

THE

CHRISTIAN SPECTATOR.

No. 11.]

NOVEMBER 1, 1822.

[VOL. IV.]

Religious Communications.

For the Christian Spectator.

Cursorv Remarks upon the Literary and Religious character and taste of the present age.

For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear (*μαρτυροῦντες*) something newer.—*Acts.*

It is impossible to deny, what is so often and so complacently asserted, that we live in an age of *action*—for every living thing is in motion. All the mighty energies of human nature are busily at work, on a great scale, and are obviously tending to great results. Beside what is healthful and health-giving, there is a feverish and preternatural excitement abroad in the world, which gives an air of extraordinary enterprise, to all the physical and moral capabilities of civilized society. But the word *action* does not fully designate the character of these remarkable times. There are other lines and features, two broad and prominent to be overlooked. Ours is the age of *writing*, of *reading*, of *fiction*, of strong *feeling*, and of insatiable *curiosity*. There is a vast deal of intelligence afloat, and of fancy and genius on the wing, especially about the “sea-girt and fast-anchored isle;” and never was true genius, never were its tinselled and vapouring counterfeits, carried to a readier, or more lucrative market.

Accordingly, as might have been expected from the combined stimulus of gain and of glory, some of the

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more airy and Elysian walks of literature are crowded almost to suffocation. Every broken lyre is brought out and hastily repaired—every minstrel that can find a string, or raise a note, is a candidate for the laurel. Never, I believe, were the lofty-dwelling Nine so hardly beset, both by the witty and the brainless; never, I am sure, was there a more breathless scrambling after the few wild-flowers that still bloom in lonely sweetness far up “the sacred mount.” In a word, the broad surface of literature, every where presents a most imposing aspect of life and buoyancy and magnificence; as if the world had never been half so rich in taste, or ethereal in fancy, or lovely in elegance, or blest with talent before. Much of this, however, is mere pagantry and moonshine—a tremulous gilding, which will not endure the breath of near inspection. I am afraid, that notwithstanding all the clappings and gratulations of the day, the stream of Helicon is losing faster in depth, than it is gaining in breadth: for while the number of literary adventurers is rapidly increasing, and every third or fourth man we meet has some favourite keel of his own on the stocks or afloat, it is chiefly small craft, that can never venture far from shore, though the painting and lettering may excite more admiration for a time, than the barnacled copper, and weather-beaten bulwarks of other centuries.

I do not mean to aver, that there is none of the good old English and

right that they should send home letters and journals; and that in their correspondence with the societies which sent them forth, they should descend to particulars on all the topics immediately connected with their labors, prospects and responsibilities. But I cannot say that I think their journals, taken together, are quite worthy of their talents and opportunities. Many of them abound too much, in dry details of necessary journies and labors, and in common place remarks. Or, admitting all these things to be entirely proper in official communications, I cannot help objecting to such minute statements, as we often see in print, about clearing land, building cabins, being visited by sea captains, &c. &c. It does appear to me, that all the information which the public need might be given in one quarter of the space which is frequently occupied, and that those who are intrusted with the original manuscripts, are bound to spend more time in the selection of extracts, and in bringing what is often spread over a wide surface under a single glance of the reader's eye. Such a process would greatly reduce the *quantity* of religious news, but it would exceedingly improve the *quality*; and this is a thing which is very much wanted. For general circulation, half would be better than the whole; and then, there would be a clear saving of one half the time and expense. This would also tend very much to check the religious dissipation of the age by leaving room for more thought and discussion.

The great thing now is, not to suppress missionary information; but to guard against its exclusive and enervating tendency. Let the whole ground be occupied by it, but so as to leave room for our standard works in divinity, and for the circulation and encouragement of well conducted theological Magazines. Let the whole christian land be refreshed, but not inundated, by the streams which should gladden every town and make it permanently fruitful.

An exclusive or prevailing taste for religious news, wherever it may be found, will be followed by some of the lamentable effects which result from the reading of novels and romances. The mind will in both cases be gradually unfitted for deep and patient investigation. All that lies a little below the surface, will be passed over; and simply because it requires labour. In both cases the unceasing demand for something *newer*, will increase the appetite and dissipate more and more some of the best and noblest energies of the mind. Surely, effects like these are to be seriously deprecated; and in concluding this paper. I would earnestly invite all the enlightened friends of literature and religion to consider, how far the remarks which have been made are entitled to their particular attention, and how their example and influence may help to counteract every threatening tendency on the one hand, and to encourage all that is safe and good on the other.

