
A youth came by, whose sunken eyes
Spoke of a load of miseries;
And he, arrested, like the twin,
Stopped to listen to the strain.

Death had bowed the youthful head
Of his bride beloved, his bride unwed:
Her marriage robes were fitted on;
Her fair young face with blushes shone;
When the destroyer smote her low,
And changed the lover's bliss to woe.

And these three listened to the song,
Silver-toned, and sweet, and strong,
Which that child, the livelong day
Chanted to itself, in play;
“When the wind blows the blossoms fall;
But a good God reigns over all.”

The widow's lips impulsive moved;
The mother's grief though unapproved,
Softened, as her trembling tongue
Repeated what the infant sung;
And the sad lover, with a start,
Conced it over to his heart.

And though the child—if child it were,
And not a seraph sitting there—
Was seen no more, the sorrowing three
Went on their way resignedly,
The song still ringing in their ears—
Was it music of the spheres?

Who shall tell? They did not know,
But in the midst of deepest woe
The strains recurred when sorrow grew,
To warm them, and console them, to—
“When the wind blows the blossoms fall,
But a good God reigns over all.”

LETTERS FROM THE HON. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS TO HIS SON, ON THE BIBLE AND ITS TEACHINGS.

LETTER VIII.

The whole system of Christianity appears to have been set forth by its Divine Author in his sermon on the Mount, recorded in the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of Mathew. I intend hereafter to make them the subject of remarks much more at large; for the present I confine myself merely to general views. What I would impress upon your mind as infinitely important to the happiness and virtue of your life, is, the general spirit of Christianity and the duties which result from it. In my last letter, I showed you, from the very words of our Savior, that He commanded His disciples to aim at absolute perfection, and that this perfection consisted in self-subjugation and brotherly love, in the complete conquest of our own passions, and in the practice of benevolence to our fellow-creatures. Among the Grecian systems of moral philosophy, that of the Stoics resembles the Christian doctrine in the particular of requiring the total subjugation of the passions; and this part of the Stoic principle was adopted by the academies. You will find the question discussed with all the eloquence and ingenuity of Cicero, in the fourth of his Tusculan disputations, which I advised you to read and meditate upon. You will there find proved, the duty of subduing the passions.

It is sometimes objected that this theory is not adapted to the infirmities of human nature; that it is not made for a being so constituted as man; that an earthen vessel is not formed to dash itself against a rock; that in

yielding to the impulses of the passions, man only follows the dictates of his nature; that to subdue them entirely is an effort beyond his powers. The weakness and frailty of our nature, it is not possible to deny—it is too strongly tested by all human experience, as well as by the whole tenor of the Scriptures; but the degree of weakness must be measured by the efforts to overcome it, and not by indulgence to it. Once admit weakness as an argument to forbear exertion, and it results in absolute impotence. It is also very inconclusive reasoning to infer that because perfection is not absolutely to be obtained, it is therefore not to be sought. Human excellence consists in approximation to perfection; and the only means of approaching to any term, is by endeavouring to obtain the term itself. With these convictions upon the mind—with a sincere and honest effort to practice upon them, and with the aid of the divine blessing which is promised to it, approaches to perfection may at least be so great as nearly to answer all the ends which absolute perfection itself could attain. All exertion, therefore, is virtue; and if the tree be judged by its fruit, it is certain that all the most virtuous characters of heathen antiquity were the disciples of the Stoic doctrine. But let it even be admitted that a perfect command of the passions is unattainable to human infirmity, it will still be true that the degree of moral excellence possessed by any individual is in exact proportion to the degree of control he exercises over himself. According to the Stoics, all vice was resolvable into folly; according to the Christian principle, it is all the effect of weakness. In order to preserve the dominion of our own passions, it behooves us to be constantly and strictly on our guard against the influence and infection of the passions of others. This caution above all is necessary to youth; and I deem it indispensable to enjoin it upon you,—because, as kindness and benevolence comprise the whole system of Christian duties, there may be and often is, great danger of falling into errors and vice merely for the want of energy to resist the example or enticement of others.

