

The Fletcher Prize Essay. V. 3

1879.

THE LIGHT:

IS IT WANING?

WHY? HOW MUCH? AND WHAT SHALL WE DO?

By rev. A. F. Dickson
of Tuscaloosa, Ala.

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THE LIGHT: IS IT WANING?

THE FLETCHER PRIZE.

THE will of the late Hon. RICHARD FLETCHER, LL.D., of Boston, placed in the hands of the Trustees of Dartmouth College a special fund, from the proceeds of which they are to offer biennially a prize of FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS for the best essay on the subject indicated in the following extract from the will:—

“In view of the numerous and powerful influences constantly active in drawing professed Christians into fatal conformity with the world, both in spirit and practice; in view also of the lamentable and amazing fact that Christianity exerts so little practical influence, even on countries nominally Christian,—it has seemed to me that some good might be done by making permanent provision for obtaining and publishing, once in two years, a prize essay setting forth truths and reasoning calculated to counteract such worldly influences, and impressing on the minds of all Christians a solemn sense of their duty to exhibit in their godly lives and conversation the beneficent effects of the religion they profess, and thus increase the efficiency of Christianity in Christian countries, and recommend its acceptance to the heathen nations of the world.”

In accordance with the said will, the trustees, in December, 1876, offered the above-named prize the third time, and appointed the following Committee of Award: Rev. E. B. Webb, D.D., Rev. A. J. Gordon, D.D., and Rev. J. E. Cookman, D.D., all of Boston. The Rev. Dr. Webb being unable to serve, on account of ill-health, the Rev. John O. Means, D.D., of Boston Highlands, was appointed in his place. The committee, by unanimous vote, awarded the prize to the essay in this volume.

S. C. BARTLETT, *President.*

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, HANOVER, N.H.

Nov. 1, 1878.

PREFACE.

THE author of this little treatise is deeply impressed with the belief that "Yea" is a more fruitful word than "Nay." It is not what we deny that makes us strong, but what we believe. Similarly, he thinks, dissuasive appeals can at the utmost be but half-way effective. As John Newton long ago said, "We cannot *shovel out* darkness: we must *shine* it out."

His plan, in the preparation of the essay, has been to forestall timid objections to the exposure he felt constrained to make, by showing, in the first place, how victorious Christianity really has been, and how it comes to pass that her victories stand out now in less bold relief than in former times.

Having thus cleared the way for plain speech, he has ventured to lay bare some of the evils and some of the dangers that now beset the Church. If many differ widely with him as to the point to which notice should be especially drawn, he will not be at all surprised. But what he offers is his sincere, well-weighed belief, long entertained.

And the remedy he proposes is simply a living sense of the great central truth, — Christ Jesus the Lord; not only Redeemer, but King; to be not merely trusted, but loyally served. That (he thinks), and *that only*, unties the knot.

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PART I.

THE LIGHT : IS IT WANING ?

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY. — LIGHT AND LIGHT-HOLDERS.

MINDS beyond all counting have, without doubt, endeavored at some time to picture to themselves the glory of that supreme moment when God said, "Let light be!" and the light was. The earth, that had been only a dark blot in the heavens, began then to be a world (may we not so imagine it?), the centre of a soft, clouded radiance, where pulses of auroral splendor beat silently. But the fiat of the fourth creative day gathered up that vague lustre which had been till then diffused and seatless. "Let there be light-holders!" "And it was so. And God made two great lights. . . . And God set them in the firmament of the heaven, *to give light to the earth.*" For all the great objects of light, this centring of it upon the heavenly bodies seems to have been indispensable.

Similarly we may well admit that there has

always been a religious sense — there have always been religious affections — outside of that constellation which we call the visible church; even that they antedated that church. Missionaries reaching islands in the South Pacific, where no Christian word had ever been spoken, have found men touched with a genuine sense of sin, and yearning for peace with an unknown God. Much more is this likely to have been true when, so to speak, the footprints of the Creator were fresh upon the earth.

But it is certain that here, also, God appointed the light-holder as necessary to the effectiveness of the light. He brought the Church into being, to concentrate, to order, and to radiate afar, the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

And — after making all sad confessions, how this light has been hidden, often and grossly hidden, by the very bodies that ought to have dispensed it — all must acknowledge, whatever they may accuse us of now, that there has been no other light-holder through all the ages that could bear a moment's comparison with the Church of Christ. Wherever the name or being of the true God is known; wherever a sound morality has taken any hold upon the public conscience; wherever true homes are found, and woman is honored, and charity diffused; wherever science flourishes, or comfort spreads, or gentle virtues are esteemed,

or freedom lives,—there, in some age, has the Church alighted and held sway. Even Mr. Lecky, who grudges any word of praise to the Christianity whose debtor he is for every thing that makes life, I will not say worth having, but fit to be endured,—even Mr. Lecky acknowledges that the Church must have the glory of bringing “the feminine virtues”¹ to their place in the front rank of honor; that to her woman owes every step of the mighty traverse she has made from abject slavery to her present exalted place; and that she—this visible and often earthly Church of Christ—alone put down the gladiatorial games, and made murder the crime it now is.

There are very few, I repeat it, to deny these things as to the past. But now many rise up to say that her term of power and blessing is near its end. Some say this triumphantly, the more shame to them! Others confess it with bitter disappointment and sorrow. They can see no victories, no power, no procreant life, in the present age, to match the glories and blessings of the past. They forget—it seems that they must have forgotten—how much *distance* has to do with the radiance of the heavenly bodies; so that if we were brought near the surface of the moon, for example, we should no longer see her “walking in brightness,” but jagged and dead rock, seamed

¹ Clemency, charity, forgiveness, patience, chastity, and such like.

and burned and dark. Consider the stars: at our awful distance the heavens are inlaid with them, they seem to light one another. But we know that their distances are inconceivable, and between them lie the infinite cold, silent spaces. Yet they *are*, and they shine. The mental impression in this second case is even more fallacious than in the first.

So, looking back through the ages, great men and great events seem to crowd upon one another. It is simply the historical perspective. Stars of any sort seldom touch.

It is a fair question, however, whether these convictions or imaginations are just or not, — fair, but far more important than fair: so important, that I refrain from even suggesting the terrible things which will logically — and actually — follow if they prove true; because the question should be considered judicially. Let us know the truth, at whatever cost.

The allegation may be partly true, and yet greatly false. The truth in it may be transient, and the falsehood permanent, or *vice versa*. Let us know.

I. We can discover some conditions in which the light would seem to be waning when it was not.

II. We can discover some conditions under which the light might wane greatly, with no real danger of extinction.

III. We can discover some conditions that would involve signal peril to the light.

How far these suppositions apply to the facts in the case, is the subject of the present study.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST VIEW. — ARE THINGS AS THEY SEEM?

IT is a very obvious remark, that, in the progress of a great change, the subordinate changes involved must become less and less striking as the work advances, — obvious, but equally necessary if we would avoid ridiculous mistakes. In ploughing a field, the drawing of the first furrow affects the landscape more than many subsequent ones can.

When a light-house puts on its “crown of glory” at night, the first forth-streaming of its ray is an incomparable change. No flashes and no glow at any later moment can make so great a difference to the eye.

The opening and the advancing spring admit the same comparison. To-day the world is gray and bare: the seal of its long death is on its face. To-night warm rains descend: the iron bonds of winter are dissolved. When, after a few days, the clouds lift and break, and give way to the pursuing sun, God has “renewed the face of the earth.” A subtle verdure tints the soil, one can

hardly say how or where; the colors of the trees have changed; a spray of bloom appears on this and the other leafless stem. In the very place of death is life.

Each following day does indeed bring its wonders; but none are so wonderful as this first, because they are all advances *in the same line*. It is only more or less of verdure and bloom, — more or less of music, instead of silence.

Now, must not this be true also of Christianity? Take the case of any people: take the case of our own ancestors, whose mythology was Druidic or Scandinavian. Their banners have been set up for ages in the name of Thor or Woden. Bloody sacrifices, superstitious fears, orgies of brutal worship, apotheosis of human passions, — the long story can be very briefly summed. This wild paganism, whichever it was, held the nation out of civilization and culture, beyond a certain very low level. It was the winter of a race.

Surely the entrance of God's word was light in darkness. The utmost that can follow it is — more light; not something new, but simply more of what we have. No subsequent change can match the first. When the heathen temples were pulled down, and the idols thrust into the fire or hurled into the sea, and war was no more a god, and the sabbath dawned, and hymns began to be sung, and woman was free, and marriage became a law, and souls were new-born, the revolution was

wrought. The old world was delivered of the new.

But, indeed, we do not need so strong an instance. Let us go out into any frontier region, where we can anticipate the church and the home missionary, see him arrive, and compare the things that are at their last with the things that succeed them.

It is the evening of the last day of the week; and, as we look about us, we see no token that that fact is remembered, or even known, unless we so interpret the larger crowd of loungers about the streets, the fruitful busy-ness of the saloons and bar-rooms, the stolid mirth, the ready quarrel, the superabounding profanity, the shameful drunkenness.

The sabbath dawns, and brightens into full day. You see that it is the sabbath, in that a part of the stores are closed; the shutters of most dwelling-houses open later, being an idle day, there is no haste about rising; children, here and there, gradually appear in clean clothes; little knots of gossips collect about the gates, or lean over their fences. Men go off hunting or fishing. Later in the day riding-parties are formed, and the last precious hours of God's day are successfully got rid of.

But the missionary begins his work: long days of visiting, investigating, negotiation, ensue. A little movement is finally seen at points in the god-

less mass, — as in a fog, when the sun has shone upon it for an hour. Some hearts, in which old memories are tender if not strong, begin to welcome the suggestion of “service” to be held. A room is found, and rudely prepared for this new purpose. A few of the bravest, and a few of the newer comers, dare to be present on the sabbath morning, and to carry home Bibles or books or tracts, and read them there, instead of visiting or worse.

And the Lord is with his servant. Some backsliders are awakened, some old soldier of Satan is struck down and taken captive, some tender youth is drawn to the Saviour’s feet. The meetings grow in numbers and result; the scornful opposition of the world, that hates this disturbing gospel, spends its force, and dies down sullenly; a CHRISTIAN SOCIETY is formed, and begins its career of blessing. In a word, the new world is created, — “the new heavens and the new earth.”

This, clearly, is the radical change. The village we are looking at may grow into a city. The little, humble upper room may give place to massive temples. The “two or three gathered in His name” may become a multitude. But, in the nature of things, there can be no other event like that first event. And when once religion has conquered standing-ground for itself, and introduced its divinely-ordered systems, it can hardly ever again produce such a sensation as that with which it began.

Except on one supposition, — that there come first a great falling-away, a declension that shall nearly destroy the life and good name of the Church. At the cost only of terrible sin, can she make a second chapter like the first.

It is not intended, of course, to maintain that the life of a church will be an absolute dead level, — utterly uneventful. Life involves more or less of fluctuation and paroxysm by a law of nature. Growth, decline, divisions, colonies, revivals, re-buildings, removals, accessions, losses, — all these things will come. A church is rather like a “revolving light, varied by flashes,” than the unwaning sun.

The application of the truth I have thus endeavored to illustrate is obvious enough. If the changes of the present period in the religious history of Christendom are less striking than of yore, it does not necessarily follow that they argue real declension or loss of power; because stages which include only *progress* can never be so telling as that stage which contained the *beginning*.

There never will be any period of American history of such intense interest as that which reaches from the first settlements to the close of the Revolutionary war, — the birth-period of the nation, — just because it *was* the period of birth. Only the life-and-death struggle of the civil war can approach it in impressiveness. The many silent and fruitful years that rolled between — the

Niles of time — make almost no record in the comparison; and yet in mere material production almost any one since the Revolution has surpassed almost any one before that date.

Just thus has it been with the modern Church. If we count one hundred and thirty years from Luther to the Peace of Westphalia, we mark out the birth-century of Protestant Europe. North-western Europe can never know such another age, except she purchase it first by wholesale apostasy. The power of Rome over her torn down; the true faith revived, and the ordinance of preaching restored to its rank; the substruction of Calvinistic theology *let in* under the Protestant Church, — the indispensable, solid pillar of its stability; the up-burst of emancipated mind; the mere addition of new words, and new classes of words, to human speech, — these things, and such as these, make it an age unique, since the Christian era itself, for all that great population, and for the multitudes in other lands that have sprung from their loins.

But is this an acknowledgment that Protestant Europe has stood still, or gone back, since 1648? Let FOREIGN MISSIONS answer, and Bible and tract societies, and the thousand-fold forms of pious benevolence. In every Protestant country, without exception, the tide of Christian life and power has risen higher and higher, and dug channels for itself, and fertilized myriads of once barren fields, and overflowed the life of the land, and

poured its sweetness upon the sea, and bathed the islands and the thirsty continents with blessing.

And, if we look long enough and candidly enough upon these things to allow them to loom up in their proper magnitude, we shall see that the reason why men honestly doubt whether religion is now making progress is, that its own accomplished work lessens its *apparent* effectiveness.

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE SAME MATTER.

I FREELY admit that Christianity is just as much open to contemporary as to historical comparison. It is just as right to test her progress by landmarks on the bank of the river of time, as by her present distance from her starting-point.

The plea is often made, that there is far less contrariety between the beliefs, tempers, practices, and principles of the Church and the world now than there once was, and that this proves the degeneracy of the Church. We may find a serious amount of truth in this plea hereafter. Just at this point I desire to show that the conclusion may not be so certain nor so direct as some people suppose. What if a steamer does not succeed in leaving a flat-boat *which is made fast to her?* must we infer that she makes no headway at all?

If Christianity has largely transformed mankind, in social, moral, intellectual, national life; i.e., if the word "Christendom" is any thing more than an uncouth and hollow sound, — then Christianity

cannot look as bright on the new background as the old. Her very success has injured the *relief*.

It will not be necessary — though not without its interest and instruction too — to dwell here upon the improved conduct of nations to each other, and that in the very direction the gospel would ordain, — the ameliorations of war since the days of “fire and sword” and of the killing or enslaving of prisoners, the almost infinitely milder spirit of criminal law, the purer and finer social relation of the sexes, the higher public opinion on moral questions. On these, and many similar and significant alterations wrought by the gospel and the Church (through God’s grace), much might truly and appropriately be said. But it will suffice for my present purpose to call attention to the work Christianity has done upon her two great adversaries, infidelity and superstition.

Looking back to the days of Bolingbroke and Hume, of Voltaire and Paine, nothing strikes one more than the utter negations in which they dealt. Their efforts were purely destructive. “*Ecrasez l’infame!*” “Crush the wretch!” is the shrill blasphemy of Voltaire. And if one had asked, “To erect what?” he would have found no answer except certain vapidities about liberty. And the Englishman would have been found as barren of constructive suggestion as the Frenchman.

Indeed, I doubt if any part of the reply upon the Christian side was more impressive, was *as*

impressive, to prudent and thoughtful minds, as the challenge based on this fact: "Before you pull down our religion, show us what we are to have in place of it. Are you building a temple to some God we can worship, or only hewing out a new tomb for Christ? You would turn off our river of the water of life into the desert; where are your living fountains?" And the fact that the infidels of that day had literally nothing to offer, in place of that whereof they would rob us, armed the great mass of the solid races they addressed against their sophistries.

But all that is changed now. Infidelity itself came to feel that it was nothing but a hungry void, a wall around a howling wilderness. Logically, and (no doubt) spiritually also, this want of a *positive belief* made itself felt. It was like the hushing of sweet voices at home, that we might listen to jackals and hyenas snarling without, to take away the Bible, and give us the "Age of Reason." Man was made for a gospel; and he that takes away one must at least profess to give him another.

I have not forgotten that remarkable phase of modern infidelity, anthropotheism, which teaches man that he is his own God. By no means new, it is newly dressed. It brews a nitrous-oxide gas of self-adulation out of science and progress, and therewith amuses and exhilarates its famishing hours. There will always be an atheistic element

in human thought, as there are always black bars in the solar spectrum. It is an unsound mental condition, almost entirely confined to one portion of the scientific class, — a hypertrophy of the intellect. It is the exceptional form of infidelity. The normal form in this age is pantheism.¹

Not always calling itself by its name, however. It is eclecticism, spiritualism, free religion, what not. But substantially they agree in this: that all things are only shows or temporary forms of God; that they are nothing, except as they are HE. By consequence, all religions are more or less true; are mere phenomena, meteoric clouds, through which the impassive earth drifts, whether they shed a faint lustre on our darkness, or pour a hot iron rain upon our heads. In neither case is the earth responsible.

But we are not at present concerned with the fallacy or the absurdity of these notions. My point is this: Infidelity has now taken such an attitude that it can at one and the same time deny a personal God, and borrow the devoutest language of any age — of the Bible itself — wherein to utter its spurious religiosity.

More: it has laboriously drawn to itself the sentiments and practices of Christianity, as well as the words which belong of right to faith, and, having extracted and cast away whatever of gospel life and truth were in them, has adorned itself with

¹ See note at end of chapter.

the empty remainder. It is deluging literature every day with this sham devoutness. How eloquent it is of heavenly aspirations! how weary of a gross, passionate, sinful world! What wonderful things it says of the All-Father! twangs its lute, and sings David's Psalms.

But let us come to particulars, and I will pause for but one, the ordinance of prayer.