A. Z.

THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS, A COMMON CHRISTIAN DUTY.—A SERMON.

James v. 19, 20.—“*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him: let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*”

How great an encouragement the apostle here presents for christians to labour for the salvation of sinners. I say for christians—all who think they bear the image of Christ, and profess to follow his example in doing good; because the apostle evidently addresses this, as well as the other exhortations in this Epistle, to all christians real or professed; and because it is a grand mistake to suppose that ministers of the gospel are the only persons, who should labour for the conversion of sinners. This

mistake, is no doubt one reason why professing christians generally give themselves no more anxiety on the subject, than if there were not another soul to be saved from death. One design of this discourse will fail if professing christians are not one and all convinced, that they have an important and much neglected duty to fulfil: and I rejoice to be able to present and urge it upon my fellow-christians in its most interesting and encouraging form. *“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”*

Is it not strange that christians—those who profess to have imbibed the spirit of Christ, who “went about doing good,” should need to be first convinced of duty, and then urged to labour for the conversion of men? There is no doubt if we had miraculous powers, and the object were to heal diseases and prolong life, we should be seen going from house to house, and laying our hands on the sick, or saying to the dead “arise.” But when the object is confessedly of infinitely greater importance,—to save men’s souls from death, and we have only to exert that influence which a man exerts over his friend for any good purpose, we do little or nothing. We do indeed pray for the conversion of others, but it is rather because we believe God is able to save them in some way, than because we really desire their salvation, or believe that our prayers will be answered. We go farther, and try to set a christian example in some things, which by the way are least calculated to produce the desired effect; and this we do, rather to confirm our own hopes of being real christians, than for the sake of “leading others to glorify God our heavenly Father;” forgetting also that these things lose their effect, because of errors in us, which men see and are influenced by more than by any thing right or

praiseworthy. And this is all, or nearly all, that we do. We profess to be “the light of the world;” but instead of “putting our light upon a candlestick, we rather put it under a bushel.” We exert upon those around us little or no positive influence towards their conversion: I mean that kind of influence which we exert over others in worldly concerns, and which we are continually putting forth in every object of human interest or enterprise, except “saving the soul from death.” Now I ask christians, why is this? It is not surely because we do not imagine the souls of men of infinite value, and therefore worth our care;—nor because we cannot exert a pious influence over others, for we can just as easily as in any of the important concerns of life;—nor because we do not love the souls of men, or are willing to be thought destitute of such a proof of christian character. In the most favourable construction of our conduct, it is because our piety is in a low and doubtful state. For this reason, we have very imperfect views of what is our duty towards others, and therefore do them no good when we might:—and for this reason we become indifferent, and indifference grows into a habit, and habit seals up our lips and hardens our hearts, until (as is sometimes the case) we come to think and to say, ‘it is not our duty—it is not our business to concern ourselves with the religious state of others—it is a “zeal without knowledge” to go from house to house, or be watching opportunities to talk with people about their souls.’ And can we think and say thus, and imagine that we bear the image of Christ? whose example enforces this duty with the clearness of sun-light—who always concerned himself with the religious state of others,—and who went from house to house watching occasions to speak to Publican and Pharisee about their souls? But instead of pressing this enquiry here, let me invite you,

I. In the first place, to look over

that portion of society with which we are intimate, and see whether there be any *occasion* for the performance of the duty in question—whether there are cases in which we might exert an influence in favour of piety, provided we could feel it to be our duty. Such a view is naturally suggested by the first clause of the text, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth.”

“The truth as it is in Jesus Christ,” or the gospel, is our standard of faith and practice. By that we profess to be governed, and by that we expect to be finally judged; of course, by that we shall judge others, whether they be in error. And if we have any observation, we are making such judgments continually.

