

Biblical Recorder.

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LETTER

From Hon. John Q. Adams to his Son: On the Bible and its Teachings.

The imperfections of the Mosaic institutions which it was the object of Christ's mission upon earth to remove, appear to me to have been these.

1st.—The want of a sufficient sanction. The rewards and penalties of the Levitical law had all a reference to the present life. There are many passages in the Old Testament which imply a state of existence after death, and some which directly assert a future state of retribution; but none of these were contained in the delivery of the Law. At the time of Christ's advent it was so far from being a settled article of the Jewish faith, that it was a subject of bitter controversy between the two principal sects—of Pharisees who believed in, and Sadducees who denied it. It was the special purpose of Christ's appearance upon earth to bring immortality to light. He substituted the rewards and punishments of a future state of existence in the room of all others. The Jewish sanctions were exclusively temporal: those of Christ exclusively spiritual.

2d.—The want of universality. The Jewish dispensation was exclusively confined to a small and obscure nation. The purposes of the Supreme Creator in restricting the knowledge of himself to one petty herd of Egyptian slaves, are as inaccessible to our intelligence as those of his having concealed from them, and from the rest of mankind, the certain knowledge of their own immortality; yet the fact is unquestionable. The mission of Christ was intended to communicate to the whole human race all the permanent advantages of the Mosaic Law, superadding to them—upon the condition of repentance—the kingdom of Heaven, the blessings of eternal life.

3d.—The complexity of the objects of legislation. I have observed in a former letter, that the law of Sinai comprised, not only all the ordinary subjects of regulation for human societies, but those which human legislators cannot reach. It was a civil law, a municipal law, an ecclesiastical law, a law of police, and a law of morality and religion: it prohibited murder, adultery, theft and perjury; it prescribed rules for the thoughts as well as for the actions of men. The complexity, however practicable and even suitable for one small national society, could not have attained to all the families of the earth. The parts of the Jewish Law adapted to promote the happiness of man, kind, under every variety of situation and government in which they can be placed, were all recognized and adopted by Christ; and he expressly separated them from the rest. He disclaimed all interference with the ordinary objects of human legislation; he declared that His "Kingdom was not of this world;" He acknowledged the authority of the Jewish magistrates; He paid for his own person the tribute to the Romans; He refused in more than one instance to assume the office of Judge in matters of legal controversy; He strictly limited the object of His own precepts and authority to religion and morals; He denounced no temporal punishment; He promised no temporal rewards; He took up man as a governable being, where the human Magistrate is compelled to leave him, and supplied both precept of virtue and motive for practicing it, such as no other moralist or legislator ever attempted to introduce.

4th.—The burdensome duties of positive rites, minute formalities and expensive sacrifices. All these had a tendency, not only to establish and maintain the separation of the Jews from all other nations, but in process of time had been mistaken by the Scribes and Pharisees and Lawyers, and probably by the body of the people, for the substance of religion. All the rites were abolished by Christ, or (as Paul expresses it) "were nailed to His Cross."

You will recollect that I am now speaking of christianity, not as the scheme of redemption to mankind from the consequences of original sin, but a system of morality for regulating the conduct of men while on earth; and the most striking and extraordinary feature of its character in this respect, is its tendency and exhortations to absolute perfection. The language of Christ to His disciples is explicit: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect"—and this he enjoins at the conclusion of that precept, so expressly laid down, and so unanswerably argued, to "love their enemies, to bless those who cursed them, and pray for those who despitefully used and persecuted them." He seems to consider the temper of benevolence in return for injury, as constituting of itself a perfection similar to that of the Divine Nature. It is undoubtedly the greatest conquest which the spirit of man can achieve over its infirmities; and to him who can attain that elevation of virtue which it requires, all other victories over the evil passions must be comparatively easy. Nor was the absolute perfection merely preached by Christ as a doctrine; it was practiced by Himself throughout His life; practiced to the last instant of His agony on the Cross; practiced under circumstances of trial, such as no other human being was ever exposed to. He proved by His own example the possibility of that virtue which He taught; and although possessed of miraculous powers sufficient to control all the laws of Nature, He expressly and repeatedly declined the use of them to save Himself from any part of the sufferings which He was able to endure. The sum of christian morality, then, consists in piety to God, and benevolence to man; piety, manifested not by formal solemnities and sacrifices of burnt-offerings, but by repentance, by

obedience, by submission, by humility, by the worship of the heart, and by benevolence; not founded upon selfish motives, but superior even to a sense of wrong or the resentment of injuries.

