

THOUGHTFULNESS AND MEDITATION.

BY REV. E. H. CHAPIN.

And Isaac went out to the field at eventide.—Gen. xiv. 63.

And who will pass through the vicissitudes of this world, without meditation? The same universe that was around Isaac, is around us. We tread the same earth—the same heavens sparkle above us. And when the rush of even tide shuts down upon the noisy world, and cares, and passions, and labors all grow still, often must there be excited, thoughts the same as those which sprung up in his mind three thousand years ago. He must be careless, indeed, who never meditates—who never calls in his thoughts from their wanderings and their daily occupation, and turns them into the channel of serious reflection. And yet this is the true spring of sincere religious life. These "hours of communion" lot in the air and light of heaven upon the soul. The cause of sin, of the lack of religious life and interest, may it not be found in the thoughtless habits of the many? Sin, generally speaking, is not promediated; or, rather, it issues from lack of meditation. Take one wicked practice, for instance—profane swearing. Let a man sit down and reflect seriously upon the evil of this habit. Let him consider its absurdity, and ingratitude, the irreverence that it displays, the slight it puts upon God, its utter violence as well as its uselessness—let him frequently meditate thus upon it, and he would not swear so freely, nay, we venture to say he would leave it off. Every oath he should speak would be a rebuke, and many a blasphemy would be arrested ere its utterance. So with any habitual sin. Let it at once become the subject of serious and candid thought let it be revolved in the mind in the light of reason, conscience, and the word of God—and its power would be weakened and broken. At least, they are few who would deliberately continue in it, or adopt it from avowed choice. We do not consider sin in its true light—we do not reason upon it—we do not bring it under prayerful inspection—we thoughtlessly yield to its impulses—we plunge recklessly forward without halting to consider our course, without reviewing our life—and it cleaves to us in our eager and restless journey, as the dust and the mire.

This lack of meditation, is, moreover, the cause of the lack of religious life and interest. We do not lack interest in other matters. We are busily engaged in our pleasures and in our daily enterprises. But religious life and devotion is an extensive want among us. We fear that they are comparatively few who act from the highest motives of religion—who make its ends the chief ends of life—who great care is for spiritual advancement, growth, love, holiness, virtue. And the reason is that we do not enough consider the value of these things. We do not make them present and real to ourselves. They seem to us mysterious and abstract. We need, then, evidently, more thoughtfulness as to these matters. Surely, if they are true, if they are real, there is nothing of so much importance. Our gains and pleasures are but little, compared to our growth in intrinsic goodness, in solid virtue. Those we shall lay aside in a little while, but these are possessions that we shall carry with us forever. God, heaven, eternal life, these are great truths—but are we familiar with them? In one sense, it is probable that we are familiar with them. We have heard of them from Sabbath to Sabbath—we have, perhaps, read of them from week to week or even from day to day. But have we ever brought our minds to bear seriously upon them? Have we ever considered them as realities? Do we think of them habitually? Have they sunk into our souls and become familiar and practical ideas with us—truths of our own experience? How many depart, after hearing a sermon, to revolve in their minds its teachings, to think and act upon its personal applications? How many feel that the commands of the Bible were addressed to them—that all he taught and did was for them, and that by every motive of love they are called upon to imitate him, to serve God and do their duty? We do not ask who knows these facts, but who feels them, intensely, habitually, practically. We answer—only those who meditate upon them—who devote some portion of life to thoughts upon their highest interests and most important obligations.

Meditation, then, is the most important exercise of the mind. It is calculated to check our sins and to fill us with a sense of the reality of religion. Indeed, it is necessary in all departments of life. The man of business devotes a portion of his time to meditation. He considers his means—he selects his object—he examines, from time to time, his losses and his profits. Careless, indeed, would that man be deemed who should go to work without thought and without thought carry on his affairs. The counting-room of successful enterprise is the scene of many a hour of intense meditation—which is the life and the efficacy of the after action. And thus with all great deeds—they have been preceded by silent and earnest meditation. The works of art that fill us with admiration—the glories of human power and intellect, these did not live for the first time in their present material shape. They were first in the mind of the artist, dismissed, recalled, brooded over, shaped, fitted, until length from the depths of profound meditation, the work was evolved—the pyramid grew—the statue rose in marble beauty—the poem spoke to the hearts of men. How long did Columbus meditate, before he launched his three small ships! How eagerly did he seek the evidences of a new world, and hail the drifting fragments of an unknown shore—ere he braved the sneers of men, the dangers of the ocean, and the fear and discontent of his companions! Meditation! It alone has generated great deeds. It has suggested the

