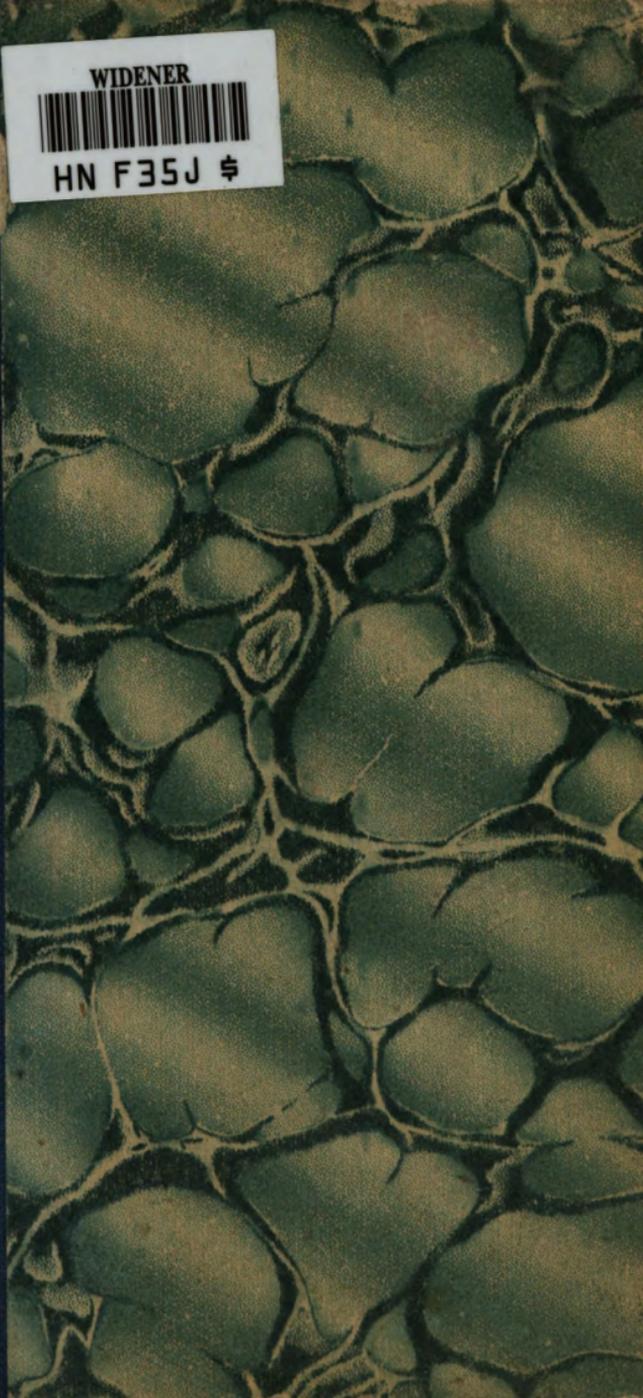


Gov
6958
71.5

WIDENER

HN F35J \$

Palmer . Christianity.

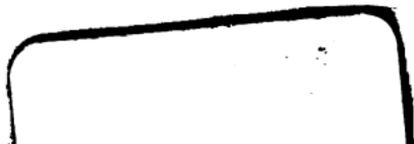


Gov 6958.71.5

**HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY**



**THE GIFT OF
CHARLES H. TAYLOR
CLASS OF 1890
OF BOSTON**



CHRISTIANITY AND THE LAW;

OR,

THE CLAIMS OF RELIGION

UPON THE

LEGAL PROFESSION.

BY

REV. B. M. PALMER, D.D., LL.D.,
Pastor First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans.

RICHMOND:
PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

Generated at Library of Congress on 2022-08-19 19:48 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hmf35j
Public Domain, Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_usefpo-google

HARVARD-YENCHING LIBRARY
SMT OF
CHARLES W. TAYLOR
OCT 10 1927

Gov 6958.71.5
✓

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1871, by
CHARLES GENNET,
in trust, as
**TREASURER OF PUBLICATION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRES-
BYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES,**
In the office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE LAW.

