

THE REPROACH OF CHRIST.

"Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." – Mark 8:38.

There is nothing in the world so beautiful to me as a little child, said one who fondly contemplated the sweet innocence and awakening mentality of a little grandson, very dear to her heart. The remark awakened a train of thought, and led to the consideration, Does God so view it? and is it really so? Let us see. The charm of childhood is its innocence, its purity as yet uncontaminated with actual sin, its awakening mental and moral powers, and the freshness and beauty of its new physical life. But viewing the matter from God's standpoint, we see there is something more beautiful still – that disciplined and ripened character, whether realized in young or middle life or in ripe old age, is of far greater value and comeliness in his sight. What! are the bent form, the faltering step and the whitened locks of age more beautiful than the freshness and vigor of youth? No; but under the rude blasts of the present imperfect conditions of human life, which ultimately wreck and ruin the physical structure, in some cases characters have been developed which far surpass in grandeur and beauty the innocence and simplicity of childhood. It is character that God most admires and loves; and if we take his standpoint, it is what we will most appreciate.

When God created Adam pure and innocent and in his own likeness – "very good" – doubtless he was worthy of love and admiration; but nevertheless, that he and his race might have the greater beauty of matured and disciplined character, and be worthy of still more love, God, for seven thousand years, submits

them to the rude hand of discipline with the ultimate design of developing and perfecting character.

The primary significance of the word character is, to make sharp, to cut into furrows, to engrave. Youthful innocence presents its first symmetrical and beautiful tracings, while mature and ripened age, if rightly exercised by the discipline of years, approaches very nearly the grand and glorious finish. The tiny rose-bud has its beauty, but hope and faith look forward to the perfect, full-blown flower; and the bud must swell, develop and open out its close-shut leaves in full-blown loveliness, before its grandeur and refreshing fragrance can be realized. Just so it is with character; and, therefore, the most beautiful thing on earth, in God's estimation, is a tried, disciplined and well developed character. A character which has yielded to the influence of evil is not the development (engraving) of the beautiful tracings found to some extent in every individual in youthful innocence, but a blurring and effacing of those tracings and the substitution of the deformities of evil.

While the inner flower of character is developing, the outer leaves that infolded the bud may be withering and dying; but he who is intent on watching for the flower, and waiting for its inner glory and fragrance, has but little regard to the outer fading leaves which in its infancy was all that was to any extent visible. Just so may we regard the infirmities of age, the loss of youthful vigor and beauty, the silvered hair, the wrinkled brow, the bent form, the halting step and voice, and the trembling limbs, if the fragrance and beauty of the ripened character present their charms. In due time God, who greatly values it, will trim off the outer leaves and transplant it to a more congenial soil and clime, where it will bloom in eternal beauty.

Let those who would appreciate the developed character mark carefully the features visible even in the infantile

tracings. [R1189 : page 6] Mark the baby's dignity – how sober and thoughtful and inquisitive and anxious to learn; note the first evidences of conscience, how he tries to balance the problems of right and wrong. Mark how he expects truth as a matter of course, and is surprised at falsehood and duplicity. See how love springs up and overflows the baby heart, and how benevolence tries to repay parental affection with smiles and loving caresses; yet each may have its evil counterpart as a possibility, but not as a part of the first tracings of character. These baby graces and charms are but the first tracings of character. Under careful discipline and training and favorable conditions these early traced features of character would develop uninterruptedly. But such conditions do not generally obtain in the present life, and as evil reigns, character is stunted, dwarfed, and the excrescences of evil appear, to disfigure and mar the creature and pervert its high and noble faculties to ignoble and base uses. But, on the other hand, view the rightly developed character of maturity. See how careful study of the principles of righteousness has dignified the thoughtful countenance; observe the easy, quiet grace with which errors are dropped and truth is gladly and thankfully embraced, because the desire for, and appreciation of, truth has been carefully cultivated. Mark how conscience, skilled in its judgment of right and wrong, and unflinchingly committed to the right, guides the actions with unwavering precision; how truth and equity, love and benevolence, rule and triumph over every temptation to evil. And with such a character, however inferior the physical form, even it is in a measure glorified. The open countenance accompanies the transparent virtues of the soul; quiet dignity and easy grace are the outward expressions of a soul at peace and in delightful communion with God. Studious care in the building of character is expressed in the thoughtful countenance; and the joys of hope and faith add a halo of glory, beautiful in the highest sense to every beholder. The perfume of such ripe and full-blown characters are blessings to those about them and precious foretastes of the wealth of blessing in store for the whole world when such shall have been

exalted to their promised position and privilege of authority and power.

A strong character is one which by continued effort and overcoming of evil has become [R1189 : page 7] established in righteousness. Righteousness has become the uniform habit of life. Some characters develop and strengthen very early in life, some in middle life, and some later, though every added year will bring its added glory if properly used. And every one whose own character is developing with energy has a keen appreciation of such development in others. Thus it is that the body of Christ, every member of which is thus actively engaged in character building, is knit together in love. They see in each other that which actually calls forth their love, however unlovely they may appear to people of the world who look not upon the heart but merely upon the outward form and conditions and circumstances.

While every child of God is engaged to a greater or less extent in this work of character-building, some grow steadily stronger while others, through lack of consecrated effort, are weak and vacillating, measurably swayed by the influence of the world, the flesh or the devil, yet not entirely so, but still making some effort toward righteousness. Such characters are not willing to be closely identified with the body of Christ, but would follow "afar off." They are not quite willing to share the reproaches of Christ, and so keep at convenient distance. Such have not learned to view character from God's standpoint and to appreciate it and the truth which develops it. But such characters are weak and unworthy of their privileges. If we have taken the Lord's standpoint, which is the only standpoint of actual merit, we should learn to value the truth and those characters which have been and are being moulded and fashioned by it, above all other considerations, and not be in the least ashamed to be identified with it or them. Such strong characters God loves and honors, while he declares that he is ashamed of the weak, vacillating ones who follow him afar off.

He says, "He that is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

There are many ways of showing ourselves ashamed of Christ. We are ashamed of Christ, if we are ashamed of any member of his body, however humble or poor or unlearned; if we are ashamed to be identified as their friends and companions. We are ashamed of Christ, if we are ashamed to be recognized by the world and nominal Christians as members of his despised body, which they do not recognize but which they reject and everywhere speak against. We are ashamed of Christ, if we are ashamed of his doctrines, either as a whole or in part.

To be ashamed of any of these is only to prove that such a character is weak and vacillating and far short of that full development which the Lord desires, and the possession of which, only, he will own and exalt as his bride and joint-heir. He would rightly be ashamed to take for his bride one so inferior to the true standard of moral excellence. Blessed is he, therefore, who overcomes these weaknesses, and who in humility and teachableness endeavors steadily to cultivate a harmonious and symmetrical character.

Soon Christ's appreciation of those strong, beautiful, symmetrical characters which have followed him closely in this evil time, from principle, and not for praise of men, will be expressed in their glorious exaltation as his bride and joint-heir.

MRS. C. T. R.

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."
