

THE

Literary and evan. mag.

EVANGELICAL AND LITERARY

MAGAZINE.

Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.
Psalm cxxii. 9.

VOL. VI.

Monthly Jan - dec 1823



44

RICHMOND, VA.

**PUBLISHED BY N. POLLARD, SIGN OF FRANKLIN'S HEAD, OPPOSITE
THE OLD MARKET..**

.....
1823.



THE

EVANGELICAL AND LITERARY MAGAZINE.

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

For the Ev. and Lit. Mag.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION UPON THE INTELLECTUAL IMPROVEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS AND OF SOCIETY.

THERE is no occasion at the present day, at least among those acquainted with the subject, for defending and illustrating the general influence of christianity.—Even those, who deny its divine origin, and have at the same time any enlarged and philosophical notions of its character, so far from branding it with infamy, like the superficial and contemptible infidels of the last century, consider it the first among those systems of instruction, that have been devised for the improvement and happiness of man. All rational philosophers, however little they may regard the christian system, as a peculiar and exclusive method of salvation, admire the purity and pre-eminent wisdom of its precepts, and its adaptedness to give moral energy and dignity to the human character. It is too late to prefer to it the doctrines of a selfish and heartless philosophy. The scepticism of Hume would be looked upon by the rational speculators of the more modern schools, as little better than disingenuous sophistry; the irony, upon which Gibbon prided himself, as unworthy of the term philosophical, by which he designated it; and the impious wit of Voltaire, as wholly beneath the regard of a sober and rational inquirer. None of these weapons can any longer prosper, and those, who venture to use them, only expose their ignorance, I do not say of religion, but of infidelity, and can only awaken the compassion of their opponents. They are in the hopeless condition of men, who ignorantly endeavour to maintain a petty fortress in an enemy's country, after their main forces have withdrawn and abandoned them.—The ground, on which they opposed their reason to the principles of religion, has been fairly yielded as untenable. The more carefully and profoundly the analysis is pursued, the more perfectly is religion found to coincide with the best interests and highest reason of men. Such has been the true result of every controversy, in which the real character of religion has been fairly tried, from the time of our Saviour to the present. The truth is, religion has its proper seat in the heart, and in those deep and retired thoughts of God, by which we are changed into his image. Here it shines by its own light, and to its possessor no reasoning is necessary to demonstrate its excellence. From this seat of life it sends forth its illuminating and cheering rays, and gives new vigour to every faculty

of the individual mind, while in its more extensive influence it sheds a lustre upon every department of social life. Such is now acknowledged to be its character and tendency by those, who with least feeling of its authority to command their own homage, have traced its history in its actual operations upon the minds of men, and by those, who have most thoroughly analyzed its principles. One of the most interesting inquiries, which have led to confirm this conclusion of late years, respects its influence upon literature, and the intellectual character of men. The result of this investigation, as it has been pursued by some of the European philosophers and historians, most clearly demonstrates, that the christian religion has been, in almost every age, not less efficient in giving energy to the speculative powers, and extending the triumphs of human reason, than in purifying the affections of the heart. To those, who, from a little superficial acquaintance with history, and Gibbon's ironical views of the weaknesses and absurdities of the earlier christians, have been accustomed to charge only credulity and superstition upon religion, these assertions may seem bold and even paradoxical. But more careful examination will shew, that even under the guise of credulity and superstition, principles of irresistible force were operating; that though religion for a time filled the moral world with clouds and darkness, it was only as the rising sun draws up and spreads over our heads the vapours, that had settled upon the landscape, but shortly scatters them from the face of heaven, and reveals with its unclouded lustre the full beauty and richness of the earth beneath. To shew how this has been done in regard to the general progress of science and literature would require more time and space, than many essays would admit. But every one may judge of the nature of the effect produced by religion upon the character of the individual.

Those, who have had frequent opportunities of witnessing its influence, must have observed how quickly, in many instances at least, it gives an impulse not to the moral feelings only, but to the whole mind of those, who conscientiously embrace it. The eye, that was once languid and unmeaning, becomes suddenly animated, and sparkles with intelligence. The understanding that had been slumbering in stupid sensuality, is at once awakened to new life. This influence of religion is felt and observed more especially among the uncultivated classes of society, and awakens to life and vigour numberless minds, that would otherwise have continued to slumber in unconscious torpor. Thus we have seen men of no educa-

tion and no reputation for talents in early life, apparently through the sole influence of religion, become bold and original thinkers, and able and eloquent preachers of the Gospel. Examples of this are sometimes so striking, as very naturally to strengthen the belief, so prevalent in some sections and some religious associations of our country, of a supernatural inspiration. But it is to the rational man a higher commendation of religion, that its natural and necessary tendency, when conscientiously embraced, and deeply felt, is to produce this effect, to raise the thoughtless and the sensual to a more self-conscious and spiritual existence.

That such must be the effect upon the intellect of the individual, may be shewn by reasons very plain and obvious. Only a few considerations can now be suggested.

