

GENERAL LITERATURE.

EVIL COMMUNICATIONS CORRUPT
GOOD MANNERS.

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You know very well, my brethren, that the order of the natural world is maintained by the operation of matter upon matter; and that the order of the moral world is maintained by the action of mind upon mind.—As the great revolutions of nature are carried on by the reciprocal action of the various parts of which the visible universe consist, upon each other, whether of smaller portions or of greater masses; so that mysterious order which the Divine Being maintains in the moral world is upheld and preserved by the mutual action of one mind upon another. This action is incessantly going on; and though it borrows for its instrumentality the organs of the body, yet the ultimate object is mind. The great medium through which this is maintained is the intercourse and conversation of man with man, which brings one mind into contact with another, and is perpetually modifying the mind which is thus drawn into union, and derives modification from that mind with which it converses. We are continually drawing and being drawn, impelling and resisting or yielding, assimilating ourselves to others, and others to ourselves; nor is it possible to go into any company and come from it exactly in the same state of mind. The moral modification is perpetually going on; and if we trace it exactly, we shall find that it is either evil or good; very seldom, if ever, entirely indifferent or neutral. It is one of the fundamental laws of nature, that our minds should be subject to perpetual modification from the minds of others; nor is it within the reach of our will to determine whether this influence shall be exercised or not. Yet we may determine to what influence we subject it: we may determine what society we will keep, but not what influence that society which we choose shall have upon us. It operates according to certain fixed and infallible laws, so that no person can, by any pretence of self-control, justify exposing himself to the action of a power the operation of which is determined by law quite independent of himself.

One of the first feelings of every person who goes into company is, to please and be pleased.—If he be a person of a benevolent and social spirit, he goes with the very design of assimilating his mind, as much as possible, to the minds of those with whom he converses. This is a silent compact, without which pleasures can neither be imparted nor received. Just in proportion to the delicacy and force of this sympathy is the pleasure derived from society; and they possess it in the most intense and vivid degree who can most imperceptibly slip into the feelings of others, so as to incorporate, for a time their sentiments, feelings, and dispositions with their own. Hence we plainly perceive that there is a preparation in the very nature of society, that society especially which is chosen and of a voluntary nature, for an assimilation of our minds to the views and principles, sentiments and dispositions, of those with whom we converse.

We not only go into society unarmed, but we go with a preparation in favour of the action of the sentiments and the agency of the minds of others which is then operating upon us—go with the intention of being pleased with the sympathies which that intercourse excites, and lay our hearts and minds, as we experience or expect social pleasure, open as much as possible to the full and entire action of the social instinct. Let us suppose then, at least, that the society into which we enter is not positively vicious in any other sense than as it is distinguished by a total absence of religion; let

the persons with whom we associate be only characterized by an entire neglect of God, an absence of the fear of the Almighty; let their general conduct and deportment be such, and such only, as might be supposed to take place if the verities of religion were exploded, and the expectation of a future account entirely dismissed; it is not too much to say that this society itself will possess a very pernicious influence over any mind. It is dangerous to be accustomed to the absence of religion, and to be familiarized to the contemplation of the most solemn and important subjects in a state of disunion from God, and non-advertence to the prospect of eternity.

For a person, especially a young person, to be accustomed to hear life and death, judgment and eternity, and all the most serious and awful scenes of human existence spoken of, I will not say with unbecoming levity, but without advertence to religion, with regard only to physical causes and effects, is a dangerous process, and must be attended with the most serious peril.—Next to the infusion of positive impiety, the most evil element in which the mind can be placed is that out of which religion is expelled. To live without God in the world, and to converse with those who thus live, is, only in a lower degree than positive impiety, less dangerous to a creature who is in a state of probation, and whose everlasting interest depends on acquaintance with and obedience to his Maker.

I recollect, some years ago, that upon reading some very popular tales (Moral Tales they are styled), the talent of which is exceedingly great, but which are distinguished by the total absence of religion, and the want of all reference to it even in the scenes of death; the influence on my mind was such that, during the time devoted to that reading, it was with great difficulty and perplexity I was able to discharge my ministerial duties. It became, therefore, painfully evident to me, that to be conversant long together with trains of thought or associations of ideas from which religion is entirely excluded is of a dangerous tendency; for religion is a positive thing, and at the same time it requires to be brought into view; it must be realized by an effort of the mind; it addresses not itself to the senses, does not occur naturally in the paths of life; it lies in an invisible state, and can only be realized by a positive act of faith, and be made operative by a serious exertion of the mental faculties, by calling our attention to spiritual impressions, and thereby overpowering the mechanical and necessary operations of sensible objects.