GENTLEMEN OF THE BAR :

I confess to a throb of exultation in this attempt to present the argument for Christianity, founded upon its wonderful affinity with human jurisprudence. The two may seem to lie far apart, yet their circles have more than one point of intersection ; and precisely where these touch I desire to place myself, and extend the hand of fellowship in much that is kindred between us. You too are invested with a priesthood, and the altar at which you minister is inscribed with the name of God. Truth and Right throw their eternal sanctions around your office, and constitute you the interpreters of a Divine Oracle. From the principles, therefore, of your own

4 CHRISTIANITY AND THE LAW.

science the Gospel weaves her plea, which I seek now to address alike to the conscience and the reason.

I. Christianity then challenges your attention, first, by the fact *that she herself founds upon the idea of law*. It is the initial suggestion by which she appeals directly to the instinct of your profession. Other men may fail to measure the sweep of the thought, but it eddies around the very centre and life of your calling. Those of your order who never rise above the authority of simple precedent, and know nothing of any fundamental principle which, as the soul of the law, informs and actuates it, will of course find the generalization too large for their feeble apprehension. These, however, are not your representatives; for you recognize the law, in its broadest conception, as being simply the science of Rights. It rests, therefore, upon the basis of fixed and immutable justice, into the spirit of which the hierophant of its mysteries must be first baptized. The solemnities of a

judicial process are but the echoes of the religious sentiment in man. Your casuistry bears you into the court of conscience, whose subtle distinctions it is the office of your dialectics to seize and to express. Even the uncouth dialect of the law is but the cunning device for weaving closer the meshes of human language; protecting the truth from injury either through the prevarications of falsehood, or through the more innocent ambiguities of speech. Your courts are thus invested with a sanctity only less than that which throws such awe around the temples of our worship; and those who minister in the holy offices of religion alone receive a higher consecration, than they who stand beside the altars of human justice. In the stately eulogium of the English Hooker: "Of law there can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is in the bosom of God, and her voice the harmony of the world: all things in heaven and earth do her homage—the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her

power; both angels and men, and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and measure, yet all with uniform consent admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy."

Language could not better describe the majesty of your calling. The law, which you have been accustomed to contemplate on its human side, has another aspect, which looks out directly upon God. Though administered by you only in its human relations, it is bright with the radiance of a Divine original. Every term, by which you define man, marks him as a being under law. Every faculty, with which he is endowed, is exercised only through the moral atmosphere which law breathes around him. His understanding, his conscience and his will find their scope only in those relations which the law describes. It is the test of character, as truly as it is the guide of conduct and the measure of duty. It is through a previous subordination under the Divine government, that man becomes

capable of earthly control. If conscience had not first bowed beneath the authority of an Infinite Ruler, the form of tyranny would remain to be devised which could break the will into subjection to any earthly power. Human law is, therefore, but the reflection and shadow of the Divine; and the advocate should find it easy to step from the temple of justice into the sanctuary of religion, to read the law of which his own is but the type, and to bow before the tribunal of which his is only the symbol. If "the undevout astronomer is mad," what must be the verdict against the irreligious lawyer? The one, though he walks among the stars, touches but the fringe of the Creator's robe; the other passes within the pavilion of Jehovah's presence, and touches the candlesticks around His throne in those eternal principles of rectitude and truth with which he deals.

You, Gentlemen of the Bar, are bound by the holy sacrament of your profession to uphold the majesty of law; and Christianity

has the juster claim upon your recognition, because she affirms its supremacy in language inconceivably solemn. She teaches that the Divine law, springing from the essential nature of God, is unchangeable as His own being. It is no more capable of relaxation, than He is susceptible of decay. We cannot even think it out of existence, for it is God's own solemn and eternal assertion of Himself. All His attributes are stamped upon its precepts, and committed to the guardianship of its single penalty. Sin is thus revealed as not simply the contradiction of the Divine will, but as an outrage upon the Divine perfections. However these may be held in abeyance for a time, they must at last leap forth against the transgressor, like the swift lightning which sleeps long in the bosom of the cloud. Never shall Justice be able to sheathe its sword, until these have been appeased. Hence all the forms of earthly suffering are but God's solemn indictment against the sinner. War, trampling the slain beneath its iron heel—

pestilence, dropping the seeds of death from its overshadowing wing—the throes of the earthquake—the breath of the simoom—the tornado which scars the earth in its furious march—the pains which rack us on the bed of sickness—the bereavements which draw the curtain of sorrow around the soul and shut us up to bitter communion with our own anguish,—all, all are the Divine accusation against the sin of man, the beginning of that stern prosecution which is to find its verdict in the decision of the last judgment.

