

THE CHRISTIAN VISITOR,

AND NEW BRUNSWICK BAPTIST.

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SELF RELIANCE.

Warren Hastings, when a young and obscure writer in the East India Company's service, was heard to remark that he had a better friend in India than the governor or the commander-in-chief, and his name was Warren Hastings. He relied upon himself and his own great abilities, and the result is well known. Had he put his trust in God, and sought guidance from Him, his success, if not more splendid and dazzling, would at least have been less tarnished by those evil deeds which have cast a shade upon his glory. But, however much we may deplore his mistakes and faults, we can but admire the spirit of self-reliance and undomitable perseverance which he showed during his whole career.

Self-reliance is a most valuable quality. Those who depend upon others for their success in life, or in any pursuit, can never attain any eminence, or acquire any useful accomplishment. Many have had their characters and prospects ruined by entertaining great expectations of what others would do for them, and neglecting what they could do for themselves. It would be well if we could learn to value the talents which God has entrusted to each one of us, as our most precious worldly possessions, and to consider their improvement and right use to be of more importance than the gifts of fortune, birth, or position. It is related of a learned man, who suffered shipwreck, and was cast, with a number of others, equally unfortunate, upon an inhospitable coast, while the rest bewailed their misfortune, and lamented the loss of their property, he was observed to preserve a serene and cheerful countenance, and to occupy himself only in comforting the distressed. When asked how it was he appeared so contented after sustaining so severe an affliction, he replied, "My learning, which has been the result of many years' hard study, is my greatest treasure, and the waves of the sea could not rob me of that."

Nor in the improvement of our talents should we be less self-reliant than in their possession. Many have been greatly disappointed and discouraged at finding that, after all, masters and teachers could do little more than point the road to knowledge, and that the trouble and labour of travelling it must be their own; and others, who have not had these advantages, have despaired of attaining the accomplishments they desired. In both cases a want of self-reliance is the fault, and the cause of disappointment and discouragement. The student who possesses every advantage must rely upon himself, almost, if not quite, as much as he who has but few. The mind is not like a bottle, into which water may be poured until it is full; it is rather like the body, which, before it can be nourished by the food it requires, must prepare, masticate, and digest it. Nor should the student, who has but slender opportunities of self-improvement, despair. He has many bright examples of industry and self-relying perseverance, overcoming as great disadvantages as any he can have to encounter. Let him consider the lives of such men as Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Kitto, and Dr. Livingstone—men who have risen from most obscure positions, by their own efforts, to be the universally acknowledged benefactors of their fellow-creatures. And a nobler object than to benefit others no man can have, if in so doing he also seeks to glorify God.

But in addition to the difficulties of obtaining knowledge, I have met with some people, young people especially, who place another obstacle in the way of self-improvement, which they fondly imagine to be noble and praiseworthy self-reliance, but which is in reality nothing but silly vanity. I fallude to the boast so often uttered of doing things without having studied them, "without being taught," as the phrase runs. Many who have the opportunities of thoroughly acquiring an accomplishment prefer mediocrity, or something below it, with this vain boast, to excellence without it. Now, it must appear clear to every thinking mind, that there is no merit in possessing a talent. The servant who hid his Lord's money derived no praise for the possession of it. The merit consists in the right use of it, in its improvement, and the practical good that comes of it. Therefore, to neglect to improve a talent God has given us when we have opportunity, is not praiseworthy, but blameable. It is sacrificing real benefit at the shrine of vanity.

We must be careful, however, not to form an over-estimate of our own powers, and rely too much upon ourselves. This is very often done, and is almost more dangerous than the habit of leaning upon others. It is as likely to lead us unto evil as the other is to keep us out of good. To illustrate this simply, I remember hearing a story of a very strong man, who, however, rather overrated his strength. One day he was walking with a friend through a farm-yard, when an infuriated bull broke in. A man thrashing in a barn close by warned him of his danger, and his weaker friend, taking the hint, took to his heels and speedily cleared the gate. The strong man, however, disdainful such a very undignified course of action; he considered himself more than a match for the bull.

"Throw me your fall!" he cried to the man in the barn; then, grasping it in his sinewy hands, waited for his antagonist.

