

ARTICLE II.

THE SCRIPTURES THE PROPER STANDARD OF APPEAL IN THE
FORMATION OF THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CHARACTER.

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In the culture of the moral powers, it is a question of great importance, what shall constitute the standard of appeal? Where shall we look for the guiding manual, for those principles which shall mould the character, for those prudent maxims that shall have the authority of law?

It is not enough to institute a severe scrutiny into the conduct, to watch carefully the motives, or the habitual deportment. There must be some standard of appeal, some external influences that shall be brought into contact with the character, in order to shape it aright; some elementary and suggestive truths, which shall, at the same time, act authoritatively, and be fitted to quicken and mould the moral and religious character.

The question, what this rule for the conduct shall be, has been answered variously. In actual practice, also, the sources of appeal in the last resort are different and sometimes conflicting. The most important of these sources may perhaps be included under five general classes.

1. In the first place, certain general, prudential maxims, which have been long current in the community, are regarded as a safe directory. They are partly written and partly unwritten. They are the result of a wide experience, of much sagacious observation. Some of them have come down through many ages, each generation proving their value, and adding the tribute of its applause. Certain individuals have become eminent as the authors of these economical precepts, and shrewd apothegms. Some of the most striking of these brief apothegms, or at least those which are most felicitously expressed, are embodied under the form of counsels for the young, or rules for the formation of the character.

The objections to this standard of appeal are two-fold. In the first place, it does not supply principles of action. It rather seeks to rectify the outward conduct. It is not so much a system of morals, or a part of one, as it is a collection of superficial rules.

It is the result of observation, rather than of reflection; or, if appeal be made to the motive, it is done in a prudential spirit, and in order to secure a fortunate and visible effect. It metes out its applause in proportion to the measure of actual success, not according to the purity of the intention. In the second place, it has respect to the present life. It confines its aims to what is seen and temporal. Its rewards are laid up in earthly store-houses, in gainful traffic, or in the proud consciousness which is felt by the worldly-wise man in the success of his sagacious speculations. It numbers among its great men the high-priests of fashion, the ministers of popular favor, those whose life is spent in efforts to please an undiscerning public, or to acquire the means of self-gratification. The whole system is shallow and unsatisfactory, often leading, in its boasted prudence, to a positive violation of the principles of virtue. The character which is formed under its influences may be totally selfish. It often creates a beautiful exterior, when beneath there is not one throb of virtuous emotion, one aspiration towards the disinterested rewards of heaven. Such wisdom can never be recommended as a safe guide.

2. In the second place, the appeal is sometimes made to what may be called the finer sentiments, to a class of feelings, partly the result of original temperament, and partly of education, which lead the soul to shrink, like the sensitive plant, from aught corrupt or degrading. The youth, when tempted to deviate from the path of virtue, is admonished to consult the better tendencies of his nature, to cherish a love for what is true and good and ennobling. He will find drawn in his own bosom a chart which shall guide him safely through every entanglement. Its lines may be obscure, but they are straight. They are not drawn by self-interest, but by self-respect. To trace them obediently and perseveringly will end in the formation of an elevated and finely proportioned character. Without calling in question the existence of these finer sentiments, it may be affirmed that they cannot answer the purpose of an adequate guide. They are wholly insufficient as a standard in educating the human soul. They have not enough of a fixed and ascertainable value. They are too delicate and evanescent. In order to attain a mature character, there must be stronger nutriment; to walk safely in the path of virtue, a firmer guide is demanded. In our better moments these finer feelings may visit the soul in their most attractive forms, and may appear competent to lead to the highest attainments in holiness; yet one hour has not elapsed before these beautiful visions seem

never to have had an existence, the soul is wholly abandoned to its selfish and earthward tendencies.

Besides, they are felt only by a limited number. They are in a great degree the result of an education to which the mass of men cannot aspire. They presuppose also a delicacy in the mental organization of which many of the educated are not conscious. Plato might have been attracted towards virtue by his sense of its fitness, congruity and exceeding beauty, while the thousands around him had no such perception and felt no such longing. To elevate, therefore, these rare and exquisitely formed feelings into the standard of right or a guide in morals, is vain. It is beyond their prerogative.

