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Literary & evang. mag.

EVANGELICAL AND LITERARY

MAGAZINE.

Because of the house of the Lord our God that is in thee, I will seek thy good.
Psalm cxxii. 4.

44

VOL. V.

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II

THE
EVANGELICAL AND LITERARY
MAGAZINE.

REFLECTIONS, ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE YEAR.

It has been frequently recommended by moralists and divines, to look back and see how past time has been spent, and past privileges have been improved. This retrospect ought to be taken every evening, before we close our eyes in sleep. The man who settles his accounts every day, will have comparatively little to do at the end of the year. Still, however, it is necessary that the daily results should be put together, and the whole amount of profits and losses ascertained. To the *man of business* this is no very difficult task; to the *careless* and *unskilful*, it is well nigh impossible. This is analogous to that solemn *moral reckoning* to which every individual is bound to call himself. It is, indeed, difficult under the most advantageous circumstances to do *this thing* well. But the man, who has faithfully reckoned with himself every day, and accurately recorded the results, has, at the close of the year, incomparably the advantage of him who has gone on, without considering what he was doing or whither he was going. Still worse is the case of him, who puts off this *necessary business* till the close of life. His whole book of accounts lies in utter confusion before his disordered mind, and he fears even to attempt that scrutiny, which will soon be thoroughly made by his omniscient judge. It is surely, then, best for every one to begin this day the work of settlement with his conscience. Opposite to the names of several in the list of subscribers, it is necessary for the Publisher to enter the word *Dead*. So it has been every year; and so it will be at the close of this year. Who the individuals are, concerning whom it is written in the book of God's purposes "This year thou shalt die," it would be presumptuous to inquire. In this uncertainty, it is wise in all to live as though this were to be the last period of their lives.

When a man comes to die, on surveying his past conduct, he sees many things, which he heartily wishes had never

thelesse, he brought his men in order of battell, and exhorted them to doo valiantlie, howbeit his enimies had scarselie cast from them their boughs when Makbeth perceiving their numbers, betooke him streiet to flight, whom Makduffe pursued with great hatred even till he came unto Lunfannaine, where Makbeth perceiving that Makduffe was hard at his backe, leapt beside his horse saieng; "Thou traitor, what meaneth it that thou shouldest thus in vaine follow me that am not appointed to be slaine by anie creature that is borne of a woman, come on therefore and receive thy reward which thou hast deserved for thy paines," and therewithall he lifted up his sword thinking to have slaine him. But Makduffe quicklie avoiding from his horse, yer he came at him answered (with his naked sword in his hand) saieng: "It is true Makbeth, and now shall thine insatiable crueltie have an end, for I am even he that thy wizzards have told thee of, who was never borne of my mother but ripped out of her wombe:" therewithall he stept unto him and slue him in the place. Then cutting his head from his shoulders he set it upon a pole and brought it unto Malcolme. This was the end of Makbeth after he had reigned 17 yeeres over the Scottishmen. In the beginning of his reigne he accomplished manie worthie acts verie profitable to the common-wealth (as ye have heard) but afterwards by illusion of the divell, he defamed the same with most terrible crueltie. He was slaine in the yeere of the incarnation, 1057, and in the 16 yeere of king Edwards reigne over the Englishmen.

For the Ev. and Lit. Magazine.

HINTS ON REVIVALS OF RELIGION.

NOTHING can please men of correct minds more than to see moral and religious knowledge keep pace with the march of thought. Much time and talent and toil have been called forth to the field of mechanical science. The volume of nature has been ransacked in order to add to the comforts and conveniencies of life. And notwithstanding all that has been invented and brought to light by the fertile power of patent grants, *for the good of the public*, we have no doubt that many a poor man has dropped into his grave, having his brain teeming warm with some useful swimming or flying machine.