Now if we look over that portion of society with which we are acquainted, we shall probably see some, perhaps many, who “err from the truth,” in their *faith*—by which I mean, their views of the doctrines and duties of the gospel. Their opinions differ from ours, i. e. if we have any that are clear and decided, and therefore we conclude them in error:—we love their souls and are grieved to see them entertaining false notions:—we think ourselves right and would fain wish them to be so:—we see their errors in principle exerting a fatal influence over their practice, and we could wish to speak to them, and have opportunities enough:—all this is taken for granted. But here occurs the question, “what have I to do with the religious faith of others? I cannot change their opinions—What good can I do them?” And here, brethren, is the very point of duty to which I would bring you. I have stated the case favourably; for the fact with most of us is, that we look upon the doctrinal errors of others with great indifference, even where we can trace them to pernicious consequences; and the true reason why we are not disposed to make any efforts to reclaim them is; not that we are doubtful of duty, (for the idea seldom occurs to us) but

that we are indifferent. We do not think it of consequence to speak to them about it; and for the reason just stated, that our own views of the doctrines and duties of the gospel are not so clear and decided, but that if tried, might be found as deficient as theirs. The fact remains, that there are cases, and probably many, in which we might, if we would, exert an influence over those who “err from the truth,” in favour of the gospel, and thus “save their souls from death.”

But the text seems to regard errors in *practice* rather than errors in faith; and if we look over the circle of our intimacy and acquaintance, we shall no doubt see many who err from the truth in their dispositions and life. For example,—what is the state of our families? our servants—do we know whether they are pious or ungodly—the servants of Christ or the slaves of sin? Do we esteem them as hirelings merely, and ourselves as having no other connection with them than labour and wages imply? And were they to go from our threshold now to the judgment seat of Christ, would they carry thither any instruction—any pious impressions—any proof that we loved their souls—or any token of remembrance in eternity, save the wages of unrighteousness?—Our children, what is the state of their minds? Have we conversed with them enough on this most interesting of all subjects to understand their feelings? Or have we, as is too often the case with christian parents, left them to forget as among their childish employments, the Bible and prayer, and been anxious to fill their opening minds with every thing but “the truth as it is in Jesus Christ?” And are we now satisfied to see them rising to manhood and spending all their time and thoughts in worldly pursuits and vain accomplishments, to the utter neglect of their souls’ salvation? Oh, what a dreadful account will many christian parents have to render for withholding from their offspring “the

nurture and admonition of the Lord?" They grow up under our eye—our hand—our entire influence; yet it may be our tutelage has only fitted them to live without God, and to die without hope!—Our relatives and intimate friends, also, in every degree, what is their religious state? If some of them are pious and devoted christians, do not most of them "err from the truth," in disposition and conduct? Some are thoughtful, perhaps, and seriously inclined, but do they ever hear a word from us, that would relieve their doubts, or encourage them to persevere, or guide them to Christ? Others are gay and thoughtless, pressing forward in the broad road to death, and using a thousand times more influence to entice us to go with them, than we are to arrest them in their sinful course and bring them back to God. We hear them pleading aloud for the idols and follies of the world, and are dumb; we see them running upon the very brink of death, and stretch not our hand to save them. And if they are ever converted, it will be because others will speak—because other hands will be extended for their rescue.

Our christian brethren—those whom we meet at the communion table, and profess to love and watch over in the Lord, what is their religious state? Are not some of them so cold, and indifferent, and worldly, that we question their piety? Do we not see some of them falling into sin, doing things in obedience to custom or some other influence, that are inconsistent with the christian profession? And might we not go to them and tell them their fault, as Christ commanded, and endeavour to restore them in the spirit of meekness? Are there not a multitude of such cases, in which it would not be obtrusive or offensive to endeavour to exert an influence in favour of piety?

From such a view of our families—of our social circle—and of the church, to say nothing of "the world that lieth in wickedness," with which we are continually in contact, and

of the heathen, that sit in the region and shadow of death; do we not see abundant room for the performance of the duty in question? that is, if we esteem it a duty?

II. Let me then, in the second place, speak of *the duty itself*, as the apostle expresses it, of "converting the sinner from the error of his way"—together with some of the arguments that enforce it.