3. In the third place, the appeal may be made to an elaborated system of morals. To the interrogatory, wherewithal shall a young man form his character, it might be replied, by taking heed, according to the directions of the moral philosopher. A treatise on ethics will furnish a safe and sufficient practical guide. The conduct may be regulated by the embodied wisdom of the thoughtful moralist.

There are, however, some serious objections to this course. In the first place, these systems are not fitted for general use. They are designed for the student in his closet, rather than for the varied scenes of practical life. They are necessarily framed in a technical manner, and for their interpretation and application require more or less skill. They can never become a copious and living spring to which all thirsty souls may repair alike.

Again, the authors of these systems were more or less under the influence of prejudice. To prepare a sound and comprehensive ethical system, the moral sense of the writer must be in an enlightened and healthful state. All the other faculties of his soul should be so harmonized as to allow to conscience her supremacy, and minister to her the appropriate aid. A bitter fountain will not send out sweet waters. An ill balanced mind can never be a safe guide in morals. Mere intellect, however brilliant, can never furnish rules for holy living and dying. Now it is a notorious fact that some of the ablest ethical writers were men whose moral faculties had run to waste, the dialectic power completely overshadowing and dwarfing what should have been predominant.

Hence, thirdly, we might expect, what we find, irreconcilable contradictions between different systems, error arrayed against truth, error in opposition to itself, correct views cunningly inter-

mingled with those which are false, unsettled or hostile opinions in regard to the nature of virtue itself, disputes in respect to the source of moral obligation.

In such circumstances, it will be readily seen, that the religious character cannot be purified and perfected by adherence to these systems. Uncertainty cannot lead to certainty; a tranquil confidence is not the growth of self-contradictions. Some better manual is demanded than the most sagacious of these moralists can supply.

While each of the three sources of influence in the formation of character, that have been mentioned, has its peculiar and inherent defects, two observations apply to all alike. Neither of them is to be set aside as useless. Each may bear its part in the great process of educating the soul. No wise man will reject an inferior help. All accessible recruits will be pressed into this spiritual warfare. The thoughts of some of the greatest of the race, the collected wisdom of ages will not be despised, because it wears the badge of human imperfection.

The second remark is, that they are all wanting in authority. They supply advice, they administer counsels; but they cannot enforce a penalty or bind the conscience. We are at perfect liberty to assent to or disown their teachings. To infallible truth, they make no pretension. The fatal defect, that there is no umpire, no authoritative arbiter, inheres in all these methods. We are running along a dangerous shore, under the lead of an ignorant pilot.

4. Another source of appeal, which may be mentioned is the light of nature, the doctrines of natural religion. Some would direct the youthful inquirer to the works of God as the sufficient rule of life and source of moral influence. No thoughtful Christian will undervalue their testimony, in order to enhance the worth of a written revelation. The works of God are marvellous and are sought out by all them that take pleasure therein. The uses of the study of nature are manifold. It constitutes in a most important sense the basis of revealed religion. The Bible never attempts to prove some cardinal points. The being and some of the attributes of God, it takes for granted. He has impressed on nature fixed laws, not mere phantasms, not mere seeming substitutes for laws; and he has also made our minds capable of tracing effects to a cause, of inferring intelligence from design, and of entertaining settled convictions of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. To disparage and reject this testimony is in fact to take away the corner stone of all true theology.

Again, in the education of the Christian life, the services of natural religion are often invaluable. There are states of mind when its evidence is most convincing. There are moments when the heavens not only reveal, but declare the glory of God. Who, at the silent hour of midnight, can look at the hosts of stars, and not sometimes feel "immortal impulses?"

"Thick clustering orbs, and this our fair domain,
The tall, dark mountains, and the deep toned stars,"

have an articulate voice.

It is mentioned of a venerable New England clergyman, now deceased, that, when in college he was called upon to demonstrate the truths of the Copernican astronomy, the evidence which it furnishes for the being of a God was so overpowering, that he fainted. The impression was never lost. It appeared to produce a permanent change in his feelings, and ever afterwards to constitute a characteristic feature of his mind.

