

# The Religious Intelligencer.

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REV. E. McLEOD,

"THAT GOD IN ALL THINGS

MAY BE GLORIFIED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST."—Peter.

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## THE INTELLIGENCER.

### THE PROGRESS OF GRACE.

IN THREE LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

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BLADE.

"First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."—Mark iv. 28.

LETTER I.

A; OR, GRACE IN THE BLADE.—MARK IV. 28.

DEAR SIR—According to your desire, I sit down

to give you my general views of a progressive

work of grace, in the several stages of a believer's

experience, which I shall mark by the different

characters, A, B, C; answerable to the distinction

our Lord teaches us to observe from the

growth of the corn, Mark 4: 28. "First the

blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the

ear." The Lord leads all his people effectually

and savingly to the knowledge of the same essen-

tial truths, but in such a variety of methods, that

it will be needful, in this disquisition, to set aside,

as much as possible, such things as may be only

personal and occasional in the experience of each,

and to collect those only which, in a greater or

less degree, are common to them all. I shall not,

therefore, give you a copy of my own experience,

or of that of any individual; but shall endeavour,

as clearly as I can, to state what the Scripture

teaches us concerning the nature and essentials

of a work of grace, so far as it will bear a general

application to all those who are the subjects of

gracious operations.

By nature we are all dead in trespasses and

sin; not only strangers to God, but in a state of

enmity and opposition to his government and

grace. In this respect, whatever difference there

may be in the characters of men as members of

society, they are all, whether wise or ignorant, if

unassisted by the Holy Spirit, incapable of receiv-

ing or approving divine truths. 1 Cor. 2: 14. On

this ground, our Lord declares, "No man can

come unto me, except the Father who has sent me

draw him." Though the term *Father* most

frequently expresses a known and important dis-

tinction in the adorable Trinity, I apprehend our

Lord sometimes uses it to denote God, or the

Divine Nature, in contradistinction from his

humanity, as in John 14: 9. And this I take to

be the sense here: "No man can come unto me

unless he be taught of God," and wrought upon by

a divine power. The immediate exertion of this

power, according to the economy of salvation, is

rather ascribed to the Holy Spirit than to the

Father, John 16: 8-11; but it is the power of the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and

therefore severally attributed to the Father, Son,

and Spirit. John 5: 21, and 6: 44, 63; 2 Cor.

3: 18; 2 Thess. 3: 5.

By A, I would understand a person who is under

the drawings of God, which will infallibly lead

him to the Lord Jesus Christ for life and salvation.

The beginning of this work is instantaneous. It

is effected by a certain kind of light communicated

to the soul, to which it was before an utter stranger.

The eyes of the understanding are opened and

enlightened. The light at first afforded is weak

and indistinct, like the morning dawn; but, when

it once begins, it will certainly increase and

spread to the perfect day. We commonly speak

as if conviction of sin were the first work of God

to the soul that he is in mercy about to draw

himself. But I think this is inaccurate. Con-

viction is only a part, or rather an immediate

effect, of that first work; and there are many

convictions which do not at all spring from it, and

therefore are only occasional and temporary,

though for a season they may be very sharp, and

put a person upon doing many things.

In order to a due conviction of sin, we must

previously have some adequate conceptions of the

God with whom we have to do. Sin may be

fearful as dangerous, without this; but its nature

and demerit can be understood only by being

contrasted with the holiness, majesty, goodness,

and truth of the God against whom it is com-

mitted. No outward means, no mercies, judgments,

or ordinances, can communicate such a discovery

of God, or produce such a conviction of sin, with-

out the concurrence of divine light and power.

The natural conscience and passions may be in-

deed so far wrought upon by outward means, as

to stir up some desires and endeavors; but if these

are not founded in a spiritual apprehension of the

perfections of God, according to the revelation he

has made of himself in his word, they will, sooner

or later, come to nothing; and the person affected

will either return by degrees to his former ways,

2 Peter, 2: 20, or he will sink into a self-righte-

ous form of godliness, destitute of the power.

are proved to be, in themselves, vain and ineffec-

tual. The soul, like the woman mentioned Mark

5: 26, wearied with vain expedients, finds itself

worse and worse; and is gradually brought to see

the necessity and sufficiency of the Gospel sal-

vation.

A may soon be a believer thus far—that he

believes the word of God, and sees and feels things

to be as they are there described, hates and avoids

sin, because he knows it is displeasing to God, and

contrary to his goodness; he receives the record

which God has given of his Son; has his heart

affected, and drawn to Jesus, by views of his glory

and of his love to poor sinners; ventures upon his

name and promises as his only encouragement to

come to a throne of grace; waits diligently in the

use of all means appointed for the communion

and growth of grace; loves the Lord's people, ac-

counts them the excellent of the earth, and de-

lights in their conversation. He is longing, wait-

ing, and praying for a share in those blessings

which he believes they enjoy, and can be satisfied

with nothing less. He is convinced of the power

of Jesus to save him; but through remaining

ignorance and legality, the remembrance of sin

committed, and the sense of present corruption,

he often questions his *willingness*; and not know-

ing the abounding of grace, and the security of

the promises, he fears lest the compassionate

Saviour should spurn him from his feet.