From this point, therefore, the Gospel takes its departure. Its original postulate is the absolute supremacy of a perfect and holy law; which is not so much an exposition of the Divine claims, as the transcript of the Divine character itself. And the problem which grace undertakes to solve is, how to reconcile the very perfections of God with the salvation of the sinner. Were all the hosts of heaven to deliberate in solemn congress, they could never answer the question, How shall God be

just, and yet justify the ungodly? How shall Infinite Truth reverse the decree, "the wages of sin is death"? How shall immaculate Holiness endure the stain of folding the polluted sinner to its bosom of love? How shall the mercy that would forgive, be in harmony with the justice that must condemn? These are the contradictions to be reconciled in any scheme of salvation which grace may devise. Just here, then, Christianity takes its stand. It accepts all the conditions of this fearful problem, and proclaims as its own basis the unchangeable majesty and authority of God's perfect and holy law. It discloses that no sinner can be saved until the very last requisition of Divine justice has been satisfied; "without shedding of blood there is no remission." It provides for this exigency by revealing a Mediator, equally related to the lawgiver and the culprit by participation in the nature of both. He takes our guilt upon himself, endures the penalty we had incurred, renders the obedience originally due from us,

and meets in our stead all the exactions of infinite justice. By this method Jehovah may, consistently with His own rectitude, pardon the guilty; and may, consistently with His own purity, sanctify the unclean. "Mercy and Truth meet together; Righteousness and Peace kiss each other: Truth springs out of the earth and Righteousness looks down from heaven;" and there is once more a blessed reconciliation between the claims of the Lawgiver and the obligations of the subject.

If there be a man then upon the globe who should think kindly of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is the intelligent lawyer. If there be one who, better than another, should be able to comprehend its glory, it is the well-instructed counsellor. Whilst he stands in the chambers of an earthly court, upholding the empire of truth and right amongst men, I take him from the very altars of his ministry to the mountain of sacrifice, where kneels the Redeemer of a lost world and bares His breast to the sword of eternal justice. Whilst he

glories in that human law which is but an outer halo of the Divine, will he withhold his homage from that august Sufferer who now bears upon His shoulder the whole weight of His Father's empire, in the administration of that law which He has vindicated from reproach by His own spotless obedience? Beyond all revelations ever made to man, Christianity affirms the supremacy of right; and by the simple instinct of their calling, challenges acceptance from those whose very commission it is to uphold the majesty of law.

II. Christianity commends itself to the legal profession, however, not simply by founding upon law, but *by its wonderful method of tempering justice with mercy*. A necessary allusion has been made to this already, but it deserves articulate exposition. The thought admits of easy expansion upon its theological side, where I should only follow the usual current of pulpit discourse. The task will be to run the parallel with human justice, so that you may discover how its most acknowledged

defects are met and overcome in the Gospel of Christ. It is a consolation to me, however, that your superior acquaintance with your side of the comparison will enable you to absorb a half-expressed hint, and to push the argument to a stronger conclusion than I can reach.

It is unquestionably difficult to frame a human code in which, from its very generality, the law intended for protection and defence shall not sometimes become the instrument of oppression and torture. Finite wisdom is incompetent to foresee every case that may come under the operation of a given statute. It falls within your notice that cases arise so perfectly described in the language of the law as to be necessarily brought within its scope, which yet the spirit of the same law as clearly exempts from its application. Besides this, there are so many modifications of crime, and varying shades of guilt, that language cannot be constructed flexible enough to embrace them all. These must all be forced beneath the pressure of one fixed penalty, doing

14 CHRISTIANITY AND THE LAW.

violence to that pure justice which calls for discrimination; or else the law is overthrown by a practical repeal of the penalty in the case even of a convicted felon. It is a sad alternative when law seems to be arrayed against truth; and when the decision, however cast, injures that fine sense of justice innate in every human breast.