Still, for a fallen race, natural theology is inadequate. It whispers of wisdom, not of grace, of a bountiful Creator, not of a redeeming Saviour, of *one* God, not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ruined man needs other provisions, powers of grace which can regenerate and sanctify his heart. The foundation of a moral and religious character must be laid in that law which converts the soul, in that Gospel which purifies the conscience.

I now come to the remaining source and standard of moral influence. The Bible is the rule of life. The moral and religious character is to be moulded in accordance with the principles and spirit of the inspired page. When practically followed, what bearing does it have upon the character? How does obedience to its precepts affect the human soul?

I. It brings it into harmony with itself. It readjusts its disordered faculties. It begins by laying the foundation well.

When we first see a complicated piece of machinery in motion, having a thousand apparently independent parts, operating over a wide surface, with springs of exceeding delicacy playing in company with those of great weight and enormous power, the whole animated with the breath of life, conspiring, almost with superhuman intelligence, to one finished and beautiful result, we are filled with admiration. It is simplicity in the midst of labyrinthine circuits, the reign of perfect order in the midst of the most deafening confusion.

At an oratorio some years ago, there were collected several hundred instruments of music, and nearly all the musical genius of three kingdoms. Yet amid this wilderness of sounds there was entire concord. From the harpings of these multitudinous harpers, only one volume of melody was poured forth. Infinite diversity and perfect unity; a thousand agents rational and irrational tasking their utmost capabilities, and yet not the slightest dissonance. We are amazed at this triumph of genius over what should seem to be invincible obstacles,—that feeble man can so copy that variety in unity which characterizes the works of God. Yet, when we view God's workmanship we can hardly call it a copy; it bears hardly a faint resemblance to its divine original. When we look at the mind of man, a simple uncompounded substance, yet with powers of the utmost variety and complexity, its states changing with the rapidity of light, with faculties different in kind as well as in degree, its delicate and diversified machinery, operating though unseen, under laws as sure as those which govern the stars in their courses, and unlike all the works of man, supplied with powers for indefinite self-improvement, with aspirations after a state which it sometimes does not even picture to itself, with glimpses into undiscovered lands into which no eagle's eye hath glanced, conscious of the absolute freedom of thought and will, yet pressed upon by a Being who foreknows and foreordains the first inception of a desire;—does the most exquisite and elaborated piece of machinery bear any analogy to this divine superstructure? Can the sublimest oratorio, that ever held the hearts of men in breathless admiration, be compared for one moment with this cunning living harp?

Besides, we know little yet of the powers of the soul. The soul of one man has, occasionally, certain moods, which may not, perhaps, find an answering chord in any other human bosom; certain states which it cannot fully explain to itself; thoughts which lie too deep for tears, and too deep to be interpreted. These peculiar moods of mind do not consist in the feelings which flow from refinement, knowledge, or piety, in the ordinary acceptation of these terms, but they are rather the yearnings of the soul towards what may be hereafter, dim foreshadowings of that joy which the disenthralled spirit alone can understand.

And yet such delineations have respect to what the mind has been and may be, not to what it is in its natural state. Its fine mechanism is strangely disordered. The original end of its creation is lost. We learn the nature of its structure by the extent and

melancholy grandeur of its ruins. Its sweet music, which once charmed the ear of its Creator, is now harsh discord. The powers that allied it to angels are now known principally by the terror of their movement.

Account for the fact as we may, its existence is beyond contradiction. Whatever be our connection with the original apostasy, whatever be the nature of the influence that has come down from Adam, be the preponderance of evil on the side of the first transgression, or of the actual personal offence, the fact admits of no qualification or denial. The proofs crowd upon us unceasingly and in broad day light. They are within us and about us. The consciousness of every moment has a tongue, every wind of heaven has its sad voices. History, with its unbroken chapters of blood and crime, only confirms what we hourly see and every moment feel.

The youth that crosses our path is full of buoyant hope. Life in its long vistas is to him the garden of Eden. He exults even in animal existence. It is delightful to see his bounding movements, to hear his joyous shouts. They are perfectly befitting his period of life, and they attest the goodness of his bountiful Creator.