After the view we have taken, brethren, of our connection with society, and of the thousand occasions we have for exerting a religious influence over "those who err from the truth," if there be any, who deny that it is their duty in any case to do it, I hesitate not to say, it is impossible that the love of Christ should be in them. Few indeed, who make any pretensions to christian character, would deny this duty altogether. On the contrary, very few of those who profess strictness in the faith and practice of the gospel, fulfil it in any thing like the extent and strictness, which the gospel enjoins. Why? Because it is one of those unlimited and universal duties, which when violated in certain degrees does not absolutely destroy christian character; and when highly fulfilled, argues an extraordinary piety, that ordinary christians it seems do not feel bound to exhibit. The great mass of professors think they discharge this duty in some measure; i. e. we pray for our children, and while they are children, teach them and urge them to pray, for it is beautiful to see a child pray; but when they rise to youth and manhood, and our influence should be exerted with most efficiency, we are content for the most part to pray for them, and advise them to be moral in their conduct and to go to church. We pray for our domestics, also, and perhaps, (though not always,) urge them to attend Sabbath schools, and means of instruction elsewhere, without giving them any under our own roof, or ever speaking to them of their soul's welfare. As for others, our relatives, friends, acquaintance—the christian

professors meeting us at the Lord's table, we feel as if we had done our duty towards them, when we have prayed without feeling for them, and set them a good example, without caring much whether it be followed or not. And of course, little thought or feeling, little anxiety or effort, (save what may be told of by the public tongue,) can be expected for the world that lieth in wickedness—for the multitudes that we meet every day, or for the poor heathen who "sit afar off in the region and shadow of death."

Now if this statement be true with regard to the vast majority of christians, let me ask, is this fulfilling the duty, which our connection with these immortal beings, aside from other considerations, demands? Is this actually "converting sinners from the error of their way?" What is it to "convert a sinner?" The word implies an exertion—a direct, agency—a positive influence—something more than to pray for him in public or private—something more than to set him a proper example. To convert, as the original word imports, is to influence, to move, to persuade, to convince, to turn, by any and every mean that may be used,—to "turn a sinner from the error of his way." Let, then, the question be—Are we now striving to convert, to turn our children, our servants, our relatives and acquaintance, and backsliding brethren from sin to holiness? Is there one in this wide circle of influence upon whom we have fixed our eye, our heart, and over whom we are now exerting an influence, that with the blessing of God, may bring them to the knowledge of the truth? If we are thus doing, in but one instance, then we apprehend the nature and extent of the duty required, and may look to the rich and glorious encouragement, which the promises of God give to such exertions. But if not, as there is no promise to obedience in any duty without a corresponding curse to disobedience—if not, I say; then in the

last judgment these souls may be required at our hands. "Father Abraham," cried the rich man, who lifted up his eyes in torment, "I pray thee that thou wouldest send Lazarus to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." That lost sinner would have fulfilled his duty—would have testified to his brethren, but it was too late! And shall christians neglect it, when they have opportunity, and when they see sinners wasting the day of grace, and rapidly going to that "place of torment!"

Consider some of the arguments by which this duty is enforced.—There is the command of God, in all its extent and spirituality, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This command is repeated in all those precepts and exhortations, which regard our children, servants, friends, relatives and neighbours; but how can we love them as ourselves unless we are as solicitous and active for their salvation as for our own? By the constitution of nature and of grace also, we are responsible for all the influence we exert over others in all the relations of life:—the father for his children, the relative for the relative, the friend for the friend; because by a constant and oft times irresistible agency, they are leading one another to heaven or to hell. Consider, likewise, how the duty is illustrated by the feelings and conduct of the saints in scripture. Indeed their story amounts to this, that they loved and laboured for the conversion of sinners. This was eminently the spirit of the primitive disciples, derived immediately from the force of our Lord's example. No sooner did they embrace Christ, than they immediately entered upon the duty, I should say privilege of converting others. Thus Andrew, it is said, when he acknowledged Christ, "first findeth, (and the expression implies that he sought him) his own brother Simon, and said unto him, we have found the Mes-

siab." So also Philip findeth Nathaniel, and saith unto him, "we have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." And on one remarkable occasion, the Saviour himself gave a specific direction to this purpose. "Go home to thy friends," said he to the man, out of whom he had cast a legion of devils, and who had expressed a desire to remain with him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how he hath had compassion on thee. And accordingly the man departed and began to publish in Decapolis, how great things Jesus had done for him." And have you, christian brethren, no occasion to publish to your children, and friends and neighbours, what great things the Lord hath done for you, not as matter of joy merely, but that they also may be "brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light?"

