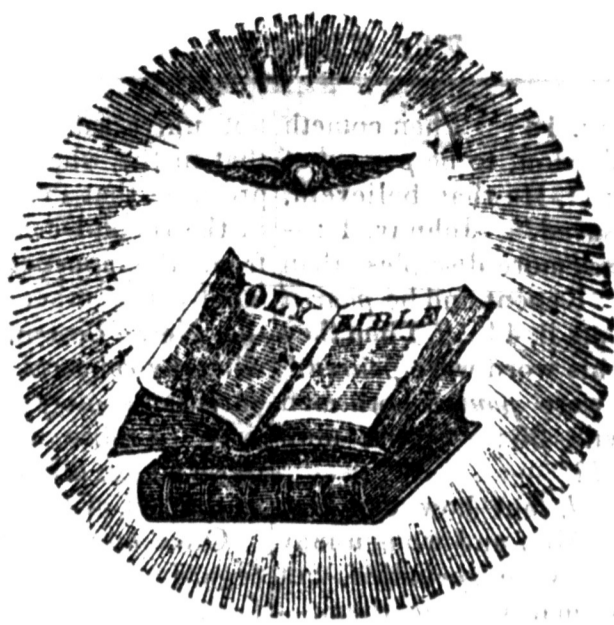


CHRISTIAN



VISITOR.

A Family Newspaper: devoted to

Religious & General Intelligence.

REV'DS I. E. BILL & R. THOMSON,

"BY PURENESS, BY KNOWLEDGE—BY LOVE UNFEIGNED"—ST. PAUL.

EDITORS.

Volume V.

SAINT JOHN, NEW-BRUNSWICK, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1852.

Number 40.

HYMN.

God is our refuge in distress,
A present help when dangers press,
Our courage then shall never fail:
Though earth should be remov'd away,
Or mountains cast into the sea,
Whose troubled waters rage and swell.

There is a river, calm and still,
Whose gentle streams with gladness fill
The holy city of the Lord:
No foe against her peace prevails,
For in her midst Jehorah dwells,
And will his tabernacle guard.

Come see the wonders he has wrought,
On earth what desolations brought,
And then commanded wars to cease:
He breaks asunder spear and bow,
Burns in the fire the chariot too,
And reigns in righteousness and peace.

His word is sounded forth aloud,
"Be still, and know that I am God,
Exalted o'er the heathen powers:"
We love to hear his gracious voice,
And in the Lord of Hosts rejoice,
For Jacob's mighty God is ours.

MEDITATION AND REFLECTION.

"O! the happiness of the man
Who walketh not after the counsel of the
wicked,
Nor abideth in the way of sinners,
Nor sitteth in the company of scoffers;
But whose delight is in the law of Jehovah,
And who on His law meditateth day and night.
Truly he is like a tree planted by water
streams,
That yieldeth its fruit in its proper season,
And whose foliage never fadeth:
And whatsoever he doeth prospereth.
O! how greatly do I love thy law!
It is daily my meditation."

"Meditate on divine things: give thyself
wholly to them."

Meditation and reflection are essential to improvement. They are necessary to self-examination and self-knowledge, without which the hope of progress and of virtue is vain.—No one can know his own character, or be aware of the dispositions, feelings, and motives by which he is actuated, except by means of deep and searching reflection. In the crowd of business and the hurry of the world, we are apt to rush on without weighing as we should, the considerations which urge us—we are liable to neglect that close inspection of ourselves, and that careful reference of our conduct to the unerring standard of right, which are requisite both to our knowing where we are, and to our keeping in the right way. It is necessary that we sometimes pause and look around us, and consider our ways—that we take observation of the course we are running, and the various influences to which we are subjected; and be sure that we are not driven or drifted from the direction in which we ought to be proceeding. Without this there is no safety.

Meditation, too, is necessary in order to the digesting of religious truth, making familiar what we have learned, and incorporating it with our own minds. We cannot even retain it in our memories, much less can we be fully sensible of its power and worth, except through the habit of reflecting upon it. We cannot have it ready at command, so as to defend it when assailed, or state it when inquired after, or apply it in the emergencies of life, unless it be familiar to us by habitual meditation; so that even reading loses its value, if unaccompanied by reflection. The ob-

ligations and motives of duty—the promises, hopes, and prospects of the Christian—the great interests and permanent realities by which he is to be actuated, are not visibly and tangibly present to him, like the scenes of his passing life; and they must be made spiritually present by deliberate meditation, if he would be guided and swayed by them. Indeed without this, he must be devoid of consideration or devotion, ignorant of the actual state of his character, and in constant danger of his falling a sacrifice to the unfriendly influence of the world.