The bull charged at him with bilious fury; received the blow between his horns as if it had been a straw instead of a fall, and the next moment the strong man was high in the air. When safely on the ground again, he did not return to the combat, but vanished swiftly over the wall, a wiser man.

thankful that no bones were broken. Thus many, trusting in their own strength, have been overthrown. It is most necessary, before undertaking any important work, that we should ascertain carefully all the difficulties we shall have to encounter. And then, having with equal care considered our own qualifications, determine whether we can creditably perform it. Any labour or pursuit hastily or rashly undertaken is almost sure to be laid aside, however good the intention, and however worthy the object may have been. It is far better never to begin than to leave undone; for besides the loss of time to the labourer, the influence of a half-accomplished work is a bad one. As some, however, are very incompetent judges of their own abilities, it is often the wisest plan to consult with judicious friends before forming an idea of our own powers, which may prove a false and exaggerated one. There are very many who entertain such very favourable notions of their own wisdom, sagacity, and experience, that they are continually placing themselves in ridiculous positions, and incurring unnecessary anxiety and disappointment; they fancy, because the world does not appreciate their imagined excellences, that the world does them injustice, and that they are injured individuals; this is a lamentable mistake, and often the source of great unhappiness. I remember hearing of one such, who called upon an eminent though eccentric minister, to entreat him to use his influence to get him ordained, as he conceived he had great abilities, and did not wish to "hide his talent in a napkin." After some conversation, the rev. gentleman came to a conclusion concerning the talents of his young visitor very different to his own idea, and he dismissed him with these words: "You need not get a napkin to contain your talent, as the very smallest pocket handkerchief will suffice."

In advocating due self-reliance, it must not be imagined, however, that I overlook the fact, that it is by the permission and blessing of God alone that any work undertaken can succeed. In recommending that man should put his trust rather in himself, and the abilities he has, than in the doubtful favour and assistance of others, I regard his own powers and abilities as the direct gifts of God; and the natural inference is, that in making the best use of those gifts, he should consult the giver. Unless self-reliance be thus connected with absolute reliance upon God, it becomes a sin; and a snare which endangers the soul.

It is a most essential duty for the Christian, before he undertakes any work, to seek guidance and wisdom from above. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. With God upon his side, the Christian is invincible. He relies upon himself, because he feels he has a sustaining power within him, which is above all human control, and superior to the chances and changes of mortal life. Nothing is so favourable to just self-reliance as entire trust in God. It is this that gives the soul calmness and firmness in the midst of trials, which appal others who have not this confidence to sustain them. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion." The reason why so many make mistakes as to their fitness for certain work, or fail in their efforts, is to be found in the fact that they have not humbly sought wisdom from their Father in heaven.

If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

THE BOUNTIFUL EYE.

"Be that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed." Prov. xxii. 9. If some very wealthy person made a promise that all who possessed eyes of a peculiar colour or character should be entitled to a large estate, what a stir would be produced, and what abundant use would be made of looking glasses!

The King of Heaven has done this. He has also furnished us with a mirror, in which we may look, and thus ascertain whether we possess this peculiar eye. Do not let us trust to the testimony of others, for by flattering man "the churl is often said to be bountiful."

The passage before us speaks of bounty in man, and blessedness from God. What is a bountiful eye, and what is the blessing belonging to him who possesses it? These are questions which it is important we should ask and endeavour to answer.

The eye is a wonderful part of the curiously wrought human frame. But the term is used in Scripture in a moral point of view, and describes a peculiar state of the mind. Thus we read of the blinded eye, the enlightened eye, the single eye, the evil eye, all of which refer to the state of the mind or heart; and so does the term, "bountiful eye." Mind, it is not said a bountiful tongue;—most men will proclaim every one his own goodness. Prov. xx. 9; nor a bountiful hand, for man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and lack charity, 1 Cor. xiii. 3; nor a bountiful heart, for an ingenious mind may devise schemes of liberality for others, and not be truly generous himself; but "a bountiful eye"—one through which the soul looks in tender compassion—one that "considers the cross of the poor." Ps. xli. 1—one that compares and contrasts—one that "affects the heart," stirs it up to feel, and moves the hand to minister. Such an eye looks in the right place to find appropriate objects. It does not shun misery, "passing by (like the priest and Levite) on the other side." It looks through the right medium, even the love and compassion of God, and says, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." "What shall I render to the Lord for

all His benefits toward me?" It looks to the right end, even the glory of God, and the good of man; and looks for a right reward—not the approbation of man, but to please God. A bountiful eye does not say, How much can I give to save appearances, or pacify conscience; but, How much can I spare God and His cause?

