

No. III.

[EXTRACTED FROM THE CHRISTIAN OBSERVER FOR MAY, 1817.]

MY DEAR R——,

I TOLD you I meditated a letter of some importance. Your years of education are over—you have entered into life as your own master—and it is now my intention to bring under your view the considerations which bear upon the choice of such a plan and course of action on setting out in life, as may be most conducive to your own welfare, and that of your connexions, both here and hereafter. Mistakes in this point are not only attended by present danger, but are productive of future difficulties, and threaten wide-spreading mischief.

First, then, the great object—that object compared with which all others so shrink into insignificance, that in Scripture it is emphatically called “the one thing needful”—is to be a Christian, and to lead a life befitting a Chris-

tian. The latter of these duties was contemplated by the Apostle, in his call on all who bore the Christian name to consider what manner of persons they ought to be in all holy conversation (meaning, by that term, our conduct in social life,) and godliness. The two obligations are most intimately connected. The former is the natural fruit of the latter; and the latter cannot be maintained without the former. But there are degrees in most things; and both points, therefore, may be often substantially attained where there is a mixture of much imperfection. To sit down, however, satisfied with imperfection is incompatible with the very essence of Christianity; which requires us constantly to aim at the highest standard, and to make it our unremitting endeavour to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect. If we thus act with the devout spirit, humility, earnestness, simplicity, and sincerity of true followers of our blessed Saviour, he will mercifully pardon our defects, and lead us on towards higher attainments; neither of which have we any scriptural right to expect while our aim and desire are bounded by any thing short of Christian perfection.

You will, I fear, think this exordium long, but I must make it still longer : for, in order to see what "conversation" becomes a Christian, we must call to mind what is his "calling;"—how exalted, how far removed from the low and mean standard of those who are Christians in name only, or who, if Christians indeed, are of so equivocal a character, that at best they build only with hay, straw, stubble; and if saved at all, must be saved "so as by fire." A Christian is called "out of the world" to have fellowship with God; while the world, notwithstanding all specious appearances, is represented as under the power of Satan. The change thus wrought in him is described as a change "from darkness to light;" and the strongest images are every where used in Scripture to set forth *his* happiness, and the misery and criminality of those who have not, like him, escaped from the snares and the pollutions which abound among the great body of mankind. *He* is spoken of as "an heir of heaven," and as sitting even now "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." *They*, on the contrary, are represented as under the Divine wrath; and, while living "according to the course of this world," are

said to live under the immediate influence of "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." (Eph. ii. 2.)

We cannot, then, be surprised that a just and holy God should make so wide a difference between these two classes, when we reflect that, however they may often agree in inferior points, yet in their leading and paramount principles, and in the great features of their character, they are directly opposed to each other. They are opposed in no less a degree than as his servants and his enemies. This view of things is strikingly exhibited in Mr. Wilberforce's work on *Vital Christianity*—a work which is more familiar to you than to me, and for which I know your just partiality. One passage to which I particularly allude, is that respecting "good hearted young men," and "innocent young women."

The very great difference between the two classes which I have mentioned is not the only thing to be noticed; but also the great danger lest that class which has escaped from the general wickedness and peril should be drawn again into the vortex by its intercourse with the other. The temptations presented by the

world are described in Scripture as most alluring; and our own hearts as most prone to yield to them; while the devil and his angels are represented as full of wiles, and as exerting them all to give to those temptations the victory over us.

Let us consider these points more distinctly.

The world is engaged, as far at least as common prudence will permit, in indulging the propensities and appetites natural to man; and its familiar maxims, and expressions of taste and feeling, bear the stamp of this its course. Now, the great effort of Christians is to emancipate themselves from the dominion of those appetites and propensities; to "keep ~~the~~ body under, and bring it into subjection;" and "to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." Surely, therefore, such persons should avoid those who pursue the opposite course, as far, at least, as is consistent with the business and the charities of life. If they do not, they will almost infallibly wander from God; all that is good in them will fade: and instead of "abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good"—instead of delighting in spirituality of character and holiness of conversa-

tion—instead of dreading and shunning the reverse, and feeling a dissatisfying void wherever, though decorum is sustained, these holy and heavenly qualities are wanting—they will find the distinction between good and evil less and less strongly marked in their affections, and, through the influence of their affections, by degrees, less strongly marked in their judgments; till both affection and judgment, but especially the former, will be in imminent danger of passing over from God's side to the side of the enemy. Then will creep upon them the degeneracy of the church of Ephesus, in leaving its "first love;" of Laodicea, in being "lukewarm;" and finally of Sardis, whose Christian attainments were all "ready to die," and which had a name that it lived while it was dead. Thus, instead of being rendered, by the powerful influence of Christian society and example operating in aid of the other means of grace, "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," there is reason to fear that, by too free communication with the world, and by an attendant and consequent love of the world, they may find in the fearful day of account that they have been gradually

prepared for the society and inheritance of the wicked.