Let it be distinctly understood that prayer, offered in good faith, absolutely demands a personal God, and confesses itself to be empty wind without him. Also, that the infidelity of to-day, when treating the matter doctrinally, repudiates prayer as understood by Christians, both because it denies the personality of God, and because it *so* holds the fixity of laws of nature as to pronounce answers to prayer impossible, and the seeking them futile and childish.

Then infidelity rejects and forbids prayer? Oh, dear, no! not at all. Its novels, its poems, its sermons, are full of prayers, and sentimental talk about prayer. True, the philosophical theory of prayer is, that it is mere aspiration, whose sole virtue is reflexive; i.e., that one is naturally so much the better, in nature or at least in comfort, for having used these pious expressions. But away with abstractions, down with definitions! Let our heroines, and sometimes even our heroes, pray away, and levy on the resources of Paul and Isaiah and David and Moses for the words to do it with.

Man will not be balked of this reverent speech; and we glory in being able to borrow it for his enjoyment, though we deny David's God, and reject Christ, whose apostle and martyr Paul was.

So far has this impropriation of Scripture language to infidel purposes gone, as to suggest and justify the sarcasm, that while the infidels claim to have rid themselves of the letter of revelation, and retained its spirit, the truth is just the other way: they have rid themselves of the spirit, and retained the letter.¹

If I were simply marshalling charges against infidelity, I should pursue this line of indictment a good deal farther. *Here* I only add: What a prodigious vitalizing power is this of which Christianity is compact, that even its deadly foe, its daily traducer, its irreconcilable contrary, borrows its speech, trades upon its capital, levies upon its mighty riches, even while engaged in the effort to destroy it! The iron, that grinds against the magnet, is imperfectly but manifestly magnetized.

Even this, however, is only a comment by the way. The point I make is that infidelity, thus tinted with the colors of Christianity, is to that extent the less strikingly diverse therefrom exteriorly.

If now we turn to the other great antagonist of Biblical religion, superstition, we shall find that a wonderful change has taken place here also, and in the same direction.

. ¹ Henry Rogers, in *The Eclipse of Faith*.

This word "superstition" applies as a title, generically, to all forms of belief in the supernatural which are not integral parts of Bible faith. Whatever sets forth our obligations to the living God, in respect of actions or of character; whatever rests frankly on his inspired word; whatever recognizes him as the only seat of supernatural power,—all that, whether it be sound and accurate or not, may fairly claim a place under the title, religion. Contrariwise, all wonders that involve no idea of duty; that impute to persons, things, or events, a magical, that is to say, an extra-legal, power; that throw the great King into the background, and exalt earthly trifles to reverence at his expense,—they are the products, as they are the food, of superstition.

In earlier periods, the superstitions of modern times took the place of heathen mythologies. Woods, lakes, clouds, winds, hills, all had their unearthly or semi-earthly tenants and powers. Brownies, pixies, fairies, goblins, witches, elves, an innumerable throng, held carnival upon the fears and fancies of mankind. The first volume of legendary lore was almost everywhere the pagan; the second was the elfic. What is the third, and so far the last?

I have no desire to blink the pitiful truth that there are still believers in witches and conjurors; nor that a new form of necromancy, which calls itself spiritualism,—meaning precisely the opposite,

viz., the material appearance and life of so-called spirit,—has had wide vogue in these last days. It would be easy to show that this delusion has borrowed all its gilding from Christianity; but let that pass. Let it stand, if you please, as an exception to that which I now proceed to allege. It will be none the less true that while these crude and gross delusions are steadily dying out of the world, the superstitious element reveals itself under certain forms of church life, in that extraordinary style of misbelief which we call ritualism.

While the true spiritual life finds its secret spring in faith, ritualism stands upon vestments, words, and rites. It has its incantations, its manipulations, its postures and charms and artificial mysteries. It relegates God, and God's dear Son, to a dim, impersonal distance, and blurs the very air between with incense and ceremony. Look across broad Christendom, begin with the churches of the East, traverse the Greek and Papal hierarchies, and include the ritualistic section of the Episcopal Church in England and America; and what have you in them all, but the lodgement of power in things below God,—that is to say, a superstition?

The same, yet not the same! Superstition, in this form, is an elaborate travesty of the Christian religion; nay, claims to *be* that religion. Its unbaptized wonders, like its unshrived dead, are hustled out of sight, and stripped of observance.

When they re-appear, lo! the chrism is upon them, and the holy sign; and the *susurrus* of gospel phrase entices the ear.

Hypocrisy has been called "the homage that vice pays to virtue." In the same way, ritualism may be called the homage which superstition pays to Christianity.

Here also, therefore, we find the outward contrast, the distance which solicits the eye, between religion and the world, lessened *by the change with which religion has affected the world*. It is her own victory which makes her the less conspicuous.

NOTE. — It may be thought that I have shown scant courtesy to that great mass of "advanced thought," called scientific, in passing it by with only a casual comment. But, in truth, that portion of infidelity which names itself of science had no proper place in the argument of this chapter. For it does most diligently endeavor to keep itself clear of all things that smack of Scripture, whether words or ideas; and, indeed, is ambitious to be recognized as the one uncompromising, sleepless adversary of those beliefs which are distinctively Christian. It will have no God mentioned, neither soul nor vital force, nor immortality, nor creation, nor atonement, nor general judgment. It scouts prayer. In the mouths of some, it denies moral accountability, and even a distinctive moral nature.

The effect of Christianity on such an element, therefore, will not be found in perverted words, nor eviscerated pious sentiments, nor windy religiosities of any style. Yet it is not far to seek.

The affirmation which these advanced thinkers continually make, the most impressive of their maxims, and that which gives dignity to their protests against Christian doc-

trine, is *the sacred obligation of truth*. Other men are content with half-truths, or old customary notions that are not even half true. Other men may be biased by interest, or scared by the cry of 'heretic' or 'infidel.' Other men may indolently endure doubt, or evade the confession of doubt; but not they. They, at least, realize the religious obligations of belief, and of the profession of that which they believe, and nothing else, less or more. If the Bible is proved not to be divine, to be not even historically or scientifically correct; if the doctrine of rewards and punishments is seen to be an immoral doctrine, — why, then, though the heavens fall, justice must be done, and truth spoken.

To all this we (Christians) emphatically agree. For the question is not, at this moment, whether their doctrines are wise or foolish, but whether men shall profess to believe only what they do believe, and have satisfactory grounds for believing. And there we have just as clear views, and as decided a conscience, as they. If they succeed as they think in announcing that view more eloquently than we, why, so much the better for them.

But whence came they by this much-vaunted chivalry to truth? Is this doctrine of the religious obligation of belief one of their discoveries, and the latest boon of the ages?

By no means. They owe it to that very Church and that very Bible which they assail, and against which they apply it. One of the many services which Isaac Taylor, as a Christian philosopher, rendered his age, was the setting in clear light the fact that this paramount obligation of man to truth in religion was unknown to classical antiquity, and was wrought out through a century and a half of torture and blood by the martyr Church.

“The virtue and duty of truthfulness, as between man and man, had been taught, and well enough understood, among ancient nations, whether more or less advanced in

civilization. And so had the religious sanctions of morality. But the one lesson which remained to be brought out, and to be wrought into the hearts of men, was THE RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION OF BELIEF; an obligation not resting upon communities as a public or social charge, but pending with the whole of its weight upon the conscience of the individual man; an obligation personal, a privilege inalienable, and, when duly discharged, a function giving the individual man a pledge of his immortality. . . . [This is] the axiom on which hinges the immeasurable moral difference between classical antiquity and the modern mind."¹

But my object in drawing attention to this matter is not at all to deny them the abstract right to use it (however easy it would be to show that they *misuse* it), nor even to taunt them, with any bitterness, about their drawing upon the wisdom and moral power of that Church which they hold in such evil esteem. I hold by my own argument: this borrowing, and wearing in public view, of the insignia of the Church of Christ, with the King's broad arrow embroidered upon it, obscures the distinction between the body of faith and the body of unbelief; and thus, again, Christianity is the less conspicuous by reason of her victories.

It is probably clear to every reader that I am not attempting to expose the fallacies or controvert the errors of any form of infidelity. I have simply to illustrate, as briefly and forcibly as I can, the historical truth, that Christianity as a living power has so wrought upon its deadliest enemies that it has changed them into something of its own image, and that this accounts in part for the fact that it seems less prominent and signal now than in some other days.

I might go farther, and show how the more definite language and more solid beliefs of the Church of the present day have compelled a more rational and (in some sense) religious style of disbelief than that of old. But this and

¹ Restoration of Belief, pp. 66, 67.

other similar theorems hardly need treatment here. We see Christianity, like a lofty light-tower, irradiating alike the waves of infidelity that beat upon her rocky base, the dank marsh of superstition that rolls up its poisonous mists against her lights, and the myriad interests of Christendom that flit like freighted vessels over the sea of time.

CHAPTER IV.

A LAST WORD ON THIS POINT.

BUT we are, fortunately, able to clinch this argument with a mass of facts which irreligion ridiculed while it could, ignored when ridicule had spent itself in vain, and now misrepresents in detail as it can no longer deny in bulk. I allude to that glory of the age, foreign missions.

It would be entirely within my right, of course, to found on them an argument of this sort: That in this very century, when so much is said of the failing life and power of Christianity, she has actually become more aggressive, and won larger territories from Pagandom, and shed a wider beneficence upon mankind, than in any century since Trajan's; and that thus the allegation is utterly destroyed by the facts.

But inasmuch as the question I am to discuss relates primarily to the Church in this country, the way is hardly open for a direct canvass of the foreign missionary history. It is, however, entirely germane to my argument, to establish, by a reference to the results of gospel labor in heathen

lands, the very point I have been pressing; viz., that it is, and always was, of the essence of Christianity to do a revolutionary work first, and a progressive work afterwards. I may perhaps add that the most material difference between its achievements now and of old is that it reaches the second stage now more rapidly. Nations are now born "in a day."

I take up, as a crucial instance, the Fiji Islands, one of the noblest groups of the South Pacific. Bearing in their persons, as they do, the evidence that they are a mixed race, the natives of these beautiful islands were, as might have been expected of their impure blood, a people singularly debased in religion, vicious, violent, and miserable. We are fortunate enough to have an official account of them from the commander of an exploring expedition sent out by the United States, which visited and surveyed the group before the missionaries had wrought any change in the life and customs of the inhabitants. And the officer to be quoted, Commander Wilkes, makes it abundantly evident throughout his volumes, that, while possessed of only kindly feelings toward the heroic men who, here and elsewhere, loved not their lives unto the death, that they might preach Christ, he had no faith at all in the enterprise in which they were engaged. There need be no suspicion, therefore, that he has deepened the tints of his picture, that it might be the better foil to their success when it should come.

I quote from the official edition, imperial octavo, 1845, vol. iii.:—

“Although, as we shall see, the natives of Fiji have made considerable progress in several of the useful arts [cloth-making and boat-building being the chief], they are in many respects the most barbarous and savage race now existing upon the globe. The intercourse they have had with white men has produced some effect upon their political condition, but does not appear to have had the least influence in mitigating the barbarous ferocity of their character.”¹ So much by way of general characterization. Let us come to particulars.

On the seventy-fifth page of this volume, the author gives us a cut of a girl of sixteen, a fully developed woman, in her ordinary attire. She is absolutely nude, except for a fringe about three fingers wide around her loins, and a fillet of about the same width around her head.

After an almost incredible statement (on the authority of white men who lived among them in their own way) about their systematic, exuberant, spontaneous lying, and after alleging that covetousness is one of the strongest features of their character, he goes on to make a qualifying and favorable remark: “I have been assured, however, that a white man might travel with safety from one end of an island to the other, provided he had nothing about him to excite their desire of

¹ p. 73.

acquisition." With these two provisos, — that one must be white, and that he have nothing anybody else wanted, — life and travel are quite safe in Fiji, as Capt. Wilkes was assured. But then, he naïvely adds, "It is impossible to say that even the most valueless article of our manufactures might not be coveted by them."¹ Verily!

As regards marriage: while some fortunate couples "in high life" may have been united by their own choice, wives were usually and openly bought. Among the common people, "the usual price is a whale's tooth, or a musket; and, this once paid, the husband has an entire right to the person of his wife, whom he may even kill AND EAT if he feel so disposed."²

Neither are those frightful words which I have emphasized a flight of fancy on the part of the captain. Cannibalism was an established — what do I say? a prized and cherished institution. It was the triumph of their wars, and the culminating point of their worship. Indeed, "sacrifices were made more frequent, to indulge their taste" for human flesh.³

It is painful to go into further particulars; but I cannot show what Christianity has done, nor thoroughly illustrate my argument, without adducing such facts as are thus unexceptionably warranted to us.

"Their fondness for [this food] will be under-

¹ p. 76.

² p. 92.

³ p. 101.

stood from the custom they have of sending portions of it to their friends at a distance as an acceptable present; and the gift is eaten, even if decomposition have begun before it is received. So highly do they esteem it, that the greatest praise they can bestow upon a delicacy is to say that it is as tender as a dead man."¹

"Stratagem and violence are resorted to [in addition to war and sacrifice] for obtaining" human flesh. Women fishing on the reefs were seized and carried off to be devoured.² "A feast frequently takes place among the chiefs, to which each is required to bring a pig. On these occasions Tanoa, from pride and ostentation, always furnishes a human body."³ But this must suffice, though even this is not all.

Let us look next at their religion. And the first thing that strikes one is, that it was *absolutely devoid of moral quality*. Even though they believed in a life after death, there was no moral discrimination between the souls, except in certain instances, where cowardice was punished. Otherwise the question whether a spirit should live on, and undergo transmigration, or be annihilated at once, was a question of "luck,"⁴ or the capricious likes and dislikes of the gods.⁵

We find, secondly, that there is no pretence of settled knowledge, much less any thing that could be called doctrine, i.e., a system of religious truth.

¹ p. 101.

² p. 102.

³ p. 103.

⁴ p. 81.

⁵ pp. 84, 85.

Thus, after giving a clear succinct account of the Fijian mythology, Commander Wilkes finds himself obliged to add, "These notions, though the most prevalent, are not universal."¹ And he illustrates this diversity by instancing their notions about the life beyond death. Of these he gives five varieties; four of which are represented as prevailing respectively in four towns, while the fifth is a belief held by some few of the natives who worship an evil spirit.

This, however, is the one point on which their diverse "notions" all agree; viz., that there is a life after death, unless the spirits happen to get killed. Upon this second killing, annihilation ensues.²

But not only are they at odds upon the manner of the future life, not only is the belief of the future life so held as to give it no moral value at all: our author proceeds to show that this very belief—the most sublime of which man is capable, save only the belief in Jehovah—is directly responsible for some of the worst of their horrible customs; viz., the killing of the old, the sick, and the maimed, and the sacrifice of wives at the funeral of their husbands.³

The subtle savage reasons thus as it would seem: This life has now little or nothing more in it of pleasure for my father, or mother, or wife, as the case may be; the life to come is probably bet-

¹ p. 84. ² See an instance of this on p. 85. ³ p. 94.

ter, and can hardly be worse : let us help them to it. It is a point of honor and affection, therefore, with sons, to commit these murders with their own hands, and often with the full consent of the parent to be murdered.

There is just one thing possible, I think, which could add blackness to this account ; and that one thing is not wanting. Capt. Wilkes declares on the authority alike of the missionaries and of the other white residents, and in view of what he himself perceived of them afterwards, "that the Fijians are a kind and affectionate people to their parents."¹

Can the human mind conceive a more infernal slavery than that which these quotations present? — a people naturally intelligent and affectionate, who know not with any confidence who or what are their gods, nor how nor where nor why they live beyond the grave ; all whose possessions are held absolutely at the disposal of the *nephew* of their chief ; among whom murder is so far from being a crime, that it is the recognized purveyor of their luxury, and the last token of respect and care to old age. To die by violence in Fiji, forty years ago, it was not necessary to have an enemy : it was only necessary to have a son, or that some one have an appetite.

If Mr. Wilkes could have revisited Fiji shortly before his death, what changes would he have seen ?

¹ p. 95.

He would have found that brutal people become precisely what we call a Christian community. Only a part, indeed, are themselves the subjects of renewing grace. But the law of Christian decorum rules the land. The spirit of Christian order informs the government. The bells ring in the sabbath worship. The sons of the cannibals are educated and ordained ministers of the gospel, well named "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." In a word, with due allowance for difference of race and recentness of the history, they are as we. They have entered, by a glad leap, that career which the English-speaking race have been running for centuries.

The gospel is what it always was. It transforms first, and then lifts on and on, with growing results but declining observation, wheresoever it has sway.

CHAPTER V.

SECOND VIEW.—PRESENT EVILS ADMITTED AND ACCOUNTED FOR.

IT is not the object of this essay, however, to “sew pillows to the armholes” of the watchmen, or to make it appear that all is well in the state of the Church. Having shown in previous chapters that our ill-wishers are too fast in inferring the decay of the Church, and the approaching downfall of Christianity itself, from the alleged but unproved decline of her light, I proceed now to admit that there is much to deplore in our condition; much that weakens our hands, takes away our consolation, flatters the wicked hopes of the adversaries, breaks the hold of the gospel on sinners, and tarnishes Christ’s glory.

In the present chapter, however, I confine myself to those evils which can be so accounted for as to show that they need not involve grave peril to the hopes or the salvation of man.