And in case, Mr. Editor, you should think me too severe, I will freely own to you, that there is not on earth an object that would sooner bring forth my "tear of memory o'er his

narrow bed," than to see Genius struggling his way through the polar storms of adversity and sinking beneath their frown unnoticed and unknown. Still, however, when we consider the comparative importance of natural science and moral and religious knowledge, it must be owned, with deep regret, that the latter is miserably neglected.

Presuming the subject incapable of yielding satisfaction to the rational inquirer, many have dismissed Religion from their thoughts, and loaded the name with all the obloquy due to a detected imposture. The motives then for storing the mind with moral and religious knowledge must be looked for in the enjoyment of Religion itself, which is the enjoyment of God. Whatever, therefore, is likely to enlist our feelings, and brighten our future prospects, must be of the last benefit in order to awake a studious and inquisitive disposition.

That a revival of religion has this tendency on a whole region of country cannot be doubted by any acquainted with the present history of the Church. Strange as it may seem, the detractors of religious excitements are not only the careless and profane; but also many of the professed lovers of Zion. These revivals in this country for ten years past have stood a good probation. It is customary that any professional *comer-in*, after sufficient trial had, shall be admitted into the public esteem and service. Nor is it easy to suppose, why a subject of so much importance as this, should be eyed askance through the glowing medium of human imperfections, and because it has its faults, and failures, proscribe the whole. Concerning it, the passions and conjectures of men have not been idle. Around it the prejudices of the speculative—the ill will of the vile—the joy of the lovers of Zion, have alternately rallied: and men have judged of its nature and effects by their several habits and inclinations.

In lands blessed with the ordinances of the gospel, there are but few who deem religion entirely unnecessary. The question with many is the system of religion, they shall adopt; and the way to approach them. Thus, during a religious excitement, offer them an all-sufficient Saviour and require them to pay him the homage of the heart, and they are afraid of being misled by feeling: follow them to the colder regions of investigation and philosophy, and they want to be impressed. There are difficulties to be proposed on every inch and aspect of the ground. The prospect is marked out in the advance. It is planted with a certain train of qualms and feelings. Whatever comes not within this range is rejected as spurious. It is certainly unreasonable for those who have well examined

the principles of the christian religion, and see the necessity of the provision of the Gospel, to expect violent symptoms. Tutors with candour and care in divine truth, for several years, the mind must imperceptibly yield, as we advance, to such indubitable evidence.

Violent emotions take place with persons of a different character. Unaccustomed to think maturely on any subject, their emotion is the effect of passions aroused by surprise, and rendered unyielding by the presence of remaining unbelief. The human heart, in such circumstances, may be compared to the bed of a river frozen through a long winter; but the torrents of spring forcing rapidly along, it must roar and break to give way, before it has time to dissolve or sink beneath the stream. Convulsions, so far from being religion, arise out of the weakness and perversion of the present state of man. If convulsions were previously necessary to a course of holy obedience, why did not the Apostles urge them on their hearers and converts? Is it not the glory of christianity that she invites reason to be satisfied with regard to the purity of her commands, and the loftiness of her character? She beckons away the human intellect to follow her track until she is lost in the bosom of God. She never appeals to the passions but through the medium of reason. She promises not to clothe us with our own vileness but in view of him whom all the angels of God worship. She never offers to control and regulate our devotions but with a live coal from the altar Christ Jesus. Should a man after all complain that he cannot understand the mystery of the Gospel, it is because he cannot understand the mystery of the Godhead. Should he still withhold his belief and homage from a religion so divine, my answer is, let him go on and prosper! But does any man abhor a religion that requires as a preliminary requisite, to convulse—or that satisfies not reason to the uttermost—or that enlightens not the understanding while she enriches and captivates the heart? *I more*: It were better to die the death of the wicked, than be the slave of a religion that purifies no affections—encourages no virtue—satisfies no principle of reason—sheds no peace on the troubled conscience—nor ray of glory on the grave.