Worldly prudence is scarcely noticed among all the institutions of Christ: the pursuit of honors and riches, the objects of ambition and avarice, are strongly discountenanced in many places; and an under solicitude about the ordinary cares of life is occasionally reproved. Of worldly prudence, there are rules enough in the Proverbs of Solomon, and in the compilations of the son of Sirach; Christ passes no censure upon them, but He left what I call the selfish virtues which He found them. It was not to proclaim common-place morality that He came down from Heaven; His commands were new; that His disciples should "love one another," that they should love even strangers, that they should "love their enemies," He prescribed barriers against all the malevolent passions; He gave as a law, the utmost point of perfection of which human powers are susceptible, and at the same time allowed degrees of indulgence and relaxation to human frailty, proportioned to the power of any individual.

An eminent writer in support of christianity, (Dr. Paley,) expresses the opinion, that the direct object of the christian revelation was to supply motives, and not rules—sanctions, and not precepts; and he strongly intimates that, independent of the purpose of Christ's atonement and propitiation for the sins of the world, the only object of His mission upon earth was to reveal a future state, "to bring life and immortality to light." He does not appear to think that Christ promulgated any new principle of morality; and he positively asserts that "morality, neither in the gospel nor in any other book can be a subject of discovery, because qualities of actions depend entirely on their effects, which effects, must all along have been the subjects of human experience." To this I reply in the express words of Jesus: "A new commandment I give you, that ye love one another;" and I add, that this command explained, illustrated, and dilated, as it was by the whole tenor of His discourses, and especially by the parable of the good Samaritan, appears to me to be not only entirely new, but in the most rigorous sense of the word, a discovery in morals; and a discovery, the importance of which to the happiness of the human race, as far exceeds any discovery in the physical laws of Nature, as the soul is superior to the body. If it be objected that the principles of benevolence towards enemies, and the forgiveness of injuries, may be found not only in the Old Testament, but even in some of the heathen writers, particularly the discourses of Socrates, I answer, that the same may be said of the immortality of the soul, and of the rewards and punishments of a future state. The doctrine was not more a discovery than the precept: but their connexion with each other, the authority with which they are taught, and the miracles by which they were enforced belong exclusively to the mission of Christ. Attend particularly to the miracle recorded in the second chapter of Luke, as having taken place at the birth of Jesus when the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds: "Fear not, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy; which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." In these words the character of Jesus, as a Redeemer, was announced; but the historian adds—"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and singing, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." These words as I understand them, announced the moral precept of benevolence as explicitly for the object of Christ's appearance, as the preceding words had declared the purpose of redemption. It is related in the life of the Roman dramatic Poet, Terence, that when one of the personages of his comedy, the "Self-Tormentor," the first time uttered on the stage the line "Homo sum, humani nil alienum puti." (I am a man, nothing human is interesting to me,) a universal shout of applause burst forth from the whole audience, and that in so great a multitude of Romans, and deputies from the nations, their subjects and allies, there was not one individual but felt in his heart this noble sentiment. Yet how feeble and defective it is, in comparison with the christian command of Charity as unfolded in the writings of his apostles. The heart of man will always respond with rapture to this sentiment when there is no selfish or unsocial passion to oppose it; but the command to lay it down as the great and fundamental rule of conduct for human life, and to subdue and sacrifice all the tyrannical and selfish passions to preserve it, this is the peculiar and unfading glory of christianity; this is the conquest over ourselves, which without the aid of a merciful God, none of us can achieve, and which it was worthy of His special interposition to enable us to accomplish.

From your affectionate Father,
JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

Report

On the Religious Instruction of the colored people Presented to the Alabama Baptist Convention.