Those to which I now refer may be summed up, perhaps, in the remark that this is a shallow age.

Not only religion is shallow; not religion, so

much, indeed, as many other things. In political life, where, in the whole world, have we a real statesman? In philosophy, whom have we as a sage? The passions of the day are vehement, rather than deep. The virtue of the day is rather bright than rich. The contests of parties, and even the warlike clash of nations, are not collisions of principle, but opposition of persons or interests. This, I know, has been true in a great degree in all ages. But there have been such contests, — contests to settle great truths. The partisanship of the present day have very, very rarely any such significance. That this is no senile whimpering for the things that are past will, I hope, be presently evident.

What concerns us at this moment, however, is that this same lack of depth, and of all that depends on depth, is almost equally apparent in religion.

“Amid much that is cheering, there is, on the other hand, much that is discouraging and distressing to the more pious observer. We behold a strange combination of zeal and worldly-mindedness; great activity for the extension of religion in the earth, united with lamentable indifference to the state of religion in the soul; in short, apparent vigor in the extremities, with a growing torpor at the heart. Multitudes are substituting zeal for piety, liberality for mortification, and a social for a personal religion. No careful reader

of the New Testament, and observer of the present state of the Church, can fail to be convinced, one should think, that what is now wanting is a high spirituality. The Christian profession is sinking in its tone of piety; the line of separation between the Church and the world becomes less and less perceptible; and the character of genuine Christianity, as expounded from pulpits and delineated in books, has too rare a counterpart in the lives and spirit of its professors.”¹

Without subscribing to every word of this forcible arraignment, — whose homely vigor is well worthy of imitation, — it must be allowed to describe very fairly the spiritual quality of the age. The abundance of rootless piety; the incessant cultivation of sentiment, as distinguished from affection; the almost reckless popularization of religion; the floods of namby-pamby talk; the disappearance to so great a degree of “the deep things of God,” in any living grasp of them, from the pulpit, — these are characteristics of the religion of the day that are to be honestly and deeply deplored.

A remarkable religious vivacity is one of the striking features of the time, — a vivacity alike intellectual and moral. Look at the immense number of Sunday-school teachers, — of scholars, emulating each other’s success in recitations and other efforts. Consider the daily and other prayer-

¹ An Earnest Ministry, pp. 62, 63.

meetings, where men of every class, with and without culture, — with and without sound knowledge, — are encouraged to speak. Think of the almost infinite wayside labors, — to recover apostates, to enlighten the ignorant, to bring the godless myriads to the hearing of the gospel. Blessed work, all of it! So far from complaining of it, I would the great remaining inert mass were effectually filled with the same spirit, and that every nook and corner of the land were invaded and pervaded by its appeals.

But looking at the matter philosophically, as a fact in current history, two reflections immediately suggest themselves.

The first is, that this wide stream cannot be deep. In the nature of things it cannot be. This countless multitude of talkers and workers *cannot* be thorough thinkers, or profoundly pious men and women. Genuine, frank, zealous, I am glad to believe them, as a whole. But nothing they say or do, still, as a whole, shows more than surface vitality.

The second is, that we are, and must be under the circumstances, living very much upon the products of a previous race of laborers of another sort. We are like a generation of millers and corn-merchants, following a generation of farmers.

The current thought of any given period is that which it inherited, as modified by present conditions. The *material* is chiefly of the past: the

coloring is of the present. This maxim, however, must be taken with one limitation: some ages are especially productive, some are elaborative. The first are called theoretic, the latter practical. And, because this is eminently a practical age, it is eminently a case in point,—a people engaged in grinding up old corn, and furnishing new styles of bread.

It has seemed to me, for some time past, that we are approaching the close—at least the decline—of this practical age. What, so far as history can suggest it to us,—what may be expected to follow it?

I believe that we may expect a transition-period of *want*, of unsatisfied desires, of innovations, experiments, errors; of discontent and mistake, of moral and spiritual deterioration,—reforms attempted but futile; abuses denounced but surviving; outbursts of right and noble aspiration, blessed to the individual, but almost barren to the community,—until, with many throes, the new productive age is born.

This will doubtless grate very harshly on the ears of many who are expecting the golden centuries to begin almost immediately. They see, in the world's material progress, the harnessing of all the powers of nature to Emmanuel's chariot. In the great revivals conducted by lay evangelists, they find a warrant for their wildest hopes. And they even suspect a stubborn unbelief in the man

who warns them that they have need, even yet, of patience.

It would be as impossible for the writer as for any other man to believe that the world ever really goes backward; that there is any age, or any people, which contributes only hinderance to the plans of God for the salvation of mankind. To believe that, he should have to unlearn his rooted confidence in the sovereign providence of God. But then, he has never seen a spring follow an autumn without an intervening winter. And winter has his storms and rains, and needs his special precautions, all the more because spring is to come. If it were not coming, where would be the inducement to endure the long inclement skies and bitter blasts? Winter brings its dangers, as well as its discomforts. They must be faced and guarded against, with hope in the soft safety to come.

The conclusion to be drawn from the many lamentable features of present church-life is, therefore, not one of alarm concerning the Church of Christ considered as a historical unity, whose years count from the cross of Calvary, and run to the great judgment. It is safe amid all calamities. Persecutions, divisions, declensions, apostasies, are only seasons of revolving years. The clouds come and go, but the world remains. And while the covenant endures, and the High Priest intercedes, and the Spirit takes the government, and the truth of God stands, Christ's Church will live. The ark will surely outride the deluge.

This, then, is not the secret of our concern. There is a personal, as well as a historical, interest involved. The Church is safe; but are Christians safe? Is their work doing, their sanctification advancing, their Master pleased? Are they in health? Are they armed for the fight, and present on the field? The battle may be won, though detachments are defeated. Are the detachments sent to the front in 1877 in any danger of defeat? and, if so, why?

It will be noticed that thus far the views taken have been comparative, as to the periods of the Church. We are now to make a very different estimate. We are to look at the features of the spiritual life of to-day, and inquire into their bearing alike upon our inward prosperity and our aggressive power.

Are these two in real danger? And, if so, from what sources? This will be the burden of the following part of this essay.

PART II.

CHAPTER VI.

REAL PERIL TO THE LIGHT.

WE are now, in pursuance of the plan proposed, to consider some conditions of real peril to the light; if not to the very existence of the Church, the light-holder, yet at least to its present keepers and its present efficiency. It is not enough that the tower should stand, and the lenses should be in their place, and the machinery remain uninjured. The tower must have manful and faithful inmates, the lenses must be burnished, the lamp trimmed, the light rushing forth from it over the sea.

Never sailed so many vessels, bearing such precious freight. Never stood so great a world in so great need. And if we may not say, never were there so many wrecks, we may safely say, never did wrecks bring home such guilt and shame to the children of the light, as now. For now, above all past ages, is there a wide diffusion of knowledge, both of truth and of our responsibility for its offering to man. Now pre-eminently are the ears and minds of men open to every sort of mes-

sage, plea, and invitation. Now have we models in every style and department of evangelical labor: what sort of books should be written for children, for the learned, for the illiterate, for the old; how to approach the infidel, how the ungodly in their afflictions, how the self-righteous, the convicted, the hardened, the despairing, or all these combined. Let the particular task be what it may, this inexhaustibly inventive age has considered it and dealt with it, more or less effectively, already. The example is already set, of serving God with every sort of talent, and by every sort of labor, right and wrong, apt and inapt. If one would give a book or tract to a reader of any class or disposition, not only is the sort of volume needed most probably already prepared, but there are accomplished advisers to be found, familiar with the books and the work, to guide in the selection. And it is altogether likely that the object sought, in the particular case, has been dealt with by some associated effort; so that the intellect of the age may be said to have broken our paths for us. And yet there are terrible encumbrances upon us, and stumbling-blocks in the way.

It is of them that I am now to speak.

One of the most painful and perplexing matters to be considered is the present average Christian intelligence, the amount of instruction in doctrine, how shallow, slight, and pretentious it is. This remark is by no means inconsistent with what has

been said, either of the floods of religious talk in the land, or of the multitude of books and aids to knowledge that have been accumulating through the last fifty years. For, first, talk and knowledge do by no means vary in direct ratio, rather inversely; and, secondly, reading and study are not at all synonymous terms. Men read largely who study not at all. Indeed, it is very well understood, paradoxical as at first it may sound, that the secret of real ignorance in many cases is too many books. They give a smattering; they tempt to garrulity and vain conceits of knowledge, and thus block the way of thorough research and profitable attainment.

In support of this allegation as to the state of Christian intelligence, I have to say, in the first place, that it has been a common subject of remark, regret, and anxious consultation, among thoughtful pastors for years past. Many indications point them to the fact that sound knowledge does not abound: questions are asked, and answers are given to questions casually arising in conversation, objections are taken to doctrines, and expositions proposed of scriptures, that could only come of that kind of *word-furnished ignorance* which is a feature of the age.

But perhaps no other indication is so decisive, or so grave, as the ease with which errorists prevail over multitudes of minds, and those usually of the class called intelligent.

Some years ago a work appeared, whose almost incomparable English was the sole compensation or set-off against the weakest cluster of notions, and some of the very silliest expositions of Scripture, this world, so fruitful in things silly and weak, has yet labored with. Often it was only necessary to *translate* them into homelier speech, to disenchant an admirer. And yet, easy as was the exposure where opportunity was given, eminent lawyers and physicians and merchants were carried away by it; pious and cultivated ladies "saw no harm in it." Reviews, ay, and volumes, had to be written against it, to arrest the mischief it was doing. The power was in the words, and the poison was in the thoughts. And the style of intelligence at present is precisely that which makes words strong, and able to commend poisonous thoughts.

About the same time a pamphlet appeared in this country, written in opposition to the doctrine of the unity of the human race, which contained the following congeries of blunders: (1) It assumed that there are just two races, the white and the black; (2) it alleged that the black race is not a race of moral beings, but akin to the beasts; (3) that this race of *un-moral* beings is not permitted to worship, and that therefore *any attempt to worship on their part is a sin!* There were many other absurd mistakes and paralogisms; but these were of the very substance of the discussion.

Is it not almost incredible, that this stuff, this gross, ridiculous, and shameful tissue of anti-human talk, not only found readers, but believers? that educated men, and even here and there a minister, were found to praise it, and accept its teachings; so much so, that learned men were appealed to, to answer it if it could be answered? As if any other comment were needed than this, — that it opened with a blunder, and closed with a blasphemy!

But why multiply instances? Is there any folly in theology, medicine, or law, in politics, in finance, in science, art, or sociology, so patent, so flagrant, so intolerable, that it cannot gather adherents? Is there any heresy, down even to the no-church heresy, that cannot gather a church? Members of our churches have become Spiritualists. Members of Christian churches have become Mormons.

Perhaps no other age ever so illustrated the truth that information is not knowledge. Information — i.e., acquaintance with fact and detail — abounds as never before. Knowledge, i.e., systematized and digested information, is pitifully deficient. And for lack of this knowledge the people is destroyed.

For, manifestly, the more information abounds, the more is knowledge necessary. A large mob is not more nearly an army than a small mob. The larger, the more unmanageable, the more mischiev-

ous, the more inflammable, the more portentous, it is.

It follows immediately upon this, — as the mills of science grind out facts, and the popular mind appropriates but does not possess them, — that the masses of men are drawn farther and farther from the benign sway of *standard truths*. For, if these details were distributed into their kinds, and estimated by their laws, we should have knowledge indeed; and we should have a thousand fallacies dropped into general contempt that now command applause. The reason that the world is not promptly rid of them is that they are not tried by the established standard. Nay: the standards are tried by them, with surprising results.

One man abandons his belief in the divine authority of the Scriptures because a fossil human skeleton has been found; another because geology teaches that the earth could not have been made, such as it was made, in six ordinary days; another because it is inconsistent with his views of the laws of Nature that miracles should be wrought, or prayer should procure an answer. And so on, almost without end.

Now, I am not to canvass these several positions. That has been done, and well done, many times. My point is, that great truths, already wrought into the great scheme of truth, are thrown over, and the whole body of human belief brought to disorder, under the influence of some half-learned

and half-weighed detail of knowledge or notion, and the safe and noble order of reason reversed.

So far, the world that hears the gospel. How is it, as regards sound doctrine, with professed believers and ordained ministers? Many there are — and we can never cease to thank God for it — who stand bravely, and once for all, by “the law and the testimony.” But if we turn our ear from that clear and steadfast proclamation of the faith once delivered to the saints, and listen to such other voices as may seek a hearing, what a Babel bursts upon us! Pre-existence of souls, regeneration by moral suasion, the religion of philanthropy, the ethics of expediency, the Bible to be judged by man’s moral intuitions, inspiration reduced to genius, the gospel of physical strength, the gospel of aspiration, eternity of matter, millenarianism, science the new Bible, the nineteenth century to sit in judgment on God’s word, and to *select* what it shall be pleased to believe (the twentieth century, of course, to have the same privilege): why, these that I have named — and they are enough to dizzy one’s brain — are only the first syllables of the clamor of the semi-infidel Church of the day; only a handful of the fruits of that prolific lie, that truth is — whatever a man is disposed to believe.

Next, it follows, that as the principles of ethics are truths, — and fundamental truths have lost their reverence, — moral questions are all becoming

unsettled, and moral judgments, whether of the individual, or the Church, or public opinion, lose much, and with many they lose all, their weight. The binding force of a vow, be it marriage-vow or vow of ordination; oaths of office or of evidence; covenants, treaties, bonds, notes, debts,—like a storm-racked ship, all the timbers are fretting and playing, all the joints are loosed, and the seams opening.

This is not to be taken, indeed, to mean that *all persons* have ceased to be bound. Thank God! we are far enough from such a frightful condition as that. But, as regards society, the allegation is just. The whole head is sick; and, now that financial distress is wearing out our fortitude, the whole heart is faint.

Public opinion on moral subjects was once, and to a very influential degree, a unit in this country. For some time, even after the chaos of faith (to borrow a strong phrase of Mr. Rogers) had set in, there was no reason to doubt what the judgment of society would be upon an unfaithful wife, or a defaulting officer, or a perjured witness, or an evil-doer in the ministry. Neither is there any doubt now what the prevalent voice will be in any such case. The ominous fact is, that there will be *many* voices instead of *one*; and they may range all the way from solemn condemnation to applause.

That is precisely the reason why wrong-doers

are so much less afraid of the public sentiment than of yore; because that sentiment is so divided, its force is dissipated. The moral power of the community is weakened by as much as its unanimity is destroyed.

And when, coincidentally with this severance in public opinion itself, *the spirit of reverence is found to be exhaling*, a day of spiritual danger has verily arrived. Is not reverence, the glory of youth and the grace of old age, — is not reverence manifestly declining?

It results inevitably from two excellent features of the time, — the exposure of old fallacies, and the cultivation of mental independence. The *débris* of old maxims, notions, institutions, strews the land, as the shells of the seventeen-year cicada strew the woods of New Jersey. Their time was out, and they had to go: the world had no more room nor tolerance for them. But they leave us, necessarily, the knack of questioning, and the habit of demolition, — of looking on old things as candidates for the hammer and fire. And this, of course, develops a spirit that is proud of not leaning on antiquated supports, and is only too ready to call any thing antiquated that is not new. This spirit not only insists on testing afresh all things that are clearly doubtful, which is the sacred duty of every generation, but it discards that most wholesome principle which accepts provisionally what has been hitherto believed, and throws the

burden of proof on whoever assails it. Now, the irreverent mind of the age, so much of it as there may be, holds under indictment whatsoever has come down from a former generation, *because it has come down*.

It can hardly be counted a digression, though the remark be not in the direct line of my argument, if I mention in passing the vast change that has taken place, through the operation of this spirit, in the relations of parents and children. More and more are children coming to believe that they are the final cause of parents. More and more does parental authority decay, does filial authority assert itself. That each is for the other, is a golden truth. That either is all, is flat heresy, and portends social ruin where it is received.

CHAPTER VII.

SUBJECT CONTINUED.—DECAY OF AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCHES.

THESE reflections lead us directly to a matter of vast importance, — a sorely evil omen, if it be not either controlled and reversed, or substituted by some better thing. I refer to the decay of authority in the churches; not now in respect of doctrine, but of discipline.

Let us waive entirely, for the present, the divine origin of the Church; not that it will bear to be waived in fact, but because, being waived just now, it will add force to the conclusion to which we shall be led. Let us, then, waive it; and consider simply that organization implies, and finds its use in, *unity of impact* upon whatever matters it is intended to effect.

We organize an army to crush resistance, or to repel aggression; a railroad company, to accomplish the transportation of a region; a government, to sum up the energies of a people for the maintenance of order at home, and safety and influence abroad. In each case, the vital necessity, so far as

the object sought is concerned, is, that the whole mass shall work as one. The elements of which it is composed may be as discordant as they please in all other relations; but the force of the blow depends completely, though not exclusively, on the solidity of the mass.

I shall no more need to tell my readers *for what* the Church was organized, than *by whom* it was called into being. The invasion and conquest of a world, this is what our Leader planned. Therefore is He called, with admirable significance, the "Captain of our salvation:" "Captain," to unify and guide the assault; "salvation," the result of every partial success, and of the whole long war.

