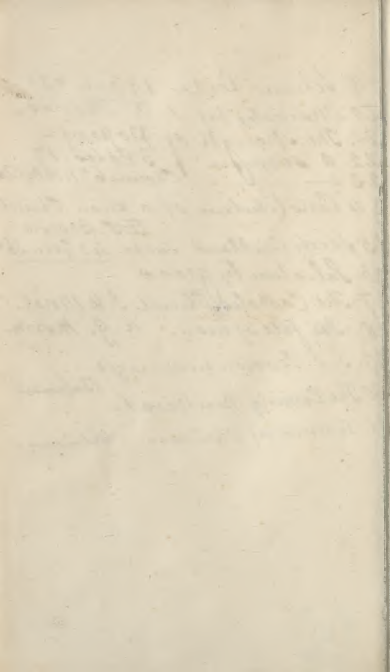


AES.1.80.274 (1-33)

1-33

Index Rerum

1. The Knowledge of Christ.
2. True Strength. Poada.
3. The purpose of God. Keerz
4. Revival Addresses.
5. Early Communion. Thomson
6. The Rainbow Round about
the throne -
7. The broad Theology. J. McElton
8. Sermon 3 Eccles 18. Eyré
9. Do 13 Jeremiah 23. Cadmon
10. Do 1 Cor 11: 1st Stanley
11. Do 50 psalm 21. 3.
12. Do 11 Matt. 23.
13. Do 12 Rev: 11
14. Do Secret Social prayer
15. Formation of Character
16. Civil Wishes - 144 psalm 12.
17. The truth in Love. H. H. H.
18. Sermon. Verse. 19th 21st.
19. Sermon Rom 15: 14-16 Cairns
20. The leaders seats - 1 Kings 7



THE
FORMATION OF CHARACTER:

A LECTURE,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE
BRISTOL ATHENÆUM, OCT. 11TH, 1849.

BY
NATHANIEL HAYCROFT, M.A.
MINISTER OF BROADMEAD CHAPEL, BRISTOL.

LONDON:
BENJAMIN L. GREEN, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1849.

P R E F A C E.

WHEN the following Lecture was composed, the author had no idea of committing it to the press. It is printed in deference to the desire of many valued friends, who thought that its publication might do some good. As the limits of the lecture prevented a full discussion of any of the topics treated of, the author, when desired to print it, at first thought of enlarging it into an essay, and giving it a less evanescent form. Many considerations, however, have induced him to relinquish this idea, and he has now printed it as originally written, and almost verbatim as delivered. Should any persons be disposed to complain of the deficiency of evangelical matter, they are respectfully reminded that the lecture was delivered to an audience composed of men of all varieties of religious opinion, as well as many totally averse to religion. It was therefore studiously intended to adapt it as much as possible to all classes, with a view to the benefit of all, without abruptly arousing the prejudices of any. Evangelical truth was sought rather to be instilled than protruded; and many friends have thought that the lecture is on that account more likely to be read by young men averse to the perusal of serious publications. The author, however, believes that nothing will be found in the lecture inimical to the interests of "pure and undefiled religion," and hopes that it will be found adapted alike to the irreligious and the pious.

THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

IN acceding to the desire of the Committee of the Bristol Athenæum, to deliver the introductory lecture of the present session, I acted on the principle, that when solicited by the managers of such institutions, no man has a right to refuse, to the work of social advancement, that measure of assistance permitted by his engagements and position. In obedience, therefore, to the call of duty, and desiring the benefit of all to whom the lecture may be adapted, I proceed to the discussion of the topic upon which I have been requested to address you,—THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER. The subject is not as interesting, as it is important; and my object will be not so much to render it attractive as useful. In its discussion, it is my intention to advert to the nature of character,—the principles to be observed in the process of its formation,—and the importance to the young men of the present generation, of diligently endeavouring to form it aright.

Character is the aggregate of a man's virtues or vices, his excellencies or defects. A description of

a man's character is an enumeration of his dispositions and habits. Every passion once indulged, every act once performed, may be regarded as individual, and isolated: but when the passion or act has been so frequently repeated, that its repetition has become more easy than its suppression, it may be considered as a habit. All the mental and moral habits of a man constitute his character. In this account of character, you will observe, our native susceptibilities, those tendencies induced by temperament, physical constitution, and the peculiar conformation of the brain—which, in the exposition of phrenology, are often described as character—are not included: since in innumerable instances these tendencies have never passed into habits, and are not exhibited in the intercourse of life. Character is the assemblage of our actual habits, not of our unmanifested tendencies. In the description of a vicious character you say he is intemperate, dishonest, licentious, revengeful: in the account of a virtuous character you say he is industrious, temperate, honourable, pious. Character is not to be regarded as consisting of those habits which are discoverable in social life, though our knowledge of a man's character can ordinarily extend no farther; but as including all his habits of thought, feeling, and action, whether ascertained or not. A man's true character has sometimes not been ascertained through his entire life. Human character does not, in the present world, consist of either virtues or vices exclusively: in the majority of instances these are blended in various proportions. You never