truths of the universe, and won the secrets of the stars. It is man's high prerogative to think—to examine, compare and reason—to trace out glorious conclusions—to unlock, with patient thought, the mysteries of life and nature—to give significance to all he sees, and to reach through fragmentary and superficial hints, profound and ultimate truth. And so must we do, not merely as intellectual but as moral, and spiritual beings, as those who value, or ought to value our religious interests as supreme. If we would break from sin, we must meditate, often meditate. If we would grow in goodness, we must meditate. If we would live a true life and secure our own highest welfare, we must meditate.

And truly there are subjects enough for meditation. If we walk out in the fields at eventide, as Isaac did they throng upon us. As the earth becomes veiled in shadow, and its objects mingle, our eyes and our thoughts are attracted to other spheres and go abroad into the limitless firmament. Compared with them, how insignificant seems this life of ours! How minute is our "individual difference," in a universe where such stupendous worlds seem like atoms of light! How do our pursuits and our cares shrink under the immensity of those suns and systems! And as the earth, comparatively, is but a dim speck, what is the worth of all our toil that begins and ends with it? And how short is the life that issues from its bosom, and sinks into it again, ere some of those worlds complete their annual circuit! And yet, something within us speaks that we are worth more than all those worlds—that we shall outlast them—that we shall rise higher and shine brighter than they. And we are led up to great thoughts of God and immortality, and we feel that it is not the work we do, but the spirit we work in, that makes us great or small. And shall we not descend from this meditation with serene spirits—shall we not be stronger for the next day's temptations and cares? Shall we not be a morsel wiser through all its hours?

Put the eventide upon us another theme for meditation. It is the close of the toilsome, careful day. Through its busy hours we have thought and acted. We have been tried. And in all these scenes of action and of trial have we done anything wrong? Have we kept our spirits pure through each conflict? Does the day's closing tug to us no account of the day's conduct that is us with shame and regret? Does its silence summon up no memories of wrong word, thought or deed? Has passion had no dominion in our souls—has sin not entered there? Or, has it on the other hand, been a day of improvement to us? Are we conscious of some temptation successfully resisted—some sin conquered—some good deed done? Blessedly will the shade of evening steal upon us then, and we shall lay us down to sleep happier than if we slept on lawless. At all events, how fit a theme for meditation is our growth or decline in virtue—how fit a time is the still eventide! And how will its hour of meditation strengthen us for the morning's action! It has indicated our short comings that another day may correct them, and its breathings of penitence and pardon are full of peace for the future. Or it has opened to us wider reaches of thought and deeper vistas of memory. It has lighted up the forgotten lapses of life, and we have beheld anew its strange vicissitudes. Dear forms, kind looks, now shrouded and in the dust have passed before us—the sins and follies of life rush in upon us, not as messengers of wrath, but as agents of warning and repentance, bidding us turn from our evil ways and live. And another thought presses upon us. The thought of death—of the last even tide—that shall fold us in its shadowy embrace, and in which we shall be drawn to our last sleep. Perhaps already we stand in the dimness of that eventide, and must, we know not how soon, go out to meditate in other fields of being!

Though in this course of remark we have rather indicated the subjects and opportunities of meditation, then indicated it as a duty, yet we find in the consideration of these opportunities arguments for its practice. We might specify other reasons appropriate to our meditation. All seasons of opportunity are appropriate, and we should bring about with us a habit of thoughtfulness. This is the characteristic of the truly religious spirit—it is thoughtful—not gloomy or austere—but thoughtful, conversant as to the highest duties and interests of life. Yet while every day and every hour should be a burden of thought, there are seasons peculiarly appropriate to meditation. Such is the period indicated in the words selected as the motto of our chapter. The Sabbath too, is an appropriate season, for then we put by our secular cares, and rest. The time of affliction affords an opportunity for meditation. We should not suffer such a time to pass by without thought on our part. We do not mean the heavy thoughts of grief, for these will come spontaneously—but consideration of the purposes of affliction, the disciplinary nature of life, our God who controls all things. The time of sorrow is peculiarly a season for meditation and prayer. So is the time of peculiar prosperity.

