

CHEAP REPOSITORY

Sunday Reading.

THE TOUCHSTONE;

OR, THE
WAY to know a TRUE CHRISTIAN.

BEING

A Description of the Character of our blessed SAVIOR,
with an Inquiry whether we are like Him. To which
is added, An Appeal first to INFIDELS, and then to
Persons who call themselves by the Name of CHRIS-
TIANs.



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T H E
TOUCHSTONE, &c.

IN this Christian Country, or at least among the more Christian part of it, the duty of imitating him by whose name we call ourselves is a point which must be allowed to be clear. I think it must also be admitted by all who consider themselves as Christians, that in proportion as a man differs from his Savior, and turns away from the consideration of his Character and Conduct, in the same proportion does he depart from true goodness, and betray the unsoundness of his whole Christian profession.

We shall proceed, without further preface, to speak of a few of those tempers and dispositions which most remarkably distinguished our blessed Lord, and they shall be the following.

First. He was remarkable for his *condescension and humility*, and for his indifference to worldly praise. He sought not honor from men; he never aimed at earthly distinction or superiority, but submitted willingly to be considered as one of the meanest of the people. No lofty high minded thoughts, no aspiring desires were harboured in his breast. He made himself "of no reputation," and appeared as the servant of all. It was most wonderful condescension in Christ, who is spoken of in Scripture as "coming down from heaven," and as having partaken in "the glory of the Father before the world was," even to visit this world at all. It was still greater condescension to visit us in the character of a man like ourselves,

but the condescension is increased to a still more astonishing pitch, by his appearing among us even as the poorest and most despised of mankind. He was destitute of such common conveniences as even the lowest have. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay his head." We find him condescending to wash his disciples' feet, and also warning them not to consider themselves as true Believers in him if they "sought honor one of another:" at another time we find him admonishing them to be "poor in spirit," and at another "not to chuse the highest place," but willingly and contentedly to take the lowest till they should be called up higher, assuring them that it was a maxim in his kingdom, "that every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Secondly. Our Savior was also endued with the greatest *meekness and patience*. No hastiness of spirit, no rash anger or resentment was found in him. His soul was meek and gentle as a lamb: all the trials, affronts, and injuries which he met with were submitted to by him patiently, without the least murmuring or repining. "He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair." "He hid not his face from shame and spitting."— "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth." "He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." St. Peter tells us that "when

“ he was reviled he reviled not again, when he
 “ suffered he threatened not, but committed him-
 “ self to him that judgeth righteously,” and his
 own admonition to his followers is, “ Take my
 “ yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am
 “ meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest
 “ for your souls.” When his enemies treated
 him with the greatest unkindness and cruelty he
 returned them good for evil, and sought to pro-
 mote their happiness and salvation. So far was
 his mind from harbouring any malice or revenge,
 that he prayed even for his murderers, and re-
 commended them to the Divine Mercy saying,
 “ Father forgive them for they know not what
 “ they do.”

Thirdly. The mind of Christ was also filled with
 the tenderest *compassion and love*. This was ma-
 nifested throughout his whole conduct, by the kind
 attention which he shewed both to the bodies and
 souls of men. He “ went about doing good,” reliev-
 ing the helpless, healing the diseased, and com-
 forting the afflicted. He also instructed the igno-
 rant, and “ gave light to them that sat in darkness
 and in the shadow of death.” The poor guilty
 sinner found him a friend indeed. We never read
 of any sinner turning from his sins, and calling
 upon Christ, without receiving an answer of peace,
 so that our Savior shewed by his conduct that he
 came, as he himself expresses it, “ to seek and to
 “ save that which was lost.” He is represented in
 Scripture as one who was always labouring to pro-
 mote the Salvation of those around him ; and when
 men would not hearken to his words, but deter-
 mined still to go on in their sins, his soul pitied
 them, and he was “ grieved for their hardness of

“ heart.” How fully does his pathetic Lamentation over devoted Jerusalem speak the compassionate affection of his mind! “ O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee: how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, and ye would not.”

But his love was shewn most eminently in his laying down his life for us: as he speaks, “ Greater Love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” This great instance of love he shewed, yet this was not all: He laid down his life for his *enemies*. St. Paul says, “ When we were yet without strength” (or when we had fallen so as to be utterly helpless and ruined) “ in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man would one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Herein is love beyond example. We read of some who have been induced to die for their country or their friends, but where have we heard or read of any one, except Jesus Christ, who has willingly died for his enemies; for those who offended and cruelly injured him.

Fourthly. Christ was remarkable for the most perfect *obedience and resignation to the will of God*.