meet with a man so abandoned to evil, that no traits of good exist, like rays of light relieving the darker shades; nor do you ever meet with an individual of such distinguished excellence, as to be free from blemish. As the virtues and vices of which character is composed, exercise a reciprocal action upon each other, our conception of it, as a whole, involves an element additional to the aggregate of the individual parts—an element resulting from their combination. As the beauty of a picture is something different from an aggregate of many beautiful parts—as many portions may be exquisitely beautiful, yet the general effect be bad, and many portions of indifferent execution, yet the effect of the whole be pleasing—so our conception of a character includes not only the excellencies and defects, but the proportions in which they are combined, the various intermingling of good and evil, and the general impression produced by the whole. In the formation of character, the object to be attained is the maximum of excellence, with the minimum of defects.

It is obvious that, if the preceding explanation be correct, character can be affirmed of every intelligent and moral agent. All spiritual beings possess character. The Supreme Being has character. On the other hand, none but intelligent and moral agents are capable of its possession. Character is the only effectual means of distinguishing between intelligent and moral agents. Intelligence differs from ignorance, wealth from poverty, barbarism from civilization, only in degree; the lines of separation are arbitrary; there are many whom it would be

impossible to distribute into either class: but between vice and virtue there is a difference in kind, a difference existing in the nature of things, and discernible in the structure of our mental constitution. Nor can we conceive the existence of any other radical distinction when the relations of a physical nature shall have passed away. The spirits of light and the spirits of darkness may, for aught we know, be equal in intelligence and power, but they differ irreconcilably in character.

In addressing you on the formation of character, we are at liberty to suppose that, in the case of many of you, character has not yet been moulded; its features are not yet definite and permanent; the lines of your countenance are not yet fixed. A knowledge of the best mode of forming your character aright, will be, in such case, especially important, since you become in early life what you will continue to be; you sow the seeds of which you will through life be reaping the harvest.

The process of forming character, whether for good or evil, is gradual. Mind is progressive in its manifestation. Perception, reflection, judgment, memory, the elaborative faculty, the affections, man's knowledge of himself, and his experience of the world, are developed by a gradual process. No evil or virtuous habit is immediately acquired. The mind is not instantaneously hardened in iniquity, nor suddenly fortified in virtue. There have been periods in the history of the profligate, when he has recoiled from the thought of proceeding to the extremes which subsequently marked his career; as

there have been times in the history of the virtuous man, when he has been on the verge of dishonour. It is by slow, gradual, and often stealthy steps, that men are guided into the path of evil : it is only step by step that they must climb the mount of virtue. He that expects to attain an honourable and virtuous character without the mental discipline, and the intelligent, persevering effort which are requisite, will as assuredly be covered with disappointment, as he who seeks to acquire fame without application, or opulence without industry.

The process of forming your character lies entirely in your own hands. There is a philosophy congenial to our disinclination to self-discipline, which has been adopted by many as a palliative to conscience, and an apology for vice and crime ; which teaches that the complexion of our characters is determined solely by the influence of external circumstances, and circumstances over which we have no control ; that the society in which we move, our companions, books, pleasures, and general occupations, determine whether, and to what extent, we shall be virtuous or vicious, honourable or depraved. Now, without depreciating the power of circumstances to influence us, (for the cause of truth can never gain by the disregard of any portion of truth, and that must be a false philosophy which is built upon the suppression of an unquestionable fact ;) it is not difficult to point out the fallacy of this doctrine. Character is the assemblage and combination of habits. Habit is but the mental facility of committing an act, and the difficulty of refraining from it,

which results from its frequent repetition. If the habit be not acquired, an element is kept back from the future character; and if the act be not repeated, the habit will not be formed. Now it is matter of consciousness that we have power to relinquish any proposed gratification, and to control our personal acts. It is in our power to resist the first temptation to dishonesty or intemperance; it is equally in our power to perform acts of benevolence and integrity. It is in our power, when any evil act has been once performed, to prevent its repetition. As individual acts are not necessitated by circumstances, it follows, that whatever be the measure of influence circumstances may exert upon us, it need not be so powerful as to direct the formation of habits, and thus determine character. It is matter of daily observation, that persons habitually placed in circumstances of great temptation do not yield to their influence. Besides, it is often in our power to alter the circumstances in which we are placed, and thus to escape from, or to modify, their influence. Those instances which may occasionally be adduced, in which the characters of individuals accord so exactly with what might have been feared from the influences to which they were exposed, as to induce the belief that circumstances made them what they were; instead of proving that their characters could not, under these circumstances, be other than they were, only prove the truism, that man does not universally become what he ought, and is able to become.