We are enrolled for this work; and it is to be done — on its human side — by two methods, — the bringing individuals, as such, under the power of grace, and the Christianization of society. These are not necessarily coterminous operations; i.e., operations that proceed with equal rapidity or result. Either may, for a time, outrun the other. Each has its turns of comparative prosperity. But both are essential to the final effect.

The sinner must be individualized either consciously and avowedly by private effort, or unconsciously and as by a bow drawn at a venture from the pulpit or the book. Yet even here a large part of the impressiveness of what is said is due to the mighty bulk behind the speaker. It is A or B that delivers the words; but it is the Christian

Church, the Church of the wide earth, the Church of all the ages, that speaks by his mouth.

Even at this point, therefore, the vast importance of a virtual unity — an unity that can make itself heard even when it cannot be seen — is sufficiently apparent. But when we turn to the other portion of the enterprise, viz., the conversion and elevation of society, what can be more manifest than that *unity of impression* at any given point is absolutely essential to any normal success? As well expect the iceberg, when distributed into cartloads, to cut its deep grooves in the trap or granite, as society to be new-shaped by a church without a common character.

At this point of the argument, many will hasten to object, that, *in fact*, the churches are not one, but many; not only numerous, but diverse in style, in history, in doctrine, in ritual, in government. They will remind me that this is the opprobrium of the Protestant world; that Papists retort upon us for calling Rome Babylon, by calling us Babel; that it is only lately that the various denominations have been upon peaceable, not to say friendly, terms with one another.

A great deal of that sort has been said and sung of late years; nor am I willing to seem without some sympathy with this ardent desire for visible oneness in the Church, in so far as that desire grows out of love to Christ and his cause. Whatever burns to serve him is thereby greatly commended to me.

But the bearing of this fact (viz., the division of the Christian body into denominations) on this argument will be found to be strong, and to confirm the views to which the argument has been leading us; as thus:—

It is the absence, it is the impossibility, of this visible, external unity, which brings before us, in something more nearly approaching its real importance, the inner unity, “the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” Just because the Church can never be wielded from without, as one mass, it is vital that it should *be* a mass,—a living, self-moving mass.

During a great battle, if the general in command should be disabled or killed, with no competent successor within reach, only one thing could save the army from overthrow; viz., that the thing to be done should be obvious to the whole host, and that, inspired throughout its multitudes with the passion of victory, they should pour out their floods of fire and steel as by one impulse. A lava-stream needs no commander.

Now that the denominations are coming more and more nearly into line upon the questions, What constitutes Christian character? and, What is essential to Christian decorum? now that the world is so stubbornly seeking to recover its lost place within the Church,—the indispensableness of churchly authority stands out in strong relief. Each community is to be impinged upon by the

people of the cross, and permeated with the spirit of the cross. In order to that, each separate church must make one impression of uprightness, of unworldliness, of peace. Each cluster of churches must make a chord, if not absolute unison, in their voice concerning duty and right. But in order to that one impression, and in order to that accord, there must be government, or that government must be temporarily substituted by an overwhelming display of the power of the Spirit. And that display must superinduce, again, government. Let every soul be subject to the higher powers.

And now, what is the fact? The voice of the official rulers is still heard; but is it heeded as of old? Is discipline enforced, or enforcible, except in extreme cases? Conferences, assemblies, conventions, have spoken, and spoken clearly, soundly, forcibly, with regard to certain worldly amusements, as the theatre and circus, and certain immoral practices, such as gambling with lottery-tickets. I do not ask, Have they been obeyed? for there have been transgressors in all ages; but, Have they been enforced? Is any general enforcement attempted? Barring certain happy exceptions, is not public opinion, and the sense of public duty, felt to be so far relaxed that discipline, for any thing less than gross and flagrant offences which society itself condemns, would be lightning-less thunder?

Take another case. All the denominations are engaged in great enterprises, at home and abroad, which require large outlay of money; and that money they must obtain by contributions among their people and from their churches. The proper officers make their estimates, and report them to the controlling body, whatever it may be. They are there carefully canvassed, revised, and adopted, and laid by authority before the local churches for their action as in duty bound.

It is notorious that those calls for contributions are disregarded by just about one-half the churches in each connection. Could there be a clearer proof of the decay of authority? It is not that the sums called for are not raised, and that thus enormous debts are incurred, to the manifest dishonor of Christ; it is not of that I speak now. It is that the *attempt to obey* is not made by half the churches.

And all this is done by those who profess Christ: there is the appalling part of it. Ministers and other officers neglect the duty they have vowed to do, or are prevented from discharging it by the churches themselves.

Alas! must we confess it, that his authority also has undergone decay? He "visited the earth, and watered it" with his blood. He loved its people unto the death, and out of the pit. He stands, alike their representative and their king, in the courts of glory. If the wide universe con-

tains a being whose lightest wish ought to weigh with us against a world, that being is Jesus Christ. There can be no right to rule over us that does not vest in him. They are dark days for mankind when the authority of Christ over his Church wanes and fades away.

It is evident that no reply to these allegations, such as the rehearsal of great sums raised for purposes of religion and benevolence, or the production of instances in which exemplary discipline has been maintained, — no such reply can avail, simply because my proposition is not that there is no life nor zeal left in the Church, but that a visible and grave declension is taking place. The light is not extinguished, thank God! but it burns by no means so brightly as it should; not so brightly, *in some directions*, as once it did.

Can either of these positions be assailed?

CHAPTER VIII.

NATURAL OPERATION OF CERTAIN MORAL
CAUSES.

I PROPOSE in this chapter to describe the way in which human nature works out of certain of its blessings and its best estate when left to itself.

It is a grave and pregnant truth, that man never "continueth long in one stay;" that what he has, or does, or is, propels him inevitably out of his present condition; as inevitably as the eating and digestion of to-day's food expels particles of his present frame, and builds-in others in their stead. Stated in this bald, general form, there may be many to question it: yet everybody knows and says that prosperity breeds luxury; that trials harden the frame, and enrich the heart; in a word, that to-day is the child of yesterday and the parent of to-morrow, — all which is contained implicitly in the aphorism above.

What concerns us now in it is the gradual impoverishment of the Christian life under the practice of its duties and the lawful enjoyment of its

blessings, unless that natural result is some way prevented. And I take two instances, — the natural history of Christian emotion, and the natural history of Christian labor.

It cannot be too emphatically said that genuine spiritual life, beginning or newly developing, kindles emotion. Feeling, no matter how deep, is in itself nowise unwholesome. Each of man's several lives — the physical, mental, social, spiritual — has its appropriate group of appetites and passions; and it is an integral part of life that they should be called into play in their degree. So far, therefore, from looking askance upon profound or lively feeling on religious subjects, I am free to say that the soul that is *entirely* without them has no religious life, and that the religion which should not produce them at all could not have come from God.

A gulf opening at one's feet; waves of endless woe beating in its dim recesses with sullen thunder; self-help impossible; man's help futile; the infinite loneliness of a soul that must deal directly with God concerning its doom, — these on one side: on the other, a face of awful sweetness, a voice of melting love, a hand of kingly power; stains of blood on robes of glory; a personal Deliverer and Friend; a river of grace flowing down from his throne; a tide of ransomed souls flowing in, into the heavenly haven; a hold, for you and for me, on that "inheritance of the saints in

light;" the riddle of death read; the sting of death taken away; the coming *thither* with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads: why, there are no other such trumpet-calls to tears, and songs, and the ecstasy compared with which both songs and tears are shallow, as these.

How deep, how violent, how permanent, these emotions may prove in any particular case, is a question partly of degree of enlightenment, but mainly of temperament. But, in their several measures, all who really see and hear with the senses of the soul, all will be moved and stirred.

Accordingly, periods of revival are marked by nothing more impressive than the quickened, deepened *feeling* that pervades the community. People who had completely lost their relish for the worship of God now again take delight therein. People who had been the *bane* of their pastor's preaching, because they sat in unresponsive stolidity through all his appeals; people whom he had learned to think of as his icebergs, — now thrill and weep, and still deplore their own hard-heartedness, and take shame to themselves because they feel so little.

And the pastor, too, — his words were, even in his own view, but lead: now they are, to all but himself, life. How the hard voice softens, and the cold eye kindles, though it be suffused with tears, and the awaking heart beats against the ribs, and the shepherd yearns, with longings that cannot be uttered, for his flock!

Now the mighty hand is laid upon the impenitent. It is the hand that wakes the dead; and they arise, and come forth from their graves of vice and sin, from drink and lust and unbelief. They shudder at themselves; they are amazed at God; they melt before Christ.

These words, I know, do but very poorly and lamely set forth the rise of the tide of life in any congregation or city where a great revival has set in. Its pathos and sublimity, its blessing for the present, and its fruit for "the ages to come," can never be told.

What follows this "high day"? What follows it, that is to say, by the laws of our mental and moral nature?

What but that very shallowing of emotions which we have already found and lamented as a present fact? Just as surely as the Gulf Stream, flowing northward, draws up its depths and broadens its surface, does the stream of joy and sorrow if left to itself, shorn of its profounder riches and expending its force, grow general, ineffective, characterless.

"If left to itself:" that qualification must not be lost sight of here for even a moment. It is not the *necessary*, but only the *natural* history, we are following. With that qualification, the rule is, as nearly as possible, absolute. Be it man or woman, be it church, be it a continent, wrought-up feeling does not merely spend itself: it comes up out of

the deep places, and plays idly upon the surface. It leaves the heart for the breast.

It is not difficult to trace this process in consciousness. Let us take a case with which, alas! the whole world is familiar, the grief of a great bereavement. A child is taken away out of his mother's arms. That bruised heart, when it can think of itself, is impressed by nothing so much as its own inability to feel. That is almost a test of deep and genuine emotion. The proof of her profound feeling is her *absorption* in her loss. Such anguish is not clamorous, even to one's own consciousness; but it silently takes possession. It takes the sheen out of the sunlight, the charm out of loved faces, the interest out of all the dear trifles of domestic life. Jacob is in a horrible solitude because he thinks Benjamin has followed Joseph out of the world. True, he has ten sons left; but what are they?

But weary time keeps steadily on. Sorrow that was a passion becomes a habit. The face has "learned the trick of grief," and wears the expression into which it has settled down. But *why has it "settled down"?* Once it could not. Each new pang brought its own convulsive distortion. Every feature wrought to tell the tale of woe. For a time those paroxysms return, but less and still less peremptorily. The deeps are yet dark, but they are becoming calm. One at this point may become all the more conscious of her grief, because less absorbed in it.

And now love of the living, and care for whatever concerns them, little or large, begins to reassert itself. Home interests, and then interests beyond the home, begin to take the eye and ear and thought. True, they all take a sombre tint from this grief. So have I seen a gulf-stream wave blown into the shoal water, and lying there, an exquisite bit of turquoise set in beryl; but it was a mere film, and it was spread upon the sea. Just thus, the colder, larger mass of the mother's life bears up this one grief, which diffuses itself over all and tinges all. It is genuine; it is lasting; but it no longer absorbs.

Now, this process, affecting a whole people and its religious life, will give us this result, a steadily shallowing emotion, as the general character. But two grave dangers develop themselves during and upon this transition, always on the supposition that nothing intervenes to overrule natural tendencies.

The first and slighter danger, but formidable indeed, is the translation of emotion into sentiment, without timely discovery of the change.

Profound is the distinction between feeling that is produced by facts, and feelings that are produced by fancy. And it makes no sort of difference whether that with which the fancy deals is itself a fact, or not. In the first case, our natures are effected by the facts immediately; in the second, mediately. In the one, truths impinge upon

us with their own force and from their proper direction; in the other, we play upon them, and give them such quality and bearing as our own natures supply. In the one case, they are the weapons of God; in the other, the playthings of men.

And yet how like they may seem! Among a thousand hearers, there shall be but a hundred — perhaps but a poor score — who distinguish between the preaching of the heart and the preaching of the imagination.¹ And of that hundred, or of that score, the larger part will be conscious only of a vague dissatisfaction and disappointment, a something wanting, to make this feast food. Only here and there a listener understands that the thing lacking is *eye-witness*, a personal presence among the facts spoken of. That inspired thinker, Paul, has expressed it in a phrase that should be classical, — “having tasted the power of the world to come.” To “taste of death” is to die, to have a personal experience of death: so also, to “taste the powers of the world to come” is to make trial, in one’s own person, of its powers; to speak what we know, and testify what we have seen.

The lack of this eye-witness-ship results either in cold intellectuality, or — and that is the present point — in luscious description, fulsome epithet, artificial pathos and decoration. It draws “tears,

¹ I use the word here in its larger, not its philosophical meaning.

idle tears;” it wins admiration; it evolves a transient and barren enthusiasm; it creates an utterly spurious spirituality, a self-congratulating, self-conscious religiosity, than which there is no more irremovable barrier to true piety.

How dreadful is the self-complacency with which many a well-dressed and intelligent audience retires from what it calls “divine service”! The service of God: ah! it involves “humbling one’s self to walk with” him;¹ it is sitting at Christ’s feet, ashamed and sorry, and being comforted—even while the sense of sin is deepening—by the voice of the Spirit in our hearts, “I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions as a thick cloud.” It is going away more than ever out of conceit with one’s self, more than ever self-devoted to his will.

Sentiment substitutes a deed with a pleasant song, a life with a pensive look, and *enjoys doing it*.

Many of the more or less novel religious appliances of the day serve the purposes of sentiment every whit as well as of true religion. Many “pious” books are mere cups of *eau sucrée*. Many gushing Sunday-school orators run pure froth. And the people love to have it so: there is the terror. Words that touch the surface of feeling, words that tickle the idle intellect,—these take the place of the solid things of God; and

¹ Mic. vi. 8, *margin*.

the Church is not indignant, not nauseated, not swift and peremptory in the demand that this Bar-mecide's feast take itself instantly away, and let our table be supplied with bread from heaven.

The other and more serious evil resulting from this shoaling-up of Christian feeling does yet so interlock with that of which I have been speaking, that it has not been possible not to anticipate it in some degree. Nevertheless, it must have special mention and protest. It is — cant.

Cant is the insincere appropriation of words to our talk; that is, of words whose use involves a profession, which profession is not true. It rings hollow, sometimes by reason of the listlessness with which the phrase is spoken, sometimes by the *foreign aspect* of the phrase in the place where it occurs, and in other ways. But always and everywhere it is offensive. If it occurs through thoughtlessness, it is folly; if consciously, it is hypocrisy. The bad taste of it is its least fault. As before men, it is clinking counterfeit coins, and pretending to be rich. As unto God, what shall I say of it? At the very best, it offers Him a hollow compliment, which is an insult. He taught his ancient people to confess and abhor it, even after many generations: "Nevertheless they flattered him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues." Yet the land reeks with it. The smooth, satisfactory clauses of our private prayers, "where not the heart is found," are cant. The

luscious words in which many a garrulous church-member disports himself (or herself), being only words, are cant. The sentimental cant is bad enough; but the cant about holiness is still worse. To have the believer's vital relation to God — the very stamp of God's fatherhood on his brow — mouthed upon and misrendered, travestied and cheapened, advertised and boasted of, is something so amazing, so humiliating, that it should be every Christian's lamentation and protest, until it is shamed out of sight.

And we are not to shrink from saying these things because the infidel, with his talent-for-hasty generalization, — it is the *Austrian lip* of the family, — is accusing all the devout of hypocrisy, and sneering at all their prayer and praise as cant. We must not be worried by a little crackling skirmish-fire like that. It is our place, it is our point of honor, to go on with our inspection without regarding such an incident. We must call cant, cant, whoever repeats the word, and in whatever tone it may be repeated. And we must with calm determination make it our business to find out how much of our army is real fighting material, and how much is Chinese national guards, with gongs and fire-crackers for their weapons of war.

It is certain that the present period, for reasons already given, is marked to a painful degree by the features of word-mongering, spurious religious fervor, and pious clap-trap. It is so *because there*

is so much genuine religious activity, and so many new and taking methods of work and worship. The penumbra is child of the light. The evil is real; its growth is alarming: not, I repeat it, as threatening the existence and perpetuity of the Church of Christ, but as portending grievous falls for many true believers, and the stumbling of many sinners, who, when they fall, will not rise again.

CHAPTER IX.

SUBJECT CONTINUED. — NATURAL HISTORY OF
CHRISTIAN LABOR.

WE are to look now — and a rapid glance will suffice — at the effect upon any given community of the transformations of Christian labor, from first efforts to routine. Those words themselves, and their associated ideas, almost tell the story.

Let us imagine a young man drawn, — despite all his previous habits of reserve, and that wonderful false shame under which Christ's disciples labor, — drawn by zeal for his Master, and by pity for souls, to address his first stammering words of warning and invitation to an impenitent friend. How his cheeks burn, and his heart beats! his hand is cold, and his brain dizzy, with the excitement of a first attempt. Not that he regrets having made the effort, painful though it be: far from it. The spirit is willing, if the flesh is weak. He thanks God that he has spoken at last, has begun the dearest and noblest work imposed on man. He thanks Christ, who long ago began, and has never

discontinued, loosing the sealed lips, as well as opening the sealed ear.

Oh, sweet is the pain, and dear the burden, and precious the fears and longings, the hesitations and brave impulses, of those first days! They are the spring-days of a heavenly year, — the youth of an immortality. Nothing more sacred shall he feel, throughout his life on earth, than those first confidences with Christ in prayer, concerning their common interest and enterprise.

