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ON OUR DUTIES TO GOD.

The ancient philosophers divided morality according to the principles from which it springs. In modern times, however, those who have attempted a treatise on the offices or duties, to the performance of which human nature is obligated, have spoken of them in regard to the objects on which they terminate. A three-fold division has been made and adopted; viz. Our duties to God—to our fellow men—and to ourselves.

In this essay, my design is to say a few things on the first class. I would not venture to indulge in abstruse and unprofitable speculations, but simply notice a few of the leading duties, as they stand connected with practical piety. That this subject is one of primary importance, must be evident to every mind, after a moment's reflection. Did not God create us? Has he not preserved us? Has he not heaped on our heads the bounties of his providence? And, above all, did he not send his own dear Son to atone for the sins of men? Therefore, it is our place to inquire, with humility and earnestness, what our duties are to our heavenly Sovereign.

1. It is our duty, first to believe with all our hearts, that God exists, that he governs the world, and observes the conduct of the children of men. To the doctrine that there is a Divine Being, almost all men, in this day, seem prepared to subscribe. Few have the brazen effrontery to stand forth, and deny what is recommended to the reason of man by arguments so powerful and convincing. But we fear that many, who thus profess a belief in this fundamental doctrine of every thing like religion, content themselves with mere speculation. Their faith, in the words of a poet,

“Plays round the head, but comes not near the heart.”

Now such a faith God regards not, nor views as a discharge of the duty we have named. He demands the heart. Men do not consider in how ridiculous a point of view they appear, when they acknowledge the being of God, not by their deportment, but occasionally with their lips, merely in compliance with general usage, or to escape being called infidels. There is a hypocrisy in it, to which a noble mind ought not to condescend. It is falsehood downright. For however true the existence of God in reality is, yet he who doubts or disbelieves it, and still speaks positively of it, violates verity, because his words do not correspond with the feelings and views of his heart. Evidently, therefore, it behoves every person, who yields in public an unwavering assent to the opinion that there is a God, to examine the foundation on which the doctrine rests, the arguments or premises out of which the conclusion grows, and, above all things, to look to God himself for the enlightening influences of his Spirit, that he may not meanly and falsely pretend to believe that, of which he neither knows the nature, nor cares for the importance. O if this were universally done, how much more guardedly would men act; how much more reverently would they use the names of Him, whose throne is Heaven and whose footstool is the earth!

But it is our duty to believe not only in the existence of God, but also in his providence and in his observation of the conduct of his subjects. And here Christians, as well as others, are too prone practically to fail. Notwithstanding that in paying their morning and evening sacrifices, they acknowledge these facts, and, perhaps, at the time feel them, yet in their intercourse with the world and in their daily occupations, how little are they sensible that the piercing eye of Omniscience is discerning their inmost purposes. How few of them manifest the thoughtfulness and heaven-born wisdom of the poor boy, who resisted the solicitation of his father to carry a bundle in his pocket on the Sabbath, by saying, "God can see into my pocket." Perhaps, in the ardour of conversation, they colour too highly a piece of narrative, or they whisper an aspersion of a brother's character, and many other things of a similar nature; all flowing from at least a momentary unbelief of God's omniscience.

Christians are also prone to talk too much of chance, thereby denying the providence of their heavenly Sovereign. But a few will be heard to say, "Such a thing providentially occurred." The rest prefer ascribing it to chance, to accident. Some might attempt to justify this mode of speaking, on the footing of its prevalence. But such a foundation is not firm. Many a bad custom reigns. Besides, with a Christian, conscience should have full operation. Let him familiarize to his mind, the in-

junctions of the Redeemer and of his inspired apostles. Let him then drag, with unrelenting severity, every form and fashion of life and of speech to the tribunal of conscience; try it with rigour, and, if it be found not innocent, refuse compliance. Such a course of discipline, under God's blessing, would soon bring Christians to imitate the manners of the early converts to the faith of the gospel. To the believer, a firm confidence in God's overruling providence is full of comfort. Occurrences around him assume an important aspect, when they are viewed as brought to pass by the finger of his God. All things, he is convinced, will work for good, therefore his soul is at peace. And with humble thankfulness, and tears of joy, will he trace out the dealings of his Father's hand, and thank him for even his severest dispensations, knowing that "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope."