In the process of forming character, you will dis-

cover, as a primary element, that man's moral condition is unhealthy. To state the idea in its elementary and least objectionable form, you find with yourselves, and you observe it in children, that it is easier to be led to evil than to good; the appetites have greater power than the intellect and moral sense; self-will, selfishness, resentment, are more easily cultivated than humility, generosity, and forbearance. Whilst there is this uniformity in our general condition, the tendencies of individual natures are characterised by great diversity. There are peculiar susceptibilities in all, which render some virtues of easier acquisition than others, and which predispose more to one vice than to another. One child you will find predisposed to covetousness, another to ambition. One man's inclination tends to intemperance, another's to licentiousness; a third is disposed to be vain, a fourth to be resentful. These peculiar susceptibilities which arise from temperament and physical constitution, have, in many instances, acquired unusual power in early life, through the negligence of our natural guardians, and will demand corresponding increase of watchfulness and exertion.

The proper period when attention should be paid to the formation of character is at the outset of life, before our vices have passed into habits, or our habits have acquired fixity. The farther you go back to its source the easier it is to divert the stream. It is in laying the foundation that the architect has regard to the nature of the superstructure; so it is essential that in early life you should diligently strive

to attain the excellence you desire hereafter to possess. What is now comparatively easy, will, in a few years, become extremely difficult. Every habit you now form will strengthen as you advance in age, and the work of self-discipline and self-subjection will increase in difficulty until what now requires the effort of a child, would task the labour of a Hercules. As the oak yearly strikes its roots more firmly into the soil, and braves with greater facility the violence of the tempest, so character tends continually to become inveterate and unalterable. The present, therefore, ere character be fixed, is the time for you to give heed to its formation. The intemperate young man, after his first indulgence, may prevent its recurrence; the dishonest man need not repeat the theft; the liar need not utter a second falsehood. It is easy, at the outset, to prevent the conversion of these acts into habits, but the difficulty of overcoming these or other evil habits, in subsequent years, is so great, as to induce many of their unhappy victims to relinquish the attempt in despair. Besides, if the character you are now maturing should be evil, and reflection in mature years should induce you to the mental exertion necessary for its reformation, it will be impossible for you ever to reflect upon your previous conduct without regret and self-reproach; it will be impossible for you to repair the evil which has been committed; it will be long before you inspire those around you with confidence in the reality and permanence of the change: and you will never gain the influence which your possession of that character from the first would have acquired. In

many instances where character has been radically reformed, the contempt of society has so followed a man after his delinquency, that he has never been able to regain his position.

“Know thyself,” was a precept of a heathen philosopher which has been universally admitted to contain a large amount of practical wisdom, and will concisely express the first principle to be regarded in the formation of character. In seeking to form your characters, begin by forming a proper estimate of the different parts of your nature, and resolutely yield to each the measure of attention, indulgence, or cultivation which is its due, and no more. The appetites are simply the means of continuing existence, which the Author of nature has at the same time constituted avenues of pleasure, and thereby enhanced the sum of human enjoyment; but their gratification is not the object of human life, nor intended to be the chief good of man. Connected as they are with a physical organization, and possessed by us in common with the animal creation, the senses are the lowest part of our constitution, and as such should their indulgence be regulated. General opinion so harmonises with this statement that no man boasts of animal enjoyments; sensual indulgences are generally concealed from human observation; and society deems that man irrecoverably abandoned who immoderately gratifies his appetites under its very eye. Let it be your first care to bring the appetites into subjection; make them the servants, not the masters of the man. Let their indulgence be the means of living, not the sum of human

happiness: eat to live, not live to eat. Consider their immoderate indulgence to be as despicable as it is criminal. The habits of modern civilization might well receive instruction from a heathen Stoic, when the civic dignitaries of the greatest city in the world are chiefly celebrated for their sumptuous banquets, and alderman has almost become a synonyme for a gourmand and an epicure.

Next in importance to the control of the appetites, is due attention to the cultivation of the intellectual powers. Let your minds be stored with knowledge. If you possess leisure and opportunity, let every department of philosophic enquiry be investigated. There are the different physical sciences, the department of ethics and metaphysics, the records of the past, the region of poetry, and, within certain limits, the rarified atmosphere of fiction, all calling for and deserving study. It would be an illustrious attainment to know all that has yet been discovered of the universe and its Author. Where, as will be the case in the majority of instances, only limited time and means are available, give chief attention to those departments of knowledge which tend to strengthen and enlarge the intellect, and which will be of most advantage in the subsequent intercourse of life. Let there be care to understand and digest what you read. Let not memory become a lumber-room of miscellaneous knowledge, without assortment and adjustment, but a well-furnished library whose every volume occupies its appropriate position, and is attainable on demand. As knowledge is only a means to an end, it is im-