The provisions for meeting this exigency in our human systems are twofold. A power of dispensation is lodged in one branch of the government to override, in extraordinary cases, the sentence of the courts, and to remit the penalty they have pronounced. The judiciary discharges its full duty to the law, by applying it rigidly to the facts and by finding the sentence which it enjoins. Executive clemency interposes with its wider discretion, and discriminates in view of those palliations which the law cannot officially recognize. But, wise as this arrangement is admitted to be, it is a plain confession of defect; and the collision between the two never occurs

without a jar in the machinery of government, endangering its integrity and weakening the foundations of society. A power so supreme, though delegated by reason of necessity, is nevertheless watched with extreme jealousy; and is perhaps never exercised without a reaction in the public mind, and a renewed conviction of the supreme importance of supporting the solemn decisions of the courts.

A far safer and more delicate provision is found, in the sphere of justice itself, by the combination of your Equity jurisprudence with that of the Common Law. Whether the two exist side by side, with a separate yet concurrent jurisdiction, or whether they are blended together by infusing the principles and spirit of the one into the forms and processes of the other, in either case the same result is reached—to abate the rigour of the law by interposing a discretionary power, within defined limits and under fixed canons, of “deciding upon principles of universal justice.” It would, of course, be simple impertinence in

me to dilate, before those learned in the law, upon all the functions which are discharged by your courts of equity. Doubtless in many ways not comprehended by me, they come to the assistance of the Common Law; especially in those cases of imperfect obligation, which can hardly be enforced under any system of rigid rules; but which require to be brought under a more elastic and expansive jurisdiction, in what may be called the Chancery of conscience. My reference is simply to its supplemental character, as it comes to the relief of positive law; whose stubborn rules cannot on the one hand be relaxed, nor yet on the other always enforced, without being made the instruments of wrong. Certain it is, the instincts of society would have long since recoiled from the injustice operated by naked and inflexible law, which, unless thus tempered and softened, would have defeated its own end in the failure to administer its decrees.

In the consummate government of God

this conflict can never emerge. The law, being the radiation of the Divine perfections, must express the whole idea of justice; and in its original enactment must contemplate every individual case that shall arise under its operation. Not a single culprit stands before its bar, whose guilt was not exactly foreseen. This is an attribute of perfection, which the most enthusiastic amongst you can never claim for any human legislation. It is only in the kingdom of God that you can ever hope to see realized the idea of perfect law. Its administration, too, is committed to an omniscient Judge, who reads the secrets of every heart and regulates his decision in accordance with the peculiar circumstances of each transgressor; and who, by a scrupulous graduation of the penalty to the measure of guilt, realizes the perfect idea of the truest equity. "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God; also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for Thou renderest to every man according to

his work." Let a legal mind but weigh the import of this testimony, and fathom the depths of its wisdom. He to whom infinite power belongs—twice affirmed, as though earth echoed back the voice to heaven—in the very assertion of His strength claims the gentler attribute of mercy. Triumphant in the august consciousness of undisputed power, He yet appears for the salvation of a lost race in the priestly robes of compassion and love. But the climax of the thought is not reached, until you see how this very mercy of Jehovah builds upon His rectoral and distributive justice. Ah, this is a Divine logic, which you cannot expound in any human court—that God should be able to forgive, just because He is essentially and eternally just. Gentlemen of the law, from which of your altars can you make proclamation to the erring and guilty in these words: "Merciful and gracious; long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression

and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty"? With all the perplexed commingling of jurisdictions in your schemes of law, how imperfectly do you realize the idea of justice! Stoop as equity may to the palliations of each case, how often does the hard and inexorable law tighten its grasp upon the victims of misfortune, while the slippery villain escapes through the meshes of its imperfect technicalities! Of pardon it is impossible that law, as such, should know anything. Its province is that of justice alone, which can have no discretion in cases of disobedience. It would be a contradiction to lodge the power of pardon in the law itself, working to its own dissolution and the utter disintegration of society. But the great Law-giver above, who is a Father as well as a Judge, can interpose with mercy. His perfect administration of law upon principles of absolute equity, vindicates Him from even the suspicion of unrighteousness. He has only to provide a competent surety for the sinner

in the person of His incarnate Son, who shall vicariously bear the penalty, and through His active obedience restore to the law the honour of which it had been robbed, and the scheme is nearly complete. After the purgation of guilt, nothing remains but to cleanse the sinner from the pollution, and deliver him from the prevalent power of sin, and even the God who is "glorious in holiness" can fold him to His heart in the fellowship of love for ever.