The Committee on religious instruction of the colored people respectfully reports:

We rejoice in the abundant evidence that the subject is receiving continually deeper and wider attention. One most cheering fact is, that such has been the success every where met with, that no effort, once begun, has been abandoned; but there has been a continual progress. In every Association from which we have heard, some action more or less vigorous has been taken; and it is hoped the in-

fluence of their recommendations will be felt all over the State. A large majority, it is believed, of all ministers connected with this body have separate exercises for the colored people in addition to the regular services in the churches, which, as usual, they also attend in considerable numbers.

The committee still feel, however that this is, as to religion, the most neglected class of our population, and that from them comes the loudest call upon our christian sympathies and labors. Those who feel and do most, must be more zealous; and all must be persuaded to do something. The reasons which should excite to more activity in the cause, and which show its pre-eminence claims on us, are so numerous, that we can only allude to a few of them.

1. They are here, in our midst, speaking our language. No expensive outfit, no tedious years spent in acquiring the strange accents of a foreign tongue, no hazardous acclimation to unhealthy regions, no accommodation to the prejudices and outlandish habits of a strange people, no painful absence from home and friends, and civilized life, is required for the vigorous prosecution of the work among them.

2. They are entirely dependent upon us.—If we are silent, and speak not to them, the words of life, they are lost. The whole horizon to them is dark, save the single spot where Southern Christians stand; and if no light comes thence, they will be in darkness indeed. To them the written word of God is a sealed book; other religious books and tracts are placed out of their reach by laws rendered necessary by the blind fanaticism of others; no missionary from another land comes to them; nor if he came, would we permit him to go among them. We alone are our colored brethren's keepers; and if their souls die, against us will their blood call to God out of the ground.

3. They are ours; they belong to us. The relation existing by "the domestic institution," is analogous to that of parents and children, and makes them a part of our families. Like Abraham, then, let us order our households after us in the Lord's way. They are ours; linked inseparably to us: our happiness, our character, our standing, are intimately connected with their behaviour, their improvement, their temporal and eternal well-being. And since it is they who, in part, provide for us the means of sending the gospel to others, is it not "just and equal," that a sufficient portion of that which has been obtained by their labor, should be expended to preach to them the glad tidings of salvation?

4. Something is practicable. Here is the point where many doubt. Probably the great reason why so little is done, is that it is thought that little can be done. They are, however, in fact, a most impressive people, and listen to the word with most eager attention, when preached to them warmly and affectionately. This is the testimony of all who have tried it. To illustrate this point, however, we beg to refer to the condition of things in Liberty county, Georgia, where a joint mission is carried on among them by the Presbyterians and Baptists. The number of colored people in the District is 4212, of whom 1139 (more than one-fourth of the whole and more than half the adult) are members of some church, and most of them Baptists. Where shall we find among whites, a population more generally evangelized than this? Yet this is what patience in well doing has accomplished. The results upon the peace and good order of the community are evident from the following facts: Out of 125 plantations, 60 have no white person regularly resident upon them any part of the year, being only visited during the day by their owners or managers; 24 only have the owner or manager resident permanently the year round. Yet, in the whole district, there is not any regularly organized or active patrol. The arm of force has been rendered unnecessary by the peaceful influence of the gospel. The planters testify that this religious reformation has increased the value of their property to 10 or 12 per cent. Drunkenness, robberies and disorders are rare, and yearly becoming more so. Prayer and hymns ascend from nearly every one of their cabins, in social prayer meetings on the plantation, or in family devotion, as regularly as the smoke from their chimneys. The church members generally conduct themselves with great propriety, and cases of discipline are scarcely more frequent than in our white churches.

5. The only other reason we shall present, is that arising from the Providence of God.—Why did he permit them to be brought here? Why, against our will, and in spite of the earnest protestations of our Southern colonies, was it allowed that they should be forced upon us and placed under our control, if not that we should be to them agents of good, the bearers of the gospel. Instead of the gospel being sent to the heathen, God in this case brought the heathen to the gospel. And now, the Providence of God seems to be opening a wider prospect of good, when the christianized negro of America shall go back to his own land, and proclaim to his own kinsmen the unspeakable riches of Christ. Where else, but from the Southern States of America, is the seed to go, which shall be sown in the fertile soil of Africa?

The only remaining part of our duty is, to suggest some feasible plans for the accomplishment of what is believed to be the most

universal desire of the Baptists of Alabama, the religious improvement of the colored people.