You will perceive that I do not present you with this picture, in order to convince you that we ought not to commit ourselves to the full stream of the world, in its society, its habits, and amusements. You, my dear R., are yourself perfectly ready to say in *that* sense, "Be not conformed to this world." My object is rather to impress on your mind how *little* we should join in its course; how *far* we should stand aloof from it. The question is, doubtless, one of degree; but it nevertheless may be a question of the highest importance: for in many cases, of which this is one, all depends upon degree. With men of the world we must of course join in business: we also owe to them all courtesy and kindness: we must, therefore, have with them some measure of social intercourse. These circumstances, aided by the propensity of our own natures, and the artifices of Satan, will infallibly draw us on to too large a measure of it, if we are not very strictly on our guard. We shall be in great danger of improper compliances, and in still greater of losing a portion of the genuine

Christian spirit, and of gradually imbibing a spirit opposed to it. And then what must follow? Do we hope that in such case we shall advance in the divine life? Do we even hope that we can maintain the ground already acquired? How can we expect to advance up the arduous ascent, when we are setting our faces the other way, by undue intercourse with those who are either in the vale below or are descending towards it? And yet to stand still in the divine life is impossible. Unless we advance, we must go back. Some fair appearances may still be kept up, and our indulgent friends may still retain their hopes: but all is likely soon to become hollow and unsound, and we shall be apt to lose the very life and soul of true religion. I will not dilate farther on any of these topics: but they seem to me to furnish irresistible arguments for fighting manfully against the seductions of the world; for prescribing to ourselves a course of conduct, so opposed to *its* course, as with God's help to preserve us from those seductions; and for maintaining in all our intercourse with society a holy jealousy of worldly influence, and a holy distrust of ourselves.

The circumstance which most tends to lull well disposed persons into practical forgetfulness of these truths, or at least into a very inadequate attention to them, is the agreement of religious and of decent worldly characters in so many inferior points, that the vast difference between them in essentials may not at first strike the view. Both are obliging, attentive to truth and honesty, and to their domestic, social, and public duties: both abstain from gross vice, and acknowledge the obligations of morality. But on a close inspection, it will appear that the one class serve God, mainly, sincerely, and unreservedly, and make his will their practical standard of duty: and that the other act on different principles—such as those of honour, worldly estimation, deference to the opinions and example of relations—to all which, religion, even if it have any sensible influence, is made subordinate. And although the religious man will be found very far superior to the worldly class, in resisting temptations to deviate from the right course, as well as in the serenity and elevation of his soul under trials; yet the best of the latter class exhibit so much that is amiable in conduct, especially when we en-

deavour, as we ought, to view them with candour, that we shall be in the greatest danger, if we be not on our guard, of losing sight of the immense distance between them and the true Christian. And yet, let it never be forgotten, in the sight of God the one class *lives*, and the other *is dead* while it appears to live : and we shall die too, if we become conformed to it.

Our temptation to overlook this mighty interval between these two classes is often much increased by the defects and imperfections, in many points, of the true Christians we associate with, when compared with the worldly characters to whom we have access. The comparatively small number of the former frequently affords us very little room for selection ; while, among the latter, we have a very extensive choice, and may suit our taste by fixing on those who are possessed of qualities which we naturally admire. And while we thus gratify ourselves by selecting pleasing associates, we shall be very apt to give them credit for much more of good, and much less of evil, than they really possess ; and consequently to multiply and magnify to our imaginations the

defects of our less fascinating religious acquaintance.