The difficulties in the way of his beginning are immense. His utter inexperience alone is a mountain in his way. His sense of un-worth, his fear of seeming to set himself up as wise or (still worse) as good; his uncertainty whether he is not about to do harm rather than good, and only bring ridicule upon himself and his cause; his consciousness that there are so many in the Church far wiser and better and more fit for the work than he; the doubt how to begin, and what to say, — clearly, nothing less than the *whole force* of the man can begin!

But he has begun, and persevered. What was a wonderful new sensation has become a normal part of his life. The sense of duty, and the soldier-spirit that are in him, keep up the work. Practice, meanwhile, is entirely removing the early difficulties, which made Christian work so severe a test of Christian heart.

But then, this very disappearance of the diffi-

culties makes the challenge to high motives and a deeply devoted allegiance less and less commanding. The work, — in form, not, of course, in fact, — the mere rind and visible outside of the work, calls for less and still less of *the man* to take part in it. It will be just like poor human nature to let it run down to bare routine.

Now, as man looketh on the outward appearance almost as much (and some men a good deal more) in their own case as in that of others, one may come by slow and insensible degrees to make a conscience of going through a round of appeals, and expending once sacred and precious words, and keeping one's own mind at rest thereby, when the fervor, the blood of the spiritual life, that once distilled into it, has all drained away. I say, it may do so. More: it is one of the features of the time, that it does so in large measure. Probably every reader of these lines who counts active Christian laborers among his acquaintances has had certain of them recalled to his mind while considering this page. He misses out of their speech — however excellent their words may be — that indescribable vital quality that we call unction. That wistfulness of eye, that *yearn* in the voice, the very posture, that should tell how the spirit is stirred, — they were there, but now they are gone.

God forbid that I should so sin against the truth as to make the impression, either that this is the general condition of things, or that there is any

necessity for their taking this course! As has been already expressly said, this is an age unparalleled in many centuries for the amount and the personal vitality of its work for Christ. It is as marvellous as delightful to behold the myriads who by the way and in the car or boat, in counting-houses, factories, shops, fields, where not? are bringing the question of salvation home to men's hearts. Probably a larger share of the harvest is now reaped by this wayside, unprofessional labor, than at any time since the apostolic and primitive ages. But the practical question here is, Does not routine affect a greater proportion of this work than it did five or even three years ago? So far as such work runs on its *momentum* instead of renewed impulse, must it not grow lighter work, or gradually cease?

And as regards the other wrong impression which these remarks might make: it is of vast importance to have it understood, not only that this shallowing and cheapening of Christian work is not unavoidable, but that, rightly used, work is itself a royal deepener and enricher of the heart. But the evil tendency is there, and must be consciously, intelligently, watchfully resisted, or the evil will ensue.

But some will say, "This is almost pure theory: have you any facts to bear you out?" If by facts are meant details, with names and dates, I certainly have none *to print*. Nor can there be any

necessity for proof of this sort, if it could be given, when every conscientious minister is praying to be saved from *professionalism*, and the most faithful laborers in every walk of life are seeking heavenly aid against the plague of their own heart; when, anxiously considering the question, why efforts that of late accomplished so much are now accomplishing so little, wise men are often driven to confess, it is because the life has exhaled out of the methods of our work.

It is worth considering, at this point, that our Saviour's use of the word "hypocrite" indicates a much broader generalization than that use to which we now limit it. Nothing less is intended by it now than a charge of conscious fraud. Hypocrisy is simply the attempt to obtain the honor of piety or virtue under false pretences, in the current sense of the term. He who wears the guise of zeal and devoutness, who sings and prays, and confesses his sins with artificial unction, inviting society to take notice how pious he is, while he knows he cares for none of these things, — he is what we now call a hypocrite.

The word in the Gospels, while it includes all that, includes a good deal more that is less gross and heinous. For the word *hypocrite* in classic Greek meant simply a play-actor, — one who acted a part on the stage. The ethical use of the word was something new when it appeared in the New Testament; a bold and even startling figure, to

describe and expose every sort of religious acting; not merely that which was to deceive others, but also the still more subtle sort which is meant to deceive *one's self*. All going through one's part in the play, — even though there be no thought of deceiving men, but only the maintenance of decorous forms, and keeping up one's respectability thereby; and then, the hope to keep right with society by our devoutness, despite some certain little peccadilloes; and then, gross and wilful shamming, — all these meet together, and fall under our Saviour's indignant and sorrowful denunciation, when he cries, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"

It will be a sufficient proof of this, if we look at his parable of the publican and the Pharisee a moment, though other proofs are abundant.

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

Not a trace is there in the whole story of his having said any thing untrue; and it is incredible that Christ should not have noted the untruth if there were one, or should have added that the publican went down *justified rather than* the Pharisee, if the Pharisee's statement of his duty-doing had been a lie.

Am I asked, then, wherein lies the defect or

the sin of his prayer? It seems to be pointed out with profound wisdom, by the words, "prayed thus *with himself*." The electric circuit was simply from his lips to his lips, touched nothing but his lips. The Pharisee's transaction was "with himself." No real thought of God as a present person, with whom in his infinite majesty he was then and there individually dealing, entered his heart. He went through the reputable form of temple-worship, and out of the abundance of his vanity his mouth spake. He was thus, in the Scripture sense, a "hypocrite."

Led to reflect upon the matter by this word, thus used, we cannot but exclaim upon the amazing amount of *blank cartridge* fired off by would-be soldiers. Superficial work and superficial worship abound. Our "wells of living water" are filling up, choked with routine and formal observance. Many a well-meaning and, at bottom, honest worker, has come away from his Sunday-school class or prayer-meeting, — ay, or his pulpit, — with a heart sinking, and even fainting, under the question, Have I meant what I said? Have I been paying hollow compliments to the all-seeing God, or speaking honest truth?

And observe, his is not the worst case who puts such questions to himself. He who flumes along, or plods along, through his work in unquestioning self-content, — he is the more miserable man. And the land is growing full of them.

CHAPTER X.

SUBJECT CONTINUED. — SCEPTICISM LEAKING IN.

EVERY age has its ailments. The complex life of civilization complicates disorders as well as resources. And Church history is as easily divided into periods by the heresies, controversies, declensions, or other diseases that have prevailed therein, as by any other characteristic whatever. The characteristic of this period, as I have already had occasion to submit, is the luxuriant growth of knowledge, and of what passes for knowledge.

There was a time when the resultant danger, as appears to me, was far other than it is now. Neither of the words in the title of this chapter would have applied then; neither would "scepticism" have described the state, nor "leaking in" the process, which then threatened disaster to the religious world.

When Geology, a flippant young hoyden then, talked as peremptorily of primary, secondary, plutonic, metamorphic, and aqueous rocks, as she speaks now in very different phrase; when the

insoluble unity of species, and the consequent dis-unity of the human race, was the shibboleth of Science; when advantage was taken of old expositions of Scripture, and the strong prejudice in their favor, to commit the Bible to untenable theories and dates; when the brilliancy and amazingness of the discoveries, and the novelty of the positions taken, bewildered many a candid but timid mind; when these questions, just because they struck us on a new side, developed an awkward stiffness of joints, a rheumatic inflexibility in the Church generally, an inability to take in and amalgamate the new with the old,—the danger then was of more or less open apostasy; avowed, consistent disbelief. Men who knew little or nothing of the strength of the Christian evidences, who would have been astonished if informed that Paley had only drawn out *one branch of one argument* for the Bible into proper proportions, instead of treating it all,—such men were very naturally thrown off their balance when confidently told that the deluge did not cover the whole earth, that the world was not made in six ordinary days, and that there were monuments in Egypt twenty thousand years old. The mere audacity of the assertions would take such a man's breath away: it would seem impossible that any one should dare to say such things, unless fact compelled him to do it. And if they were true! why, the very heavens would seem to roll backward at the supposition.

We have learned better now. We know that other constraint than compulsion by truth brings men to make audacious assertions, that the organ of destructiveness is portentously large on many heads, and that a passion for standing in the blaze of fireworks is the secret of many a loud explosion. And, on the other hand, we know the rooted strength of the gospel argument. We know that it is not the rolling of this or the other little boulder against the foot of the mountain, that will crush it down. It is with a certain exultation that a truly robust mind sums up the difficulties in the way of believing that the Bible is from God.

“True” — he will say — “that I know not the nature of inspiration, but only its results; that I cannot put my finger on the divine warrant for precisely these sixty-six books and no other; that the imperfect science of hermeneutics and the immature natural sciences have not yet completely harmonized their products; that errors of transcription in certain details make the books conflict in certain minor regards; and that other such drawbacks from absolute demonstration can be found by those who look for them. What then? The whole of natural theology points to the Bible; the whole Bible rehearses, continues, and completes that theology; the whole evidence of history establishes the truth of the Gospels in their vital point, — the resurrection of Christ, — which

being established, the Bible and Christianity follow as a necessity; the whole of my own being — that which I am by nature, and that which I am by grace — responds alike to its doctrines and to its facts; and type, and prophecy, and things past, and things present, consent together in witness. What can summer breezes do against the Pyramid?"

But it must be confessed that all minds are not robust enough to hold the truth in this simple, exulting constancy. And where there is not sufficient spiritual vitality to throw off the poison, — as perfect bodily health is said to expel some bodily poisons, — a pitiable effect is often produced. No wrong doctrine is received; no right doctrine is rejected. But the whole life is weakened; the spiritual vision is blurred; a haze of uncertainty is thrown over those precious things which every believer ought *so* to hold as loyally to die upon them.

The effect upon the soul is what the effect of a leak, not large enough to sink the ship, is upon the ship. It breeds foul gases in the hold; it rots whatever perishable articles are left within its reach; and, as the water gathers, it spoils the steering, and deadens the headway.

With the popularization of the discoveries of science (for science itself cannot be popularized, but must grow more and more impracticable in that direction as its researches grow more abstruse), in an age of declining vitality, this sad

consequence of the wider knowledge of God's works must become more wide-spread. And in the course of time it must operate very seriously against the forth-putting of her full power by the Church. And that, again, means, declension and shame for many Christians; ruin for many, many sinners.

How plain it is, when one takes the courage to think it, that not the man of hypotheses and revisable discoveries, but the man of revelation, has the right to speak dogmatically! We know *now* what science *will* think about God when science is done learning. It is not our place to sit down at Mr. Tyndall's feet, and be taught concerning prayer, creation, or immortality. Even concerning heat, light, and molecular motion, it is just possible that he may live to correct his views, or to see them corrected; but when he tries to topple over the temple, we need not be frightened — except for him.

So it is, however, that ever and anon some philosopher and divine, who ought to know better, takes the apologetic tone, makes large concessions of what does not belong to him, — the truth, — and spends honors upon the enemies that enure of right to the friends of piety. And that apparent retreat weakens many a heart, and dims many a light, that should beat and burn for Christ.

It is greatly to be deplored, that this evil, so subtle, so secret, so enfeebling the whole inner

life, so inexpugnable by any logical method, has spread and is yet spreading so widely. It is like a foul smoke within the lantern of the light-house; eddying round the lenses to tarnish them, and round the lamp itself to quench its rays. I have said nothing yet of remedies; but, if they be not found for such dangers as these, our light will yet be but darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

ABUSES AND DISORDERS.

ENSUING, more or less directly, from one or other of those generic evil tendencies of which I have spoken, come many which it might seem pedantry to classify closely, and of which by no means all will be named in this chapter. For, when the greater dangers and their appointed safeguards have been rehearsed, the less are practically, even though not logically, included. My purpose, therefore, is rather to make certain practical points than to exhaust the list of ills to which the Church of the present is heir.

One of the chief — by no means new, but newly dangerous — is the divorce, in many minds and consciences, of morals and religion.

The fundamental idea of religion, beyond all doubt, is obligation. And the fundamental idea of morals is precisely the same, — obligation. So far as they can be distinguished, their distinction lies in this: that the obligation of morals is to a *principle*, while that of religion is to a *Person*, even God. But this does not, and cannot, dis-

criminate either the *subjects* of moral obligation, i.e., all moral beings, or the *objects* thereof, i.e., all duties. Religion takes up, under her imperial and benignant sway, all creatures to whom right and wrong are or can be known, and lays her heavenly sanctions on all they ought to do. She vastly enlarges the scope and dignifies the office of duty. She raises dead ethics to a life. She substitutes allegiance to man's true King, for the cold and ineffective impositions of abstract truth.

There need be no larger reference to Scripture, in confirmation of this statement, than to adduce our Saviour's two great commandments, "on which hang all the law and the prophets:" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." "Shalt" is the very keynote of morals. "The Lord thy God" is the sublime Person from whom the law must come, and to whom, in infinite degree, is moral service due. "Thy neighbor" is every brother subject who is brought within our reach.

But, inasmuch as every human subject of God's glorious government is under doom by the law, it has pleased God to make his religion a salvatory scheme; so to shape it that men may be recovered by it to goodness, safety, and eternal joy. Not one bond of duty is relaxed. Not one humiliation is laid upon the law. Duty is the more binding,

because its motives are transfigured. The question of self-preservation is laid aside for the believer: his safety is assured in advance. And the law, which was once only a voice, — a Sinai-trumpet voice, — is now Christ, with nail-scarred hands, and thorn-scarred brow, and rent side, saying no longer, “Do this, and live!” but, “Live, and do this!”¹

It is a part of the intrinsic and abominable meanness of sin, that it enters its wedge just here, There is an Antinomian unbelief — usually silent and secret — which assumes that this work of redemption has filled the whole realm of religion and morals, and that he who “believes” (whatever that may mean in such a context) is discharged from any other service of his Creator and Saviour. In a form rather less gross, it proposes to balance moral shortcomings by religious observance; to pay for a fault with a psalm, and rectify a dishonest ledger by a prayer, and gild a malignant temper with a sanctimonious look or a “holy tone” in the voice; to keep a profit-and-loss account with God, and reimburse him for denial and treachery with a little extra piety.

It is this which Thomas Hood set forth — it is hardly a caricature — in the well-known lines: —

“Rogue that I am, I cheat, I lie, I steal;
But who can say I am not pious?”

¹ Dr. Chalmers.

If I am reminded that this is no new thing, as even this quotation shows, I admit it, of course. But it must be insisted, (*a*) that in a period of large declension the tendencies that way are increased; (*b*) and that outward religious activity makes the self-deception easier; (*c*) and that the failure of discipline in the churches leaves man more than ever at the mercy of his own deceitful heart. Just as many a soldier in the late war persuaded himself that dying in the ranks would insure his salvation, many a man believes his sins against law, human and divine, will all be condoned at the final account by his devotions.

Thus, to all other relaxing influences upon men's integrity, this is added, — that men should feel they are not obliged to do just right toward man, if only they are "religious."

Now, it is quite true that God has provided a way of escape for those who have sinned, laying their guilt upon his dear Son; but he has done it precisely and expressly to save them *from their sins*. It is to make a holy world, he has intervened; not a foul pit, where corruption is perfumed with incense, and gangrene is lacquered with pretence.

Such appear to have been certain Assyrian tombs, where a thin gold mask is found to have been laid upon the face of the dead. Sennacherib would have taken no glory, reigning over such a realm. And shall God?

Another sore and perilous evil, apparently contrasted with the last, yet not really foreign to it, is the intermingling and confusion of worldly and spiritual interests and practices, even to the secularizing of churches and worship.

We have seen already that the world has borrowed, and learned to use, much of that phraseology which other years considered sacred, and which belongs of right to the children of God. It is an ill reprisal we make when we secularize holy things, — speaking in the speech of Ashdod, — bringing the ivory and peacocks and apes of Ophir into the Holy City. But where shall one begin the specifications involved in this charge?

There are sermons on literary, social, and political topics. There are sermons, professedly religious in subject, rendered absolutely irreligious by their tone, their jests, their stagey claptrap.

There are church-fairs, and Sunday-school fairs, positively pervaded by the very spirit of the lottery, where all the traffic is in “chances.” There are tea-parties, receptions, and theatrical entertainments given in the churches. There are “real-estate churches,” and pious speculations, and manœuvres and wire-pullings in ecclesiastical bodies. Against the operas constructed on sacred subjects, may be placed the churches where men laugh aloud, and applaud, as in theatres.

And must we not place in the list of dangerous evils the hymns for general use that profess too

much? particularly as sung in Sunday schools. If, indeed, we could single out the children whom the Lord has blessed, who tenderly love their Saviour, who simply and truly trust in him, and let them sing their joyful profession of faith and love, the good taste and wisdom of much of it might still be questioned, but at least there need be nothing hollow or insincere. But now the most emphatic, the most rapturous avowals of affection, confidence, and joy in Christ, are taught them *en masse*. They are taught to sing what is palpably untrue, and to plume themselves upon the doing it spiritedly and well. But what shall be said of the hymns that utter an intense, passionate longing to die and go to heaven? Can any thing be more certain than that — except in the rarest instances — such desires (where they really exist in the minds of the children, or grown persons either, not broken by afflictions or years) are altogether morbid? or that to sing them without feeling them is (more or less guiltily) to make a false profession?

The word of life continually guards us against “guile.” It makes man confess, “The heart is deceitful above all things.” It represents God as abhorring, almost above all other sins, the sin of false pretences. And it cannot be a light thing to embed in the child-heart, as his earliest, dearest style of worship, — as that which the Church inculcates, and saints pray to have blessed, — the offering God idle words.