It has been already observed, that the violent appearances, during a season of excitement, are confined to persons who could not command time or taste to investigate thoroughly this or any other subject. And if any subject, alarming as the forfeiture of their eternal happiness, were brought before them, it is reasonable they must feel to the same ex-

tent. Nothing, therefore, can be more unjust than to tax religion with the excesses and infirmities of our nature. This is to exile the physician for the crimes of his patient. We must take all the credit of these violent appearances to ourselves and weep over them. They are not religion. And often alas! they are not even preparatory to it. Would you have then, some one may ask, a revival without convulsions and sobs and lamentations? The answer is, as few as possible. Let no one weep who can at all avoid it:—Let none fear who sees not before him in the way the sword of Almighty wrath:—Let none tremble, who believes not, that without living religion, he is accursed of his Maker.

I. *Remarks on the mechanism of religious revivals.*—That excitements of this nature are brought on at pleasure, and entirely at the control of human agency, is a very common observation. Pity and terror, the engine of the tragic muse, produce no lasting effects. The feeling awakened by theatrical exhibitions are transient as the causes which produce them. We retire, sick of yielding the obedience of the passions to representations which have no living reality.

Moreover, it is much easier to enlist the passions, by visible than invisible objects. With the former we have lines of intimate sympathies and relations; the latter are so far remote that we can scarcely trace them unless aided by divine energy. We are not now considering spurious, but real, religious impressions. And it is here to be remarked that *hell-fire*, so much vituperated by philosophical quacks, as the Gospel minister's torturing engine, can have, apart from the character of God, no influence whatever on sober and correct minds. Let it be offered as a reason, the fact, that we have no connexion with future punishment, and of course can apprehend no danger from it, but in view (as a previous feeling) of the holiness of God expressed in the universal dimensions of the moral law. For, talk of *hell-fire* forever, without letting us feel our liability to punishment, and we should conceive no more alarm, than an angel is in danger of being torn by wild beasts. It is not from any hideous descriptions of *hell-fire* that a sinner can be truly convicted; but from just apprehensions of the holiness of God. With the latter the sinner has relations even in time, which he knows bind him to obedience: but no relation to *hell-fire* until he is actually therein. No rational creature, by the laws of his nature, has been made for suffering, but for seeking and finding his happiness in the enjoyment of his Creator. To suffer, to man, is accidental: to seek felicity in holiness, a law of our original

constitution. We cannot then feel apprehensive of a species of punishment, that is accidental, excepting through the medium of relations which are natural. In short, not to meddle with the subject by metaphysicks, no sinner was ever truly awakened by the forebodings of hell-fire, but by the holiness of God, operating on the mind and conscience; and none ever conceived the idea of holiness but by the Holy Ghost. Without him we can do nothing: believe nothing of essential divine truth: obey nothing. Separate the infinite holiness of God from the threatenings of hell-fire, and I for one, should fear them no more than being scalded in the Etnas of the moon. What power of elocution can display the idea of holiness? What similitude, what analogy, or combination can represent to us the infinitely perfect God? What *data* or clew shall conduct forth the glow-worm reason of man from amid the pestilence of his dim and narrow horizon to survey Him who is incomprehensible? So much for the mechanism of revivals.

ROBIN GRAY.

(To be continued.)

For the Evangelical and Literary Magazine.

A VISITATION.

—What would you with the ‘ladies?’

—Nothing but peace and gentle visitation.

SHAKSPEARE.

MR. EDITOR.—I am a professor of religion, and think it right to visit my brothers and sisters of the church, (especially the last,) every now and then, in the way of christian friendship. Sometimes too, when I have leisure for it, I like to make a sort of visitation as it were, (though I am no bishop neither,) calling upon half a dozen of them in rotation, to see how they do; and what they are doing, you know.