portant that you should cultivate the habit of thinking and generalisation. Meditate on what you read, and make it your own. Form the habit of thinking for yourself on every subject of study. Let not knowledge be to you as gold in the miser's coffer, only to be treasured and admired, but as the fire and water to the steam engine—means of its action and elements of its power. Above all, on every question within the reach of your investigations seek to form an independent judgment, and not follow the dictum of ermine, or of lawn, or be intellectual pensioners on Oxford, Germany, Exeter, or Rome. Let your opinions be formed with modesty, with caution, and after extensive enquiry, not with the precipitation and the dogmatism which distinguish the ignorant and the weak. Cultivate a taste for general literature, the fine arts, and every other pursuit which tends to elevate and refine the mind. Intellectual tastes will raise you above pleasures of an inferior order. The larger development of your higher faculties will weaken the power of your lower tendencies. Multitudes have fallen into the debasing vices of the licentious, the intemperate, and the epicure, from the want of enjoyments of a more elevated character. Remember that you are not animals but men; and consider immoderate indulgence in pleasures which are kindred only to those of the brute creation, to be degrading to the dignity of reason and of mind.

It is important, in the formation of character, that you should bring the emotional part of your nature under the control of the intellectual. Let every

passion and desire be held in subjection, to be indulged or restrained as reason may direct. Possess yourself. It is mournful to find an otherwise cultivated man the subject of violent resentment, selfishness, or avarice, or even the slave of some of his finer sensibilities. One passion or taste has sometimes been permitted to exercise such power over the man that his whole character and conduct have derived their hue and complexion from it. The love of country, literature, or music, has often alone redeemed a man from the slavery of the senses; while the love of money, fame, or power, has in other instances become the master-passion, and subjected the mind to a tyranny ever increasing in degradation and oppression. Let the reins of inclination be therefore held with a firm grasp. Be watchful against its sudden outbreaks. Have a care to ascertain the peculiar susceptibilities, the stronger tendencies of your minds, and let them be the object of special solicitude: let the fortress be doubly guarded at its weakest point. Sedulously guard against the first indulgence of passion. Strenuously resist every incentive to evil. If you have unhappily been overcome, let the act never be repeated, lest indulgence become the habit. While the passions have the mastery of the man, even if the character should in some respects be virtuous, it cannot fail to be, on the whole, lamentably defective, and the great probability is that it will become radically bad.

It is essentially important in the right formation of character, that you yield implicit deference to

those instinctive moral judgments which, as a part of your constitution, are a powerful apparatus for good, and are familiarly known under the designation of conscience. It is a fact in your nature that you have a conscience, that that faculty is formed for government, and that it can be the source of the highest satisfaction, or of conscious degradation and the deepest sorrow. Reverence your moral instincts. Let no sophistry entangle them in its spider's web; let no prejudice or passion obscure or warp them; let no consideration induce you to violate them. Cherish no desire, indulge no passion, perform no act which does not perfectly accord with them. Let their decisions be regarded by you as law, and from their verdict let there be no appeal. Conscience is the weapon with which vicious inclinations can be most readily subdued. A conscientious man cannot have other than an honourable character: even misguided conscientiousness is respected. In the formation of character, the work is already half accomplished, if you can be brought to reverence and obey the voice of conscience.

From conscience we pass on to a yet higher department of your nature—your religious instinct;—which is so general and so peculiar to man, that many philosophers, of accredited respectability, have proposed to define man rather as a religious, than a rational animal. That philosophic account of the human mind which excludes this is seriously defective, since it overlooks a prominent feature in the mental constitution. The history of man shows that, of all the elements of influence brought to

bear upon man, the religious sense, when rightly directed, exerts the greatest power, has proved the strongest element in character, and has exercised supremacy over the whole man. So profoundly impressed were statesmen among the ancient heathen with its power, that they made its direction one of the most effective engines of government; and many Christian rulers have studiously followed their example. It should be an object of primary importance in the formation of character, that the religious sense should occupy the position for which it was obviously designed, and, like the moral sense, should be freed from all obscurity and error. Irreligion cannot be a feature of a complete character; for one side of the man's nature is left uncultivated, one class of his instincts and tendencies unmet. Irreligion involves a violation of conscience, and thereby weakens the bonds of obligation, and the power of self-government. The character of an irreligious man is defective in one of the most important elements,—an element considered by many specifically distinctive of man; and the irreligious man is so far removed out of the category of humanity. The religious element is of immense value in character, as it leads to the cultivation of every virtue. Its supremacy is incompatible with the criminal indulgence of the appetites and passions, and the cherishing of mean and dishonourable desires; whilst it prompts to the discharge of every social duty, and to excellence in every relation of life. So profound is the connexion between religion and virtue, that wherever an ordinary share of intelli-