The communion season and the communion Sabbath, is the time peculiarly appropriate to this exercise. We have been, and we are, about to go to the table of our Lord. And is this a mere form with us—or do we live in communion with him? Do we only remember him, when we take the broken bread and of the cup, or is he constantly in our thoughts? Are we his disciples indeed? Do we possess his spirit? Have we set him before us as our great model, and are we making it our chief aim to be like him? And how far below him are we in moral stature? Are we pained at the difference? Oh! there are subjects enough for us to meditate upon as we come into his presence—as we approach or retire from the outward communion? Let us make the occasion a

season of meditation—an opportunity and instrument of divine life. Meditation! Let us practice it. Let us often examine our own hearts—our daily life—our relations to God and duty. Let us retire from the bustling cares of the world, the sensualities that entice us and draw us so mightily, and think of those realities that pertain to us, and which we regard as spiritual beings. And to which we go forth from these hours of communion, strengthened and blest!

HOW TO OBTAIN HOPE.

Have you obtained a hope? Is a very common question with many professors of religion, and which indicates that the hope of the Gospel may be obtained at almost any hour of the day without previous thought. For ourselves, we confess that we have never so learned of the Scriptures; we have been never taught by them that it can be received and lost in a moment—that a man may get a hope by a mysterious change in one day, and lose it the next.

Hope, like faith, is founded on evidence: it is the desire of future good, with the reasonable possibility of obtaining it. What is the evidence which the Bible furnishes for a well grounded hope? Let the apostle Paul answer: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon hope set before us: both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that which the world is not." And what was the promise so firm, so immutable and sure? The connection shows: it was the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed (which seed is Christ) all the nations, families and kindreds of the earth shall be blessed; which must of course include the whole world, for if all these are blessed in him, not a man here can finally be unblessed, seeing they include all of every name and language.

To this promise, Paul and his brethren fled for refuge. God revealed to them a glorious truth—and declared the final salvation of all men from the bondage of corruption, and their deliverance into the "glorious liberty of the children of God." They staggered not at the promise, although it was great in grace and goodness, but were "strong in the faith giving glory to God, being fully persuaded, that what he had promised he was able to perform."

Professed Christians! see here the foundation of the hope of the apostle, and put the question to thine own heart, is this thy foundation? or art thou resting upon thine own strength?

On what rests the hope of those, who obtain it according to popular opinion? They profess to have a hope, but it is not firm, for it rests almost exclusively with themselves. It changes with their feelings and conduct. If they do right, they have hope of future happiness, and if wrong, their hope is gone. So then, it is altogether different from Paul's; he fled, not to his own works of experience for a hope, but to the immutable promise of God. People now flee to exciting meetings, and anxious seats for one, and when they get it, they can keep it no longer than their excited feelings continue. Ask the class for the evidence of their hope, and they will refer you back, back to the apostle Paul for his, and he will point you to the refuge of God's promise—"we have fled to the refuge to lay hold of the hope set (not behind us, but) before us." The foundation of his hope was forward in the word of God, his unchanging oath that the world should be saved; but the others alluded to, refer you to something they have done years or months before as the refuge of their hope. They hope to be saved because they have performed such and such deeds and acts: while the apostle hoped for the same result, and his hope was indeed an anchor in his soul. Why so? because he had for anchorage God himself; and when, therefore, the winds of adversity arose, felt perfectly safe; the tempest and the storm beat upon his bark in vain, for the anchor was within the veil.

Not so with him whose hope rests within himself. His condition is the same of the ship, which being tossed to and fro on the billows, and having an anchor on board, fails to cast it out. As well might it have gone at all, for so long as it rests on the vessel it is useless. Precisely so it is with the professed Christian whose hope has no better foundation than himself—which may be removed by a different course of conduct than the one set out with;—when the storms and tempests of life arise and the dark billows of affliction rise up before him, ten to one if he is not shipwrecked, and lost upon the breakers of time.