More delightful still is it to see the unfolding of his intellectual powers, the ardor with which he opens the page of knowledge, the admiration with which he gazes on the discoveries of science, when all the walks of literature wear the freshness of the morning. He is developing another part of the nature that God has given him. It is always pleasant to see these transitions from a life of sensation to one of reflection and imagination, the blending of childlike feelings with those of youth and manhood.

And yet if we follow this ardent youth through the day till the shadows of night close around him, do we find that his thoughts and feelings spontaneously revert to his Creator and Redeemer? Does he sometimes *hasten* to the place of retirement and prayer? Does he sometimes gladly leave the society of his companions that he may converse with his invisible Friend and Father? Is this last duty of the day the most grateful? Does his heart sometimes seem like a flame of fire ascending to its original source? Nothing like this appears. The animal and the intellectual absorb the whole of his thoughts. His moral nature is a waste.

Now here is the point where the word of God comes in. It does not repress the animal instincts. It does not discourage the

highest efforts of the intellect, but it rectifies the moral disorder. It rearranges the scattered pillars of the moral edifice. It brings the entire soul into harmony with itself. In short it establishes the character on an enduring basis. It begins with a foresight of the end. It builds a structure which the storms shall not overturn.

The maxims current in society, those finer sentiments possessed by a few elevated natures, together with all the formal rules of the moralist, and even the sublime teachings of nature, fail on this point. They do not touch the source of the difficulty. They do not mould aright the primary elements of the character. This is the prerogative of God's truth.

II. The Bible furnishes the appropriate knowledge for the formation of character.

This knowledge will be particularly serviceable in the formation of character in three respects. It is fitted to the enlightening and educating of the conscience. Its principal design is to affect our moral nature. It does not concern itself primarily, with the understanding. It has nothing to do with abstract, scientific truth. Its doctrines and precepts relate to us as moral and spiritual beings, to our duties towards our fellow men and to God. While, therefore, the eye is perusing these sacred truths, and the mind is apprehending their relations, the conscience is quickened, and the mists of prejudice being dispersed, it becomes quick to discern and authoritative to decide. It lives in its appropriate element; it has food congenial to its nature. We no longer mistake its enlightened conclusions for weak and unfounded scruples. Thus the way is prepared for unanimity in its verdicts, and the characters of all formed under its divine illuminations will have strong points of coincidence.

Again, this knowledge consists, in large part, of general principles. Many of the precepts of the New Testament are stated in the most comprehensive forms, as if they admitted no exception. The Bible teaches nothing dialectically. It has no system of definitions, no ingenious casuistry. It affirms broadly and without qualification, not informing us whether its statement has respect to this country, or to that age exclusively. It imposes no such shackles.

Now the advantages of this mode are manifold. We feel an interest that we could not in any other circumstances. It throws us upon our common sense and good judgment. It compels us to make limitations, to separate the local from the permanent, the

shadow from the substance. We are to carry out the principle into its details. We are to judge in regard to its applicability to particular cases. The intellect and moral sense are thus thoroughly awakened. We search the Scriptures. We dig into them as for hidden treasure. And not the intellect merely expands in the process; under this hardy discipline the character is formed to an excellence which could never be attained, did the Bible consist of minute detail, specific applications, and not of suggestive hints and fruitful principles.

A third peculiarity of this knowledge is, that where there is a living exemplification of a principle, no notice is given of the fact. There is no moral appendix to the story. We are not advertised of the object of the narrative. All is left to make its natural impression upon us. It seems to be a history, or biography, and nothing more. No ulterior purpose is apparent. In the most guileless simplicity every incident is recorded, as if the matter were to end with itself. Now such compositions always make the deepest impressions on the heart. We are taken captive before we are aware. The story has conveyed some abiding practical lesson. The account respecting Joseph is an artless memoir. Yet it fastens on the soul some of the weightiest articles in a scheme of theology. It is eminently useful because it makes no pretension. How unlike the wordy commentary with which vain man often covers up this beautiful narrative. This is peculiarly characteristic of the Bible. Its stories drop like the rain and distil as the dew. The writers never try to take the heart by storm. On the contrary, their words insinuate themselves among our deepest sensibilities, just as the preparatory influences in the winter and early spring silently pervade the soil,—the sure precursors of abundant flowers and fruits.