In this humour accordingly, I set out this afternoon to take a walk, and look in upon a few of my good friends, in my way. The time I took, you see, was not the most fashionable; but what of that, said I to myself, for indeed what have christians to do with the fashions of a world whose fashion itself *passeth away*? And so saying, I knocked at the door of my sister Mrs. Wavering, and walked in; when I found her sitting by the fire, and knitting a pair of stockings for a poor woman, a neighbour of hers who was not able to work for herself, she said. This was promising enough, you see,

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For the Evan. and Lit. Magazine.

SCRIPTURE A HELP TO SELF-EXAMINATION.

THE duty of self-examination is as readily acknowledged by Christians, as the importance of self-knowledge is by all the world. But the duty is for the most part carelessly performed, and the knowledge is imperfectly acquired. One reason of this neglect is the difficulty of discharging the duty. This difficulty is universally felt, and may easily be accounted for.

1. Self-examination, when conducted in reference to the law of God, always discovers mortifying truths. It lays open our deficiencies in duty, our breach of resolutions, our rebellion and ingratitude, our waste of time, our abuse of mercies; and in a word the deep and dreadful depravity of our hearts. From such scenes we instinctively turn away to contemplate objects more agreeable to our taste, and more flattering to our vanity.

2. The subject of inquiry does not present itself to our senses, and thus seize our attention. It is to be viewed by the mind's eye alone. And all experience shows how difficult it is to fix the thoughts on objects of this nature. But when the disinclination produced by the first cause is combined with the difficulty here noticed, it is not wonderful that the duty in question should be imperfectly discharged.

3. But in addition to these, it may be remarked that our motives are too often of so mixed a character that it is no easy matter to ascertain their true nature, and say, without fear of mistake, by what precisely our actions have been prompted. Thus, one may perform an act of charity from obedience to the will of God, from pity to the distressed, or from a desire of human applause. And while we may act under the influence of a single one of these motives, it is easy to see that the power of all may, in many cases, be combined. But to form a just judgment of our own character, we must take into view not only the actions which we perform, but the

which infinite wisdom passes on us as moral agents, revealed to us, while reformation is possible, and pardon is offered to the *truly* penitent?

3. But this lays the foundation for another remark; The Bible is supremely valuable for the purpose in view, *because of its perfect acquaintance with the human heart.* In this respect it is unlike any of the productions of man. There is throughout the book a reference to the state of the heart. In historical or biographical narratives, in doctrines, precepts, admonitions and exhortations, there is a continual turning to the inner man, which always carries along the attention of the careful reader, and makes him think of his purposes and motives. But there is more than this; "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It is this quality of scripture which makes it so admirable a help in the work of self-examination. Let one read it with continual application, and he will find the state of his heart more and more laid open to his view. His true character will be discovered to himself; and he will be made to wonder at his former self-ignorance.

Experience fully supports these assertions; and gives all its sanctions to the exhortation which we found on them—*Be diligent in studying the Bible, as the most valuable help in the world, in discharging the duty of self-examination, and acquiring self-knowledge.*

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For the Ev. and Lit. Mag.

HINTS ON REVIVALS OF RELIGION—(CONTINUED.)

You were pleased to admit, Mr. Editor, some hints from Robin Gray on the pages of your respectable and useful work. The subject in which the old man has presumed to dabble is worthy of a Reid or a Stewart. It has been often before the public, in ephemeral sketches; and this author is not certain, but the impression has been, and still is, in many sections of our country, unfavourable. To remove unreasonable prejudice, occasioned by the foibles and mishaps of men, is doing the work of God. At the time when revivals of Religion are met with unfriendly bias—viewed through a false, or illiberal medium—or positively opposed; may we not inquire where is the promised