To be continued.

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE NAVY.

Religion in the navy! Vital godliness on board ship! The supposition is absurd—the existence of such a thing impossible. Consider the usual recklessness of our seaman, the incalculable injury they have done to the Christian cause in other lands by their ungodliness. Visit our seaports: witness a ship paid off. Observe the licentious misuse of money; the triumph of vice; the hard-gained earnings of months, or even years, squandered in a very few days or hours. How can we look, then, for religion or godliness among men of such habits? (Of course these remarks do not apply to the officers, nor to any class indiscriminately.) And yet wherein consist the absurdity and the impossibility that religion and vital godliness should be found in the navy? Proofs innumerable may be attested of the bravest and most honoured of those who have fought their country's battles, who have been eminent for true piety, who have uniformly conducted themselves, even in an atmosphere confessedly little calculated to foster and cherish Christian feeling and principles, in a manner such as becometh the gospel of Christ. But as the state of our navy once was—and it is to be feared it is had enough still—it has, nevertheless, possessed its seven thousand who have not bowed

the knee to Baal; who have been enabled, boldly and unflinchingly, to confront vice, to resist temptation, and to set before others an example of beautiful consistency. And this among all ranks in the service from a Gambier to the lowest seaman in the fleet. Gambier—the name ever must be regarded as one of the noblest in Britain's peerage. Gambier—the foremost to fight the battles of his country, the foremost to fight the battles of his Lord. Long, long will that name be had in remembrance—and deservedly—in our navy; probably longer still by those who, through his instrumentality, were brought out of darkness into marvellous light.

It has appeared to me that the situation in the ministry which I should the most dislike to fill would be that of a chaplain in the navy; but this may be an unwarranted prejudice. It certainly may not afford so many comforts as a snug rectory; but it may, and possibly will, afford many more opportunities for usefulness. And if a man is really devoted to his work, and has conscientiously embarked in his Master's cause, for the setting forth of his glory and the good of his fellow-creatures, a naval appointment may be by no means ineligible. A seaman's soul is surely as valuable as a rustic's—the salvation of a commander as the salvation of a squire. If a naval chaplain finds few congenial souls with whom he could delight to hold converse, are not many of the clergy, in country districts especially, compelled with reluctance to admit the fact; for they are too often appointed to situations, which they are necessitated to fill, where the society is of a character with which no right feeling man would for a moment have a desire to mingle. The grand point is to follow the leadings of God's providence, so far as we think we can discover them, and then set about our work, in faith that if we be not weary in well doing, we shall in due season reap if we faint not.

I have often heard naval chaplains declare that they have uniformly met with the utmost respect to their ministerial office, as well as to themselves personally; that they have rarely witnessed, in their immediate presence, any thing gross or revolting; that, often in conversations with seamen, they have discovered a religious tone of feeling on which they had little calculated; and that they could number many with whom—though in widely different spheres of life—they could take sweet counsel together, and whom they trust at the last to meet in that sure and certain haven, when the din of war will be heard no more, and the raging of the tempest shall have sunk into a calm—quietness and assurance for ever.

There is a very common notion, in the world, that, the moment a man becomes seriously religious, he grows lax in the performance of his worldly duties. It is very true such instances may be adduced in vast numbers, but they will not bear the scrutiny of strict investigation. It will be found that erroneous views of religion and of human responsibility have been the cause of this; and that to the individual's weakness, and not to religious principles, his inconsistency is to be attributed. I have known a man, indeed, so fond of attending religious meetings, that he entirely neglected his business, and ruined his family—a man so fond of hunting after popular preachers, that the sabbath domestic arrangements of his family never occupied his thoughts. He would order his carriage to one church and then to another, without ever recollecting that his coachman or footman might, while he was spending the time in seeking to satisfy his itching ears which an apostle himself would not have satisfied, for he would have grumbled at the sermon-preacher on Mars hill, be worse than wasting that time in the next wine-vaults or pot-shop. The religious man lives above the world; but he recollects that he lives in the world, that he has worldly duties to perform according to the best energies, and that the very fact of the non-performance of those is an incontrovertible evidence that he has as yet learned nothing effectually of the true obligations of the Christian calling.

And is it not so in the navy? Is a man less courageous because he fights taking God for his shield? Is he necessarily a coward in an engagement, because he has entered it with prayer, and not with cursing? Does he fight his foe less resolutely, because he has been warring against the world and the flesh and the devil? Is he the more apt to flinch from the prospects of death, because he has been accustomed to meditate on