Let me say also, that it is becoming characteristic of the piety of the present day, for private christians to be anxious and watchful to "convert sinners." A great change is taking place throughout the church in this respect: and among the signs, that the Saviour's universal kingdom is rapidly approaching, this is one of the clearest and most promising.—The love of souls, and exertions for their salvation in every possible way, is becoming a leading test of practical piety; and already does every one that "names the name of Christ," especially where vital religion is most seen and felt, begin to tremble and doubt of his interest in Christ, if he be not found giving, not his gold and silver merely, but like the Apostle, "what he has," his time, his talents, his direct and positive influence to the cause of truth and righteousness. Yes, brethren, a christian is now persuaded that he has something more to do than to pray, or set an example of passive goodness, or contribute to a Bible or Missionary fund, if he would come up

to the virtue and glory of imitating his divine Redeemer: a deeper and more swaying sentiment occupies his bosom, which prompts him to say to his friend and to his brother, "know the Lord;"—which constrains him to fill up his own sphere of influence, be it greater or less, with the light and power of the gospel, because he feels the responsibility and privilege of being a co-worker with Christ in the redemption of the world. He sees a glorious day—a day in which it is a blessing to live—a day which kings and prophets, apostles and martyrs desired to see—a day, in which every one, if he would not seem to be behind or destitute of the redeeming spirit of the age—if he would rather hasten the chariot wheels of the triumphant Saviour, must be active, and zealous, and faithful unto death; and to the very extent of his widening influence, strive to make men feel the subduing and merciful sway of that gospel, which is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation."

III. Let me now call your attention to *what is requisite* in order to the proper performance of this duty. Many imagine they would be disposed to be active, if they thought themselves qualified to do any good. Some think themselves destitute of the requisite talents—others that they have not sufficient weight of character and influence—others that they cannot overcome their natural diffidence—others that they have no time or opportunities for such a duty. We may judge for ourselves whether such excuses are valid—I should say, whether they are not used as apologies for unjustifiable neglect. Whom do we hear complaining of being destitute of the requisite talents, when he would engage his friend or neighbour in some worldly scheme? Though he feel the want of more, he uses what he has to the best advantage. And why? because he is deeply interested. And will you—dare you, my brethren, because you have not ten talents

at your disposal, bury the one which you have? Will you, because you have not the qualifications of a preacher of the gospel, refuse to speak to your relative or friend about his salvation? And who is so destitute of weight of character and influence, in a religious sense, that he can do nothing? that is, to translate this phrase, that he cannot do great things? Let him first obtain a religious character, if he really think himself so destitute, and then let him do small things;—they will be great in the sight of God. And who is so overcome by natural diffidence and backwardness, that he cannot speak to others on the very subject which lies nearest his own heart? It will be well for him, so long as he has none of this diffidence or backwardness on other subjects of interest and importance, to examine himself, and see whether it be not owing, in a great degree, to his being “ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” And if there be any, who plead that they have no time or opportunity for the performance of this duty, surrounded as they are with souls that might be saved from death,—they should at once abandon their hope of being christians, and learn of Christ the first lesson of the gospel, to “go about doing good.”

It is perfectly obvious, that we are either wrong in our conceptions of what is required, or these and similar excuses for inactivity are the mere apologies for wilful neglect. The duty required is what every real christian can do; the requisite qualifications are such as pertain to every child of God. And they are these:—

In the first place *benevolence*—the love of souls: that Christ-like goodness which will dispose us to impart to others the same spiritual blessings which we ourselves enjoy; that principle, which contemplates the eternal more than the temporal welfare of men—which actuated the Saviour in all the days of his humiliation and sorrow—which has ever made those who have felt its influ-

ence, the lights of the world and the benefactors of mankind,—and which must in a greater or less degree sway the feelings and conduct of every one who bears the image of Christ.