Would you then have the hope of the Gospel, the hope which will prove the sure and steadfast in time of danger, flee to the promises, of Almighty love—lay hold of that immutable word, which makes the redemption of the world as sure as the existence of the Being from whom that word came.

QUARREL AMONG THE METHODISTS.

We learn from the last "Advocate and Journal," that the Commissioners of the M. E. Church South, have announced their resolution to commence a prosecution, against the Northern Branch of that Church, in order to obtain an equitable share of the Joint Property, and that four eminent lawyers are employed to carry on the suit. So then, it would seem that these professedly holy men, and nominal followers of the

Prince of Peace, from words are about to proceed to blows, in other words, that they have become so much confirmed to the world that they in the first place indulge in bitter epithets and the casting of the world's people "call in the lawyers to settle the difficulty." Verily, if the world is not to be evangelized until that work is accomplished through the agency of Methodism, we apprehend that it will be a long time before the reign of "peace on earth and good will to men shall be fully established." We would most earnestly and respectfully call the parties to this contest, before they commence operations, to sit down and carefully estimate how many souls might be saved with the money that will be wasted in it, and then ask themselves how they will answer at the bar of judgement, for allowing so many souls to sink into endless perdition, merely because they cannot settle their difficulties without a lawsuit. Will some one of our Methodist brethren be kind enough to point us to the directions contained in the Sermon on the mount or in any other part of the gospels, for managing an affair of this kind?—N. Y. Christian Messenger.

WHAT IS SALVATION?

Deliverance from eternal torment in a future state, is the answer which partialists give to this question. But we deny this, for the sufficient reason that men were never in danger of such torment, and consequently do not need to be saved from it. Christ declared that he came "to seek and to save that which was lost." Not to save from danger of being lost in the future state, but to save them from the condition in which they continually were. Without the light of the Gospel men are lost in ignorance, unbelief and sin. To deliver them from the wretchedness involved in such a condition, and to bring them to the knowledge, belief and practice of the truth, is salvation. In the light of this definition it is by no means difficult to understand the purpose for which Christ came into the world, and the necessity for his coming. But if, as partialists contend, men are in danger of an eternal hell, we do not know who will save them from it. We are sure of one thing, however, and that is that Christ has never promised to do it, either conditionally or otherwise. Reader if you doubt this, take your Bible and see if you can find a passage in which it is declared that Christ came to save sinners or anybody else from hell.

THE THREE PROPOSITIONS.

The entire argument in relation to the ultimate destiny of the human race, has been very briefly but fairly stated in the following form:

- 1. Either God can save all men, but will not; or 2. He would save all men, but cannot; or 3. He both can and will save all men; inasmuch as the case does not admit of a fourth proposition, different from these, we are reduced to the necessity of selecting from one of these three. Reader, which will you take as expressive of your view on this important subject? The first is virtually contradicted by the express declaration of the Bible that "God will have all men to be saved." The second, by the equally explicit declaration that "His counsel shall stand, and that he will do all his pleasure." If, then, you are a believer in the divine authority of the scriptures, you must admit that God has both the will and the ability to bless and save all of his rational offspring. In short you must be a Universalist.

CONVERSION IN THE MINISTRY.

The Trumpet of last week says: "We have satisfaction to announce, that Rev. Tobias H. Miller, of Portsmouth, N. H., has embraced the doctrine of the final holiness and happiness of all men. This is a gentleman of high respectability; and he was for some time the editor of the Orthodox journal in New Hampshire, which has been since succeeded by the 'Congregational Journal,' under the charge of Rev. H. Wood. Mr. M. was formerly settled in the ministry in Kittery, Me. The reading of the Scriptures, and a diligent and prayerful search after truth, have brought him to his present views. Up to the time of his becoming a Universalist, and indeed up to the present time, he is in excellent standing among his former brethren, as a man of sound sense and sterling honesty."

A family where the great Father of the universe is duly revered, where parents are honored and obeyed, where brothers and sisters dwell together in love and harmony, where peace and order reign, where there is no law but the law of kindness, and no fear but the fear to do wrong, is surely a representation on earth of heaven above.

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