

**AIDS TO A HOLY LIFE, IN FORMS FOR
SELF-EXAMINATION, GENERAL AND
PARTICULAR, COMPILED FROM VARIOUS
SOURCES WITH INTRODUCTION,
EXPLAINING THE MANNER IN WHICH THE
DUTY SHOULD BE PERFORMED**

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Aids to a holy life, in forms for self-examination, general and particular, compiled from various sources with introduction, explaining the manner in which the duty should be performed by Thomas H. B. Bund

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THOMAS H. B. BUND

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INTRODUCTION.

It is not proposed in these introductory remarks to enforce upon the consideration of the reader the advantages of self-examination. A very little reflection will be enough to point out to any one who is at all earnest about religion, quite sufficient reason to commence this exercise ; and then if it be honestly and regularly performed, the advantages will become every day more evident, so that in such case there will be no danger of its being left off, or neglected from any idea of its uselessness. The object of the following observations will be chiefly to give directions for the due performance of this most beneficial exercise.

There are two kinds of self-examination, general

and particular. The general consists in an examination of all our thoughts, words, and actions, since the exercise was last performed—the particular, in the examination of our conduct during that interval, as to some particular vice or failing, which we have set ourselves to conquer.

The subject for particular examination should be a besetting sin (see Heb. xii. 1).

There are few, if any, who have not many good and amiable qualities; and in the generality of Christians, it is only in one or two points of conduct that their neglect of obedience to God's commands is *very evident*. It is true that no part of their conduct may arise from a proper motive, but where the real corruption of the heart manifests itself, is seldom in more than in one or two particular habits, and it is in these that the besetting sin or sins consist. The nature and character of the sin may be such indeed, that though really indulged in and habitually given way to, yet it is not known or observed by others, and sometimes is not recognised by ourselves.

Now there are many parts of Scripture which appear to point out that the Christian's probation consists in this—whether he will set himself in earnest to overcome these his particular besetting sin or sins: thus St. John says, "Whosoever is born

of God doth not commit sin" (1 John iii. 9); in which he appears to teach us, that no one has any right to call himself a child of God, whatever he may once have been, and consequently no right to expect the blessings of Christ's kingdom, who lives in the unrepented and allowed practise of any known sin. Nor can we suppose that the smallness of the sin so indulged in, can exempt us from this condemnation; for to give way habitually in a small matter, shows how little earnestness we have, and how very little, if any, of the grace of God is within us. But in fact such small point, as we may think it, is by no means such in reality; its being overcome or given way to will generally be found to be the very turning point in our Christian character, although we may be quite unconscious of its vast importance. St. James also appears to teach us this same truth, when speaking of the "law of liberty;" he says to Christians, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James ii. 10). Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews we appear to be taught, that the manner in which we must act, if we would hope to attain the privilege of being reckoned among the saints of God, is by "laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. xii. 1, 2).

A modern writer,* of deep thought concerning the teaching of Holy Writ, proposes as a question, "Whether it is not the case, in considering the characters and dispositions of persons in holy Scripture, that where Scripture has pronounced, or shown any intimation of the divine judgment on the saints of God, it is often rather different, if not quite the contrary to that which we should have been otherwise inclined to form concerning them?" And considering such to be the case, he adds, "that it seems to lead us to this remarkable inference, that in the saints of God, the character acquired by the gift of the Holy Spirit, is often that which is most opposed to the natural tendencies and dispositions. And this may be connected with some great mystery in our probation; it may be that the victory of faith consists in overcoming natural infirmities."

The same writer goes on to observe another point in the probation of God's saints—namely, "that in the providential dispensation of God respecting them, the external trials with which they were exercised, seem to have consisted mostly, in occasions wherein their natural weakness was most

* Rev. J. Williams, "On the Study of the Gospels," pt. vii, sec. 5.

tried, and in mastering which their spiritual strength was attained." "Thus it is that the internal tendencies and external temptations combined together, make up the course of probation, and thus the character stamped upon them, when approved by Scripture, is the result." That is, their besetting sin had been by the power of the Holy Spirit so entirely overcome, that the opposite virtue had become a prominent feature in their character. And further on in the same section he says, that "one can see some obvious reasons, why temptations should assail a person in that point in which he is most tender, and feels them the most. Each person has, perhaps, some affection, passion, or inclination, which most of all hinders him from the love of God: even in good men, there exists some natural tendency or some subject to which the heart turns, which most obstructs its free rise to things heavenly. And since God chastens those whom he loves, and sends them afflictions in order to wean them from the world, and draw them to Himself, such arrows of the Almighty will necessarily find them out in those weak points, in which they will feel them the most; will attack them in those places in which the world has the strongest hold upon them. It is their constitutional bias which makes men gravitate to the earth, whether

fit be parental fondness, or covetousness, or ambition, which most reigns in their weakness; in these points they will be thwarted, and tried, and weaned to Almighty God. The more severe the Cross is, the brighter is that crown when internal weakness and external temptation are both overcome. Thus are they formed who compose the army of saints and martyrs—formed by that faith which *overcometh* the world. Nor is it only in the probation of the good, but in those also who seem to fail and fall short in their course of probation is the same thing apparent. Thus when any evil temper of any kind is gaining the mastery in any character, it naturally puts itself into all those conditions of life which afford the greatest indulgence to its inclinations; and thus men are prone, by the mere force of their evil nature, when unrestrained, to place themselves in that very position in which their weak point is tried and most beset; as the covetous seek places of wealth, the ambitious of authority, increasing thereby both the occasion of sin, and the tendencies to it. By grace, on the contrary, men seek to avoid those places and snares of their weakness. Thus do men as they advance in grace not only grow out of the infirmities of their former nature, but also become free from those occasions which combined with