Brethren, do you love the souls of men?—you love your children, domestics, friends, acquaintance, because they are your children, your domestics, your friends,—but do you love them because they are spiritual, immortal beings, and must be forever happy or miserable? “If ye love them which love you,” said our Saviour, “what thank have ye?—do not even publicans and sinners the same?” To try this feeling, select an individual from among your friends or acquaintance, who has no special claims on you, but who is nevertheless “erring from the truth” and going down to death. Do you love him? Have you any thing of the feeling which the blessed Saviour would have manifested for such an one, thus thrown within the circle of his influence? Do you ever think of his soul—of what immense value it is—what a high place it holds in the universe,—and that there is danger of its being lost? Do you ever feel anxious for his soul, that though it is an emanation of the eternal mind,—the brother of angels,—though its capacities for pleasure and endurance are boundless,—though immortality is interwoven in its very being, and the fields of its action and enjoyment occupy immensity and eternity,—and though it has been redeemed by the blood of the Son of God, is yet in danger of being lost?—of becoming an accursed thing in God’s kingdom?—Do you ever feel as if you might not, if you sought the opportunity and made the experiment, be instrumental in saving that soul, and as successful perhaps, as Philip was in bringing Nathaniel to Christ? If not, then, dear brethren, you know not what it is to love the souls of men; and of course must be strangers to the love of Christ and of God. But if you do—if you have such views and feelings, why not obey the im-

pulse they naturally give, and go to that individual, and speak to him of his error—of his soul's salvation,—and, if possible, win him to Christ? Oh, if Christians were but faithful, how many would have occasion to thank them now, and in the last day, to “rise up and call them blessed!”

Another requisite in the proper performance of this duty, is *freedom from error ourselves*. We must manifest a deep solicitude to keep ourselves in the faith and practice of the gospel, else our zeal for others will appear to spring from a worse motive than benevolence; and those to whom we go will have a right to say, “physician, heal thyself.” Some of us, no doubt, will be backward in this duty, for fear it may be seen that there is “a beam in our own eye”—for fear people may say, struck with the glaring inconsistency between this kind of zeal and our christian character in general, “is Saul also among the prophets?” Our duty then, in this case, is not, as we may suppose, to continue backward and neglectful, because we are not pure and exemplary enough to attempt to convert others, but to reform—to become exemplary—to “cast out the beam out of our own eye”—to manifest that we are swayed not by hypocrisy, or spiritual pride, but the love of souls. After all, brethren, this may be the grand difficulty with us. No wonder that we are not disposed to try to convert sinners, so long as we are conscious of being so inconsistent in our profession, as to feel rather the need of such influence ourselves, than the ability to exert it over others. Our children and domestics see this;—our friends and connections see this;—the world and the church see this;—and no wonder our lips are silent, when Christ and his cause are concerned. And will not God require it of us, that thus we bring a reproach upon his cause,—and, if we are christians, throw this obstacle in the way of our fulfilling a duty of such immense responsibility? Shall we not

then reform, and bring our own lives nearer to the standard of the gospel, that we may cause “our light to shine,”—and so to shine, that others, seeing our good works, may be led to glorify God our heavenly Father.”

A third requisite is “*zeal according to knowledge*.” There is, I know, an unwise and intemperate zeal, by which men are sometimes influenced, that renders religion offensive rather than inviting, to those who cannot discriminate between the thing itself and the manner in which it is presented. There is also, I know, among many christian professors, a prejudice against every appearance of zeal in religion, because it savours of enthusiasm or fanaticism. Men may be zealous and enthusiastic about the business and the bubbles of life, and bring their whole soul into the most active and spirited exertion, but in religion, which is calculated to excite all the best affections of the mind to the highest degree, and which touches every thing happy and glorious in both worlds,—in religion men must be unmoved as statues—cold as ice. There is a sacred apothegm, which says, “it is good to be zealously affected in a good thing.” It is better, infinitely better that a christian's zeal should err, if his motive be to do good, than that he should have none. Oh, let us beware, brethren, how we prefer coldness and lukewarmness and formality in the service of Christ, to that zeal, which warms and glows in the bosoms of those, who love him most and serve him best! God has given us understandings for the examination and comparison of duties, his word and Holy Spirit for our guides, the love of souls for our motive, and their conversion for our object. According, then, to our knowledge of truth and duty—of the necessities and dangers of men, let us be zealous. And let us be assured, that in those instances, and they are numerous, where the night and the winter have long lain upon the em-

bers of christian feeling, there is infinitely more danger of being without a proper zeal for the salvation of souls, than of its becoming wild or enthusiastic. Let our zeal be directed to this one object, "to convert sinners from the error of their way;" and let us labour to accomplish this object, "by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned:"—being "gentle unto all, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth."