Masters may do very much by encouraging assemblies of their servants for religious worship, by providing suitable places for their meetings, by having them to attend family worship when convenient, or embracing other occasions for reading the Scriptures to them and prayer. An active, pious son or daughter, may do much in this way. Preaching seems generally to be most useful when addressed expressly to them, though there are many of them able to profit from the regular exercise in the churches. Some churches have adopted the plan of meeting with their colored people on one Sabbath in the month besides their monthly meeting, for the purpose of instructing them, (teaching them hymns, catechisms and passages of Scripture,) and worshipping with them. This has been found so eminently successful and so useful both to teachers and taught, that the Union Association have recommended it to all their churches.

In some churches where there are large numbers of colored people, the following plan has been found admirably adapted to their orderly discipline and building up in the faith.—The colored members meet once a month just before the regular meeting of the church, under the superintendence of the pastor or some experienced white member, who presides and keeps in a book belonging to the church, a record of all the proceedings. The colored people are considered as a sort of committee of the church to attend to their own affairs, and recommend what they think best for the church as to the reception and discipline of colored members. These records are read over every church meeting, and the vote of the church taken upon each particular item requiring action; and nothing done by the colored people takes effect until so approved by the church. In connexion with this, weekly prayer meetings are kept up, attended by some white persons; and a suitable number of the most pious and experienced colored brethren are appointed watchmen or leaders, who have a general care over them.—This last feature is found to be of great advantage. We hope that these suggestions may at least be sufficient to awaken attention to the subject.

As the "Catechetical Instructor" by Rev. A. W. Chambliss has been already recommended by this Convention, we deem it only necessary to advise our brethren to examine, and use it where they may find expedient.

For the Committee.

B. MANLY, Jr.

Self-Government.

BY S. G. GOODRICH.

In the midst of events, which seem to bespeak predestination, man still feels that he is free. The planets wheel through the heavens; the earth revolves on its axis, and performs its vast annual circuit; the seasons come and go; the clouds rise and vanish; the rain, the hail, the snow descend; and in all this man has no voice. There is a system of government above, beyond and around him, declaring a sovereignty which takes no counsel of him. But still, in the midst of all this, man possesses a consciousness of freedom.—The metaphysician may be confounded with the seeming inconsistency of an omnipotence, ruling over all things, yet granting free agency to the subject of its power. But common sense does not puzzle itself with an attempt to discover the precise point at which these seeming principles of opposition may clash or coalesce. It contents itself with the obvious fact that God is a sovereign, who has yet created beings, and given them their freedom prescribing boundaries to their powers and capacities indeed, but within these limits permitting them to act by their own volition.

Man then is free; he has the power to seek happiness in his own way. He enters upon existence and sets forward in the path of life. But as he passes along, a thousand tempters beset him. Pleasure comes to beckon him away, offering him present flowers, and unfolding beautiful prospects in the distance. Wealth seeks to make him her votary, by disclosing her magic power over men and things. Ambition wooes him with dreams of glory. Indolence essays to soften and seduce him to her influence. Love, envy, malice, revenge, jealousy, and other busy spirits, assail him with their various arts. And man is free to yield to these temptations if he will. God has surrendered him to his own discretion, making him responsible, however, for the use and the abuse of the liberty bestowed upon him.

If a person mounts a high-spirited horse, it is important that he should be able to control him, otherwise he may be dashed to pieces. If an engineer undertakes to conduct a locomotive, it is necessary that he should be able to guide or check the panting engine at his pleasure, else his own life, and the life of others, may be sacrificed. But it is still more indispensable that an individual, who is entrusted with the care of himself, should be able to govern himself.

This might seem a very easy task; but it is one of the most difficult that we are called upon to perform. History shows us that some of the greatest men have failed in it. Alexander could conquer the legions of Persia, but he could not conquer his passions. Caesar triumphed in a hundred battles, but he fell a victim to the desire of being a king. Bonaparte vanquished nearly the whole of Europe, but he could not vanquish his own ambition.

And in humbler life, nearer home, in our own every-day affairs most of us are often drawn aside from the path of duty and discretion, because we cannot resist some temptation or overcome some prejudice.