But this interesting topic, on which much might be said, I must now leave, having already dwelt longer on it than I designed when I lifted my pen.

2. After arriving at the facts of God's existence and providence, reason teaches us that our next duty is *worship*. This assertion needs no proof. And if we appeal to the revelation of God's mind and will, with which he has blessed the world, it with earnestness enjoins the same duty: "Pray without ceasing:" "Worship God." To the acceptable performance of this office, sincerity of heart is of far more consequence than the mode. Nevertheless, both reason and Sacred Writ concur in requiring attention to the manner and matter of our supplications.

It has been asked, "What purpose can prayer answer? God will do his own pleasure, though all men should beseech him to the contrary." As my purpose is to avoid abstruse speculation, I cannot stop to say much on this subject. The efficacy of addresses to the throne of grace is not to be explained. But, in scripture, we are told that the prayer of faith does avail, and we are commanded to offer it. To him who believes the Bible, this should be enough. He credits the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead—can he explain it? No. He believes the union of the divine and human natures in the Redeemer—can he fully comprehend it? No. Therefore, let him believe in the efficacy of prayer, though by him it may be inexplicable. Dr. Witherspoon observes, that it is proper to speak of prayer as having an influence as real in procuring the mercies for which we ask, as ploughing and sowing have in procuring a crop. And it is true that the same reasoning, which is employed against directing our cry to God, might be as forcibly turned against the use of means, in any thing. In consequence, the systems of human affairs would hasten to be dissolved.

Perhaps, however, prayer may be especially important, from

its reflex effect on him who offers it. It reduces him to a state of dependance—it teaches him humility—it makes him feel his accountableness—it spreads a calmness over his mind, and has purifying effect on his soul.

God is therefore to be worshipped; and this interesting and all-important duty should earnestly be recommended to all men.

3. I would name *resignation* as a third duty to God, consequent from that of worship. This duty can, by no fair means, be construed to supersede the necessity of prayer. To suffer it to do so, would be to give fully into the absurd doctrine of fate, as taught by some of Zeno's disciples. We must pray; but being convinced of our own short-sightedness, we are not always to expect an exact answer to our prayers. God knows more than we; and when he refuses our requests, we should ascribe it to his infinitely superior wisdom, and be calmly resigned. A heathen philosopher said, that men when praying to the gods, should always use this petition: "O Gods! the things that would be injurious to us, do not grant, even if we desire them." Shall Christians be less resigned than that heathen? Perhaps a believer can have no stronger proof of his adoption, than what is afforded by a holy and calm resignation to the will of his heavenly Father, as manifested by his dealings towards him.

4. The last duty, to which I will now advert, is devotedness to the promotion of God's glory. This is of immense consequence, and flows naturally from the due performance of the others. To treat it fully would require limits much larger than those assigned to this essay. It includes devotedness of talents—of estate—of body—of all. It requires that every favourable moment should be seized for speaking a word for the Saviour—for performing a charity—for administering reproof—and for consoling the children of God, under the hidings of his face. It demands constant reflexion of Christian light, to the end that God's name may be glorified in the earth. It requires our becoming all things to all men, like the apostles, that thereby the salvation of some may be secured. It leads us, in fact, to view ourselves as in no sense of the words our own, but as having been bought with a price, and of course bound to the constant service of Him who purchased us.

These are a few of our leading duties to God. The enumeration is very incomplete. The remarks that have been dropped are very trite, but not, on that account, the less true or momentous. Perhaps this observation may be hazarded, that he who will diligently discharge the duties above specified, will not fail of attaining to immortality, holiness and peace, beyond the grave, *through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

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