

ON

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION,

ACCORDING TO THE

DOCTRINE OF SACRED SCRIPTURE.

WHAT is the state of Christian Perfection to which all are called, and which every sincere Christian is eager to attain? In what does it consist, and what are its principal characters, qualities, or marks of distinction?

We proceed to reply to the above inquiry, because of so many mistaken ideas which are afloat on the subject. Every sincere Christian will be delighted to see his way clearly, in a case where mistake may be attended with mischief, and in which every traveller to Mount Zion must stand in need both of light and of direction, for security and comfort.

The remarks which we have to make will fall under one or other of these two considerations, *first*, what Christian Perfection is *not*, and, *secondly*, what it is.

But, previous to replying to this inquiry, it may be proper to state, that by Christian perfection, we do not mean *absolute* perfection, since this belongs to God alone, but only that measure of relative perfection to which all Christians are called, and which all therefore must be supposed capable of attaining.

To begin, then, with the first consideration, viz., what Christian perfection is *not*.

On this point we do not scruple to assert, that to imagine we have already attained a state of perfection,

beyond which there can be no further advancement, is *not* Christian perfection; and for this plain reason, because such an imagination, implies that we have arrived at a degree of perfection, beyond which it is impossible to make any further progress. But, whereas, no such degree is attainable by any finite intelligence; therefore, the imagination involves in it a contradiction to truth, consequently, imperfection, either in the will or the understanding of him who cherishes it. The more, also, that this imagination is attended with confidence, so much the more of imperfection doth it bespeak, inasmuch as confidence in our own superior attainments of any kind, and especially of Christian excellence, is again contradictory to truth, which is ever leading man to distrust himself, and rather to be abased, under a sense of his distance from perfection, than to be exalted with the idea of possessing it. Accordingly there is reason to believe, that the most *perfect* Christian, judging from fallacious appearances in his own mind, frequently fancies himself the most *imperfect*; as, on the other hand, the most *imperfect* Christian, forming an estimate of himself from the same fallacies, is as often led to imagine himself the most *perfect*.

Again. Christian perfection does not consist in an exemption from trials, temptations, and troubles, because it is possible that a Christian may enjoy such exemption, and yet be far, very far from perfection; as, on the other hand, it is possible he may be subject to trials, temptations, and troubles of the severest kind, and yet be advancing towards the highest state of perfection. The Eternal Truth accordingly testifies, "Every one that is perfect shall be as his Master," (Luke vi. 40.,) which is a positive declaration, that perfection consists rather in the endurance of trials, temptations, and troubles, than in the enjoyment of their opposites; for the Master here spoken of, is the Great Saviour, whose name is Jesus Christ, and who, as he testifies of himself, entered through sufferings into His glory. (Luke xxiv. 26.) If, then, the Lord, who

is infinitely perfect, was not exempted from trials, temptations, and troubles, who amongst the sons of men shall dare to plead such exemption, as any proof of the perfection of Christian character and life ?

Again. Christian perfection is not to be estimated by the number, the extent, or even the splendour and benefit of the good and useful works which we perform, since it is possible that the principle in which our operations are grounded, and from which, therefore, they proceed, may be defective and defiled, consequently *imperfect*. For all actions, it is well known, partake of the quality of their parent principle ; or, what amounts to the same, of the end regarded in doing them ; or, what is still the same, of the love from which they flow, and of the intelligence by which that love is guided. If, then, the end be low and degraded, or if the love and intelligence from which we act be some inferior and polluted love, and intelligence, having no higher origin than self and the world, in such case it must of necessity follow, that our actions will also in themselves, be low, degraded, and polluted, whatsoever aspect they may assume in the sight of men, or howsoever human eyes may be dazzled by the brilliancy of their fame, or the extent of their utility. No man, therefore, has any just claim to the venerable title of a perfect Christian, on the mere ground of his public usefulness, or of any degree of natural talent, or of acquired learning, which may have been instrumental in promoting it. He may astonish the world by his acts of benevolence, and edify it by his instructions ; he may be as zealous and successful as the apostles Peter or Paul in making converts to the Christian faith ; he may build temples without number, and endow them with a liberality unassuming and unexampled ; yet if, with all these semblances of Christian excellencies, he be found wanting in Christian *motive*, and thus has laboured rather to establish the reputation of his virtues, than to purify their *end*, by placing them under the influence of a pure love ; how plain is it to see, that howsoever he may