Allow me to present the contrast in this concrete form. Suppose the fierce indictment to be sustained before an earthly tribunal, and the law to be satisfied by a full infliction of the penalty which should yet spare the culprit the suffering of a single pang. It is, of course, a violent contradiction only to be tolerated in a hypothesis. Then let satisfied Justice seal with its own hand that culprit's discharge from the forfeitures he has incurred. Precisely at this moment, too, let the court have power to work a complete transformation

in the character of the criminal, freeing him from the domination of all his passions and converting him at once into the upright and obedient citizen—I ask what encomiums would be too extravagant to lavish upon the glory of such a jurisprudence? Law is honoured, justice is satisfied, the penalty is exhausted; yet the transgressor is saved from immolation, and the whole judicial process has restored a guilty wretch to a loving and grateful obedience through the remainder of his life. Why, Gentlemen of the Bar, grand as your calling is in the exposition of simple justice, this ingrafting of imperial mercy would lift it into the sublime. Poetry would exhaust its inspiration, and philosophy its eloquence, to wreath the garlands of praise around your bloodless altars. And yet who does not see that I have but drawn the profile of the Gospel—the skeleton outline of its immortal achievements? The very path of your profession leads you into the sanctuary of Jehovah's presence. You have only to

lift the curtain, and you bow before the Shekinah in its beautiful splendour between the cherubim upon the mercy-seat. The maxims of the law and all its forms of process, can they be rightly construed except as your response to God's solemn appeal; that you should recognize, in the Gospel, that justice which maintains truth and righteousness upon the earth, and that grace which is able to forgive to the uttermost every penitent and believing sinner?

III. A third ground of appeal is the fact that *the cardinal principles upon which the whole method of grace proceeds, lie among the elementary truths, and are illustrated in the daily practice of your profession.* Do you lay your hand upon the law of contracts, in which there are negotiating parties and reciprocal stipulations, enforced by mutual pledges and forfeitures? Who, then, should better understand that earliest of all compacts between the Persons of the Godhead, when, in the language of Erskine, they "sat down

together around the council-board of redemption?" The Eternal Father gave to the Eternal Son a seed to be redeemed and saved; binding Himself by the most solemn and exact stipulations to accept Him in the execution of His work; and to accept in Him all whom He should present without spot or wrinkle before His throne. However abstruse these principles may appear to some, they are primary elements of thought to those whose whole business lies in the enforcement of just such obligations between man and man.

Is there anything more familiar to you than the principle of suretyship, by which two distinct persons stand in the eye of law as one party, and are treated as identical? Why, it is upon this pivot the whole Gospel of our salvation turns. Whoever else may stumble over the grand conception of an infinite Redeemer standing for the condemned and lost, the jurist is inexcusable who is not instantly arrested by the announcement, or who

hesitates to acknowledge its validity as a principle of law.

When, in the beginning, the Divine law took its lien upon the whole immortality of man, holding it in pledge for the obedience which was due; when, further, upon transgression, that immortality became a forfeit to the penalty and was covered by the curse; when, still further, the second Adam paid that forfeit in His own death, cancelled the bond, transferred the claim to Himself, and thereby laid the foundation of an *evangelical* obedience in place of the *legal*;—in all these doctrinal propositions, which make up so large a portion of our theology, what do I more than simply restate the law of mortgages, as interpreted in your own courts, and the method of their redemption?

Tell me, too, how the orphan and the outcast may be gathered from the streets, placed in the household, and be legally entitled to the inheritance of a child; and you will but explain to me that adoption by our Father in

heaven, which is the fountain-head whence all the blessings of eternal life flow to the sinner. The latter has just this pre-eminence over the former—that it is not a mere fiction of the law, wherein one is treated as a child who by no power on earth can be made actually such. It is an adoption real and substantive, by veritable birth of the Holy Ghost and by living union with Jesus Christ, who, as the only begotten Son of God, is the original and sole proprietor of the relation and the title.