gence exists, it is useless for the profligate to lay claim to sentiments of piety; the moral and religious instincts of society revolt against the pretension. Social virtue may be cultivated without piety, but piety is impossible without social virtue. One of the surest and readiest means of attaining a virtuous and honourable character, is to cultivate the religious element. In endeavouring to effect this object, you will seek to know and to do the will of your Supreme Creator; and avail yourself, diligently, of all the means furnished you for this purpose. If there be a book professing to be a revelation from God, you will examine its claims, and investigate and ponder the different classes of its evidences—external, internal, historical, and experimental—as affecting a question of inconceivable moment. If you are anxious to form your character aright, you will never be so unphilosophical as to condemn without inquiry, what, after all, may be the book of God. If, upon examination, you discover that Christianity appeals to the experimental evidence, as the highest test that can be furnished; if it tells you that “he that believeth hath the witness in himself;” that it must be embraced, in order to the strongest evidence of its truth, you will earnestly and heartily embrace it, yield yourselves to its influence, and mould your conduct by its laws. The resulting influence must ever be of the most beneficial character. It introduces you to the fellowship of God, the infinitely beneficent and holy; it awakens the dormant sensibility of conscience; gives greater keenness

to its vision, and energy to its reproof; and brings you completely under its magic power. It enlarges your idea of the dignity and importance of man, and the illustrious or mournful destiny that awaits him. It brings you under the influence of new and more powerful motives to virtue, assures to you the sympathy of the most exalted intelligences, and promises to you the assistance of the Divine Spirit. It enlarges your sphere of action, multiplies your sources of enjoyment, refines and purifies your entire nature. The aristocracy of mind is, unquestionably, superior to the aristocracy of birth and of wealth; but the nobility of pious men exceeds them both. These are the "sons of God," whose spirits hold converse with the invisible and eternal. Young men! start in life with piety as the first and greatest element of your character. It will never be an impediment, but always a prompter in every honourable pursuit. Milton lost nothing of his sublimity, David's arm was not unnerved for war, Solomon was not less wise, Locke and Newton lost nothing of their pre-eminence, Howard, Wilberforce, and Clarkson were not less benevolent, because of their piety; on the contrary, piety made them, to a large extent, what they were. "The fear of God" will not unfit you for, but increase the likelihood of your success in the bar, the pulpit, or the senate; in literature, science, or the arts. It will qualify you for every worthy and honourable pursuit, and shed a lustre upon every department of exertion in which you labour; it dignifies poverty, sanctifies disaster, adds new honour to the highest position in society,

and will infallibly secure for you, in every circumstance of life, an honourable and dignified career—a truly honourable reputation—and a truly honourable grave.

In the formation of character it is important that you keep in view the duties that will devolve upon you in every relation you sustain, that you estimate each duty at its proper importance, and conscientiously aim to discharge them all. You are laid under great obligations to the authors of your being; there are duties you owe to those dependent upon you—your family and your household; there are duties you owe to the circle of your associates; there are duties you owe to society at large. If you would form your character aright, you would seek to ascertain what each class of obligations requires of you, and endeavour, to the utmost, to satisfy every demand. Cultivate assiduously the social and benevolent affections, and repudiate all selfish ends. Live not for yourselves, but “serve your generation.” Make it your aim to say of every human being, “I have done what I could for his welfare!” Let the maxim of the Great Teacher be your motto: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets.”

It must be allowed that, through the whole of life, we are exposed to some influence from the circumstances in which we are placed: circumstances may, therefore, exert an influence in the formation of character which must be carefully watched. Companions, books, amusements, may easily initiate into

pleasures too congenial with inclination not soon to become habitual, or on the other hand may stimulate us greatly in the pursuit of virtue. Sedulously remove from your path every influence which will tend to deteriorate your character, injure your moral and religious sentiments, or be incentives to vicious inclination; and at the same time seek to place yourselves in the most favourable circumstances, and under the most favourable influences for the development of virtue and piety. Choose for your companions and friends, men whose characters you would wish to imitate, and by whose intercourse your minds will be elevated and improved. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Never peruse a volume which tends to weaken the intellectual powers, and stimulate a morbid imagination; or that is offensive to good taste, to good morals, or to piety. Let all questionable pleasures be avoided as you would avoid the pestilence. The control of circumstances will be to a large extent in your own hands; but if it should at any time be otherwise, and you are unavoidably placed within the enchanted circle of temptation, remember that you have still the power to refuse the solicitation, and to resist the foe.