This suggestion is very reluctantly made. I hasten to acknowledge the exceeding difficulty of providing our Sunday schools with suitable and unobjectionable music. But it is absolutely necessary to point out that the very knot of the difficulty lies in this matter's having become *a trade*. Rival publishers crowd against each other with their books of sensational title and sentimental doggerel, the so-called "music" of each new one more utterly machine-made than the last. They wear out our words of passion: they rack metaphor, that our children may sing twaddle.

This is one of the ways in which the varnish of sentiment is spread glistening over the most incongruous materials, the faults of the true surface and the defect of the actual substance cheaply hidden *and kept unchanged*. There is no more certain prescription for impoverishing our nature, and cutting ourselves off from supplies of grace, than thus — as the prophet Hosea has it — thus "feeding on wind."

But I draw rein. One must stop short of saying all on so inexhaustible a theme; and it may as well be at this point. We have seen reason enough why the light burns dim, — reason to some extent in the surroundings; reason more and sadder far in the condition of the light-holder, the Church of the age.

We come now, in the third part, to inquire for a remedy.

PART III.

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE SHALL WE SEEK A REMEDY?

TO a very great degree, the religious aspect of our country resembles the agricultural aspect of any region where tillage has been shallow, wasteful, ignorant. In such a case the mere surface-soil is exhausted; the earth beneath is baked almost as hard as stone; the rains, unrestrained by the farmers' precautions, tear deep channels between the hills, and wash them away; weeds flourish, while crops fail; the wood-growth is not by any means the old forest restored, but a scanty, starveling, bastard substitute; his land is the old farmer's reproach, and the young farmer's despair.

If, now, one should treat the fields with a fertilizer which stimulated the plant without really enriching the soil, the result must manifestly be temporary improvement, and then a worse condition than ever.

And this is precisely what we have to guard against, in attempting to better the spiritual condition of the country. The clever, the vivacious, the not too accurate and conscientious, the impa-

tiently zealous, are eager to rectify the world. Peter rushes in where John almost fears to tread. We see the baneful effects of their interference, in the course and results of many religious revivals, or what pass for them. Surface-growth is stimulated; the rock beneath the surface is not crumbled; the plants of grace are not fed and tilled; and the second exhaustion is far, far worse than the first.

Realizing these truths, the challenge of the prophets to Israel is just what we might expect. There, also, there had been a great declension. There also, had been many superficial movements of repentance. There, also, were there many to heal the hurt of the people slightly. Morals were relaxed, sincerity declined, forms over-valued, the spirit of true worship forgotten and dispensed with. False prophets and unfaithful priests dishonored the sanctuary, and misled the nation. Misery grew. The light of the nation's best life dimmed and darkened, and threatened to go out.

What, now, in circumstances resembling, but in truth much worse than, our own, — what did Israel's inspired teachers prescribe?

In words as simple as profoundly significant, they command the nation thus: "Break up your fallow ground!"¹ They knew — as a Wiser than they afterward said — that sowing among thorns would bring no fruit to perfection. And they

¹ Jer. iv. 3; Hos. x. 12, — the same words by two prophets.

knew that *deep work is the remedy* for woes and sins such as theirs.

Deliverance from this present evil age and its especial perils is to be sought by praying and working for AN AGE OF STRONG CONVICTIONS. I select this word, conviction, because it is so comprehensive, including, as it does, judgments of the mind, and principles of the heart.

And these things, so easily separated in speech, are inseparable in any genuine spiritual life. It is only for the sake of sharply defined ideas that they are here, and for the moment, treated of apart.

Strong intellectual convictions contain three elements: they are beliefs, positive, rooted, and practical.

Most of the arguments which have been given to the world in behalf of the gospel were prepared and are shaped as answers to certain assaults. They show us why we should not be moved from our hope by this and the other reasoning, more or less subtle or gross, respectful or profane; but, when they have repelled the assault, they are done. They assume the truth of the Scriptures *provided* these particular blows can be parried.

Now, that is a perfectly legitimate course to take. The assumption made is entirely fair, among those who already receive the Bible as *probably true*. But the impression made, in reading hundreds of

pages, all crowded with proofs that this, that, or the other assault does not overthrow Christianity, is apt to be one of dissatisfaction. We have been "marking time" instead of marching. Have we nothing to say, as of ourselves? Have we not truths to prove? And is not that more fruitful work than exposing fallacies and confuting sophistries? And, indeed, after a long bout of purely negative debate, many a hearer or reader is left ready to ask, "What, then, do we actually believe? What facts, what truths, do we hold as our own, which give to these strictures and controversies all their value? In the interest of the discussion, I have begun to lose sight of that truth, for whose sake we entered upon the discussion."¹

And how completely is the whole scene changed, when we lay down our own positions, and establish their strength by proofs! It is not enough—it is almost nothing—that a man reject deism, and abhor atheism, and brush pantheism aside; that he separates himself from Unitarians, Swedenborgians, or any other and all unsound bodies. Does he "know whom he believes"? Does he know what he believes? Is his scheme of religious truth clear to his own mind? Can he lay his hand upon one after another of the positive affirmations of Scripture, and claim it as his own? Believing, and not disbelieving, are very different things.

¹ See this subject admirably treated in Isaac Taylor's *Restoration of Belief*.

For reasons assigned, I am strongly convinced that there is a great deal of that sort of orthodoxy in the Church, which consists in *not denying* what the creed asserts. In an age of powerful religious conviction, that feature would almost disappear.

But it is not enough that our belief be thus affirmative: it must be sure and steadfast, — a robust soul, grasping with cordial confidence what God has given it to believe. *Rooted convictions*, well weighed, well warranted, unalterable knowledge of things good and true, — rooted convictions are a priceless treasure. They ask no caviller's leave to be; no glozing sophistry disturbs their intelligent assurance. They are the formulas by which we solve life's problems, the clews that extricate us from perplexities and entanglements, the indestructible riches which remain to us when all of which we can be despoiled has been taken away.

One thing more is essential, — that our belief be no mere theory, but the solid substance of our life. Nothing less than this deserves to be called a conviction at all. How much a man finally believes as a basis for all his work, inclusive of that noblest work we call suffering, — so much and no more is he.

And now we pass in a word from the merely intellectual convictions to those which are moral, when I add: They must centre upon a Person grand enough and good enough to bear the whole

weight of man's devotion, even to martyrdom. This meets the craving of the immortal soul,— this, and this alone,— the soul which cries for

“Something to feel before the heart grows hard;
Something to think with which no doubting strives;
Something to love incarnate, which yet lives
All undefiled by thought or touch or word.”¹

Fix the mind on any name of one who has done a great thing, or struck an effective blow at a great abuse, or endured successfully the grind of the whole world's opposition, and you find him a man possessed of final convictions. From Palissy the potter to Francis Xavier, the rule is absolute. Precisely thus is it of the ages. The age that needs no monument, because its work is its monument, is always the age whose convictions were monumental.

I should need to ask pardon of my readers if I argued this point as though it needed to be proved. But there is often another reason for the argumentative statement of a truth, viz., that the mind may be constrained to set it out apart from every other notion, and convert mere vague acquaintance with it into possession.

¹ Algernon Sydney Logan.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF OUR RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS.

ERROR itself is the handmaid of Providence. It is set to render two great services to truth, both relevant to the matter in hand. One is to compel clear definitions, and test all offered proofs: this is the intellectual service. The other is to provoke our languid interest into a passionate love of that truth, whichever it may be, which error threatens: this is the moral service.

And Christianity, as the highest form of truth, has always stood related in this way — indebted without thanks due — to its several antagonists, Pagan philosophy, infidelity, heresy. Persecution and controversy wrought her gristle into bone. Mistake, growing up into false doctrine, compelled deep and accurate thinking. And the sight, even the thought, of some great healing truth repelled, and seeming about to vanish again from the people who held it in too light esteem, has set the heart of the Pauls, the Augustines, the Calvins, Luthers, Wesleys, beating such throbs of

love and grief, kindling such fires of zeal, as man will be the better of forever.

Speaking of the reign of Alexander Severus, a Christian philosopher has said, "Everywhere — the exceptions are few — throughout the regions which the Mediterranean divides, in cities and in fields, we meet companies of men, even multitudes, who have quite thrown off the listlessness of scepticism, — men from whose countenances the sullenness of atheism has been dispelled, and who speak to us in the decisive tones that spring from an accepted and undoubted belief. Instead of those inarticulate babblings, as from the frivolous million, the ear catches now the intelligible utterances of men who say they have come into the possession of certainty and of hope. Multitudes of men, of all the races that were then subject to the Roman sway, and of some other races probably, had passed from a condition of frivolous indifference, or of sensual obtuseness, or of sullen hopelessness, and had come, rightfully or not, into the possession of a bright and well-defined religious belief. The 'yea' which Christianity has uttered takes a thorough hold of men's inmost souls as well as of their reason."¹

So far had their enemies brought them; grace transmuting the mischief they would have done into a vast and blessed progression.

That work has gone on still. We have now to

¹ Sentences taken from *Restoration of Belief*, pp. 44-46.

renew the statement of Christian belief, the very same belief now as then, but modified in statement by the progress of the campaign. It is the very same army: it has changed front a little, to face the enemy.

Of these few great ideas which together are the pivot on which turns man's spiritual history, perhaps the last (as yet) to be perfected has been the idea of moral government, the government by authority. It is, of course, perfectly revealed as a fact, and in its elementary principles, in the Bible. It has been profoundly discoursed by sundry divines. But it is to neither of these that I refer, rather to the real possession of it by the cultivated mind of the day.

MORAL GOVERNMENT BY A REDEEMER: that is the subject-matter of that strong conviction of which I have spoken, whose uprising into the first place in men's hearts is to be to this needy age as life from the dead. A very few words will suffice, by way of explication.

Moral government, pure and simple, is government by law; that law obeyed because of the authority of Him who gave it. That government as administered by God appears always to have contemplated probation, to end in justification, and establishment in righteousness and peace. Disobedience was naturally and necessarily fatal.

Redemption is the arrest of the old processes, and the substitution of new ones *for the very same*

object,—government by authority and according to law.

Salvation is not impunity. Justification is more than forgiveness, and, in fact, inseparable from regeneration. The subject of it is bound—but by new ties—to the old, perfect law of God, the law of love. That law, therefore, is not to be thought of as re-instated, as though it had fallen from its ancient seat of power, but magnified—glorified—by the new relation into which it is brought to man. Man's fall was an opportunity, and it was divinely used.

The fierce clangor of the blast of Sinai was charmed and tempered and toned into the awful sweetness of a Saviour's voice. If there be less severity in it, there is equal dignity; and it hath now, as never before, *a constraining power*. Duty itself, like the regenerated soul, is translated out of the darkness of a condemning law, into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

This is the point which we have been steadily approaching. That conviction, which, if deeply enough inwrought and earnestly enough believed, will prove the life-spring of the coming age, is a conviction of the double,—no, not double, for that implies partition,—the twofold work of Christ. Even that is not just right: I mean Christ in his twofold work.

He who sees him only as a sacrifice for sin sees in salvation only impunity. He who hears only the

wisdom of his gracious words sees in salvation only instruction. He who sees in him only a martyr takes his crown clear away, and leaves the law all its terrors, and leaves a perishing world no arm to save.

But he who discovers his opportunity in the offer of pardon ; who feels a thousand soft, strong, dear bonds binding him to his Master, because that Master is also his Redeemer ; to whom — for Christ's sake — “ the word *duty* is become beautiful ; ” whose knowledge of Christ by faith and by experience is solid enough to rank with his intuitions ; who returns the King's kind look with a deep devotion ; who, by dint of this personal and experimental knowledge, is affected with pity and not at all with alarm when men cavil or scoff ; in fine, he whose spiritual life is constantly enriched, and his heart dilated with larger and purer affections all round, by commerce with this divine fact, — A REDEEMER ADMINISTERING A LAW, — he is a type of the manhood we stand in need of. He is a man of strong religious convictions, and his conviction regards the truth.

It is not that he knows what other men are ignorant of. It is not that a saving application of the truth has been made to him alone. But he holds his knowledge by a different tenure, and with far other grasp, than other men ; and he is attaining to the greater salvation, — greater and loftier than pardon and peace, — a truly loyal soul.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW DOES THIS CONVICTION COMPORT ITSELF?

THIS question supplies the crucial test of the principles I have laid down. It asks, What will be the attitude, and what the work and life, of the man on whom this conviction lays hold? and what would be the effect on a community, on the English-speaking race let us say, of its rise, like a *set* of the sea, on all their coasts? And it proposes to measure the curative power of this offered remedy by the answers.

If, now, we keep in our minds, that the object of this conviction is a Person, so that it is as much our right (by supposition) to speak of "him" as of "it," the answer is easily outlined, however it may surpass human power to render it in full.

It is one of the qualities of a strong conviction, strongly to assert itself as central. Just because it is fixed, all movable things which are any way attached to it will revolve about it. Because it cannot be shaken, or moulded, or cut and fitted, all more practicable things will conform to it.

So, when HE comes to be not merely thought

of, or looked at, or weighed and considered, but possessed, — or, rather, to take possession, — loyalty to him becomes the pivot of the soul. This will not be the case while his outlines are dim to us, or our views concerning him are opinions, open to review and modification. It is when we *know* Him whom we have believed, — that is to say, when our mental relation toward him is that which we hold toward a fact and not a notion, — it is then that Jesus Christ takes on his proper stature, and towers in his proper kingliness over every other claimant of the soul. Other men may love, but this man's love will be devotion. Others may think, but he knows. Others may gravitate to obedience, but he is clamped to it. The sun that is always above his horizon, the light that cannot be put out, the object which triumphantly holds his vision and holds his heart, is Christ.

Again, it is a constant tendency of a strong conviction to reduce the area and destroy the power of doubt. The very fact that one foot is on firm ground sets the other foot to feeling about for ground equally firm. Such a mind grows impatient of fluttering, hovering, swinging to and fro. It settles what can be settled; eminently, it settles so much as can be made sure by a reference to this, which it knows assuredly; and it remits from view, as equally unsatisfactory and unimportant, whatever cannot be relieved from doubt. What a cheerful courage rings out in Luther's favorite phrase, "This is certainly true!"

It is in vital contrast with that airy recklessness which tosses all its notions and conjectures gayly to and fro, not particularly concerned whether ay or no be the final verdict. Of all the states of man, there is hardly any one so pitiful, so meagre, so spiritless and idle, so shallow in every thing but its egotism, as the levity which utters alike its yea and its nay with an interrogation-mark; which hates no error, as it is devoted to no truth; which is only amused when the most sacred things are drawn into question, or when the effort is made that they be henceforth out of question.

Not so he who has grasped his Saviour-Master with the hand of deep conviction. He finds a thousand issues closed, now that that fact is sure. That God is a person, holy and true, and (most profound of wonders) a God of *covenants*,—a notion absolutely unique, and as precious as unique; that sin can be forgiven, but only through a plan of justification and vicarious atonement; that his Redeemer is God-man; that the Holy Spirit is a living being, who loves and hears, and keeps truth forever,—these, and truths like these, cluster about his FACT, as planets about the sun, and are sure because they revolve around him. But you cannot deeply interest such a man in the “separate state” of the dead, or the typical character of Samson, or the metaphysical account of inspiration, or any such subordinate and indeterminate question. The contrast between the solid

and the shadowy disenchantments him of them all. It is the man who knows nothing finally and with all his mind, for whom there is a haze over all doctrine alike, it is he who dallies with whatever takes his fancy at the moment, and is profoundly interested in none.

It is naturally a sort of instinct with a strong conviction, to make its central truth a standard of value. It asks, on the presentation to the mind of any matter, "How does it bear on this? Does it speak according to this word? If not, there is no light in it."

One of Franklin's counsels to young men is, Settle a question by thorough examination, and then shelve it. It is of course conceivable, that so strong evidence might arise as to compel an honest man to take it down, and revise his judgment; but, until so compelled, weigh the shifting opinions of the day by these settled principles. One may apply here the words of Edmund Burke, though they were spoken in a somewhat different connection: "I must beg leave to hint to you that we may suffer great detriment by being open to every talker. It is not to be imagined how much of service is lost from spirits full of activity and full of energy, who are pressing, who are rushing forward, to great and capital objects, when you oblige them to be continually looking back."

The state of mental health and wholesome energy is that in which all notions, importunate candi-

dates for our favor, are estimated in terms of our central truth. "What think ye of Christ?" is our measure for men. "How bear ye on Christ?" is our measure for notions and theories of every size and sort, our answer to temptations, our test of plans and proposals for his work or worship. Thus Paul glories in counting all things but dross, that he may win Christ. For him, "it is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment: he that judgeth me is the Lord." His battle-chant runs, "Laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset; looking unto Jesus." And his pæan is, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown which the Lord will give me at that day."

It is involved in this, that a Christian's strong conviction becomes the guide of his life. What a heroic word is that of Paul's, "This one thing I do"! That a life like his, so various and eventful, so busy and rich, so beset by enmities, addressed to so many interests, pursued through so many years, in distant lands, amid diverse people, can be condensed into a single formula, and expressed in the "doing of one thing," fills it with an indescribable grandeur. No purchasable convenience he! no shuttlecock of fortune, or, worse still, of temper! steadfast, faithful, loyal, valiant, the simplicity of his purpose is the sublimity of his life.

Another happy effect of strong conviction is its

enriching and deepening of emotions, and its converting them into affections.