coming of the Redeemer's kingdom—may we not write "*the glory departed,*" on the dwellings of Zion? The stale clamour, of how did Religion and the church exist until now, when there was no revival,—may be answered in the true style of the north, by putting another question, how did Religion and the church exist before the Messiah—when the blood of Gethsemane and Calvary was sleeping in the loins from which "*Shiloh came?*"—and how did these blessings flourish under the criminal autocracy of the successor of St. Peter, when worse than Egyptian night overspread the land, and the blood of the martyrs showed its awful varnish on the racks, and death-implements of Christendom! The reply of every villian, in this magazine of murder, during 1100 years was, so did our fathers. They contended thus for the faith once delivered to the saints—they are now in heaven! The evil of such a Religion, instead of being the bliss—the curse and the scourge of mankind, must have been felt even by the savage. For after that revenge has glutted his bowels of fire, who is there that will not weep at the blood of the innocent, slain? But precedent supported, and the hands of the guilty gave absolution, for the crime. It is dismal to dwell on these topics.—It is odious to liken the comparatively glorious present with the dark and ignominious past. One important lesson however, may be learned from the survey: viz. that there is no boundary in religious duties beyond which we must not pass,—no standard to be derived from our forefathers, since our privileges demand a more spiritual and disinterested obedience;—no period in the advance, where the Spirit of God will not second our endeavours. Not to wander, above measure, from my first intention, permit me to remind the courteous reader, that my former remark was on the mechanism of revivals: this

II. *On natural and religious sympathy.*—Man has been made for being happy in the enjoyment of God. It is part of that happiness to share it with other, and the same orders of being. The felicity of angels might be perfect before the creation of matter. But its pure and exalted movement seems to have been accelerated at the birth of time. "The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted aloud for joy." Now it were but accounting for half the pathos which thrilled in their holy bosoms, to say that it arose at the loftiest exhibition of the Deity, they had ever witnessed; may we not, without the folly of extravagance, conceive that it was also in prospect of sharing with new worlds, and their new inhabitants, the joys which they felt? Is there any thing

in the thought incompatible with the machinery and temperament of perfect minds—with the expanded views and feelings of a great moral circle over which the poison of sin had never diffused its killing atmosphere, and narrowed the tide of its unbounded benevolence?

The exhibitions of the Divinity, throughout the immeasurable provinces of his empire, are attended with two grand effects. First, that his wisdom, power, and goodness are witnessed in the works of his hands: Second, that his intelligent creatures should be made happy in the enjoyment of these—of the Creator—of one another. It is true, the felicity of Religion, which is the felicity of Heaven and earth, takes its first and mightiest movement from the PRESENCE who sits upon the throne; but it is strengthened, and if possible, sublimated, by passing through a host of waiting worshippers who cast their crowns before Him. “And one cried and said unto another, Holy, &c.” Measuring their enjoyment by the accession of numbers—the purity and disinterestedness of their love—the expansion and loftiness of their apprehension, the unfallen present in their worship, the most sublime spectacle of a host enraptured before the emanated glories of Him who fills immensity, and their happiness increased by being together sharers of his favour which is more than life. Is there then no sympathy in the Religion of Heaven? Is not the universal and unanimous movement accelerated by reciprocation of feeling? And why should the homage of earth be damped or limited by a principle recognized in the regions of purity and perfection?

2. Let us see whether this dreaded co-action of sympathy can have, under proper management, any such mischievous tendencies as are generally ascribed to it. Be it remembered that we are not at all apologizing for the abuse of sympathy which we know to exist; an evil that has slain its thousands. All that we plead for, on principles which need not be repeated, is, that it is impossible for us to avoid fellow-feeling, that it is implanted in our nature for the most admirable purposes and that it ought to be so husbanded as to turn it to the best account.

That much of the commotion, which takes place in a revival of religion, arises from sympathy is not to be denied. This is owing to our consciousness of common fate as well as common family with apostate and fallen man. The withdrawal of the Divine countenance and consolation from the path of our exile and death, is occasionally felt by all; and the lamentation of one sinner over his guilt and danger, may clothe a thousand in tears. But is this sympathy to be re-

pressed and brow-beaten at the instance of a few delicate habits who are afraid of every thing that has the least semblance to religion as they are of religion itself? Too fastidious to weep for their own follies or those of others, they think they are doing God and themselves service, if they can ward off the charges of a guilty conscience, by quarreling with the mode, or accidental circumstances, by which they are affected.