One more requisite in the proper performance of this duty is *opportunity*. But why do I speak of opportunity, when every day, every hour is full of it? But how do we improve these opportunities? Should a stranger come into our family circle, or friendly meetings of any sort, how long, think you, before he would find out that we had any desire to promote Christ's cause, or indeed made any pretensions to religion? In our families we exhaust the world of its topics, and meet to exhaust it again, without a word concerning the soul's welfare, or the great interests of piety. In our social meetings, or accidental intercourse with friends, we forget the one topic, which to a christian mind it may be supposed, is replete with interest, and inexhaustible; and after business, and news, and politics, and every thing else is discussed, and we begin to grow weary of each other's society, and grow dull in conversation for want of topics, still not a syllable, perhaps not a thought of each other's spiritual and eternal good. Oh, dear brethren, aside from the duty, did we rightly appreciate the privilege we forego, in thus wasting opportunities of mutual benefit of christian communion, and of "saving souls from death," we should rather open our mouths on every occasion; we should always have something to say that might tell in the book of God's remembrance;—we should enter into a covenant with ourselves,

and with each other, (as has sometimes been done with wonderful effect) to make it the leading object of our intercourse with our families and friends, and the world, and the church, to do good to the souls of men. We remember of whom it is said, and should be induced to follow their example, "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord and thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

Such, brethren, are the requisites to the proper performance of this duty. The ardent love of souls, freedom from error ourselves, zeal for the conversion of sinners, and opportunity to act. They are such as pertain to every one, who bears the image of Christ; and they evince the duty to be such as every real christian may, and ought to perform, if he would consistently claim that character.

IV. I would present, in the last place, *the encouragement* a christian has to labour for the conversion of sinners. "Let him know," says the Apostle, "that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

To "save a soul from death." This is the first topic of encouragement. And can any moral influence be considered as thrown away—can any anxieties and labours be too great—can any self-sacrifices be too valuable to be bestowed, when the object is to "save a soul from death?" If we have vital benevolence,—that powerful spring of action, which like the redeeming love of Christ, extends to all within its range,—if we love the souls of men, because they are spiritual, of infinite value, and capable of immortal bliss or woe, will any thing dissuade us—can any thing compel

us to withhold what may "save them from death?" Especially when the encouragement imports that a little faithfulness on our part—a little labour and influence, well exerted, shall be blessed of God to their salvation? "Let him know," the apostle says: let him be assured of this result: let him derive the same encouragement to exertion in this case, that he does from any of the specific promises of God. And in these days of peculiar grace to the church, believers have not only the encouragement of promise, but of facts, occurring and multiplying all around us, and shewing what glorious success may attend the exertions of private christians.

Look around you, christians, upon those who "err from the truth,"—who are in constant danger of eternal death, and whom you must meet by and by at the judgment seat of Christ! They are your dearest relatives—your friends and neighbours, over whom you have much influence. Does not God love these souls?—has he not given his Son to die for them, and granted them a day of grace, and through your agency offered them his mercy? Does not Christ love them?—has he not suffered and poured out his blood on the cross, that they might be redeemed, and appointed you the almoners of his grace to them? Do not the angels love them, and will there not be joy in heaven over one that you bring to repentance? Are they not of more value than a thousand worlds? And must they not be miserable without hope and forever, unless by some means they are brought to the knowledge of the truth? And are they not now in the broad road to destruction, passing within your reach? And do you love them? Why then, oh, why are you not more anxious for them? Why do you seem willing that they should go down to death, without a tear of pity, or an effort to save them? Why is not your arm extended to pluck them as "brands from the burning?" Why does not

your zeal glow—your affections rise—your tongue speak—your time and talents, and influence become a willing sacrifice to "save their souls from death?"