It frequently happens that great facility is imparted for resisting incentives to evil, and great stimulus given to the practice of virtue, when a man has laid down certain general principles for his guidance. When these principles regard our time, books, companions, pleasures, and general pursuits, and are regarded by

us as laws, they become bulwarks of defence,—rallying points in our mental conflicts, where we can collect our scattered forces for a second encounter. It will be important for you to lay down for your guidance certain general rules, to which you will inflexibly adhere, and which shall form standards of appeal in all cases of difficulty and danger. It is impossible to enumerate all that we may conceive to be desirable: it is sufficient to indicate their general character. Let it be a principle with you always to do what is right—not what is simply expedient. Resolve never to subordinate your higher faculties to the lower. In every relation of life, aim to attain the highest excellence. Under all circumstances live as becomes a being who is immortal. Or, if it be desirable to state the case more definitely, the principles I would urge upon your attention, are the precepts and laws of Christianity. Character will acquire unwonted decision and firmness, when these precepts are kept before our minds, as mottos for our guidance and invariable rules of action. Each precept will be a fortress in which the spirit will be impregably entrenched.

Great consolidation has often been imparted to character, and a strong fortification thrown around the man for good or evil, when some great purpose has been fixed on as the object of life,—the object to which all other considerations shall be subordinate and subsidiary: as when a man has resolved to attain the highest eminence in his profession; avarice has resolved on acquisition; or genius has resolved on fame. Howard was thus devoted to

benevolence; Buxton to the liberation of the Negro; Paul to the diffusion of Christianity. Whilst a great conservative influence is exercised, when the object is virtuous and honourable, the most serious results ensue when it is evil and unworthy. The votary of pleasure has often been led to adopt the most mean and contemptible expedients for the gratification of his desires; and has sacrificed to enjoyment, his reputation, fortune, life. The ambition of Napoleon led him restlessly on, from one scene of conquest to another, whilst, in the meantime, his character was blackened by perfidy and selfishness, and his history was written in blood. Let me exhort you then to fix on some great purpose, as the object of your life. Let it be a purpose worthy of your nature; a purpose that will bear constant reflection, that can be prosecuted under the smiles of conscience, and with an eye upon eternity.

It affords invaluable assistance in the formation of character, when we can propose to ourselves a model for imitation. If that model embodies all the principles by which we are to be guided, and exemplifies the great purpose of our life, obedience is rendered more easy, and the prosecution of the object more certain. The principles are more easily understood when illustrated by example, and another element of our nature, the imitative, is called into exercise. As the artist studies his model, as embodying all the principles of his art, so biographies of illustrious characters are models to be studied and copied in the formation of character. It is important in our selection of a model

that it should be perfect, lest in copying its excellences, we copy also its defects. Artists invariably study the works of the most illustrious masters, and believe that eminence can only be attained by aiming at perfection. Let me, therefore, propose to you a model which exemplifies all the principles you ought to acknowledge, and exhibits all that you need wish to become,—a character of inimitable beauty, of unrivalled dignity and purity,—the prophet of Galilee, the Son of God. Is that character a fiction? It is the most beautiful fiction that ever was conceived; and his life the most wonderful romance that ever was invented,—a character too beautiful for fiction, a life too wonderful to be untrue. Keep that illustrious example before you. In every act of life and feature of character, seek to exemplify his spirit, and follow in his steps; and though you may not attain perfection, you will attain, in the opinion of others, if not in your own, a height of excellence which at present you deem impossible.

Having thus furnished you with those general hints which may serve for your guidance in the formation of character, I will now advert to the immense importance to your future welfare, of giving earnest and diligent attention to all that is adapted to render you honourable, virtuous and pious. This is a theme from which the minds of all, who are prone to indolence and self-indulgence naturally recoil: but, as the testimony of the aged is unanimous,—that the foundation of their reputation or infamy, was laid in early life, it is worthy of your calm and patient attention.

Character contributes the most to the happiness or gloom of life: it is the most active element of comfort or of sorrow. The connexion between happiness and the possession of knowledge, wealth, fame, or power is accidental; for happiness has frequently been enjoyed amid the privations of poverty, and all the inconveniencies of humble life. The connexion between happiness and character is necessary: for conscience has to do with character. Every habit we form, every principle by which we are influenced is an object of approval or condemnation, and thus becomes one of the roses or thorns in the highway of life. Character is an inseparable companion: it follows you wherever you go. You may quit the society of friendship, scatter your property to the winds, exchange power and distinction for the retirement of private life; you may repudiate association with your species, and make your home with "the owls of the desert": but you cannot part with the pleasure or the sorrow that character imparts. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy." If you are under the reprobation of society, the consciousness that you possess your own approval—that all is serene within,—will inspire satisfaction which no obloquy can ruffle, nor violence destroy. On the other hand, no position or reputation can console for the bitter consciousness that you are not what you seem and are supposed to be; that you have a reputation for integrity, whilst, in reality, though not yet detected, you are dishonest; that you are thought to be moral, whilst you are

secretly licentious ; that you are esteemed as devout, whilst you are a stranger to " the fear of God." Character you carry with you into society : it is your companion in retirement. It can embitter opulence and fame, augment the sorrows of indigence, render disease more distressing, and death more terrible : or it can prove, through life, one of the richest consolations of your lot. It will be an angel gladdening you with its smiles, or a scorpion lashing you with its sting. In forming character, you are nursing a brother and a friend, training a sweet and happy cherub to be your companion, your monitor, your guide ; or you are fostering a fiend of inexorable malignity, and, in the solemn figures of prophetic teaching, " hatching a cockatrice's eggs, and weaving a spider's web."