III. Another advantage of the biblical morality arises from the fact that it lays its prohibition on the first tendency to evil in the heart. It does not wait for the overt act, nor for the half-formed desire. It denounces the slightest parleying with temptation, the entertaining for the briefest moment of a corrupt wish. In its view, the apostasy did not consist in plucking the fruit. The race was ruined, when the first suggestion of the tempter was not instantly repelled. Death eternal hung on a moment's weakness in the will. All hope was gone when the moral principle wavered.

In the estimate of God's law, the high-way robbery is comparatively innocent. The crime was in the covetous glance of the eye—in not instantaneously crushing the avaricious desire. What

is called a fraudulent bankruptcy may be venial. The guilt was in the assumption of obligations which there was no reasonable prospect of discharging, or rather it was in the state of mind which first began to elevate riches into a god. The degenerating process began in the idolatry of gold, in the first turning of the feeblest current of the affections in the wrong direction. Men charge the deviation of the youth from the paths of virtue to some overmastering temptation, to some public and astounding offence. But the divine precept laid its finger on the desire, years before, to read a certain book, against which, at the time, the conscience remonstrated. Thus the word of God becomes the discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. No latent desire can evade its searching glance; no recess of the soul is so barred as to exclude it.

The heart educated under such discipline, the character formed under such influences, will have a delicate moral perception, a nice apprehension of moral distinctions, a kind of anticipatory dread of defilement, which no human systems of morals can produce. These, indeed, proceed on the ground that sin consists in the corrupt motive, or wrong intention. But they do not lay that stress which the Bible does, on the slight, inceptive movement, on the germinating desire. They often weaken their own teachings by their ingenious explanations and subtle casuistry.

IV. The observance of the precepts of the Bible secures a general purity in the *intellectual* faculties.

In the education of the young, sufficient attention has not been paid to what may be termed the purity of the mental powers. They may have an innocence and transparency as truly as the affections of the heart; or, they may be as real and, sometimes, as great an impediment to the attainment of holiness as a depraved will. Moral obliquity cannot, of course, be strictly affirmed of an intellectual power, yet the latter may be so conversant with degrading objects, as to appear to be itself hopelessly corrupt. It has so long lived in a pestilential atmosphere, that it has apparently changed its nature. It has borrowed an infection to which it should seem to have no *affinity*. How often is the memory tenacious of objects which one would thankfully forget! How often may her records become a swift witness against one in the adjudications of the great day! In how many cases, also, is the power of association the handmaid of evil! If in youthful days it gathered images which it ought not, if it revelled amid scenes where a fatal malaria lurked, if its wonderful capabilities were employed

on objects which, while they corrupted the heart, infected the mind also, a purification seems to be nearly hopeless. To banish these degrading associations, is sometimes far more difficult than to exorcise a moral faculty of its impure possessions. The love of holiness may be supreme in the heart, while the mind may be chained, like a galley slave, to early acquired and invincibly bad habits. Of the intellect it may not unfrequently be said, as really as of the desires or the will, *can* the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?

Now the Scriptures furnish a two-fold guard against this evil. They, themselves, supply pure and invigorating excitement for the intellect; they introduce it to objects and associations on which it may healthfully and forever meditate, while they prohibit it from stepping on the enchanted ground; they mark off, with ineffaceable lines, the territory on which it may not enter; they anathematise the first prompting of a desire to resort to places where the mind becomes like a cage of unclean birds; they would bind in iron clasps, or rather burn, every book which seduces the understanding, while it inflames the appetites and petrifies the feelings. Be ye holy, is their requisition, both in the movements of your intellect, and the impulses of your heart.

V. Under the influence of the Scriptures, a manly character will be formed. Some of the principal elements of such a character are self-knowledge, reverence and benevolent feeling.