You remember, brethren, it is not the death of the body that is here contemplated, but of the soul; a living death—the "second death"—the death eternal!—that fearful state of darkness and misery, into which the soul sinks under the wrath of God, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;"—that dreadful destiny which the eye of the Lord penetrated when he said, "what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Remember, also, that those who now peacefully surround you, and are dear to you by every tie, are the beings who are in hourly danger of this doom! Oh, then, save them, if it be possible,—save them from "going down to the pit!" To-morrow they may be beyond your reach and lost! To-day you may save them, and place them far from death,—far from hell,—high on the threshold of heaven!

The second topic of encouragement in this duty is "*the hiding or pardon of a multitude of sins*:"—of sins as committed against God; and that in two respects:—Of sins in him who is converted from the error of his way, and of sins in him who is the happy instrument of such conversion.

Think, then, brethren, of the consequences of converting one sinner. He is delivered from the condemnation of sin, which as a dreadful curse was suspended over his head and threatening to sink him into hell:—his sins are washed away in the atoning blood of Christ, never more to appear in judgment against him, or prevent his access to eternal happiness:—death hath no longer dominion over him:—he is redeemed from its darkness—its torment—its unutterable agonies, and made an heir of all the brightness, and felicity and glory of heaven?

Think, likewise, of the consequen-

ces of converting one sinner upon your own soul—the pardon of a multitude of sins! Not as a reward of merit; for our best services, so defiled are they by sin, and our most fervent love, so far short does it come of the glory of God, can never merit the pardon of the least of our transgressions—but as a reward of grace. My dear brethren, the love of souls is a divine principle, and in his sovereign mercy, God has been pleased, by promise, to suspend upon its exercise the pardon of our sins, because it is a high evidence of grace, and forms the best possible preparation for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Is it true, that he who “gives a cup of cold water to a disciple in the name of a disciple shall not lose his reward?” What then shall be the reward of one, who plucks a fellow creature from everlasting ruin—who saves a soul from death—who disappoints hell of her expectation, and adds another blessed one to the church triumphant? How honoured is such an instrument! What reason has he to thank God that he was ever born! What rich consolation has he in his own soul!—the pleasure of doing good, the light of God’s countenance in all his way, and the glories of God’s presence for his home!

Shall we not then, christian brethren, under the force of such encouragement, bring our minds and our hearts to this duty? Now, while God appears willing to bless the churches with the effusions of his Holy Spirit; while many are beginning to awake to a sense of their responsibility and privilege; while sinners around us are inquiring “what shall we do to be saved;” and backsliding christians are returning to their first love and first works;—now, while it seems to require but a little faithfulness, on the part of God’s people in this duty to secure a rich and lasting blessing for ourselves, our families, our friends and neighbours, shall we not be “up and doing”—labouring to “convert sinners from the error of their way?” I rejoice to

know that in many churches, much of this spirit has already been manifested. May it extend and strengthen, until the minds and hearts of all that “love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,” are engaged in this work of redeeming mercy! Until the love of souls shall become the grand, controlling principle of our intercourse with others—until our own lives are brought to the standard of the gospel—until our zeal shall tread the footsteps of our divine Master, and shew us to be “the friends of human nature,” co-workers with Christ and with God in the designs of eternal salvation!

When we look forward to a day of judgment, and consider what may then be the result of the influence which we are now exerting upon one another, are we not filled with fear and trembling? Will it not then appear that the controul of a father or mother has been death to his children? that the unfaithfulness of a friend has been death to a friend? that many hearts will be agonized with bitterness and reproaches, because they have been the occasion of each other’s perdition? But Oh, what joy will it be to meet a soul in that assemblage of the universe, which we have “saved from death;” be it a child or a servant, or a friend or a neighbour, or a heathen!—what joy to be able to say of those we loved so dearly in this world, and have converted from the error of their way, “here Lord, am I, and the children which thou hast given me!”—what joy, to see in ourselves fulfilled that glorious promise, “they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever!”

For the Christian Spectator.

Exposition of 1 Peter iii, 19, 20.

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when