In your very pleadings in the courts you but symbolize that great Advocate who appears in the Chancery of heaven, and pleads the stipulation of His Father's covenant for a guilty race. You sit beside your client, pale with apprehension and throbbing in every fibre of his frame. You seal his lips in silence, that you may place your soul in his soul's stead and roll upon yourself all his anxiety and sorrow. With your learning and eloquence you utter his defence, at once his

representative and the representative of the law, from whose anathema you seek to shield him. In all you seem to be the shadow of Christ Himself, as He ascends into the Holy of Holies to plead the argument of His own blood, with the mute eloquence of the marks of His own passion and death.

Swing round the whole circle of theology, and you will find it sown thick with analogies to your own profession. The affinity is, indeed, so clear between the Gospel and the law, in the underlying unity of both, that nothing seems easier than for you and me to change places, and each become the other. With that knowledge of the eternal principles of law derived only from the Bible, the grandest of all law-books, a little special training would perhaps suffice to render me your peer in the courts of earthly justice. So, on the other hand, were these doctrines of grace first wrought into your experience by the Holy Spirit, you could as easily become Heaven's attorney to prosecute the grave indictment at

the bar of the sinner's conscience. Can I avoid challenging you under this plea? Can you evade the responsibility imposed by this rare faculty of comprehending the principles of grace? Oh that you would but take shelter beneath the robe of the only Advocate, who can bar the sinner's impeachment and open to him the gates of life!

IV. Christianity claims your homage again, since *you are compelled in the trial of every cause to recognize the religious nature of man.* A single illustration will adequately develop this thought. What is the significance of the juror's oath, that he will try the cause faithfully and alone upon the evidence? And what is the virtue of swearing the witness upon the sacred Book, which he seals with a reverential kiss, that he will utter "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth"? It is a plain admission that you cannot administer human law, without building upon the religious element in man. You must throw up a dyke against the prejudices and

passions of men, before they can be safely trusted with the disposal of even earthly interests. And that you may have the best guarantee for integrity and truth, you place jury and witness under the awful sanctions of the last judgment, and beneath the eye of Omniscience itself. The sternest penalties against perjury are confessed to be inadequate, until you station a police in man's own breast. You appeal to him as a being with a soul, which must finally account to a Judge who cannot be deceived. You summon conscience to the office of a secret detective, to scan the slightest deviation from the record and report the same to the bar of Jehovah. What if Jehovah should turn the confession against yourselves? What if He should say, Your tribunals were so truly the symbols of My own that you could not dispense with My presence, but must arm yourselves with the sceptre of My authority? Forgive me for suggesting that half-convictions, where principle is involved, are always a dishonour and a blot.

You should either do less or more. Religion is everything or nothing. You have made an admission which cannot stop halfway. In thus summoning the soul before God and compelling its homage to eternal sanctions, you have performed a sacramental act that binds you over to a personal and devout recognition of the same supremacy. God forbid that you should be condemned at last under your own judicial processes, and find too late that it is a fearful hazard to trifle with Divine prerogatives!

V. Christianity commends itself, farther, as a *stupendous system of truth whose evidence you are professionally fitted to estimate*. The very nature of your calling compels you to be critical in the examination of truth. Whatever your eloquence, or your power to touch the sympathies of the human heart, you are necessarily held to the testimony upon record. And I suppose it will be granted that true eloquence at the Bar, and everywhere else, is but the highest expression of the truth.