Then hope comes in to assist the delusion. We cannot think that persons so pleasing will not improve, and in the end, perhaps in a short time, add true religion to their other attainments. We even flatter ourselves that this most desirable event will be promoted by our own attentions; and in this way almost persuade ourselves that it is our duty to give them a large share of our society, and perhaps of our friendship; nay, possibly, we smooth, by our acquiescence, their unhallowed path, and connive at their faultiness, the better to win them over to religion. The result of such a course, or of any course analogous to it, is far more likely to be prejudicial to the Christian than beneficial to the other party. The firmness of Christian principle is weakened, its elevation is sunk, its purity soiled, its brightness dimmed, and its influence in the soul lessened, perhaps lost, before the unhappy adventurer—who is thus trying (for, however shocking, so it is!) what fellowship there can be betwixt Christ and Belial—is aware of his situation. Associations formed on such principles will admit of

a variety of shades and gradations in describing their progress ; but the practical result, I fear, is likely to be, for the most part, of the same dark complexion.

After all, when we have a propensity to indulge in worldly society, does not the evil lie deeper than in an error of judgment, as to what is the best Christian course? May it not be traced to the absence of a sound Christian taste ; to the want of a due approval of " the things which are excellent ?" If we are in any adequate measure sensible not only of the value, but of the beauty of holiness ; if we enter deeply into the loveliness of the character of our blessed Redeemer ; if we are in a disposition to have listened, like the converts at Corinth, with interest and delight to the discourses of the humble Paul, rather than to the polished harangues of the philosophers, and to have taken the Tent-maker and his friends for our companions, instead of those admired sages ; then surely we shall not suffer refined manners, mental ability, talents for conversation, and other similar endowments, to outweigh in our esteem and affections those qualities of our religious friends which have the praise, not of

man, but of God, and possess an intrinsic loveliness, as well as a sterling excellence, far outweighing all that the world can boast. To be alive to this loveliness, and to respond to it in the tenor of our affections, was made by our Saviour a distinguishing mark of his disciples. (John xiii. 34, 35; xv. 12, 17; 1 John iii. 14.) And corresponding habits of intercourse and union are insisted upon very frequently in the New Testament. (John xvii. 20, 23; Acts iv. 32, &c.) Lucian, at a later period, bears testimony to this character in true believers: "See how these Christians love one another." If, then, we discover in ourselves a want of this characteristic, nay, if even we discover (and this discovery we may all make in a considerable degree) that it falls short of the life and energy with which it shone forth in the first disciples of Christ; let us be earnest in our prayers and diligent in our endeavours to attain it, and to cherish in ourselves so important an evidence of our religious character.

I have stated, that a wish to win others to religion is sometimes urged as a motive for improper compliances with the world. This motive is in itself so amiable and excellent; it is

so often brought forward as an extenuation by those who err in this particular respect; and is so much held out by the world itself as an inducement for religious persons to relax in strictness, and to join, more than is consistent, in worldly society and amusements, that it requires a particular and distinct consideration.

Christians ought to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things. His doctrine, like himself, is "altogether lovely;" and grievously deficient must that disciple be in the spirit of his Lord, if not also in his views of Christian duty, who disfigures the Gospel by gloomy austerity, or by a want of cordial kindness and courtesy towards those from whom, by the unmerited grace of God, he has been made to differ. But as an Englishman must never forget, when surrounded by foreigners with whose nation his own is at war, that he is an Englishman; as a good subject must never forget his principles and character when thrown among those who are adverse to the constitution of his country; and as, in both these cases, kindness and courtesy must be accompanied by much caution and prudent reserve, and by a studied care not to join in any thing wrong,

not to omit any duty to his country, not even to subject himself to the suspicion of so doing ; so likewise must the Christian conduct himself in the midst of the world. He professes to be a stranger and sojourner in it ; he professes to stand aloof from its principles, its habits, its spirit ; he has renounced the usurper that rules in it, “ the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” Surely then he must dread its influence, and shun all approaches to familiarity with it : and while he endeavours to “ abound in love and in good works” towards all men, he must not fail to guard against lowering the pure and elevated standard of true religion in their eyes ; against injury to his own principles and spirit, or even the subjecting them to suspicion ; and also against giving any countenance to principles and a spirit opposed to those which he is bound by every tie of Christian allegiance, and Christian gratitude, to cultivate. Even therefore if he *could* make the Gospel of his Saviour amiable in the eyes of others, at the expense of any of these objects, he would be bound not to attempt to do so. By detracting from its character, and from his

