

we shall be in eternity we must become in time. The difference there will be only a difference in degree, not in kind; for change of locality has in itself no power to change character. Let an angel from heaven come down to the meanest, most barren and polluted spot on earth, and he would be an angel still. If it were possible to take an unregenerated man up to heaven and set him down before the throne of God and the Lamb, he would still be a vile sinner. This should convince us of the importance of looking well to the character we fashion for ourselves here, for in it we must appear before the great God at last, and then it will be for us a robe of beauty or of shame which we must wear for ever. And for this character in itself, and for the influence it exerts on others now, we shall have to answer to the judge of all the earth.

In character-building who is the architect? Not circumstances, though these have much to do with the formation of our character. Not friends, though they may do much to mould our character. Not providences, though they play their part in the formation of every man's character. Not even God Himself, though without Him no man can form a true character. Who then is the architect? *The man himself.* God must furnish the plan. He must provide for us the materials out of which we are to build. He must provide the foundation on which the structure is to rest. He must give us the strength to work. He must inspire us with proper motives. But the work of building must be done by ourselves. So says the apostle Jude,—"Building up yourselves in your most holy faith." And Paul exhorts us to work out our own salvation, because God works in us. If our character is bad we are to blame for it; if it turns out a good one, we shall have the credit of it, under God, or through His grace, and no one else.

That man is the maker of his own moral character is evident from the constitution of the human mind, which is essentially free in the production of thought which is the material out of which character is formed. For as a man thinketh in his heart so is he. "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Actions are but the incarnations of thoughts.

Conscience, too, testifies to the fact of man's free agency, and, consequently, to the fact that every man is responsible to God for the character he forms on the earth. Conscience is God's organ in the human soul, which, although it is corrupted and perverted by sin, accuses or excuses us according to the moral character of our actions. Of one man it makes a coward, of another it makes a moral hero; but these things could never take place were we not free agents.

The Bible, also, in its precepts and commands, and the sanctions it pronounces upon human thoughts, words, and actions, appeals to man as a free agent, and holds him accountable for both the character he forms and the influence which through that character he exerts upon others. The Scriptures teach us that while the gracious affections in the heart of the Christian are an effect of God's gracious power, they are not, on this account, any the less the acts of the Christian's mind. His love to God is his own act; he himself performs it, although it is "shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost."

In the work of character-building, as in material architecture, we must have a good foundation in order to build well. We have an excellent illustration of this in our Lord's description of the wise and foolish builders. Every edifice must have a foundation to rest upon. The central idea of a man's life is the foundation of his character. It shapes his life. With