Your province is to sift the evidence furnished to the court; and your professional power depends largely upon the tact, acquired through long training, of appraising this evidence at its precise value. With the quickness almost of intuition you must look through the perspective of a case, discarding collateral issues and seizing the salient points, upon which the testimony is brought to bear with adroitness and skill. You cannot afford to understate the evidence, for you are bound in the interests of the client to make a due impression of the facts upon the mind of the court. You may not, on the other hand, exaggerate it; for there is an adversary taking notes, who "will keek you through with critical inspection." In the scales of an equal judgment this testimony must be fairly weighed; which depends as much, I fancy, upon the fineness of the moral sensibilities as upon the clearness of merely mental perceptions. The intellectual habits of the lawyer render him, therefore, singularly competent

to deal with a vast and complex system of truth like that of Christianity. From first to last it is a matter of testimony, drawn partly from the facts deposed by our own consciousness, and still more from the written statement of an inspired Record. The great body of its truths transcends the bounds of natural reason, and can only be known by an immediate disclosure of the purposes and will of Jehovah. The kind of reasoning, probable rather than demonstrative, yet resting upon principles of the soundest philosophy, is what we both employ. The mental discipline is precisely similar with the jurist and with the divine, who are brought by their habits of thought and forms of discipline into relationship and sympathy.

We bring, then, this august Gospel before the legal profession as a Grand Jury to find a bill. We lay the testimony out in the revelations of the Divine Word, and challenge the severest scrutiny of the evidence. You may go into the branch that is *external*, and try

the system by its miracles, or by its splendid prophecies spreading like an arch over the whole range of history; or you may go into the evidence that is *internal*, and examine its doctrines resting upon the abutments of man's own nature as moral. You may explore the matchless conception of such a character as that of Jesus Christ; the facts of whose personal history can only be harmonized, upon the assumption that He really possessed the twofold nature which He claimed. You may observe the exact coincidence between the moral condition of the human race and the corresponding history of it in Holy Writ. We bring the whole system in its colossal grandeur, in its architectural proportions, and in the severe simplicity of its design, and ask nothing but fair dealing in the examination of its claims. Subject the witnesses and the evidence to all the torture of the most jealous criticism; and you will arise from the inquisition, unflinching believers in the Bible as the exhaustive revelation of God

to man—never to be superseded by other disclosures, until we ourselves are transfigured and read the truth anew in the light of the glory of heaven. I cannot wrong you by the suspicion that you are insensible to the attractions of truth, when it reveals to you the soul, eternity and God. Let me only recall to your remembrance that exquisite sentiment of Lord Bacon: "The inquiry of truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it; the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it; and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature. The first creature of God, in the works of the days, was the light of sense; the last was the light of reason; and His Sabbath-work ever since is the illumination of His Spirit."

VI. Experimental Christianity offers, finally, *the surest protection against the professional dangers to which the lawyer is exposed.* Every pursuit in life is surrounded with its peculiar temptations. Even those intellectual occupations which lock us up in comparative seclusion

sion, and by their elevation would seem to lift us above the gross and material, are not free from influences which depreciate the character or tarnish its loveliness. This, of course, springs from the discipline of the earthly sphere, through which man is educated for a nobler destiny hereafter. You are exposed, for example, to entire loss of faith in the reality of virtue through the sickening details of fraud and crime with which you professionally deal. Occasionally the dismal prospect is relieved by heroic examples of suffering virtue, which you are called to defend; but these are too rare to cancel the influence of a constant exhibition of human nature upon its worse side. The overreaching and cunning of the covetous, the bitterness and revenge of the malignant, the passions and vices of the profligate, and, worse than all in its practical effect upon yourselves, the gradual crumbling of the character in those just drawn into sin,—all, by their ceaseless attrition, wear out that faith in mankind

which is only less necessary to us than faith in God. How immense the benefit of discovering, in the Gospel, the ideal of goodness held up before the soul; not in the delineation of fiction, but obligatory as a duty; to which we are stimulated by many a gracious promise, and which is partly realized in the stirrings of the new life breathed into the soul by the Holy Spirit? Can you afford to dispense with a protection so needed to preserve the beautiful enamel of your character?

The polemic nature, too, of your calling exposes you to the danger of one-sidedness of mind; sinking the philosopher into the wrangler, with whom victory is more important than truth. This intellectual degradation soon deepens into the moral. The loss of candour, which is "honesty of reason," lets down the tone of the whole man; who, at length, substitutes expediency for right, and makes duty purely conventional. There is such a thing as unscrupulousness of mind, easily deceived by its own sophistries, until

the reason is struck with a paralysis and is utterly imbecile in distinguishing truth from falsehood. It is from that moment wholly worthless as an instrument of direction. There is no corrective against this tendency equal to the Gospel; which, as the law of truth, rules the understanding, precisely as the law of right it rules the conscience.