In the genealogy of feeling, emotion stands parent of these two,—sentiment and affection. In the one, feeling is played upon by fancy, as we have seen: in the other, it grows into a principle. When an intellectual conviction passes over into the heart, and becomes a moral conviction (see Rom. x. 10: “with the *heart* man believeth unto *righteousness*”); when it draws to itself the desires, tendernesses, hopes, longings,—in a word, the love that is in him,—then, clearly, his belief is a fountain of living water within him, a spring of action,—more, a spring of being.

Sentiment is a summer shower, moistening the uppermost layer of the soul, refreshing verdure for an hour or two, strewing its transient jewelry upon the grass and the leaves. Affection is the brimming, over-running well, a perennial gift to the earth about it; *making* the verdure which the other adorns, but seeking the roots of the palm-tree and the oak as well; making the ground a garden, that would otherwise have been a desert; making the life a joy, which but for it would have been a bondage.

It draws its emotions now from that which it knows, namely, Jesus Christ, this Redeemer, who pays the homage of a death to the law.

In no other light but this will this soul of strong belief look at any thing. Sin is “against

Thee, thee only." Duty is serving the living God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hell is his fixed displeasure. Heaven is his dear society. The law is his kind and righteous will. The crosses of life are his relics. The afflictions of life are his tenderest tokens of love. Prayer is communing with him. Believers are *our* brethren, because they are *his*. Sinners are most of all to be pitied for this, that they will be denied his love forever. Doing good is laying a tribute, a poor little thing, but the best we have, at his dear wounded feet.

Science tells us that the far-darting sun, shining steadily upon the earth as it spins around him, describes an endless spiral there, a vast magnetic coil; that this is his vitalizing power. Heat, electricity, and whatever other forces they involve or develop, spring into being, and play their fruitful parts, and uphold all life and beauty and strength and work in all the world, out of the sun, and by virtue of this relation.

What a noble parable is here! For this is nothing else but CHRIST, "the light or sun of the world," holding his royal place, and pouring his rays upon and about the soul that makes HIM its centre, evoking its inmost life, waking its rich affections, setting the whole man to thrill and throb with blessed energies, — energies which sum themselves up in this one word, "love."

And now it cannot but be added that strength

is thus brought to the whole nature, and not only to the affections. The rise of a great conviction in the heart is the six days of creation in one. It sheds light in the misty darkness; it separates opinion and knowledge, as the weltering waters from the firm dry land; it puts the clouds in their place, and the strong hills in their place. Christ is the sun, and all other good, like the moon, borrows a little of his light; and the quickened nature teems with a thousand noble products, which adorn and enrich the man, and glorify his new Creator.

CHAPTER XV.

SUBJECT CONTINUED. — HOW WILL THIS CONVICTION COMPORT ITSELF IN A NATION?

EXPOSITORS of the Book of Revelation are agreed, I believe, that the sea is the prophetic symbol of the people. And there is an admirable fitness in the figure. For the ocean is an absolute unit, one might almost say, without parts or members, no more to be divided than to be controlled by man; an unit, yet utterly intractable by any power that man can apply, by any power that does not apply itself to the mass, like the lunar attraction; an intractable unit, yet how mobile, how restless, how incessant! Its swells heave, its billows beat, its tides flow, in grand conformity with laws which we only partially understand. And all these are features of nation-life, as of the ocean.

But now the operation of a great idea, revealed or only re-revealed to the convictions of a people, — that is like the flow of an oceanic current, which parts the more passive waters with a resistless momentum; which holds on its steady way irrespective of the winds; which spreads as it

flows, warms the air, tints the sea, displaces and sets in motion the masses on which it may have impinged, and, in its long circuit, works out the renovation of the whole element.

It is the purpose of this chapter to suggest the results which would ensue if the belief of our countrymen in Christ were to become a living conviction. That he is widely and truly believed in; that he is largely and sincerely served; that every good thing owes nearly all its goodness, and every noble passion its best nobility, to the thought and love of Christ, — this it is my joy and my duty to maintain. But I am very sure no one will insist that the American Church, or any one of its several divisions, holds him in its heart or in its knowledge as it ought or as it might. * One feels as though there were some irreverence in the comparison; and yet I see not how it can be wrong to say, simply by way of illustration, we surely might love him as the French army is said to have loved Napoleon, or the French people to have loved military glory, or the Americans of 1776 to have loved independence and freedom.

Suppose we did. Suppose he lived in our hearts, — the heart of the whole Christian mass, — as once in Paul's, — ay, or in the hearts of many sainted ones of later days: what then?

Why then, how small and futile would the whole bulk of infidelity appear! The unity of certain knowledge would show itself as a unity

of life. Mutual trust and honor would take the vacant place wherever jealousy and suspicion lately abode. Reverence, that has ebbed so low, would pour its melodious waters upon every shore. The Christian conscience now lies prone, confounded with public opinion: then it would rise and stand erect, and utter its imperial voice for God's law and glory, and men would hear, and sin would be ashamed.

How the old battle-cry, "For Christ's crown and covenant!" would ring out! not in enmity to man or men, only to their misery, pollution, and danger. And the mighty ranks would be full, and the trumpet of the gospel would search the blood with its sweetness. *Every* good word and work would prosper, — *every one*, — if only a profound conviction of what the Lord Jesus Christ is, and has done and suffered, and now desires, could but possess the soul of his people.

Then, what brotherly love would grow out of this divine love! The hearts of all Christ's people "being knit together," as Paul prayed; loving, as Peter bids, "with a pure heart, fervently," — what power there would be in prayer, what majesty in the calm strength of the Church, what fruits of labor, and what joy in those fruits!

Then learning would be sanctified; and science, like the kings of Sheba and Seba, would offer princely gifts. Then should we waste no more power in collisions and denominational wrangles;

then would every man help his brother, and every man his neighbor, as in the building again of the walls of Jerusalem. How quickly would every fall of any Christian be retrieved, when all realized that righteousness and the law under the gospel *régime* are as truly honored by repentance as by punishment!

And then man's treasures would indeed be the Lord's. No more doling out, under pressure, of barely enough to protract the dying agony of a great cause. I protest it would be more merciful, totally to deny the call for money, and put the toiling, sorrowful officers of many great enterprises out of the pain of suspense and the sickness of hope deferred, than to toll them on from one disappointment and anxiety to another, by gifts neither large enough, nor of right spirit enough, to effect prosperity. A foreign mission slowly expiring: what a weight of woe and sin is revealed in those words! A ligature is on the aorta,—the ligature of Christian selfishness. Each month tightens it; each month dispenses less, and then less, and still less, of the indispensable means of living and working. The printing-press is paralyzed. The colporteur is dismissed. The worn-out missionary comes home to recruit his wasted forces, and is confidentially advised not to return. Appeals from the struggling mission-churches are answered with sad words, and the answers received with bitter tears or utter dismay. The

poor, neglected light! its oil all gone, it flickers a little in the horrible darkness of heathenism, and then goes out.

And yet there is money in the land for pictures, statuary, bric-à-brac. A scrap of yellow paper, with a great man's autograph upon it, is still worth scores or hundreds of dollars. There are tons of books given to already swollen libraries; there are educational refinements and extravagances supported by religious people,—all good things in their way: but there is bareness, miserable poverty, in the coffers of beneficence.

Strong conviction, pervading the land, would array all these objects in their proper order, and pay tribute to them in their several degrees. Light for darkness, food for hunger, a helping hand for the fallen, the gospel for the ignorant and the pagan,—these would take their places among the necessaries of life, and a thousand pretty and pleasant things would return to their place among the luxuries.

Then would God's word be glorified, and have its full and blessing sway. Human laws would be little more than the fringed hem upon the robe of law divine. The word of Christ revered, accepted, pondered, kept, would order the nation's life in peace and beauty.

Not that the golden age would come in all at once,—that all people would at once be good, and all the miserable be made suddenly happy. The

sun, arising upon a mist, does not dissipate it instantly; neither will the best truth at once transfigure man. But the virtue is in the sun, and the virtue is in the truth, infallibly to work their benignant effects.

CHAPTER XVI.

IS THIS CONCLUSION PRACTICAL?

ALL primary truths are theoretical. It is secondary truths, — truths of application, — that are strictly practical. But it is because they are secondaries of their respective primaries, that they can be practical.

That which I have endeavored to set forth in these pages — that the remedy for our waning light is a living conviction, a living sense of Christ, not merely redeeming from punishment, but setting up God's law in our hearts, — is indeed a primary truth. It is the theory of personal and national life.

But all action has its root in a theory, known or unknown; and all intelligent action has its root in a theory seized and applied.

The first law of motion is pure theory. It never yet was seen in action, unmodified. And yet mechanics, astronomy, and how many other of the sciences and arts, have that grand law at their base, and would wilt like an uprooted flower if it could be taken away!

The fallacy I have tried to strike is, that any thing this side of Christ secures good, or brings in a lasting blessing, except as *we* draw vital power into it from Christ. Not only all believers, but every good work and every heavenly blessing, is but a branch of the vine. "Severed from me," saith he to them all, "severed from me, ye can do nothing." Let them remain grafted in him, and every vessel is full of sap. Cut them loose from him, and they begin at once to wither and decay.

If one were to look for the root, in man's mind and heart, of the great reformation, he would find it to be so much of this truth as is contained in the doctrine of justification by faith,—stated, however, and received, not in its abstract, but in its personal form. Christ, in whom God is a loving and reclaiming Father; Christ gathering into his own bosom the guilt of all our sins; Christ substituting our neglected or misperformed works by his perfect obedience; Christ covering up the pitiful thing we are with his glorious righteousness,—clothing his bride in wrought gold (Ps. xlv. 13); Christ thus answering to divine justice for all its claims upon his people; Christ as our representative holding his place and ours in the eternal glory,—this, wrought by the Spirit in the hearts of the nations, revived and has rebuilt the world.

I surely need not tell again the story,—how it

struck off the shackles of superstition; created a soul beneath the ribs of infidel despair; brushed away the mob of saints that had been thrust into the mediatorship, and set Christ only on that throne; set the willing songs of praise, and the whispers of frank and confident prayer, a-flowing; renewed the stamp of freedom and immortality, so nearly effaced from the soul of man.

Neither can it be necessary to trace the benign results in other spheres, — how liberty of thought ensued, and the nobler uses of knowledge were conceived, and despotism began to sicken and pine, and the lights of home were brightened, and private purity and virtue seemed to grow possible. Then science was born, and philosophy was born again; and charity put on new robes, and laid down the mask of pietism she had worn so long; and the swaddling bands of guilds were burst, and the seals of humanity's winter dissolved, and the streams ran, and the singing of the birds came back, and twelve frozen centuries found their spring.

But I have long believed and felt, that while the truth I am about to name again was not denied in terms, or held back, or purposely disguised, yet it necessarily resulted from the nature of the times and the shape of the conflict in the sixteenth century, that it did not *so* impress itself on man, — so deeply, familiarly, practically, — as did the doctrine of free justification. That truth is: —

CHRIST THE FRIEND OF LAW AND THE GIVER
OF DUTY.

Justification is the means to an end. The impression exists in millions of hearts that it is itself an end. Consequently, pardon and peace are constantly sought *as the termination of the struggle to be a Christian*, and as bringing the effort-section of one's life to a close.

Observe, no minister intentionally preaches that falsehood. It is preached, but casually, unconsciously, — preached much more by what is *not* said than by what is said, and still more by that tone and manner of putting things which holds out conversion and safety as the goal of the race.¹

A most natural error on the part of any preacher whose chief anxiety is to rescue men from their horrible danger, and who specially appreciates Christ's glory in giving them bliss in the place of despair. But, oh, my friends! salvation is obedience, salvation is holiness; and there is no other. It is pitiful that men should set their hearts on mere safety, — should fail to realize how it is infinitely the greater blessing to be enabled and constrained to obey God than to live on in sin in ever so perfect an impunity.

If the practical quality of this truth be inquired

¹ Many years ago an ignorant negro, on being baptized, was heard to mutter, "Thar! Now I gwine res'!" ("I'm going to rest.") The work all done! And he is not a unique specimen by any means.

of, therefore, the answer is, it underlies a thousand practical truths.

Such, for example, as this: They that preach Christ must preach him as exalted to give not only remission of sins, but repentance. They must make it understood that repentance is not only, nor chiefly, sorrow for the past, but the beginning, and living, a new life, — even a life of steady, unflinching service. They must strike, as at a deadly heresy, at the notion that religion is escaping the curse of the law, and substitute for it religion, the loving and keeping of the law for Christ's sake. They must preach, more and more, the *kingdom* of heaven; for kingdom is government, and government is appointing, enforcing, and accepting — duty.

While they proclaim as loudly and gladly as ever that Christ has put an end to the law's being used for justification, let them blow as strong a blast when they proclaim him taking up the law into himself, and claiming a perfect allegiance unto himself. "Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am."

In their pastoral labors, let them diligently put aside those debates about *feelings*, of which the self-petting, self-pitying egotizers in the Church are so idly fond, and press *work and duty* on every conscience, — a spotless example, an uncompromising spirituality, a faithfulness, truth, and uprightness in things small and great. "Happiness,"

it hath been both wittily and beautifully said (by Coleridge I think), — “happiness is like one’s shadow: if we try to draw nearer to it, it flies from us; but, if we go on our way, it will never leave us.”

But the warning cannot be too earnestly repeated: *If they preach mere duties, they will fail.* It is CHRIST that must be preached; only obedience upon salvation must be preached, instead of the old heresy of salvation upon obedience, or the heresy of to-day, — salvation without reference to obedience, past, present, or to come.

Is there not a brilliant array of authors, the most widely read and influential of authors, — at their head such names as Thackeray and Dickens, — who continually set up virtue as the rival of religion, and the nobler competitor of the two? And is there any other such door to a refined deism as that?

And knowing, as we do most certainly know, that virtue owes its life among men to its *inoscultation* with religion, and draws its arterial supply thus at second-hand from the heart of Christ, what can be more practical than insistence upon man’s serving him in all things, by whom he is to be completely saved?

Whence, else, shall every-day life draw its dignity, its worthiness to be the life of an immortal, and its joy, its fitness to light up the soul of an immortal, but from this doing all for Christ? And

how can we do all for Christ, unless he impresses himself upon the soul so deeply, and pervades it with so supreme a presence, as to be inseparably associated with all its interests, hopes, fears, deeds, — the least as much as the greatest?

Am I asked, How can this be done? I answer, There is only one way, and that is *doing* it. Praying, vowing, examining one's self, repenting and beginning again, watching, fighting one's inward foes, bearing the cross, receiving sorrows meekly, studying the word, in short, doing all things with this in view, and doing all by faith, — this is doing it.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUMMING UP.

WE have only now rapidly to review the ground we have traversed, to make sure of its lessons, and my message will have been delivered.

It appears that two things have happened, with reference to the waning of the light of Christ's Church in the world, — an *apparent* diminution of its brightness, of which its enemies have made too much; and a *real* diminution, of which we may easily make too little, — which is, in fact, of vast importance, because it involves the sin and the declension of the Lord's people, dishonoring his name, grieving his Spirit, provoking his displeasure, stumbling his feeble ones, and keeping the saving power of his gospel from the hearts of sinners.

The facts on which this grave accusation is founded are such as these; viz., —

The general intelligence of Christians is slight, but vain; poor, but counting itself rich, because it is rich in words and undigested information. They

are a people of itching ears: they run to and fro among the notions and sophisms of the day, but knowledge is not thereby increased.

Standard truths have lost much of their hold, either as tests of things new, or as settling the moral judgments of the community, and giving force to the public conscience.

Reverence is decayed: the moral power of discipline is almost entirely gone.

The stream of Christian emotion is shallowing; and, as it shallows, it loses its truer and nobler strain, and runs into sentiment and cant.

Christian labor, while abounding as never before, shows symptoms of running out to routine, losing its original spirit, and retaining the barren forms of once fruitful work.

And, while thus the general vitality is weakening, the effect of scientific infidelity is wide and large in tarnishing men's joys, multiplying their doubts, clogging their prayers, unsettling their confidence, planting thorns in their comfort,—breeding an uneasy, nervous debility, as by a malarious fog.

So it comes about, that — as in other periods of religious declension — there is a large divorce of morals and religion; one part of the community trying to make up for their lack of honesty and moral worth by their windy piety, and another part flattering themselves that doing their duty to man will supersede the painful necessity of doing any thing for God.

And again it follows, that, while some men are trying to *pietize* a worldly life, others are trying to make religion more attractive by more completely secularizing it. And, as the sense of absolute truthfulness as a necessary of life is lost, our hymns, like our prayers, come to abound in false professions; till one's soul is sick, hearing little children clamorously avowing their passionate love of a God they hardly care for, and their longing for death which they ought to dread, their weariness of the life they ought to love, their yearning for a heaven which has no attractions for them. There are, of course, multitudes with whom these professions are true; but they are made by the masses of unconverted children and very defectively sanctified Christians, with whom they are false.

If these allegations are true, or if they in any considerable degree approximate truth, then it is certain that the vitality of the Church is declining, her vows are losing their sacredness, her doctrines are less loyally loved and defended, her work more slightly done, her sincerity alloyed, and her purity tarnished, *by her own children*. None can so wrong her but they.