In the sorrow of sympathy, it is true, there may be no permanent good. But whatever is calculated to humble the soul in the dust before God ought to be hailed with delight as promising a better day. We are too much afraid of animal feeling, as if all our sorrows for sin were always pure and spiritual. There can be no advantage in sorrow of any kind farther than it prepares the heart for the humbling doctrines of the cross. For weeping, although favourable to a devotional frame, is not worship, nor sanctification of heart. And certainly experience will bear out the assertion that many in a solemn religious assembly weep without knowing at the time the exact reason; but who, continuing in the use of means, find the Saviour, "as a morning without clouds." To what can we ascribe the diffusion of the Holy Ghost through a whole hamlet or region of country, but to the occasional devotion of its inhabitants, partly excited by sympathy. Have not these unpromising beginnings, commencing with one individual, "like the leaven in three measures of meal," advanced their slow and solemn march through a wide population? A solemnity ensued—sinners could bear the faithful discharge of the minister's duty—felt their sin and danger with deepening distress—crowded the house of prayer, and bound, with their own hands, the sacrifice to the horns of the altar.

3. To produce, by means unworthy of a pure and undefiled religion, a state of feeling, quoted by the enemies of religion with a view to tarnish its glory and excite the prejudices of the ignorant, must be very unbecoming the ministers of the sanctuary and detrimental to the best interests of men. Man has been made the partner of the joys and sorrows of his fellow. Nay the sufferings and misfortunes of those we love serve to endear them to us the more. It adds a veneration to their character that makes their woe-worn countenance desirable; and though we are not happy there, we are more so than any where else. The last melancholy pleasure the dying can yield us, is to drop from our reluctant embrace into the home of all our fathers, with a sense of our un-

changing regards and services vibrating in the last pulse of the bleeding heart. It were sacrilege to violate a law of nature so intimately blended with our present happiness and future prospects. To excite causeless alarm in a human bosom were cruel. But no alarm can be causeless while the soul is at enmity with its Maker:—no friendship can be more true than that which would put forth its last effort to rescue a fellow-immortal from unquenchable fire! This is true sympathy expending its energies to recover and reclaim the noblest forfeit:—to mould afresh the sin-begone soul into the image of God. If sympathy with another in tears, is calculated to produce a preparatory humiliation and solemnity of mind, it is then the most favourable crisis to direct it to Him in whom the fatherless findeth mercy, and to impress it deeply with the realities of eternity. The sole cautions to be observed, are, first, to be scriptural as to the mode and motive; and then, to urge the inquirer not to stop with the religion of sympathy; but that which subdues and sanctifies the heart. The rule for external decorum, in a company of inquirers, is solemnity and stillness; for the inner man, self-examination, faith, and prayer. If the Apostle of the Gentiles could make use of the altar of idol-worship as a text, much more may the kindred feelings which bind man to man, the cement of common fears and hopes, be made the ministers of a state of mind which is the joy of angels to witness and the glory of man to possess. But it must be through the medium of reason;—it must be accomplished by argument;—it must be attended by a conduct worthy of the dignity of man returning to his allegiance to his Maker; aye and becoming the character of that God whose government he owns. Since, therefore, we have been made for sharing common happiness or woe, joys or misfortunes;—it is not only lawful but duty, to awaken our sympathies, and direct them to the best possible issue, the peace and favour of God.

ROBIN GRAY.

(To be continued.)

A JOURNEY IN NEW-ENGLAND—(CONTINUED.)

Boston, July 5, 1822.

MY DEAR SIR,—After a very fatiguing journey, and the greater fatigue produced by the celebration of “Independence day,” I sit down to give you an account of our farther peregrinations, if I may use this word in relation to travels in a part of my own country.