Character is the chief element which will secure for you the esteem or contempt of society, and acquire for you, if you be virtuous, the largest amount of influence over your species. The most important element of your influence at home is not your superior mind and greater intelligence, still less your wealth and position ; it is your character. Your excellence alone will make you loved and respected in that inner circle of domestic life, of which you ought to be the centre and the charm. It is this that wins you the esteem and confidence of your associates, and renders you honored and respected in commerce. It is this that gives weight to your opinion and dignity to your name ; that will acquire for you veneration amidst the infirmities of age, will cause you to be followed to the grave with mourn-

ing, and will constitute, after your departure, your imperishable monument. "A good name is better than precious ointment."

"Who steals my purse, steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and may be slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that, which not enriches him,
But makes me poor indeed."

How little can any other advantages acquire for you, if they are unassociated with this. Wealth may procure you flattery, genius may gain you admiration; but character will procure respect, confidence and love, and will embalm your name for the admiration of posterity. If you possess other advantages, the possession of character will enable you to employ them to the greatest effect: wealth, knowledge, genius—your position as a magistrate, a tradesman, a mechanic, a student of the professions, literature, or the arts, will have a lustre shed around them by your virtues, which they had not previously acquired. On the other hand, if you have not character, nothing can save you from ultimate contempt. Monarchs have sat on the British throne, whose names are now by-words for every species of perfidy, cruelty and licentiousness, whilst virtues which have adorned an obscure position have, in many instances, been brought into distinguished notice, and will never be forgotten. Brilliant stars have vanished from our heavens, and illustrious names have sunk into obscurity, when character has departed. "The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance, but the memory of the wicked shall rot."

Character is the only element that you can reckon upon as your own—that never can be wrested from you but by your own suicidal hand. Its glory or infamy no other man can share. Wealth, knowledge, genius, rank, may pass away and be forgotten, but of character you can never be divested; it is a pillar of cloud dark and tempestuous, or a pillar of fire radiant with glory, through all your earthly sojourn. If you are permitted to retain through life all the advantages of your present lot, they must be relinquished at the borders of the grave; for the sepulchre admits not, and eternity knows not the distinctions of opulence, of rank, of genius, or of power; but character follows you into the world of spirits, will be a partaker of your immortality, and is the only element in which your nature will be unchangeable for ever.

Remember that the character you now form you will probably continue to retain through life, for rarely in mature manhood does serious reformation occur. Let the character you now form be one you would desire to possess when surrounded by family, friends, dependents, amidst the sorrows of adversity and the infirmities of advancing age. The character you now form you will probably, by your instructions and example, impart to your children and dependents, and impress, to a large extent, upon all around you. You will not travel your course alone, but either lead others with you to virtue and piety, or seduce them into the paths of evil and sorrow. If you attain eminence in society, you will have great opportunity for stamping your character upon the

age in which you live. You are placed, therefore, in a position of solemn responsibility; in forming character you are amassing a treasure of influence for weal or woe. Strive, I beseech you, to form a character of so elevated a nature, that you would like to bequeath to posterity its imperishable fruits. Remember, also, that it is possible, nay certain, that you will carry your character into eternity; that the character you are now forming will influence your future destiny, and that, at this present hour, you may be composing the first paragraph of an everlasting history.*

Whatever importance may be attached to the subject at all times, is augmented by the nature of the times in which we live. Stirring events are continually transpiring around us. Science has made rapid advances. Art is multiplying its inventions. The age in which we live is extraordinary—the age of the steam-engine and the electric telegraph; the age of the newspaper, the magazine, the review; the age of cheap literature; the age of unwonted attention to the necessities of the poor; the age of British Schools, Mechanics' Institutions, Athenæums, and the communication of knowledge to every class of society; the age of advancing civil and religious liberty; the age of unparalleled exertion by all sections of religionists. It is a bright and