On this point the true character of Christian morality appears to me to have been misunderstood by some of its ablest and warmest defenders. In Paley's "View of the Evidences of Christianity," there is a chapter on the Morality of the gospel, the general tenor of which (as of the whole work) is excellent, but in which there is the following passage: "there are two opposite descriptions of character, under which mankind may generally be classed: the one possesses vigor, firmness, resolution, is active and daring, quick in its sensibilities, jealous of its fame, eager in its attachments, inflexible of its purposes, violent in its resentment: the other meek, yielding, complying, forgiving, not prompt to act, but willing to suffer, silent and gentle under rudeness and insults, suing for reconciliation where others would demand satisfaction; giving away to the pushes of impudence, conceding and indulgent to the prejudices, the wrong-headedness, the intractability of others with whom it has to deal. The former of these characters is, and ever has been, the favorite of the world; it is the character of great men; there is a dignity in it which commands respect. The latter is poor, spirited, tame and abject. Yet, so it happened, that with the founder of Christianity, the latter is the subject of His commendation, His precepts, His example, and that the former is so in no part of its composition. Dr. Paley in this place adopts the opinion of Soame Jennings, whose essay on the "Internal Evidences of Christianity," he strongly recommends; but I cannot consider it either as an accurate and discerning delineation of character, or as exhibiting a correct representation of christian principles. The founder of christianity did indeed pronounce distinct and positive blessings upon the "poor in spirit," which is by no means synonymous with the "poor spirited;" and upon the meek. But in what part of the gospel did Dr. Paley find Him countenancing by "commendation, by precept or example the tame and abject?" The character which Christ assumed upon earth, was that of a Lord and Master; it was in that character His disciples received and acknowledged Him. The obedience He required was unbounded, infinitely beyond that which was ever claimed by the most absolute earthly sovereign of his subjects; never for one moment did He recede from his authoritative station; He preserved it in washing the feet of His disciples; He preserved it in answer to the officers who struck Him for his very deportment, and to the High Priest; He preserved it in the agony of His ejaculation on the Cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." He expressly declared Himself "the Prince of this world, and Son of God." He spoke as one having authority, not only to His disciples, but to His mother, to His judges, to Pilate the Roman Governor, to John the Baptist, His precursor; and there is not in the four gospels, one act, not one word recorded of Him, (excepting His communion with God) that was not a direct, or implied assertion of au-

thority. He said to His disciples, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart," &c., but where did He ever say to them learn of me for I am tame and abject? There is certainly nothing more strongly marked in the precepts and example of Christ, than the principle of stubborn and inflexible resistance against the impulses of others to evil. He taught His disciples to renounce everything that is counted enjoyment upon earth; "to take up their cross;" and to suffer ill treatment, and persecution and death for His sake. What else is the book of the "Acts of the Apostles" than a record of the faithfulness with which these chosen ministers of the gospel carried these injunctions into execution? In the conduct and speeches of Peter, John, and Paul, is there anything that could justly be called "tame or abject?" Is there anything indicating a resemblance to the second class or character into which Dr. Paley divides all mankind. If there is a character upon historical record distinguished by a bold, inflexible, tenacious and intrepid spirit, it is that of Paul. It was to such characters only, that the commission to "teach all nations," could be committed with certainty of success. Observe the impression of Christ, in His charge to Peter; (a rock) And upon this rock will I build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Dr. Paley's Christian is one of those drivelers who, to use a vulgar phrase, can never say "No," to anybody.

The true Christian is the "Justum et tenacem propositum virum" of Horace, (the man who is just and steady to his purpose.) The combination of these qualities, so essential to heroic character, with those of meekness, lowliness of heart, and brotherly love, is what constitutes that moral perfection of which Christ gave an example in His own life, and to which He commands His disciples to aspire. Endeavor, my dear son, to discipline your heart, and to govern your conduct by these principles thus combined; be meek, be gentle, be kindly affectionate to all mankind, not excepting your enemies, but never be "tame or abject;" never give way to the pushes of impudence, or show yourself yielding or complying to prejudice, wrong-headedness, or intractability, which would lead or draw you astray from the dictates of your own sense of right: "till you die, let not your integrity depart from you;" build your house upon the rock, and then let the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon that house; "it shall not fall, it will be founded upon a rock." So promises your blessed Lord and Master, and so prays your affectionate Father,

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

TRUE VIRTUE.

When I set before me true virtue, all the distinctions on which men value themselves fade away. Wealth is poor; worldly honor is mean; outward forms are beggarly elements. Condition, country, church, all sink into unimportance. Before this simple greatness I bow, reverent. The robed priest, the gorgeous altar, the great assembly, the pealing organ, all the exteriors of religion, vanish from my sight as I look at the good and great man, the holy, disinterested soul. Even I, with vision so dim, with heart so cold, can see and feel the divinity, the grandeur of true goodness. How, then, must God regard it? To his pure eye how lovely must it be! And can any of us turn from it, because some water has not been dropped on its forehead, or some bread put into its lips by a minister or priest? or because it has not learned to repeat some mysterious creed, which a church or human council has ordained?—Channing.