Without self-knowledge we may entertain an opinion of ourselves below what the truth warrants. In an important sense there is a dignity in human nature. The language which has been used on this subject, is not altogether that of cant or of false assumption. No one can carefully study his nature, compare his various susceptibilities, or obtain any glimpses of the yet unknown energies which are wrapped up within him;—no one can look at those heights of knowledge and goodness, which a few men have reached;—no one can think, for a moment, what it is to be formed in the image of God, without a profound conviction of man's intellectual and moral dignity. The misfortune of multitudes is, that they undervalue themselves and possess no adequate apprehension of the immense capabilities of even a finite mind. They have little sympathy with that apostle who reached forth to the things which are before. They practically reject the doctrine of human perfectibility in any sense. There are many who need no lectures on the imbecility of human reason. They lose their salvation, possibly, by a too mean opinion of themselves.

On the other hand, self-knowledge is the parent of genuine humility. Every person, it is frequently said, has some weak points in his character, some peculiar mental and moral infirmities visible to every one except himself. But a patient examination will enable him to detect all these. By the light of divine truth, he will discern many humiliating deficiencies, many sad weaknesses. The domination of the lower appetites, the imbecility of the will, the unaccountable vaccillation of the feelings, the darkness of the reason itself, the strange aversion to what is really of the utmost importance to him, will, with the cooperating grace of God, teach him that it is better to be of an humble spirit than to divide the spoil with the proud; will expel from his bosom those feelings which prompt to a supercilious demeanor, to arrogant assumptions, or to a contemptuous disregard of the rights and feelings of others. He will wish to be what he is, in the sight of God, no more and no less. In God's view, the most beautiful robe for man or angel is unaffected humility.

This accurate self-knowledge furnishes a firm basis for a manly character. Building on this foundation, one will be equally removed from a cringing servility, and from airs of self-importance, from the seductions of flattery, and from the despondent feelings which spring from a false shame.

Another important element is reverence towards God, and towards man also, so far as he is like his Maker, or real esteem for whatever is deserving of it, whether found in an individual now living, or on the page of history, in institutions and usages past or present, in abstract truth, or, as it has been exemplified in great and beneficent actions.

Recklessness, impatience in respect to whatever is fixed and ancient, is diametrically opposed to a truly manly character. This is founded in part on a discriminating knowledge of men and things. But a contempt for authority and for whatever is time-worn and venerable makes no such distinctions. It looks on all men in the light of its own mediocrity. He who has no reverence for others, cannot entertain much for himself.

A third element for a manly character is true benevolence, a disinterested regard for the rights and happiness of others. A predominating selfishness, be it gross or refined, is the parent of an ignoble character. Do good to others with hearty affection, if thou wishest to build a reputation on a solid basis. If thou wouldst possess the happiness that flows from true dignity,

“Four blessings round thee like a shower of gold.”

It is when man is moving about the little circle of his own pleasures, that he gains the contempt of others, if not of himself.

Real gentility, true courteousness, is the product of a friendly heart. All else, which men name politeness, is counterfeit. If amenity of manners does not spring from good will, it is nothing but hypocrisy, for while the professions of kindness are on the lips and in the gestures, the motive is unadulterated selfishness. A character formed under such influences cannot have one ennobling trait.

Now the adoption of the word of God as the rule of life implies and presupposes self-knowledge, true reverence and disinterested affection. It bids us search our hearts, and judge, as the truth demands. It nowhere disparages our reason, nor speaks slightly of any faculty, except so far as we have perverted it by sin. It calls upon us to embrace its promises, and thereby act a manly part. God himself assumes the attitude of reasoning with us. In disobeying him, we are charged with unmanliness, with brutalizing our rational and moral nature.

At the same time, the biblical instructions are fitted to place our sins and weaknesses in the most convincing light, to reveal our guilt in contrast with God's spotless purity. It eradicates our pride by offering a gratuitous salvation. The reception of its gracious provisions cannot coëxist with self-ignorance, or an overweening conceit.

The Bible, also, is filled with objects which excite the deepest reverence. Its spirit is that of the profoundest awe. It utterly discountenances all unseemly familiarities with sacred things. On the other hand, it does not repress curiosity. It strikes the balance accurately between a blind admiration for the past, and an inconsiderate desire for change, between an indiscriminate veneration, and a passionate love of what is new. If the character be moulded in accordance with such influences, it will possess that accurate proportion, that appropriate adjustment, without which true manliness cannot exist.