Now, as we are born again by God's word which liveth and abideth forever, as we are sanctified by his word which is truth, it is evident that the root of our disease is *a weakened hold of vital truth*; and the remedy must be a recovery of strong con-

victions to mind, heart, and life. And that which these convictions must regard is, just as clearly, that fact which makes the truth vital; i.e., Christ in his place and work.

And I have indicated reasons for believing that the *special* defect in our present convictions regards Christ's relations to law and duty, and that if, through the grace of the Spirit, he should become a living presence with his people in this regard, the age of power and glory would immediately be born.

No abated gospel, no half-way proclamations of salvation and holiness, no learned or politic compromises with unbelief or disbelief, will serve our turn. Neither will the individual believer of the new age dally with doubts or duties. It will be his glory to venture all on the Lord he loves. They are found now, these brave ones, few but bright, dotting the dim ocean with points of light, like the northern seas. What we want is the broad splendor of an universal sense of Christ our King.

“What is it that may, and that *will*, hold its ground against the ever-increasing momentum of our modern philosophy? It is that CHRISTIANITY, whole and entire, which, filling as it did the mind and heart of the early Church, carried it so well through its day of trial.”

“Can any one persuade himself that this war [of church and heathendom] could have been

waged on the strength of any of those abated notions of Christianity which we are now required to accept instead of itself? We may be sure that it *could* not have been so, and we know it was not so. The faith of the martyr church was undoubting in its quality, and ample in its compass."

"The religious convictions of many around us may have been loosened or impaired, yet not so injured as that the renovation of them would not be joyfully welcomed, even as a man exults in the restoration of sight or hearing. Multitudes are there on all sides, to whom, although they have gone out of the way, a return . . . would involve no strange or incongruous revolution of mind, but only a repentant acquiescence in principles too long forgotten or misunderstood. . . . Churches are filled with those to whom the first wakening sounds of another Whitefield's voice would be hailed as bringing 'glad tidings of great joy.'"

"But while, in this manner, a new proclamation of the gospel acts upon the multitude as a process of discrimination, it finds always a small number whom it beckons forward to follow gladly, rather than challenges to choose their part; and these are they who long have been looking for, and expecting, this visitation which now makes them glad."

"No age has been so dark, no time so corrupt in doctrine or in manners, as not to have sent forward from earth a tide, albeit a slackened tide, of

souls ransomed from the ills of earth; but at moments, and as with a sudden swell, it is as if the portals of paradise were thrown wide open, and as if the plains of that region were to be made glad with the arrival of hosts of spirits, safe housed."

These sentences are culled from the writings of a Christian philosopher to whom this little work is greatly indebted, but not nearly so much as its author is, — the late Isaac Taylor.

"THEREFORE LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW ASSUREDLY THAT GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME JESUS BOTH LORD AND CHRIST."

The soul of saintly heroism is in those words. Is it not He that said, "Follow me"? To be commanded, to be possessed, by Christ Jesus, — that is victory and blessing here, blessing and glory hereafter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT THEN?

THE power of his knowledge over what man does, and over what he is, being his final distinction as a rational creature, the question at once arises, upon the conclusion of an argument such as we have been pursuing, What then? What rule of action and being results from the truth now established?

Or state it thus: Since man as thinking, and man as willing, is the very same man, he must be bound to translate into terms of the heart those principles which he has demonstrated in terms of the intellect. In what word, then, shall we set forth the principle of action which we have been pondering as a conviction? In what word shall this law of the believer's life become incarnate?

That word is CONSECRATION. The correspondence is absolute between the living sense of *Christ, given us as our Lord and King*, and the cordial and complete dedication of our whole manhood to him in "an enlightened obedience." ¹

¹ Bishop Butler.

Ah, "he is worthy for whom we should do this!" His divine wisdom saw, with perfect intuition, that the secret of man's moral ruin was that God's law had become something external to him. It pressed upon him, from the moment of his fall, *from without*. It overlaid his whole being with injunctions which he could no longer obey. The law could not retreat, because it was a right law. Man could not receive it, because he was fallen man. Such as the pressure of the air would be upon his body if there were no air within his frame; such the crush of the law upon his soul if it were only imposed, and not inwrought.

The law unalterable, and man depraved! There lay the profounder problem of salvation, — what we may call the vital, as distinguished from the judicial, problem. How shall man be so changed as that the immutable law shall become to him "the perfect law of liberty"?

Clearly, it must be by its re-introduction *into* him *as a vital principle*. Let me enlarge upon this a moment: there is nothing really abstruse in it.

As I observe Nature, and her infinitely varied features, I find countless forces in action; all acting according to some determinable method, and acting by the same method upon all material bodies without regard to any thing special in their constitution. For example, I find the force which we call gravitation making no distinction at all, as to the quality of its action, between a thread of

gossamer and a planet or a sun. The laws of motion, the laws of momentum, the laws of impact, — all such laws take effect indiscriminately; and they may be said, accurately enough for my present purpose, to act from *without*, upon their objects. These may be called mechanical laws.

But, without reference to all those objects which are said to be alive, I find another set of facts co-existing with these. They have forces of their own, which we call vital forces; and those forces have their regular modes of action, which we call laws of life, or vital laws. They together make the plant or animal what it is; and, if they are not interfered with, we may know exactly what they will do. *Leave them free*, and they will take such a form, or live out such a term, or attain this or that result.

Just in front of me, as I write, grows a flowering vine. Obeying the laws of its life, it clings to or clambers upon such supports as are within its reach: it will wear its own distinctive tint of green, it will throw out its own particular sprays of bloom, or dispense its own peculiar fragrance upon the air. And likewise the thrush and the swallow, careering so triumphantly about, have their own interior principles of being, which are the laws of thrush-life and swallow-life, from which they will only depart under duress; and, if the violence done those principles be in any degree radical, life itself is ended.

But if, by a process of natural development, such as from the egg to the birdling, from the caterpillar to the butterfly, new vital laws are introduced, — so that, e.g., that which carried its food within itself comes to nourish itself by food obtained from without; that which swam beneath the water disports itself in the air; that which crawled, now flies, — its liberty now is to live by the last code of vital laws. All else is bondage, disease, or death.

As we rise in the scale of being, this distinction between laws mechanical and laws vital becomes the more signal and profound. Everywhere the law of life is a law *impressed*, and not a law *imposed*.

It is just here that some of the great apostle's most startling phrases find an easy and instructive explanation. At first blush, it seems almost incredible that a loyal man should say of God's law that it "worketh wrath," that the effect of salvation is that we become "dead to the law," that we are "delivered from" it, that "without the law, sin was dead;" where his example (the tenth commandment) shows that he has no reference here to the ceremonial law; that "when the commandment came, sin revived," and he died; all this, though "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." The effect of a holy and good law imposed upon a corrupt heart could only be to define and to exasperate its wickedness.

Thus, again, we see that Paul had reference to the inner and vital law — the actual and operative principle of life — in what follows, in that seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans: “I find, then, a *law* (not an imposed law, not a moral, but a vital law), that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” This it is which he calls the law of sin,” yea, “the law of sin and death.” And he exclaims exultingly that the spirit’s law, viz., the *law of life in Christ Jesus*, hath made him free from that ruinous, that fatal, law of sin.¹

“He that believeth on the Son of God HATH LIFE.” What a pitiful evisceration, to make this mean only (or chiefly) “hath pardon”! He that believeth is grafted in, and draws sap from, the royal stem. He that believeth is a member of Christ’s body, yea, “of his flesh and of his bones.” He that believeth can say, “I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”

Neither is there any thing at all mystical about this, unless any one should hold it mystical to say that man has a moral and spiritual life. For, if one may say so much as that without mysticism, he may surely say that He who gave that life at first has now made it such, in some degree, as the Lord Jesus himself lives.

Here, then, is the solution of our problem. We hear the voice of Christ, proclaiming, “I will be in them a law of life; that which they hated to

¹ Rom. viii. 2.

do, they shall love; that which was a weariness shall be a delight; that to which they were dead shall witness their resurrection."

Every life above the plants has its instincts, its passions, and its powers. And the higher beings, having the more complex life, have their several ranges or strata of these. And nothing defines more accurately the moral status of any such being than the particular range of vital qualities which takes the precedence, and sways and subordinates the rest. I shall not waste a line upon the proof or illustration of truths so obvious and so familiar.

But they lead us right into the heart of that whereof I am to speak, — the glory and the freedom of consecration.

He who has been born again has received from the Holy Spirit, in his regeneration, the first gift, the germinal point, of the Christ-life. It is to develop and grow from that beginning. And *he is put in charge of the work*; not left to himself in the charge — God forbid! what is man, to endure such a trust alone? But he is put in charge, and made fellow-worker with God in the growth and perfecting of a saint. And the work to be done is the completing of that germinal life, and the subjecting to it of all the rest of his being. It is in this last respect, pre-eminently, that the significance of the word "consecration" appears.

Sin, with Christ in the shrine of the heart, is

above all things a profanation. It bursts in the holy doors. It pours into the sacred place a foul and greedy throng. It transacts its folly and shame in the holy presence. It is not without meaning that the same word in the Greek (1 Cor. iii. 17) should signify "defile" and "destroy." That which is defiled as a temple is to the same extent destroyed as a shrine. To consecrate, therefore, is to keep sacred, to reserve to a holy use. To consecrate one's self is to keep one's self sacred. And to keep one's self sacred involves the keeping down all in the soul which can rival the Christ-life, and keeping out all that would resist it.

And when this life, which is love,—truth-wrought love,—has obtained possession, what freedom and joy are there! Were ever words penned with a sweeter joy than these: "We love Him, because he first loved us"? The heart is cleansed of its old pollutions; but that is not all. The gangrened members rejoice in soundness and growing power; but that is not all. But to love with Christ, to be moved with his emotions, to rest in the lowly and unclouded assurance of his favor, to bear pains, and take up burdens, and abhor sins, and love saints, and live in praise, and sleep in peace, and spread his knowledge and honor, and be swept along with his victories, and see the starry heights and the unclosing gates of his glory, — THIS IS LIFE.

But will any reader say, "Ah, that is all very

well for God's favored ones: *they can* climb to those joys, and attain to such spiritual strength and prosperity; but we common Christians must be satisfied with low attainments and scanty joys, — we must just live along as well as we can, and not be ambitious to be saints." How pride does ape humility! *Too much self-satisfaction* is at the bottom of all that.

Now, I am not going to deny that God has his favored ones. Only a rose-water optimism ever tries to explain away the patent facts. There are *ranks* of being; there are angels and archangels. There are diversities of gifts in every kind and of every degree. But *why* he favors, he has not deigned to explain. We should be glad to leave it with him.

What concerns us at present, however, lies in a different direction. God's most worthy and glorious "favored one" is his Son Jesus Christ. It is in the covenant with Christ, that "he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." Inasmuch as he came to save his people from their sin, it is clear that he cannot be "satisfied" while they are in bondage to sin. The fundamental question, just here, is not whether God loves *you* so languidly as not to care how far you are from being a saint, — though that is a vast question too, with a very obvious answer to it, — but does God love *his Son* so languidly as not to care how much his people decline from him, slight his love, bring re-

proach on his name, wound his heart, and tarnish his victory? Is it not simply incredible that the reason of our continuing half-believers, dallying servants, skulking soldiers, *should be in God?*

It is greatly to be desired that all such weak and sinful speech should be banished from among believers, and that they who shrink from seeking a complete and thorough consecration should own that fact, to themselves at least. Acknowledge it: "I am too indolent, too worldly, too much afraid of my neighbors or my probable crosses if I went fully into his service. It might involve me in labors, sacrifices, and afflictions, beyond any thing I could consent to bear, if I undertook to be altogether Christ's." Shall I put your thought into still briefer phrase for you? You are neither willing to belong to Christ entirely, nor to trust Christ entirely: that is the substance and the sum of it all. Will you go and tell your Lord that?

It is certain that a life of consecration will involve a great deal of self-denial, simply because there are so many "selves" in every man that all cannot be indulged. Self-denial of some sort is inseparable from any life. *Which "self" will you deny?* that is the searching question. Will you check the spirit lusting against the flesh, or crucify the flesh lusting against the spirit?

To put one's noblest self in command, *for Christ*; to sweep out of the soul its self-service and self-worship; to be very jealous for the Lord

of hosts, lest any treacherous thing within us rob him of his rights; to see our Lord by faith, and live for him by love, and walk with him by grace; to be moulded by his power, and steeped in his peace, and lifted into his light, and renewed in his image from day to day, — we call this consecration, but is it not heaven begun in the heart?

And what would the Church be, and what would the earth be, if the spirit of our Saviour should thus fully possess us all?

“When I have this righteousness reigning in my heart, I descend from heaven as the rain making fruitful the earth; that is to say, I come forth into another kingdom, and I ‘do good works,’ how and whensoever occasion is offered. If I be a minister of the word, I preach, I comfort the broken-hearted, I administer the sacraments. If I be an householder, I govern my house and my family, I bring up my children in the knowledge and fear of God. If I be a magistrate, the charge that is given me from above I diligently execute. If I be a servant, I do my master’s business faithfully.”¹

That is to say, all duty and all work *become sacred* to us when this righteousness reigns in our hearts.

Conceive it, if you can, believers; imagine a large and influential element in every honest and lawful vocation, pursuing their calling as some-

¹ Martin Luther’s argument of the Epistle to the Galatians.

thing into which worship, and our epistle-ship for Christ, directly and continually enter. Imagine every artisan, merchant, artist, every lawyer, physician, teacher, minister, breathing the spirit of Christ, serving the Lord consciously, with lowly joy and peace, as catching the glint of his smile, as swayed into the right way by his will, as guided by his eye, while a present friend and Saviour makes solitude impossible, makes sorrow sweet, and glory sure.

As these disks of light multiply, and round out into fulness, and touch, or almost touch, each other, surely a sabbath sweetness would charm the air, as though softly sinking down from heaven. No more collisions of selfish interest; no more spirit of war in daily business; or, if remaining sin, and a devil not yet quite banished from the earth, should bring them in, they would have but trivial power against the *set* and ruling passion of God's consolidated people. They would *test* the virtue they could not corrupt.

The control of that mighty engine, public opinion, would be recovered to the Church. Vice would be abashed. Violence would be charmed to peace. A thousand pleasures which a sinful world has contaminated, and from which we are therefore unjustly shut out, would be purified and restored. So far from the world's being made gloomy by the supremacy of religion, it would then, for the first time since Eden, be seen how

bright the earth can be. It is the conflict with the powers of sin; it is being surrounded with temptations and dangers, — a complete and dreadful system of them, — which compels the people of God to walk warily, and “suspect some danger nigh, where they possess delight.”

Restrain our terrible neighbor, or — which comes to the same thing — enhance the power and secure the safety of Christ’s flock; let it be seen that the “kingdom of heaven” is indeed established, and the war of sixty centuries is entering on its last campaign, and a thousand restrictions and safeguards would be cut loose, and drift away, that now encumber as much as they protect.

I am quite sure that none of us can realize the riches, power, and sweetness of human affections, as they will be when righteousness reigns. We know well what man’s passions are and can do: they have torn, channelled, flooded, *weather-worn*, the whole world, as the lightnings and waters have scarred the earth. But love has never yet come into his kingdom. We get glimpses of what is possible, in the faces of some of Christ’s saintly ones. There we see a tender steadfastness of heart, a loving kindness so deep and mellow, so rich in sympathy, so warm and pure, shedding a peace so perfect and so strong, that we can compare it to nothing but a crystal river, risen into the air, lapsing soft music, and dispensing ethereal freshness on every hand.

And what if all God's million sons and daughters on earth were like this? what if a cluster of such precious spirits were found in every village, and a group of such clusters in every town, and a constellation in every city, and scattered lights by the wayside, and in the forest, and over the prairies? what incense of a pure worship would flow to heaven, what rest in communing, what hallowing of earthly joys, what steeping of the sun and rain, yea, and the very soil, in the radiance of his realized presence, so that the very "trees of the wood should rejoice before the Lord!"

I *cannot* set forth even my poor thought of a land where God's people should indeed be one with Christ; where absolute rightness of conduct, purity of thought, wholesomeness and wealth of feeling, should be the outcome of a holy liberty; where men should dwell in mutual confidence and honor, bearing each other's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ; where the name that is above every name should be to every heart as ointment poured forth; where the aroma of God's grace should be to the spiritual world what the breath of spring is to the physical world, — a subtle fragrance, betokening an infinite and blessed power, "renewing the face of the earth."

For what portion of this grand result — which ought to have gladdened our weary eyes, long, long ago — is each Christian responsible? For himself chiefly (though not indeed solely, as the

very next clause will show), and for so much of the general effect as his influence and labors would cover. If he were right, he would make movement in the right direction by so much the easier, and movement in the wrong direction by so much the more difficult, to some of his forlorn and shipwrecked brothers. Every candle dissipates at least a little darkness. Every lighthouse beckons, and shoots forth its warnings, to some home-bound vessel.

Let the little child gather a tint of brightness at the Saviour's feet. Let a devoted heart shed its courage, shed its hope, upon the face of the young who are strong, and the older who are wise. And let the dear old saint, drawing nigh his rest, turn upon us who wait, one last look, lit up with the glory of immortal love and joy. When the Church is such as these words suggest, she will be as though one of God's constellations had stooped through the sky of night, and bathed the continents in splendor.

“Then shall the earth yield her increase,
And God, even our own God, shall bless us :
God shall bless us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear him.”