BLESSED BE THE HAND WHICH PREPARES A PLEASURE FOR A CHILD; for there is, no saying where and when it may again bloom forth. Does not almost everybody remember some kind-hearted man who showed him a kindness in the quiet days of his childhood? The writer of this recollects himself at this moment, as a bare-footed lad standing at the wooden fence of a poor little garden, in his native village; with longing eyes he gazed on the flowers which were blooming there quietly in the brightness of a Sunday morning. The possessor of the garden came forth from his little cottage—he was a wood-cutter by trade—and spent the whole week at his work in the woods. He was come into his garden to gather a flower to stick in his coat when he went to church. He saw the boy, and breaking off the most beautiful of his carnations, (it was streaked with red and white,) gave it to him. Neither the giver, nor the receiver spoke one word; and with bounding steps the boy ran home; and now here at a vast distance from that home, after so many events of so many years, the feeling of gratitude which agitated the breast of that boy expresses itself on paper. The carnation is long since withered, but it now blooms afresh.—Douglas Jerrold.

ALWAYS BE ACTIVE.

It is the odds and ends of our time, its orts and offals, laid up, as they usually are, in corners, to rot there, instead of being used out as they should be—these, I say, are the occasions of our moral unsoundness and corruption; a dead fly, little thing as it is, will spoil a whole box of the most precious ointment; and idleness, if it be once suffered, though but for a brief while, is sure, by the communication of its listless quality, to clog and cumber the clockwork of the whole day. It is the ancient enemy,—the old man of the Arabian tales. Once take him upon your shoulders, and he is not to be shaken off so easily. I had a notion of these truths, and I framed my plan after their rules: I resolved that every minute should be occupied by thought, word, or act, or, if none of these, by intention; vacancy was my only outcast, the scapegoat of my proscription. For this my purpose I required a certain energy of will, as, indeed, this same energy is requisite for every good thing of every sort and kind; without it we are as powerless as grubs, noisome as ditch water, vague, loose, and unpredestinate as the clouds above our heads. However, I had sufficient of this energy to serve me for that turn; I felt the excellence of the practice, I was penetrated with it through all my being; I clung to it, I cherished it. I made a point of everything; I was active, brisk, and animated (oh! how true is that word) in all things that I did, even to the picking up of a glove, or asking the time of day. If I ever felt the approach, the first approach, of the insidious languor, I said at once within myself, in the next quarter of an hour I will do such a thing, and, presto, it was done, and much more than that into the bargain; my mind was set in motion, my spirits stirred and quickened, and raised to their proper height.—Self-Formation.

PARENTAL FAITHFULNESS.

There are some trusts which cannot be delegated, some responsibilities which no other being can bear for us, which no other being, I had almost said, can understand. Parental influence, parental watchfulness, God never suffers to be transferred. In the beautiful and holy order of His Providence the work which angels love to see, whose progress heaven rejoices over in the dawning soul, is committed to parents. They may not have time, nor the needed intellect, to fit their child for stepping at once from the fireside into the thick of life, and pursuing with all wisdom the great interests of his worldly being. But why complain, if they have not? Infinitely greater interests are within their legitimate influence, unspeakably nobler concerns of his are entrusted to their care, are determined even by their want of care. In the opening days of life they are to him a present Deity; the word "Father" translates to that young heart all it knows of the Heavenly King. In them he beholds, yes in his very dreams, the path of duty, the sure and shining way of virtue, the ideal of all he prays most fervently to realize. A word, a look, an expression of sadness as if the whole soul was wrung, at the tale of violated faith, the kindling of joy in the countenance, as at the finding of a treasure richer than all the buried hoards of fable, when the story is told of all-subduing patience, all-resisting purity,—most of all, the moments given to free communion with a child upon his immediate duties, the parent's sympathy with his trials, or gladness in his victories over temptation, shall write themselves out again in a gentle, holy life, shall tell without fail upon that tender heart, shall send their "amen" up to heaven from thoughts consecrated in the baptism of the spirit, offered by the priest-ordained of God to make this acceptable sacrifice.

It is painful to think how many parents disregard what are alike the privileges and the responsibilities of their sacred office. And it is little less painful, to see what poor counsels are often given them on this subject.—Here is a book—no matter by whom—in which the mother is exhorted to begin the education of her child with an unhesitating faith in the depravity of his nature, and is charged to inculcate upon him, as the first truth in religion, that he cannot love God except he be the subject of a change reaching to the very constitution of his being!—Thanks be to the Creator, the maternal heart is an overmatch for doctrinal theology. In spite of all the catechism and the creed say the simplicity of childhood, its tender reliance, its innocence, interpret to the loving parent the Saviour's words—"Of such is the kingdom of heaven." If we could only keep men children, there would be no need of conversion in this world of ours.

Published monthly by the Committee of THE MONTREAL UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

Joseph W. Harrison, Printer.