We need hardly refer to the *spirit* which the Bible cherishes and enjoins—to the perfect disinterestedness which it breathes and inculcates on every page. The counteraction of selfishness, the implantation of liberal principles, is its unceasing aim. Poetry and history, doctrine, admonition and example, sealed and ratified in blood,—all conspire to the same end, promulgate the same lesson. There is nothing there narrow, ambiguous, mean, serpentine, unless brought out in order to put the brand of

reprobation upon it. The water of the river of life has not a more crystalline clearness.

Were we required to designate the principles of true politeness, we would not go to the pages of Chesterfield, nor to the usages of aristocratic society, nor to the ceremonies of royal courts. We would rather point to such men as Abraham and Paul, as specimens of true nobility. How nice a sense of honor had the father of the faithful! What a princely spirit shone out in his life! What a total forgetfulness of himself did the great apostle exhibit! His burning zeal in the cause of his Master, the stupendous labors which he performed, the depth of his insight into the scheme of redemption, are not the most interesting things about him. We wonder at his Christian chivalry, at his knightly bearing, at his delicate sense of what was due to himself and to others, at his Christ-like charity, over-leaping everything which commonly holds men in bondage. His courteousness was equal to his moral courage, his Christian generosity was more remarkable than his martyrdom.

VI The Bible supplies a perfect example for the formation of character. The benefits of having before the mind some lofty ideal, when attempting to accomplish a great object, are well known. The masters in the arts, men of the highest order of genius, have well understood the advantages of this imagined perfect form, floating before the imagination. It has lived in their dreams by night, and excited them to superhuman efforts by day. They had no hope of ever embodying it in actual form. Its pictured brightness no color could copy, yet not the less did the artist toil on, painting, as he said, for eternity.

So likewise when excellence of any kind has been exhibited in actual life. A few great men have been the teachers of the world. Their example shines with a never-setting radiance. Through the mists of ages, their defects are not visible, while their great and beneficent deeds have a more potent spell as time passes on. Washington's usefulness is not seen in the country which, under God, he saved; it is in his undying example. David Brainerd's field of labor was not the Delaware Indians; it was the plains of India, and the gardens of Persia where his great copyist, Henry Martyn, lived and labored. Howard's theatre was not the prisons of Europe; it is in the hearts of philanthropists that his memory is now influential in the four quarters of the world. The good that men do lives after them. The limit of human life is not forty or sixty years,—ages are its own. Not

simply by great men are its deeds contemplated and copied. A thousand lesser spirits take heart and hope. The mere recollection of a name often determines the will. The recorded or the living example becomes an important element in moulding the character of myriads, whose name perishes on the spot that gave them birth.

But all these, at the best, are very imperfect examples. In the character of our Lord, we have absolute, yet attainable perfection. We may study it forever with unabated interest. It has just those points which touch the heart. The stern characteristics do not bear disproportionate sway. These are softened and made attractive by his inimitable gentleness, by his lamb-like meekness, by all those softer qualities which form the foreground of the picture.

There is in the character of the Saviour that blending of qualities, that mingling of different colors, that fair and exquisite proportion—the study of which never tires. It has a feeble analogy in one of those old paintings which requires years of study to detect all its beauties, whose rare workmanship one life cannot adequately perceive.

The study of our Lord's character is eminently rich in its moral effects. While we gaze, we are attracted, while we contemplate, the chains of ignorance and sin fall from around us.

VII. The Bible furnishes the most urgent motives, for the formation and perfection of the moral character. These motives are diversified, and appeal to various susceptibilities of our nature.

One motive addresses our self-interest. In the possession of the character which it aids in forming, we become associates with all the truly good and great. We are admitted into an illustrious company. This character is the key which opens to us royal palaces, and introduces us to kingly companions. We are no longer solitary wanderers on the wastes of life. We are guests at an imperial banquet. We are citizens of a mighty commonwealth. Possessed of this character, actuated by the spirit which it implies, we can almost converse with the departed whose bodies the grave conceals. We can almost see those old, familiar faces, whom a thin veil only hides from us. We are one with them, for the living and all the dead but one communion make. We are allied to them yet by the closest relations. They seem to call us upwards by their well-known, human voices.