A bountiful eye may be considered in contrast with the evil eye. "Eat not the bread of him that hath an evil eye." Prov. xxiii. 6. Why not? Such an one maketh haste to be rich: Prov. xxvii. 22. He attempts to serve God and mammon: Matt. vi. 13. Thus his eye is evil, and his whole body is full of darkness. Whereas, concerning him who hath the bountiful eye, it is written, "his whole body shall be full of light." It shall be so, for the "Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, no shadow of turning," will bless him with every good and perfect gift. God's blessing is a comprehensive one, including all temporal, spiritual, and eternal good. It maketh rich, wise, and honourable. It is a covenant blessing. It comes through a sacrifice, and according to promise. It is a constant blessing. It is compared to the dew of Hermon; and the Lord Himself says, "That He will be as the dew unto Israel." So, thus shall the bountiful man be blessed. The promise is positive and permanent. It cannot be hindered; it should not be doubted. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." "The liberal soul shall be made fat." "Give, and it shall be given you." Such are God's words, and they cannot fail. Those who have received righteousness, pardon, peace, and a good hope through grace, all freely, should be of all men most liberal. God's bountiful eye has looked on them; let them seek to imitate their heavenly Father in His diffusive goodness.

Have you a bountiful eye? Be careful of it. The eye of the body wants guarding; so does the eye of the soul. It sometimes grows dim. Conscience steals silent matches even on liberal souls. Happy is he of whom it can be said spiritually, as of Moses literally, that his eye is not dim, nor his spiritual force abated. The way to strengthen the habit is to be frequent in the act. Those in whom zeal for God's glory and the good of man has become a strong habit, a ruling passion, are blessed indeed, and shall be made blessings. And oh how blessed is He, and how worthy to be blessed, of whom we wonderingly and joyfully sing—

"His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued, as long as the sun; and man shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen."

PREACHING.

No one is warranted in anticipating beneficial results from his ministry, unless his sermons are the product of deep thought, and of an anxious wish to adapt them to the necessities of the congregation. We are afraid that this is frequently forgotten, and that many are content with delivering discourses, without inquiring whether the doctrines advanced were powerfully and impressively stated. What is wanted is truth proclaimed with such unctious and convincing force that the attention of the hearers shall be arrested, their reason compelled to assent to the arguments employed, and their hearts touched by the appeals addressed to them. Sermons which convey no instruction, which excite neither hope nor fear, and fall listlessly upon the audience, are worse than useless. They exert an injurious influence on all concerned, and tend to throw contempt on the great distinctive ordinance of the Gospel dispensation. We have no sympathy with those who would convert the pulpit into a professional chair, and eliminate from sermons the practical and searching truths of Christianity. Recondite treatises, and elaborated rhetorical essays on every subject but the "one thing needful," are wholly out of place. Mere intellectual displays are unprofitable perorations of a man of grace is an opportunity for self-glorification; while, on the other hand, rapid and unmeaning discourses are grievous disparagements thereof. Both are reprehensible, and manifest deplorable heedlessness on the part of the preacher respecting the solemnity of the occasion, and the gravity of the duty which he has undertaken.

At no time in the history of our Church was it more essential than now that great care should be bestowed on the preparation of sermons. Men's minds are disquieted by conflicting statements. So much error is abroad, and the very foundations of the faith are assailed with so much pertinacity, that numbers are perplexed. They have neither leisure nor ability to investigate the truth of the astounding assertions which are so rife; but they are painfully aware that, they need aid to enable them to quench the misgivings which they occasion. There are others also who are captivated by the specious pleas put forward by the advocates of strange doctrines. Bold and eager spirits are apt to respond when they are invited to throw off the shackles of an unenlightened age, and urged only to accept those dogmas as proved which commend themselves to their reason. Congregations, therefore, require to be fortified against these insidious statements. Their minds should be so well stored with the precious treasures of God's holy Word, that they may instinctively recoil from latitudinarianism as poisonous. And this is the province of the preacher. All the divinity which multitudes know is derived from what they hear at Church.