If we consider that self-government requires two things; first, whenever we are tempted to deviate from the path of rectitude or to act imprudently, or whenever we are tempted to neglect any duty, that we should possess and exercise the power to check ourselves in the one case, and to compel ourselves to the required action in the other, we shall see that it is the great regulator of conduct, the very balance-wheel of life. Without it, a person is almost sure to miss happiness, however great may be his gifts, however high his fortune; with it, the humblest individual may command not merely the world's wealth, but the world's respect; and, what is better, peace of mind and the consciousness of Heaven's approbation.

If parents would not trust a child upon the back of a wild horse without bit or bridle, let them not permit him to go forth into the world unskilled in self-government. If a child is passionate, teach him, by gentle and patient means to curb his temper. If he is greedy, cultivate liberty in him. If he is selfish, promote generosity. If he is sulky, charm him out of it, by encouraging frank and good humor. If he is indolent, accustom him to exertion, and train him so as to perform even onerous duties with alacrity. If pride comes in to make his obedience reluctant, subdue him, either by counsel or discipline. In short, give your children the habit of overcoming their besetting sins. Let them feel that they can overcome temptation. Let them acquire from experience that confidence in themselves which gives security to the practised horseman, even on the back of a high-strung steed, and they will triumph over the difficulties and dangers which beset them in the path of life.

The Course and Rapidity of Life

Human life is like a road which terminates in a frightful precipice: we are warned of it from the first step; but the law is gone forth—we must constantly advance. I would wish to retrace my steps; on, on. An invisible force hurries us forward; we must unceasingly advance towards the precipice. A thousand vexations, a thousand troubles, fatigue and distress us on the road; but if I could only avoid that frightful precipice. No, no, we must advance; we must even run, such is the rapidity of years. We console ourselves, however, because from time to time we meet with objects which amuse us; running waters, passing flowers. We would wish to pause. On, on! And yet we see all that we have passed falling into ruins behind us. Frightful crash—in-avoidable destruction! We console ourselves, because we have carried off some flowers gathered by the way-side, which fade in our hands ere the evening approaches, some fruits, which we lose in tasting; enchantment, illusion! Still hurried on, thou approachest the gulf; already every thing begins to pass away; the gardens are less flowery, less brilliant, their colors less lively; the meadows less smiling, the streams less pure;—all fade; all pass away; the shadow of death appears, we begin to feel the approach of the fatal gulf. But we must advance to the brink; another step. Already horror has seized upon the senses; the head grows dizzy; the eyes wander; on, on. I would retrace my steps; impossible: all has fallen, all has vanished, all is lost.

I need not tell you that this road is Life; this gulf is Death.—Bossuet.

The Blessed End of the Righteous.

Our heavenly mansion, our everlasting tabernacle, our spiritual inheritance is such and so full fraught with such variety of joy, with such unspeakable comforts, with such endless felicity and surpassing glory, yea, such is the fullness of all spiritual content there, that we shall not covet to see more, the ear desire to hear more, the body have will to feel more, nor the heart thirst to conceive more than we shall there forevermore enjoy, however they are now, whilst we are in the flesh, far removed from our gross conceits and every report of them seemeth dark unto our senses, until our all-sufficient God, our Christ and our Saviour, shall himself appear again in the clouds; then shall our understandings be opened, then shall our senses be enlightened, and then shall we most plainly see, evidently perceive, and to our absolute comfort, taste of the fullness thereof; yea, then shall we see our God face to face, when there shall be an end to all our travails, of our toil, of all our care, fear, trouble and irksome passage; then shall we hunger no more, thirst no more; then shall we need no friend, nor fear any foe; then shall we that are here now in prison be set at liberty, and we that are pressed down with misery shall be raised up to comfort; yea, then shall be an end of all things that now discomfit us.—Oh let us therefore be ever thankful unto our God, that hath not only provided this heavenly heart's ease and endless joys for us, but hath also laid out the way thereunto, and give us his own hand to lead us, yea, himself to conduct us unto the same. Let us without ceasing, therefore, pray unto him; and let us be always in good comfort in him; yea, let us groan in our hearts, with most longing expectation for the appearing of him that shall deliver us, and free us from dangers, and settle us in these joys. And let us cut off all lets and impediments, how near or how dear soever they be unto us, whether it be the eye, the