“ I came down from heaven, he saith, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day, the night cometh when

“no man can work.” At twelve years old we find him diligently employed in pursuing the great object for which God sent him into the world, reasoning with and questioning the Jewish Doctors in the Temple. When his mother inquired of him concerning the reason of his conduct, his answer was, “Wist ye not that I must be about my father’s business :” He was more intent on obeying God than on receiving his daily food. “I have meat to eat,” said he, “which the world knows not of :” and immediately after he adds, “my meat is to do the will of God, and to finish the work which he hath given me to do.” And as he was active in performing, so was he also patient in suffering whatever God required. All the severe trials and afflictions which Christ endured, were endured without reluctance or repining, because he knew that they came upon him by Divine appointment. Even when his last bitter sufferings drew near, and his human Nature shuddered at the prospect of them, hear with what obedient resignation he prayed : “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say, Father, save me from this hour ; but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.—Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me ; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.”

If there were room to enlarge on this subject, we might proceed to speak of our Savior’s spotless purity, of his unshaken faith and trust in God, of his noble courage in the cause of truth, and also of his ardent devotion, as well as many other shining excellencies in his character ; but it is the less necessary, because they are partly implied in the tempers already treated of.

And now let me put a very simple question to the reader. Who are they that are the true Disciples of this Jesus Christ? The answer is easy. The true Disciples are those undoubtedly who most nearly resemble that character of Christ which has been spoken of. Those are not the true Christians who merely call themselves such. Again, those are not the true Christians who, though they believe and affirm the Bible to be true, yet never read it, and know nothing of what is contained in it. Again, those are not the true Christians who though they may read the Bible, and though they can prove by argument that it is no imposture, are nevertheless no better for all this knowledge. Again, they are not the true Christians who have had Christian baptism, who attend at Christian worship, and receive every month the Christian Sacrament, and who are orthodox even in their Creed, and can see the errors into which other men fall on these subjects; for a man may still want the main thing which Christianity consists in, I mean he may want a resemblance to Christ in his turn of Character, and temper, and spirit. But in order to bring this whole subject more distinctly home to the Reader, let us again briefly touch on the several tempers that were spoken of.

First, then your Savior was remarkable for his condescension, humility, and indifference to worldly praise. Are you distinguished by the same dispositions? Are you willing to drop down from your rank in life, as Christ did from his celestial dignity? Are you contented also with a low estate as he was? And is your heart deadened like his to the desire of worldly praise and reputation? Is this, I say, your character? Or, on the contrary, are

you one of those Christians who make a point of not stooping to any employment that is judged beneath them, and who are continually aiming at high acquaintance, whose great anxiety it is also to fare plentifully in this world, and who, in short are in full chase of wealth as well as reputation, honor, and preferment? This is one test by which you are to judge whether you are a Christian.

Secondly. We spoke of the meekness and patience of Christ. When he was "reviled he reviled not again." His soul, as we observed, was meek and gentle as a lamb. Is this also your character? Has your natural temper if it is hasty been brought under, so that affronts and injuries do not much ruffle you? Are you not made violent in your spirit by the violence of those who are opposed to you? How do you feel, for instance, towards men of an opposite nation, or of a contrary party to you in politics, or of another sect in religion? Christ died for his enemies; how do you feel towards all your enemies? Do you bear the evils of life also as Christ did, without murmuring and complaining, submitting cheerfully to a hard and humble lot if it be the will of your heavenly Father?

Thirdly. Christ was full of tender compassion and love both to the bodies and souls of men. How stands the likeness in these particulars? For instance, what part of your time and money do you give to the relief of men's bodily distresses? Is your character that of a father to the fatherless, a visitor of the sick, a benefactor to the poor, and a comforter of the afflicted? Do you, like your Savior, "go about doing good?" How do you act also towards those who are of bad character in

the world, and who have trespassed, as some judge, past all forgiveness? Does your benevolence embrace even these outcasts also? It was one of the reproaches cast on Christ by the Pharisees, that he stooped too low in this respect, and that he seemed to take the part of wicked and undeserving people. "Behold!" said they "a friend to Publicans and Sinners," and again, "this woman is a Sinner." Are you in like manner a friend to the most discreditable kind of Sinners? Is the idea of their unworthiness no argument with you for declining an opportunity of doing them good? Do you take their part and not despair of them, notwithstanding the sneers of some unchristian people? Or, on the contrary does the dread of suffering in your own reputation continually check you in the just exercise of your beneficence?

But the love of Christ had respect chiefly to the souls of men. Are you chiefly concerned about their souls also? Do you do what in you lieth to promote men's eternal interests? Do you labour to enlighten, to instruct, to invite, and to warn men with all earnestness as Christ did? And do you weep over the case of impenitent Sinners, as your Savior wept over Jerusalem? Or, on the contrary, are you one of those who make light of men's spiritual interests, who seem almost to forget that their fellow-creatures have immortal souls, and who at the utmost can only be prevailed on to shew a little humanity to their bodies?