In attempting, therefore, the acquisition of a religious character, it is important that you maintain an habitual thoughtfulness of mind. It has been said, and with perfect truth, that no man pauses a great interest of any kind, in which important consequences are at stake, without a profound and settled seriousness of mind; and that a man of really frivolous disposition never accomplishes anything valuable. How especially true must this be in regard to the great interests of religion and eternity!—How can you hope to make progress in that perplexing and difficult work, the establishment of a religious character, the attainment of the great Christian accomplishments, without a fixed and habitual thoughtfulness?—a thoughtfulness which never forgets the vastness and responsibility of the work assigned to man, nor loses the consciousness of a relation to more glorious beings than are found upon the earth. This must be your habit—something more than an occasional musing and reverie—at set times when you shall force yourself to the task. It must be the uniform condition of your mind—as much so as solicitude to the merchant, who has great treasures exposed to the uncertainties of the ocean and the foe—a solicitude in your case not gloomy, or unsocial, or morose; but thoughtful, so that nothing shall be done inconsiderately, or without adverting to the bearing it may have on your character and final prospects.

Then, besides this general state of mind, there must be, as I have said, allotted periods of express meditation. As the precept respecting devotion is "Pray without ceasing," and yet set times of prayer are necessary—so also, while we say, "Be always thoughtful," we must add that particular seasons are necessary on purpose for meditation. You must set apart certain times for reflection, when you shall deliberately sit down and survey with keen scrutiny yourself, your condition, your past life, and the prospect before you—inquire into the state of your religious knowledge and personal attainments—and strengthen your sense of responsibility and purposes of duty, by dwelling on the attributes and government of God—the ways of His providence—the revelations of His will—the glory of His kingdom—and all the affecting truths and promises which the gospel displays. These are to be the subjects of distinct and profound consideration, till your mind becomes imbued with them, and until filled and inspired by the spiritual contemplation, you are in a manner, "changed into the same image, as by the spirit of the Lord." The proper season for this meditation is the season of your daily devotion, when, having shut out the world, and sought the nearer presence of God, your mind is prepared to work fervently. Then contemplation, aided by prayer, ascends to heights which it could never reach alone; and sometimes, whether in the body or out of the body, it can hardly tell, soars, as it were, to the third heaven, and enjoys a revelation to which, at other times, it is a stranger.

This, however, is an excitement of mind which is rarely to be expected. Those seasons are 'few as angel's visits,' which lift the

spirit to anything like ecstasy. They are glimpses of heaven, which the soul in its present tabernacle, can seldom catch—only frequently enough to afford a brief foretaste of that bliss to which it shall hereafter arrive.—Its ordinary musings are less ethereal—happy undoubtedly, though oftentimes clouded by feelings of sadness and doubt, and by a sense of unworthiness and sin. But however mixed they may be, they are always salutary. If sad and disheartening, they lead to more vigilant self examination, that we may discover their cause, and thus rekindle the watchlight that is so essential to right progress. If serene and joyous, they are a present earnest of peace which is assured to the righteous, and the joy of heart which is one of the genuine fruits of the spirit. Be not, therefore, troubled or cast down (indeed never be cast down, so long as you can say to your soul, trust in God;) be not, I say, disquieted or cast down, because of the inequalities of feeling with which you enter and leave your closet, and the changes from brightness to gloom, from clearness to obscurity, which often pass over your mind. This, alas! is the inheritance of our frail nature. An equal vigor of thought, clearness of apprehension, force of imagination, fervor of devotion—always perceiving, feeling, adoring, with the same vividness and satisfaction—are to be our portion in the world of spirits. Here we see all things "as in a glass darkly;"—there we shall see "face to face." Here the truths we rejoice in are too often like the images of absent friends, which we strive in vain to bring brightly before the eye of our minds; they are shadowy, indistinct and fleeting.—But there they will be like our friends themselves, always present in their own full form and beauty, to dwell in the mind unfadingly, and constitute its bliss. Be satisfied, then, if you sometimes arrive, in your meditations, at that glow of elevated enjoyment which you desire. What you are rather to seek for, is a calm and composed state of the affections, an equanimity of spirit, a serenity of temper,—like the quiet which an affectionate child experiences in the circle of its parents and brothers, where it is not excited to ecstasy by the thought of a father's goodness, but lives beneath it in a state of equal and affectionate trust. Like this should be the habitual experience of the Christian; and if it be thus with you, let not occasional dullness or darkness, coming over your spirit in its religious hours, dishearten or distress you.