own, he might possibly render it more palatable to those who cannot "abide its purity," or relish that which should adorn the lives of all who embrace it. But though it would be thus less revolting to their natural appetites and passions, it would also be less an object of their esteem and admiration. It would lose, I think, more than it would gain in their eyes, and they would perhaps be farther from embracing it than when it wore a less accommodating aspect. But even if they *were* thus induced to embrace it, they would neither embrace the true and unadulterated Gospel, nor would they in all probability proceed in their new course with genuine repentance and lively faith. *Their* Saviour would not be the object of their affection as "holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners." They would not hear from his lips, with the full and cordial approbation of true disciples, "Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John ii. 15, 16.) *Their* Saviour would be shorn of those beams of transcendent brightness which belong to Jesus Christ; and *their* Gospel would not only in very many par-

ticulars, but in its general spirit, be "another Gospel;" not reflecting, like the true, the unsullied glories of Christ, but affording only a faint, obscure, and imperfect shadow of Him who is the image of the invisible God. *Such* was not the Saviour who came to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." *Such* was not the Gospel given to turn men "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;" nor can scriptural conversion be expected, however smooth and flattering outward appearances, through a Saviour and a Gospel so mutilated and disfigured.

I have hitherto touched only incidentally on the effect of an undue intercourse with the world, on the family and immediate connexions of the person who falls into this error, and on its effect also on those who live around him. It will therefore be necessary to consider these points more distinctly.

First—As to his relations and friends.

Here the mischief must be great and rapid; ten, twenty, thirty persons may be very soon injured by his inconsistent conduct; and among these there may be many far less prepared than .

himself for meeting the threatened danger, far less fenced and guarded against its worst evils, and far less furnished with principles and habits which may lead after a fall to a recovery. Some may be very young and inexperienced, others particularly pliant and unreflecting, easily captivated by certain shewy qualities, or very averse to self-denial, or very open to flattery and self-delusion. Though his own bark should ride steadily, and preserve a straight course (no likely event) amidst the shifting winds and currents to which he ventures to consign it, what will become of theirs? And will he thus run the risk of destroying his "weak brother for whom Christ died," in a case in which to escape fatal evils is so difficult? Rather let him imitate the great Apostle of the Gentiles, who declared, that he would abstain for ever from a practice innocent in itself, (and who shall pronounce that worldly conformity is so?) rather than make his brother to offend: (See Rom. xiv. and 1 Cor. viii.)

But particularly, my dear R., would I call the attention of any person undecided in his mind, or hesitating in his conduct, on the point under consideration, to the effect of his example

on his children. How great will be their danger, if the habits of their parents on this point being lax, they are led from their infancy to dally with temptation by mixing too freely with the world, instead of being carefully taught, by example as well as by precept, that Christ's disciples are "not of the world," for that "he has chosen them out of the world!" So prone are the young to gratify their wishes, and so seducing are the pleasures which the world offers to them, that, humanly speaking, I see no prospect of their resisting the temptation to swim with the stream, if they are not early and long trained by the habits of their family, to stand in awe of so doing. As they advance a little in life, the young women will have to withstand the vivid sense of pleasure, and the strong desire not to be slighted or ridiculed on account of their particularity, and comparative seclusion: and the young men will be assailed by still stronger temptations at school, and afterwards on a still farther entrance into life. Happy will it be, (especially in the case of the latter,) if parental principles and the parental system so far maintain their ground in the youthful bosom, that though the tender shoots

of religion may yield to the blasts and blights to which they are exposed, the root, at least, may be kept alive by the Spirit of God, in mercy to parents whom he loves, and send forth a fresh and more vigorous scion in after life! But let no parents look for this blessing, and presume to hope that their "labour will not be in vain in the Lord," unless in training up their offspring they are "sober and vigilant," and "always abounding," not only in their instructions, but in their example also, and their family institutions, "in the work of the Lord."

There are also other relations not to be overlooked: I mean such as, from their age and confirmed Christian habits, may probably not be misled by the example of a young relation; but who will be subjected to deep anxiety, and great pain, by his misconduct in the point under consideration. Among these *parents* stand pre-eminent. Think what parents must feel when they see their long course of instruction ineffectual; their example unavailing; their family habits abandoned, abandoned in a point so important, and so near their hearts; their feelings sacrificed to a youthful love of pleasure, or to the fancy, perhaps even the deli-

berate judgment, of one who ought, in wisdom and kindness, as well as in duty, to accommodate himself to their wishes. Could a young person lose much substantial good, even in his own judgment, by thus accommodating himself to the wishes of those who have his benefit at heart, in the restrictions which they feel it necessary to lay upon his intercourse with a deceitful world? Or if *his* pleasure is to be balanced against *their* pain, is he sure that he gains more than he takes from them?