Fourthly. Christ was remarkable for his obedience and resignation to the will of God. He evidently lived only for the purpose of doing the will of his heavenly Father. Is this the proposed end of your living? Do you consider all your employ-

ments in this life as the fulfilling of a work which God hath given you to do, and do you labour to know his will in order to your thus fulfilling it? Or, on the contrary, are you one of those who never think of God's will, but go their own way and say, they have a right to please themselves provided they commit no great crime against their neighbour. And again, when crosses or troubles come upon you do you bear them with resignation, considering them to be sent by God, or are you impatient until they are removed, reversing on such occasions the language of your Savior and saying, "Not thy will, O Lord! but mine be done."

On the subject of our Savior's holiness and purity, his unshaken faith and trust in God, his boldness in the cause of truth, and his ardent devotion, as well as his other excellencies, we will not attempt to enter here. Let it be remembered, however, that it is the part of a true Christian to trace out the whole character of his Savior, and to imitate him in every one of those points in which the Scriptures set him forth as our example.

And now let us make an appeal in a few words to two or three different descriptions of people. And first to the downright Infidel. You are one who disbelieve in Christ; but are you one that has duly weighed and considered his character? What is the fault you find in it? When the unbelieving Jews once took up stones to cast at Jesus, he answered them by saying, "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father, and for which of these good works do you stone me?" And so it may be said to you now. Many excellencies in Christ's character have been set before you, and for which of these is it that you disbelieve in him?

Surely you cannot deny that there is something very excellent, and unimpeachable, something very pure and holy, something also very original, something in short that looks very like divine in the character that has been spoken of, nor can there be any doubt of the tendency of the dispositions which have been described to promote the peace and happiness of mankind. When therefore one man scoffs, when another gravely disbelieves, when a third doubts about Christianity; when difficulties rise up in the minds of some, and when profane and blaspheming books are spread abroad to overthrow the faith of others, to all this host of unbelievers we beg leave in this place simply to reply, by opposing to them the character of Jesus Christ, a character which those who are the most violent in running down Christianity, will be found I believe in general, to take very little trouble in considering.

When those unbelieving Jews of old who were so bent on crucifying Christ were asked, "Why, what evil hath he done?" the grand difficulty was, to get them to give their attention fairly to the character of the prisoner; the multitude of them, when this very reasonable question was asked, are said to have returned to their general abuse, and to have "only cried out the more let him be crucified;" but when Pilate, though disposed to side with the Jews, was obliged by his office to examine and cross examine this Jesus, "Verily," said Pilate, "I find no fault in him."—Our present difficulty is much the same; for if we could but persuade our modern Infidels and Blasphemers to bestow for once a little time in examining, point by point, the character of this Jesus of Nazareth as

Pilate did, methinks they would be glad to wash their hands also, like Pilate, of the blame of being his more forward enemies: they would turn over at least the heavier part of the guilt to the rabble of more uninformed persons saying, like Pilate after the examination, "Take ye him and crucify him."

But let us next address the merely nominal and false Christians. Now these are the persons who, though some of them lament perhaps the present growth of infidelity, have been the principal causes of it. Not a few of these Christians so called are, it is to be feared, men even of immoral character, and these must be named among the best friends of infidelity, for the corrupt life of one who calls himself a Christian, is certainly the greatest of all encouragements to the unbelievers. But let us not confine our observation to immoral Christians only. You are certainly a promoter of Infidelity if you do but fail of having that peculiar temper and turn of mind which has been described. I will suppose now that you are a decent moral person—But must we not own that so also are many of the Infidels—honorable—so are the Infidels—humane, perhaps handsome in your conduct, and very respectable—but so also are many of the Infidels. If this then be all, you have nothing in your character but what is common both to you and them, and an Infidel at this rate is just as good as a Christian; and if as good he must be as safe also—surely then there is no need of Christianity; and if there is no need of it there arises a strong suspicion also that there is no truth in it; for to suppose Christianity to be true, and sent of God, as it professes to be, while nevertheless there is no need of it, and while the fol-

lowers of it are no better then the Unbelievers, is to suppose that God acts foolishly and in vain, which supposition is itself a kind of Infidelity, and is an approach even to Atheism. It follows therefore, that in order to defend the truth of Christianity, it is necessary to exclude out of the pale of the true Christian Church every such merely decent Christian as I have been speaking of, saying to him (as all serious Christians indeed are used to do) that you have no share in the privileges of the Gospel any more than the Unbelievers, and if "he that believeth not shall be condemned," then you it is to be feared are involved in the same condemnation.