The great principle, which lies at the bottom of the whole, undoubtedly is, that religion establishes in the mind a fixed and abiding principle of duty. Amidst the fluctuations of sensuality, of passion, and interest, the religious man has something that is not subject to the unceasing changes of the world. He has a resting place to which he may retire, a rock, on which his understanding may repose and recover strength, when otherwise all that his mind could fix on, would be unstable as the waves. His fixed and unchanging principles form a nucleus, around which his thoughts and feelings are clustered. Like the *ideas* of the ancient philosophers, they are the unalienable property of the soul, while the sanctions of religion give them an authority and influence, which the abstractions of the philosopher could never acquire. The mind, that has been long running from one object of desire to another, and kept down to the low level of sensual, or at least worldly gratifications, is fixed and begins, to aspire to objects, that call forth more constant and more persevering efforts. It begins to act consistently and uniformly. It begins to be *built up*, to be edified in the order of the gospel. This, it may be said indeed, does not imply a greater degree, of mental activity, but it does imply a greater degree of consistency, and more of character in the operations and productions of the mind. And is this a matter of no consequence? Voltaire was a man of great activity of mind, of unceasing vivacity, and inexhaustible wit. But he had no character. Nothing was fixed in his mind, but the principle of action, and the habits of change. It was but the ceaseless fluctuation of feeling, that swept away in its progress every thing elevated and permanent, and reduced all the fabrics of human wisdom, and the most splendid trophies of intellectual and moral power to the level of a sneering vulgar ridicule.

How different from this was the character of Hooker or of Barrow. On their minds a consistent and harmonious structure was erected, on the firm and immoveable basis of religious principle. Their whole intellectual effort was to build up, not to destroy. And the fabric was continually becoming more ample, and more brightly illuminated with the light of divine truth. Every production was an index of principles, that were permanent, and partook of the *character* of its author. They were eminently men of character, and considered in this respect, even though inferior in vivacity and wit, how vastly superior must their minds be considered to that of Voltaire.

But another principle intimately connected with this, is the habit of continual watchfulness and self-inspection, which religion enjoins. *Keep thy heart with all diligence*, is one of the most frequent and urgent exhortations of the christian teacher. It is an exhortation, too, obedience to which involves difficulties and produces effects, which probably few have sufficiently considered. How often have metaphysicians complained of the intangible nature of the objects, with which that science is concerned? How strongly have they represented the difficulty of turning their thoughts inward upon themselves, and fixing their attention upon the fleeting operations of their own minds? These representations too are certainly not without reason. But few philosophers have considered, that what they find so difficult in the prosecution of scientific research with all their habits of attention, and minds carefully disciplined by education, is made the daily duty of the most uncultivated christian, and urged upon him by the strongest obligations of conscience. He feels himself bound to keep his eye continually fixed upon what is passing within him, to bring to the perfect standard of the law of God every thought, and the most hidden motives of his conduct. He seeks by the most careful meditation, as a matter of conscience, to call forth into distinct consciousness the most secret inclinations and purposes of his heart. To do this, the metaphysician knows is a thing of no easy attainment, and the christian knows, that it is one of the utmost difficulty. But what I wish now to remark is the effect, which it must necessarily produce on minds unaccustomed to thought and habitually controlled by their senses and passions. It fixes the thoughts, that were wandering, induces habits of continual reflection, and, what is more, it leads them, according to the exhortation of St. Bernard, to withdraw from the world without, to retire inward, and thence ascend upward by prayer

and meditation. It opens a new world within them to those, who had been accustomed to look only at the world without. It compels them to fix their thoughts stedfastly on the things that are not seen, and thus produces a power of attention, which is of the utmost importance in the cultivation of intellectual character. We are not apt to consider sufficiently how great this effect of conscientious self-examination must be upon the mass of christians, or sufficiently to value that consistency of thought as well as feeling which it induces. The religious man will reason and judge not only more honestly but more skilfully than the irreligious man, whose advantages have in other respects been equal, and to their settled religious principles, as well as the difference of education in other respects, we are to ascribe it, that the peasantry of Scotland are so superior to the same classes in almost every other country.

The subject here introduced, will probably be pursued at considerable length, in succeeding numbers; and it will be shown how important religion is, to the success of all general plans of intellectual improvement. We are persuaded that they who refuse the aid of this powerful auxiliary, act as unwisely as the architect, who should build without securing a good foundation, and without sufficient cement. How just soever the proportions, and costly the materials, the building cannot sustain its own weight, and its fall disappoints all the fond hopes of the projector. M.

REVIEW.—*The Life of the Rev. Thomas Scott, D.D. Rector of Aston Sandford, Bucks; including a Narrative drawn up by himself, and copious Extracts from his Letters. By John Scott, A.M. Vicar of North Ferriby, and Minister of St. Mary's, Hull. 12mo. pp. 454. Price \$1,25. Boston: S. T. Armstrong. New-York: John P. Haven. (On Sale at Warner's, Richmond.)*

THE value of well written Biography consists in this, that it sets before us the real character of its subjects, and describes the process by which that character was formed. Nothing can be more insipid and jejune, than Memoirs which merely contain names and dates, and general remarks concerning the learning, the piety, the political integrity of men who have borne some share, during their day, in the general business of life. It is as though a portrait painter, instead of giving us real likenesses of distinguished personages, should draw an imaginary picture, having of course the common