This appeal would be just, even in the case of an only child. How much stronger then, when there are brothers and sisters, in whose education, and confirmation in good principles and habits, parents will find their hands weakened by the indiscretion or obstinacy of one member of the family! When they contemplate the future, and especially the event of their being removed from their family by death, their fears of mischievous consequences will probably far exceed the evils they at present experience. Under such circumstances, how difficult the line of parental duty! To hold up one of their children as a warning to the rest, is a most painful measure, and one from which

they will abstain as much as possible : but to avoid it altogether is not always possible or safe, consistently with their parental obligations. However guardedly and tenderly they perform this duty, it may lead to consequences which they would most anxiously wish to avoid, and the very danger of which will affect them most sensibly. Surely when all these domestic considerations are united, they cannot be resisted by any young person without a degree of hardihood not very compatible with that gentleness, that spirit of accommodation and of deference to elders, and especially to parents, and that anxious endeavour to maintain harmony and unity with fellow-Christians and relations, which the Gospel every where inculcates.

If the foregoing considerations ought to induce a child to follow the parental system, even when more than ordinarily rigid, and in some points perhaps liable to the imputation of going too far, what must be thought of a departure from that system, when it is marked by a spirit of accommodation as far as duty will permit ; when it is neither offensive nor obtrusive ; when it endeavours to avoid extremes, and, taken as a whole, is moderate, and sanctioned, though

perhaps with some exceptions, by the general practice of the decided followers of Christ? So strong are the temptations which assail youth in its pursuit of personal gratifications, or in its eagerness to shun singularity, and the ridicule attached to it—so great, in some instances, is its thoughtlessness as to consequences, and in others its love of a fancied independence—that such cases, it will readily be allowed, may exist: but at the same time no parent will like to dwell upon them.

These things must be said for parents; for (whether rightly or not) parents will often have too much delicacy and generosity to say them, at least to say them plainly and freely, for themselves: but the subject will not on that account press the less forcibly on their minds, and sadden their hearts. I do not like to enlarge on this topic, or to set forth the long train of benefits, with their attendant cares and labours, conferred on the one side, and the corresponding obligations contracted on the other. But could my voice be heard through the land, I should wish solemnly to leave these considerations to the dispassionate reflection of the young; and to call upon them to count the

cost paid by others, and above all by a parent, for their departure from the principles inculcated in their education, and from the established habits of their families.

Secondly—As to the general effect on others.

I fear that an undue intercourse of religious with worldly characters is calculated to blind the eyes of the latter, as to their distance from God, and to lead them to think that cordial and vital religion is a thing more of profession than reality, and to view it therefore with disrespect. Now, whatever tends to bring Christianity down from her high eminence, must tend to degrade her in the eyes of men, and to despoil her of her rightful authority, while it tends also to degrade her votaries, and particularly those who thus deprive her of her honours.

What I have said, and shall have occasion still to say in this letter, prevents my enlarging on this topic beyond a single observation. If the blessed Jesus himself was vilified as “gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners,” because he mixed freely with the world, though he mixed with it only to lead it to God, and to perform the sacred duties for he sake of which he came upon earth; what

is likely to be said of those who mix with it too freely without his perfect innocence, without his native dignity or Divine wisdom, and without his object full in their view, and forming the life and soul of their practice? I believe no Christian of much experience will find any difficulty in answering this inquiry.

As this question, with respect to intercourse with the world, has been said to be a question of degree, you will ask, perhaps, for some guidance on that point. It is apparent, that within due bounds, the proper degree of intercourse will depend much on the personal character of the party, on the state of his family, and on the circumstances in which he is placed; and his best guide will be the Holy Spirit, operating through a watchful and enlightened conscience. But still something may be said on this subject, which may serve to point out certain rocks and shelves to be avoided in the Christian voyage, and to ascertain the limits within which the course of the vessel should, in all ordinary cases, be confined.

First, then, he must take care that his society shall consist chiefly of religious characters.