We cannot help observing, that Christians of this merely decent class, especially if possessed of a little orthodoxy also, are not seldom the persons who cry out most violently against Infidelity, and who perhaps come forward in defence of the national faith, as if these were the best Champions by whom the truths of Christ can be defended; whereas I think I have shewn, that they are some of the very persons who have betrayed the cause, and have surrendered up the ark of our most holy faith into the hands of the modern Philistines.

Let us next address another class of persons, I mean those who are very remarkable for their attachment to certain Christian Doctrines, and are very zealous for what they call the Gospel. Some of these perhaps carry their zeal for doctrines so far, that they feel but little interest in any thing that can be said concerning the example of Christ, and are ready to turn away from what they call so merely moral a lesson. They desire to hear of nothing else than the "blood and

“righteousness of Christ,” and his atonement, and grace, and intercession. But has not the same Scripture which speaks on these subjects said also, “Let the same *mind* be in you which was also “in Christ Jesus, and that Christ hath set us an “example that we should tread in his steps:” and again, “that he that saith he abideth in him “ought himself so to walk even as he walked:” and again, “that if any man have not the Spirit “of Christ,” (which certainly must include the temper of Christ) “he is none of his.” A plain scriptural declaration of the Character of Christ, and an appeal to those texts which assert the necessity of being like him in our own character and conduct, may be of admirable use in pulling down the vain confidence of the Enthusiast, in rectifying many errors of the Bigot, in exposing the sinful passions of some who pretend that they are magnifying Christ, in proving in short the faith of all, and in calming many political as well as religious controversies of the Christian Church.

But once more. There are some who think indeed that they copy after Christ, and that they copy him the more because they make light of doctrines and bestow their whole attention upon practice. But what is their practice? Are they close and real imitators of all these holy tempers of Jesus? I fear those who neglect or pervert the doctrinal parts of Scripture, in order to suit their own creed, are prone equally to forget or lower what is practical in Scripture in order to suit their own practice: many take, for instance, only a part of Christ’s example instead of the whole of it, and even what they take they lower and deprive of all the spirit that is in it before

they can agree to it: thus they may possibly imitate Christ's benevolence to the bodies of men, but even this is done only in some small degree, for they cannot be said to "go about doing good," as Christ did, making their benevolence their business, and quitting their home, like him, in search of wretched people; and as to Christ's benevolence to the *souls* of men they hardly think of it, and are altogether opposite to him in that particular: thus many also may consider a certain degree of resignation to Providence in a time of calamity to be a branch of Christian duty, and may fancy they follow Christ's example in this respect, while in fact perhaps they are much more influenced by an idea of it's being necessary to submit to their fate; and as to that other temper of Christ which we coupled with willingness to suffer, I mean a willingness also to *do* the whole will of our heavenly Father, here they most lamentably fail: for do they look upon the doing of God's will, as Christ did, to be more necessary, as it were, than their daily meat, and do they count their time, their money, and their labor lost except as it is devoted to God's service, and employed for his glory? In truth, the whole example of Christ, when rightly understood, can neither be imitated nor approved by the common kind of worldly men; and indeed we all seem naturally to fall into dispositions the most contrary to those which characterised our Savior; for are men *naturally* humble, and lowly, and indifferent, as he was to worldly praise? Are they *naturally* prone to forgive injuries, and to love even their enemies, shewing their chief compassion also to the souls of those whom they love? Are men *naturally* dis-

posed to renounce their own will, and to look only to the will of God? and are men *naturally* submissive, and resigned, and devoted altogether to the Lord's service? The corruption of our nature then is one of the lessons which we learn by thus appealing to the example of Christ as the touchstone of real goodness, and when through the knowledge of this corruption we are humbled under the sense of guilt, and are become anxious to find mercy, then, and not till then, we turn to our Saviour's Cross, and begin heartily to plead "the Propitiation" of that Son of God who "bare our sins in his own body on the tree," having "given his life to be a ransom for us."

The distance at which we find ourselves from the great Standard of Perfection, and the difficulty which we soon begin to feel when we endeavour to copy after it, cannot fail to teach us another lesson in Christianity of the first importance; we are now taught, I mean, to "bow our knees" before the God of all grace, imploring him "to help our infirmities," and to pour down upon us a portion of that spirit which was "given without measure" unto Christ; and thus do the several parts of Christianity reflect mutual light on each other. He then is the true Christian who, believing the doctrines of Christ, is also animated thereby to follow all the precepts of his master, who heartily approves and zealously copies after the bright example that is set before him, and who, by the help of Divine Grace, attains in his humble measure to some true resemblance of his Savior.