There is another very peculiar and constant temptation—that of blunting the moral sensibility through too close identification with the interests of the client. The annals of justice afford few examples of infidelity to this species of trust; a striking illustration, perhaps, of that conventional morality which is the principle of cohesion in fraternities of men. The danger, indeed, lies just the other way—of sacrificing honesty to the necessities of the case you have in hand. I suppose, however, that you are as truly the representative of the law, as the guardian of your client; and that your protection of him must be under prescribed limitations. However impressive your

statement of his cause, it must be within the boundaries of truth. You can secure him no rights except those to which he is entitled under the rules of the court and the provisions of the law. Your advocacy can go no farther than to secure an impartial trial and an adequate defence. To go beyond this, to obscure the truth, and to confound the distinctions of right and wrong, must be an offence against the ethics of your own profession, and inflict a supreme wrong upon yourself. The high character of the Bar precludes the supposition that this is often avowedly done. But, from the nature of things, there must always be a silent pressure in this direction. The protection against it must be found in antecedent integrity of character—a Roman virtue built up in solid masonry, against which temptation will dash into spray like a wave of the sea. Where can a robust justice be found like that of the Gospel, which will wrap you in its principles as though you were sheathed with triple brass? It draws its sense of hon-

our from the very character of God, and breathes it into us as the first instinct of the spiritual life.

I proffer these practical aids of Christianity to you, Gentlemen of the Law, because I think society has the right to exact that you should build up your character on every side, and by just such influences as Religion alone can bring to bear. You are her constituted guardians; and as the sworn minister of justice, all classes of men come alike under the mantle of your protection. Life, liberty, honour and estate,—all in their turn are committed to your trust. You are under the vow of the truest knight-errantry, going forth armed with knowledge and virtue to redress all human wrongs. The prisoner waits for you to unlock the door of his dungeon and restore him once more to the joys of freedom. The criminal in the dock hangs in the dreadful suspense between life and death upon your eloquence; to relieve him from the gibbet. The fatherless and the widow appeal to you

for protection against the perjury and fraud which would violate the most sacred of trusts, and turn them out to beggary and want. You pluck the fangs from beneath the tongue of slander, when it would stain the honour of the good and poison the very life of life itself. You unravel the plots of avarice and cunning, of malice, treachery and revenge, when these dire passions form their foul conspiracies against the peace and happiness of our homes. The whisper of long-hidden guilt, and the sadder story of wrong which cannot be avenged, pour their confidence into your ear; and the secret anguish of dark and bitter years is laid bare to your inspection. When all these passages of human life have been trodden, you stand at the very portals of Eternity itself and share the funereal experiences of a dying hour. Your hands trace the last will and testament, in which love looks back, as from beyond the tomb, to shield the objects of its fond solicitude.

In view of all this dependence upon the

legal profession, has not Society the right to challenge her champions who stand in solemn sentry upon all her bulwarks, and to see that they are girded for these high responsibilities? It is not enough that you draw inspiration from the fountains which earthly genius has supplied. We must remand you beyond Coke and Blackstone, and all the expounders of human rights, to the beginning of all law in the Bible of God. We must summon you into the presence of the eternal Lawgiver Himself, that you may be magnetized by the contact. When you have talked face to face with Him, as Moses did in the bosom of the cloud, then you may come down to the litigations of earth; and because you fear God, and are baptized into the spirit of mercy as well as of justice, we will repose upon your integrity and friendship to the last degree.

It is not for me to eulogize your splendid vocation. It is the highest encomium to pronounce that you are indispensable to society. My observation has been that the moral tone

of every community is determined by the character of its Bar. In every part of the civilized world, it is the leading influence by which society is silently moulded. May God help you to appreciate the magnitude of your trust! Would that you might equally appreciate the nobility of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; being not only the champions of human justice, but the earnest advocates of the Law of God; upholding the majesty of the Divine Empire, and illustrating the power of that grace upon which man depends for salvation!

4 *

THE END.

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