A man's companions will generally be chosen according to the prevailing bent of his own opinions and dispositions, and will therefore be no incorrect index of the state of his soul. But if circumstances should throw him into a circle of persons differing materially from himself—such in the human mind is the power of sympathy, the propensity to imitation, and the desire to conciliate the good will of others, an object best effected by becoming like them—that he will probably soon begin to imbibe something of the taste and spirit of his new companions. It is vain for any one to hope that his good principles and dispositions, and his moral taste, will continue unsullied, if he associate much with persons of an opposite character. In hazarding the experiment he is trifling with one of the most powerful engines of good or of evil, according as it is used, which God has given to man; and he can no more controul its operation, than he could change the course of summer and winter. Its force, though capable of being in a measure eluded and mitigated, cannot by any means be destroyed; and if applied in the wrong direction, it will not fail to impress on his soul bane-

ful and, not improbably, fatal marks of its potency. We should at once allow this statement in political, and in merely moral points. What would be thought of any man, professedly loyal, who was much, and willingly, in the society of persons notoriously otherwise? What of a professedly sober or honest man who associated with the intemperate and dishonest? And what is there in religion to exempt the professedly religious man from suspicion as to his real principles, from the charge of inconsistency and folly, and from a progressive deterioration by means of his companions, if he mixes, more than the business of life and Christian kindness render necessary, with persons of an opposite character? On the contrary, he will even be more liable to suspicion, and he will also be in greater danger than the persons which have been mentioned, because, his conscience being more enlightened than theirs, he acts in opposition to higher principles and more powerful checks. He professes to live in the love and fear of his God and Saviour, and to devote himself unreservedly to their service. He is aware that he cannot do this without the aid of the Holy Spirit, to

“ work in him both to will and to do, according to God’s good pleasure.” And how then can he hope to be a temple of that Divine Agent—to have that Spirit dwelling in his heart—if he does not act on the rules, and pursue the course best calculated to keep himself “ unspotted from the world.”

2. He must abstain from intimacy with those whom he does not believe to be true Christians. Civility and kindness may be well preserved without intimacy. The latter, from taste as well as from prudence, should be carefully avoided, where we have not reason to think there is sound religious principle. From taste—because if we value our high calling as we ought, we shall naturally feel a sort of repugnance to an intimacy with those who are “ alienated in their minds” from that God and that Saviour whom we delight to serve: from prudence—because intimacy removes many of the guards and reserves which to a considerable degree regulate conversation and conduct in general society, and thus prevent bad principles and dispositions from exhibiting themselves to the view of others. Besides, if intimacy is avoided, that familiarity of intercourse between

the younger members of two families, which would be dangerous, may be prevented, without the necessity of embarrassing explanations. On the opposite supposition, the whole case will be reversed, and the most lamentable consequences may be expected to follow.

3. Let a participation with the world in its assemblages for purposes of pleasure be avoided. There are many pleasures which the Christian enjoys in common with men of a different character. There are others of which he cannot partake at all without a manifest dereliction of Christian duty. The latter, of course, must be altogether shunned: the former must be enjoyed in such a manner as not to render that which is safe and allowable in itself, unsafe and unfit from its attendant circumstances. Now the spirit of the world never breaks forth with less restraint than in its professed amusements. Not only do these very much remove customary guards and restrictions, but by being framed for the indulgence of worldly appetites, and dispositions merely natural, they draw these propensities forth into a more prominent display than usual. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, appear in decor-

ous, perhaps, but very intelligible shapes, and in connection also with so much that is good humoured and amiable, as to assume the most seducing appearance. Happy they who, having once entered the magic circle, escape its fascinations! Happy, if they do not become, in a measure, reconciled to the low and unhallowed principles of the gay crowd with which they associate! Of those who think that they pass through this fire unhurt, certainly the greater part flatter and delude themselves. At all events, the Christian ought not to incur the danger. Nothing is more imperceptibly imbibed than a worldly spirit, and nothing is more fatal than such a spirit to the very life and existence of true religion. It requires all the efforts and all the watchfulness of the Christian, even under favourable circumstances, to escape its infection. What then must be his danger, when he places himself in the very atmosphere where it abounds!—Is he not then flagrantly violating the precept implied in the petition which he so often addresses to his God,—“Lead us not into temptation?” Instead of “fleeing youthful lusts,” is he not throwing himself into the very region where they are prevalent? And

if these questions cannot be satisfactorily answered, as they certainly cannot, let him solemnly ask himself still another, Whether he is not "giving place to the devil."

