

(ORIGINAL.)

ON CONTENTMENT.

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"The true felicity of life is to be free from perturbations; to understand our duties towards God and man; to enjoy the present without any dependence on the future. Not to amuse ourselves with either hopes or fears, but to rest satisfied with what we have—for he that is so, wants nothing."

Seneca.

HAPPY are they who can say with St. Paul, "*I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.*" The number, however, of those who are really satisfied with their lot, and whose desires are confined to what they possess, appears to be small. It seems natural for man to look forward, with the expectation of enjoying some future good, rather than to appreciate his present blessings. But our happiness is so intimately connected with a contented mind, that the practise of this disposition becomes a positive duty, which we owe, not only to ourselves, but also to those around us, whose peace and comfort must necessarily, in some degree at least, be influenced by our conduct. Some are by nature more inclined to this temper than others, but the cultivation of it lies in the power of all.

That it forms no mean part of the Christian's duty to be contented under all the dark and mysterious providences that God permits to fall upon him, no one will pretend to deny; yet we occasionally observe that some who bear the name indulge in discontent and repining.

We are but poor judges of what is best for us; and the conviction that our Father in Heaven alone really knows what is so, should cause us readily to acquiesce in his judgments. The experience of many has led them to perceive that circumstances, which they at first considered as highly afflictive, have ultimately proved blessings; and, on the other hand, what seemed to them the joyous fulfilment of many an anxious hope, has at length appeared to exert the most unfavourable influence upon their happiness,—clearly shewing how unfit is short-sighted man to mark out his own destiny, giving him cause to exclaim:

"O happiness! how far we flee
Thine own sweet paths in search of thee."

The history of man plainly shews that a state of uninterrupted prosperity is not desirable; and God has, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, allotted to every one those trials by which he will be most likely to receive benefit. Few are gifted with sufficient philosophy to desire affliction, and this is not expected of us; yet, when the chastening hand of our Father sends us needful correction, he requires a cheerful submission, which it is incumbent upon

us to assume, would we learn that "sweet are the uses of adversity."

Afflictions received in a right spirit, have a tendency to improve and refine the heart and affections, and we should endeavour to meet them with such a frame of mind that we may pass through the furnace like silver purified by the fire.

The principles by which we are impelled to cultivate and practise contentment, do not imply that we are to be so satisfied with our present condition that we ought not to seek to improve it by all laudable means. There is nothing wrong in seeking to add to our worldly advantages in a moderate and proper manner. And in embracing every opportunity of increasing the stores of the mind, we but perform an important duty, which we owe to that nobler part of ourselves, which shall survive its frail tenement of clay throughout the vast ages of eternity.

A disposition of contentment is not like the brilliant and transitory light of a meteor, but may be termed the calm and steady sunshine of the soul,—brightening the aspect of all things around, and teaching us to look at everything on its fairest side; while a contrary spirit—the canker-worm of discontent—imperceptibly wears itself into our natures, causing us to keep our eyes fixed on the dark clouds that occasionally obscure our path, and heedlessly to disregard the many flowers that the kind hand of Providence has yet strewn in our way, to cheer and encourage us in pursuing our onward course through life—and occasions us to forget the consoling truth, that, after all, there is more of happiness than of sorrow in the common lot of man, even as the days of sunshine exceed those of gloom. We should consider, under all our trials and afflictions, that we have still much cause for thankfulness—that we are not as much afflicted as we might have been—that our misfortunes are less than those of others, who are perhaps more deserving than ourselves—and that, by indulging in murmuring and repining, we cannot, in the least degree, improve our condition, but only add to our unhappiness. By giving way to a discontented and fretful temper, we are laying the foundation of a miserable life, as our frame of mind will eventually become such that no blessing will be rightly received and appreciated.

By placing a due value on those means of enjoyment within our reach, and partaking of them with a thankful heart, we are not deterred from the pleasure of looking forward through the bright vista of hope, in the soothing expectation of better days to come. Yet it is not wise to permit the mind to be so fully bent upon happy anticipations of the future, that we place ourselves in danger of incurring the bitter heart sickness of hope long deferred.

Another incentive to the cultivation of contentment, is the consideration that one possessed of this disposition finds enjoyment in the contemplation of the happiness of others, which causes him in part to