While he is thus young in the knowledge of

the Gospel, burdened with sin, and perhaps beset

with Satan's temptations, the Lord, "who gathers

this lambs in his arms, and carries them in his

bosom," is pleased at times to favor him with

cordials, that he may not be swallowed up with

overmuch sorrow. Perhaps his heart is enlarged

in prayer, or under hearing; or some good prom-

ise is brought home to his mind, and applied

with power and sweetness. He mistakes the

nature and design of these comforts, which are

not given him to rest in, but to encourage him to

press forward. He thinks he is then right, be-

cause he has them, and fondly hopes to have them

always. Then his mountain stands strong. But,

ere long, he feels a change; his comforts are

withdrawn; he finds no heart to pray, no atten-

tion in hearing, indwelling sin revives with fresh

strength, and perhaps Satan returns with redou-

bled rage.

Then he is at his wit's end; thinks his hopes

were presumptuous, and his comforts delusions.

He wants to feel something that may give him a

warrant to trust in the free promises of Christ.

His views of his Redeemer's grace are very nar-

row; he sees not the harmony and glory of the

divine attributes in the salvation of a sinner; he

sighs for mercy, but fears that justice is against

him. However, by these changing dispensations

the Lord is training him up, and bringing him

forward. He receives grace from Jesus, whereby

he is enabled to fight against sin; his conscience

tender, his troubles are chiefly spiritual troubles;

and he thinks, if he could but attain a sure and

abiding sense of his acceptance in the Beloved,

hardly any outward trial would be capable of

giving him much disturbance.

Indeed, notwithstanding the weakness of his

faith, and the prevalence of a legal spirit, which

greatly hurt him, there are some things in his

present experience, the absence of which he may,

perhaps, look back upon with regret hereafter,

when his hope and knowledge will be more estab-

lished; particularly that sensibility and keenness

of appetite with which he now attends the ordi-

nances, desiring the sincere milk of the word with

earnestness and eagerness, as a babe does the

breast. He counts the hours from one opportunity

to another; and the attention and desire with

which he hears, may be read in his countenance.

His zeal is likewise lively, and may be, for want

of more experience, too importunate and forward.

He has a love for souls, and a concern for the

glory of God; which, though it may at some

seasons create him trouble, and at others be mixed

with some undue notions of self, yet, in its prin-

ciple, is highly desirable and commendable. John

18: 10.

The grace of God influences both the under-

standing and the affections. Warm affections

without knowledge can rise no higher than super-

stition; and that knowledge which does not in-

fluence the heart and affections will only make a

hypocrite. The true believer is rewarded in both

respects; yet we may observe, that though A is

not without knowledge, this state is more usually

remarkable for the warmth and liveliness of the

affections. On the other hand, as the work ad-

vances, though the affections are not left out, yet

departing from him, and the hour of liberty, which

he longs for, is approaching, when, by a further

discovery of the glorious gospel, it shall be given

him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the

Lord's finished salvation. We shall then take

notice of him by the name of B, in a second letter,

if you are not unwilling that I should prosecute

the subject. I am, &c.

(To be Continued.)

A CONTRAST.

PICTURE FIRST.

"There was a sound of revelry by night"—Byron.

In the saloons of a spacious mansion, in the

fashionable part of town, were gathered, and

gathering, a large company. It was a noble

mansion. Wealth had been lavished upon it, and

the invention of art, for luxury and ease were

grouped in tasteful array throughout its lofty

rooms. The richly gemmed lamps threw a soft

splendor over the carved and figured ceiling.

All the various forms that the art of man could

fashion from massive mahogany and stainless

marble, for the ease of men, were there. Gorge-

ous tapestry, every heavy fold of which was

studiously graceful, might put to shame the richest

webs of Tyre. No footfall echoed from the soft

and yielding carpet, though many on that night

passed over it.

New-comers were still pouring in; and as the

night grew dark without, the life grew high within.

There were men and women of different dispo-

sitions, but all of the upper grade, whose misfor-

tune it was to be rich, and whose pride it was to

be supercilious. No publicans and sinners there;

sorry poverty was not invited, and of course did

not come, though he cast many a wistful glance

to the lofty portal, as he plodded on his way.

Shivering with cold, he involuntarily halted

in the blaze of light that streamed from the

windows, and his wondering fancy pictured the

comfort and joy within. Let us go in. The babel

of voices swells, and jest and song are bandied

about with untiring industry. The hoary head

of age is almost cheated of its frost. The ear of

beauty is flattered. The severity of matronly

dignity unbends. Even the coxcomb expands his

butterfly wings, secure, at least in the sunshine

of his own approbation. The Rev. Mr. A. is en-

trancingly fascinating. Good Elder B. rejoices to

see his magnificent rooms so well filled, and fosters

the gaiety with well-bred art. Deacon C.

has a ready jest for all. Miss D. draws most

eloquent music from the splendid piano; and Miss P.,

the best voice in the choir of a Sunday, after much

solicitation, entertains the company with a variety

of sentimental and lively songs. The night wanes.

Then comes the feasting, and still the hilarity is

"fast and flowing." Midnight! sings the watch-

man; but still the lights flash, the tongues rattle,

Dawn, and the party separate, and the clattering

wheels go out in various directions to convey the

tired revellers to their homes and to bed.

PICTURE SECOND.

"And it came to pass in those days, that he went out

into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to

God."—Luke ix. 18.

The dusky haze of a summer evening was

gradually deepening into the night. The tall

spires of the Temple, and its turreted roofs, and

its light pinnacles, stood out with bold distinctness

against the southern sky. The hum of the flowing

multitude came fainter and fainter from the narrow

streets, and the evening song floated from many a

family group, gathered upon the flat roofs to enjoy

the evening twilight. The darker shades of night

had already veiled the rugged ravines, and were

stealing up to the summits of the mountains.

The song of the way-faring man was hushed, and

the distant tinkling of bells came clear and musical

up the valleys. Earth, with its multitudinous

sounds, was sinking to slumber.