4. The course of the Christian ought to be such as to shew clearly to what class of persons he belongs. He owes this full disclosure to God and to man, and of men to none more than to himself. If his conduct is equivocal, he either does not display the standard of his holy warfare, or he displays it only to dishonour it. In the first case, how can he hope to be acknowledged by Christ as his soldier? In the second, how can he hope for the meed of a good and faithful soldier? His light either does not shine before men, or at best it does not shine with such clearness and purity as to lead them to glorify his heavenly Father. By holding a course which leaves it a matter of any doubt whether he follows Christ or the world, he violates his duty to man as well as to God; for he is required not only to work out his own salvation, but to promote by every means in his power the salvation of all around him. But how can he hope in any measure to succeed in the latter object unless his conduct bear the

clear stamp of the elevated principles of the Gospel, and therefore the stamp of their contrariety to the principles of the world? And how can he exhibit that stamp, if he slide into a similarity to the conduct of the world, in points in which Christians in general think that a decided and manifest distinction is requisite? The effect of this dubious system of conduct upon men of the world is very obvious. They will imagine, either that the profession of strict Christian principle is unsound, having more of pretence than of reality in it, or that Christian principle is a far lower thing, and approaches far nearer to the principles of the world at large, than is in fact the case. On either supposition, their conversion to God will be not forwarded but impeded. How eager will the "god of this world" be to avail himself of such means of blinding men's eyes, and of keeping them from coming to the true light which alone can lead them to salvation!

But after all, he who adopts so dubious a course, and who seems so backward to choose whom he will serve, most injures himself. His consistency will be denied; and it must follow that either his sincerity will be doubted, or his

good sense questioned :—he will be thought by some to have renounced and condemned vital and true religion, and by others, to have disproved its efficacy or existence. Even if he ultimately escape the imminent danger to which he exposes himself of spiritual shipwreck, never can he hope to enjoy that elevation of soul, that solid peace and joy in believing, or that extensive influence as a servant of God, which are reserved for those who, “ through honour and dishonour, through evil report and good report,” proceed straight forward in their Christian course, and are studious only to discover how much they can do for their great Lord, and how they can best “ walk worthy of their high calling.” Contemplate for a moment the prodigious difference in the eyes of men between the two following characters :—the one professing religion, but departing from the general strictness of its most esteemed professors ; nominally classing himself with those who, as “ a chosen generation, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people,” are daily labouring, by God’s power working in them, to obtain a victory over the world ; and yet in practice

seeming not afraid or disinclined to associate pretty freely with that world, and to join in its plans of unhallowed pleasure,—calling himself “a stranger and pilgrim upon earth,” yet appearing to live among its inhabitants rather as in his own than as in a strange country;—the other reversing this picture in all its parts, and, while he abounds in candour, and kindness, and beneficence towards all around him, conducting himself among the busy or the idle crowd, as one who views their pursuits in a very different light from that in which they themselves view them; as one who has higher aims, whose ruling affections have different objects, who orders his life and conversation as even now called to sit down, “holy and unblameable, and unreprouable, in heavenly places with Christ Jesus,” and to partake hereafter of all the blessings of his eternal and glorious kingdom. Is it not plain what a wide difference must appear in these characters, especially to those who have an opportunity of viewing them closely? Can it be doubted which will best reflect the adorable image of his Saviour, which will most adorn his own high and holy profes-

sion, and which will impress mankind with the greatest respect and esteem both for his own character and his religious principles?

And now, my dear R., it is time that I should close this long letter. You know that it has been dictated by a sense of duty, and by love for you; and I hope it is not stained by any disposition to severe criticism, or by a wish to deprive youth of its innocent and Christian pleasures. If I have pointed out dangers to which you do not think yourself exposed, and said things which you imagine I need not to have said to *you*, forgive me a wrong which has arisen from a recollection of *my own* youth, and from the warmest parental sympathy and anxiety for your temporal and eternal welfare. If my years have led me to be too cautious and too open to alarm, remember that yours may tempt you to be too unguarded and sanguine. Above all, reflect that on a point of such infinite importance, it is incomparably safer to err on the side of caution and circumspection, than on that of carelessness and temerity. I really believe that the love and fear of God are in your heart. May that blessed Spirit who has implanted them there, cause them to increase

and abound and bring forth fruit to perfection! But when you read of the enemy secretly sowing tares among the wheat; and of a Demas who departed from the Apostle, because "he loved this present world;" you cannot be much surprised at the solicitude of your father, or think his admonition altogether out of place.

Yours most affectionately,

R. S.

LONDON :

IBOTSON AND PALMER, PRINTERS, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.

25
DRIS