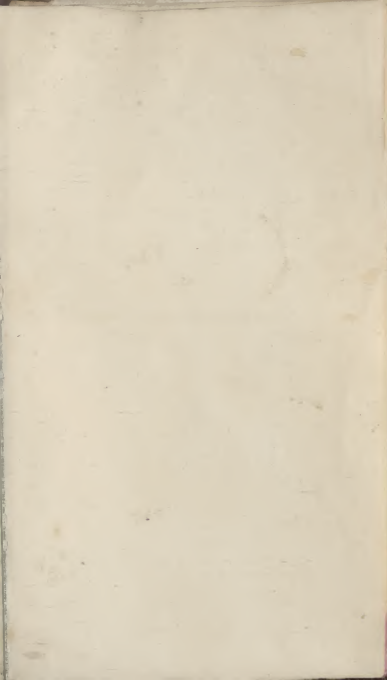
* A melancholy illustration of this clause may prove a salutary warning. A young man of deistical principles was present at the lecture, and afterwards ridiculed and scoffed at the more serious portion of it. The following morning he was seized with cholera, and in a very few hours died—it is to be feared as he lived—"without hope."

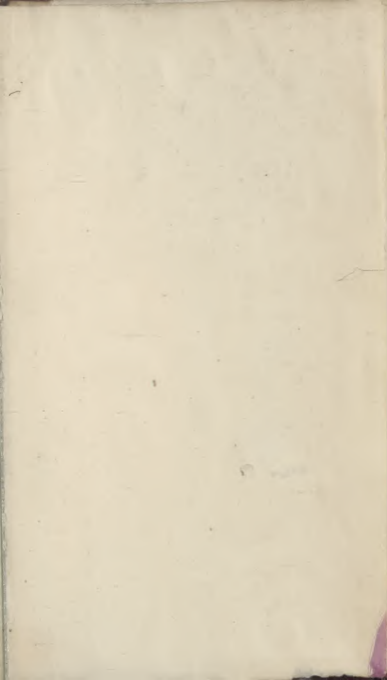
happy era which is now dawning upon us. The golden age of the world is approaching, when knowledge, liberty, peace, religion, shall be the happy heritage of universal man. It is gratifying to observe that the young men of this generation are availing themselves of advantages to which their sires were strangers, to qualify themselves for their parts in the new drama which Providence is commencing. Although the protracted hours to which the avocations of business extend are still maintained, through the cupidity of some of your employers, (hours, in "the good time coming," to undergo a radical revolution) and you are thus prevented from undertaking much that you would otherwise attempt; still, I I trust, that those which are permitted you, will only be the more sedulously improved, that in those future positions of honour and trust you may be called to occupy, you may be qualified to "serve your generation by the will of God." The present is an age which demands the activity of each, and the earnest employment of the powers of all. No man is to be indolent or selfish now. No man is to "live to himself;" each must labour for society, each for the world; each must contribute the quota of effort permitted him to the work of the world's regeneration. Form for yourselves such characters as for their integrity, virtue and piety, shall tell with mighty effect on the coming age. The era is now dawning. The figure-hand on the mighty dial of time is already indicating its approach. Live not on the traditions of the past, but in the anticipation of the future. Let the ge-

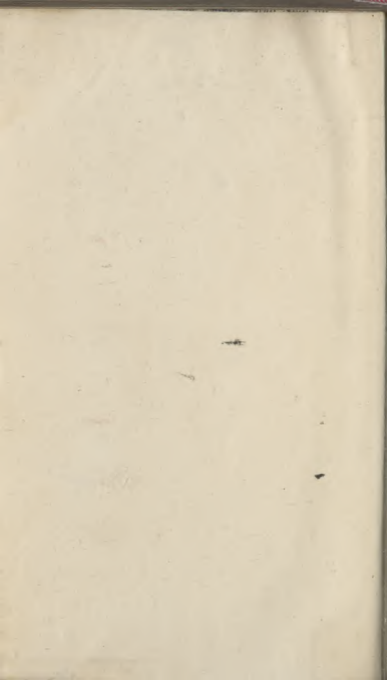
neration in which you are to be the actors, be a generation of enlightened, cultivated, upright and godly men; and more will be accomplished for the diffusion of intelligence and freedom, for the triumph of peace, and the universal reign of Christianity than has been accomplished since the era of the Apostles. Young men of England! the hope of our country and the hope of Christianity — qualify yourselves earnestly and devoutly for the part you have to play: when you enter upon the work execute it well; and leave behind you proof that you have not lived in vain. And let us all so act in our generation as to hasten the arrival of that illustrious day of universal knowledge, liberty and godliness, for which the nations are now “travailing in birth,” and which God the Lord, “will hasten in His time.”

“ There is a fount about to stream,
 There is a light about to beam,
 There is a warmth about to flow,
 There is a flower about to blow,
 There is a midnight blackness changing
 Into grey :
 Men of thought and men of action
 Clear the way !

Aid the dawning, tongue and pen ;
 Aid it, hopes of honest men ;
 Aid it, paper ; aid it type ;
 Aid it, for the hour is ripe, —
 And our earnest must not slacken
 Into play :
 Men of thought and men action
 Clear the way ! ”







+

13-2-97