This I say, because many persons of truly devout habits have unquestionably suffered much from this cause. In the natural fluctuations of the animal spirits, or the nervous system, or the bodily health, they sometimes find themselves cold at heart, and seemingly insensible to religious considerations. It seems to them that their hearts have waxed gross, that their eyes have closed, and their ears become dull of hearing. In vain do they read and think—they cannot arouse themselves to anything like a "realizing sense" of these great objects; but regard with a stupid unconcern what at other times has been their chief enjoyment. But let the humble and timid believer be of good cheer. This is not always a sign of guilt, or of desertion by God. It may be traced to the original and unavoidable imperfection of human nature; it is to be lamented as such, but not to be repented of as sin; and one may not expect to be relieved from it, till the soul is freed from the body. Let him watch the course of his mind, and he will find the same inequality of feeling to exist upon other subjects. He does not at all times take an equal interest in his ordinary concerns, nor does he at all times feel the highest warmth of affection towards his parent, friend, or child. Let him observe

others, and he will discover the same variations in them. They will confess it to be so. The oldest and most established Christians will describe themselves to have passed their whole pilgrimage in this state of fluctuation. Read the private journals of distinguished believers, and you will find in them frequent complaints of lukewarmness, indifference and deadness of heart. They mourn over it, they bewail it, they strive against it, and yet it clings to them as long as they live. It is not therefore, your peculiar sin, but a common infirmity. Regard it in this light, and do not let it destroy your peace of mind, or lead you to overlook the rational evidence that your heart is right with God.

But also, on the other hand—for the Christian's path is hedged in with dangers on every side, and in trying to escape one it is easy to rush into another—take heed that you do not unwarrantably apply this consolation, and make this excuse to yourself, in cases in which you really deserve blame. Do not let this apology, which is designed only for the comfort of the humble and watchful, be used by you as a cover for negligence and sinful self-confidence. Remember that your unsatisfactory state of religious sensibility may be possibly your fault; and you are not to presume that it is otherwise, until you have faithfully searched and tried. Have you not, for a time, been unreasonably devoted to amusement, or engrossed by unnecessary cares, so as to have neglected the watching of your heart?—Have you not for a season been thoughtless, light-minded, frivolous, and careless of that devout reference to God, by which you should always be actuated? Have you not engaged in some questionable undertaking—or allowed yourself in sloth or self-indulgence—or cherished ill-feelings toward others—or permitted your temper to be kept irritated by some unimportant vexations—or let your imagination run loose among forbidden desires? Ask yourself such questions, and perhaps in the nature of your recent occupations you may detect the cause of your present listlessness. If so, change the general turn of your life. In the words of Cowper's hymn, it is only "A closer walk with God," which can bring back "the blessedness you once enjoyed." Now your heart is desolate and unsatisfied; you find in it "an aching void which God alone can fill"; and it is only by renewing your acquaintance with Him, that you can renew your peace.

But after all, remember that you are to judge of the real worth of these seasons, not by your enjoyment of them as they pass, not by the luxury or rapture of your contemplation, but by their effect upon your character and principles, by the religious power you gain from them toward meeting the duties and sufferings, the joys and sorrows, the temptations, trials and conflicts of actual life.—Meditation is a means of religion; not to be rested in as a final good, nor allowed to satisfy us, except so far as it imparts to the character a permanent impress of seriousness and duty, and strengthens the principles of faith and self-government. If it add daily vigor to your resolutions, and secure order to your thoughts, serenity to your temper, and uprightness to your life, then it has fulfilled its legitimate purpose. If, on the other hand, it end in the reverie of the hour, then however fervent and exalted, it is comparatively speaking, worthless to yourself and unacceptable to God. Its permanent influence on the character is the true test of its virtue.

It is easy to see, therefore, that there are three purposes which you have in view; the cultivation of a religious spirit, the scrutiny of your life and character, and the renewing of your good purposes.