They are dependent on the clergyman for their acquaintance with the evidences of religion. If then they glean little or nothing from his teaching, they will fall a ready prey to the subtleties of skepticism; whereas, if his testimony be sound, full, and edifying, they will be armed against them. They may be wholly unable to argue out the question, but their innate persuasion of the truth of Christianity will preserve them from embracing error.

We do not, however, recommend the constant introduction of controversy into the pulpit. There are occasions when it becomes a positive duty to expose the fallacies of false apostles; but, as a general rule, polemical discourses do not tend to growth in grace. They necessarily lack that close self-application which constrains men to examine into their own hearts, and deal in negations rather than in those clear, positive statements which are so useful. It seems, therefore, desirable that the great objective truths of Revelation should be dwelt upon with more earnestness and intensity of feeling than they have been in many instances. The reality and power of faith in God, the blessedness of hope in Jesus Christ, the sufficiency of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and all those kindred topics which radiate around these central truths, need to be enforced with more direct and decisive bearing on the life and conversation. Preachers must not be satisfied with uttering those obvious reflections which occur to everybody. They must dig down deep into the mine of truth, and spread before their flocks the valuable ore which they have obtained, especially the treasures gained from the experience of the influence of the precious truth upon their own lives. A sermon should be an exhaustive comment on the text, enriching the understanding and confirming the principles of the hearers. Were this the case there would not be so many complaints of the feebleness of the pulpit on the one hand, or of the absence of fruitfulness on the other. Much of the criticism which has been directed against the sermons of the day is due to caprice, and to a distaste for evangelical doctrine; but, after every allowance has been made, none can deny that, speaking generally, there is great room for improvement. The matter is often dull and uninteresting, the composition loose and verbose, the delivery tame, the exhortations pointless. It was not by such preaching that Latimer moved men to tears, or that Cecil Romaine, and Simeon awakened the Church of England from its apathy. We counsel, therefore, the younger clergy especially to try themselves by the standard of these Apostolic men, and above all to pray for Divine guidance, that they may be able to speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but in the spirit of demonstration and of power.—Record.

THIS IS NOT YOUR REST.

Blessed thought, this world is no resting-place for the believer: God has reserved another and a better country for him, to which he loves to look forward. This is not your rest! Only the path that leads to it. Then sit not down in idle contentment with the desert, when your own beautiful home is before you; be not satisfied with the few flowers you may gather; for they fade and die almost before you pluck them; hasten to the country where you shall enjoy the fadeless and immortal flowers, which bloom in the city of God for ever and for ever.

"This is not your rest! Do you long for your glorious resting-place, and often weary of the things of earth? Then faint not, it is only for a moment that you must mingle with earth's inhabitants, partaking of its joys and sorrows, and often tossed about with storms and winds in this ungenial climate. Only for a moment you must battle with the stern realities of life; and then earth, with all its sins and sorrows, will be exchanged for the never-ending joys of the better country. Is not the blessedness in store for you, Christian, enough to sustain thee amidst all the trials and crosses you may now experience; and is it not comforting, in this fluctuating world of change and affliction, to keep your eye steadfastly above, ever fixed upon the land of Canaan, and think that soon you will, through the blood of the Lamb, obtain an entrance into this glorious rest, and bask with never-ending pleasure in the sunshine of God's smile?"

"This is not your rest! But let us remember the tools must come first; the rest after: if we would obtain the latter, we must be ready to accept the former. O let us press on with new vigour, praying that the blood of Jesus may give us a title to heaven, and that the holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, may bestow His gracious influences upon our hearts, so making us daily obtain more meetness for the enjoyment of our eternal rest; and then, when we have safely crossed the ocean of time, we shall with joy anchor our souls on the shore of a blissful eternity, unclouded by a sin or sorrow; where no longer shall we by faith obtain a glimpse of our home, but our eyes shall behold the Kingdom in beauty; and without a cloud between, shall we be permitted to gaze upon the ineffable glory of our risen Immanuel, in whose presence we shall feel that we, even we, have indeed entered into that blessed rest which "remaineth for the people of God."

"We must not expect two heavens; it is enough if we possess one. We must not travel to heaven through a bed of roses; it is not much that we go to heaven in a fiery chariot, having afflictions and calamities our companions all the way. When our feet shall stand upon the threshold of the door of our everlasting rest, then our chains shall fall from our hands, and our fetters from our feet, and we shall sit up our heads with joy.

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