

SERMONS

BY THE LATE

REV. OLIVER BRONSON,

WITH A

MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE,

BY

WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.



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WM. B. SPRAGUE, JR.

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## MÉMOIR.

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To us, who now see through a glass darkly, it is among the most mysterious of the Divine dispensations that so much that is strong, and lovely, and beautiful, seems to perish prematurely from the earth; that minds of the finest mould, and the highest culture, and the brightest promise, with every prospect of a long career of honorable Christian usefulness before them, are suddenly dismissed from their earthly mission, perhaps leaving a cloud to settle over some good enterprise with which they were identified, and, as a consequence, leaving a whole community in tears. But when such events occur, we who survive, have something more to do than to brood sadly over our loss, or even to pay a passing tribute to the intellectual power, or the moral and Christian worth, which Death, as the agent of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness, has consigned to a higher sphere. We are bound, while we follow these bright and pure spirits, in our grateful thoughts, to their heavenly home, to do what we can to perpetuate their usefulness on earth;—for though every good man, when he goes to Heaven, necessarily leaves behind him many enduring memorials, invisible as well as visible, through which his benign influence will tell upon many minds, yet there is no doubt that that influence may be rendered much more powerful by being seconded and directed by the hand of surviving friendship. We may do this in two ways—by embalming in a written record the traits of character which were so fruitful of blessing, and by rendering accessible the productions which the gifted and elevated mind, when it ascended, left behind it. In both these ways is it now attempted to extend and perpetuate the usefulness of the subject of this sketch, and the author of the Discourses that follow.

As I have undertaken, in compliance with the wishes of friends, whom I consider it a privilege to obey and honor, to present to the public a brief account of the life and character of the lamented young minister here commemorated, I think it proper to state my opportunities and sources of information respecting him. When I came to my present charge, in 1829, his parents had then just removed to Albany, and shortly after became members of the church of which I am pastor. Oliver was then between three and four years old; and, as he spent most of his time at home, previous to his entering College, I had a good opportunity of witnessing his early developments. After he left his paternal home, I saw him frequently, and the more so as a very intimate friendship between him and one of my sons often brought him to my house, even on his most transient visits to Albany. I always regarded him with great interest and affection, and thought myself well acquainted with his prominent characteristics. In latter years, my opportunities of seeing him have been less frequent, and I never met him after his removal to the West; but what I had not the opportunity of observing in respect to him has been supplied by a hand at once the most competent and the most ready. I may add that I have also the benefit of a very satisfactory communication from his honored father, who carefully watched his developments from infancy to manhood, and whose testimony, notwithstanding the near relation he sustained to him, I deem worthy of all acceptance. I am willing to hope that, with these advantages, I may be able to present a tolerably faithful account of this devoted minister, so early called to his reward.

OLIVER BRONSON, a son of Greene C. and Lucretia Bronson, was born at Utica, N. Y., on the 9th of January, 1826. His father is well known as having held various important civil offices, among which is that of Chief Justice of the State of New York. He removed his family to Albany, when Oliver was between three and four years old; and it was partly in the Albany Academy, and partly in the High School at Poughkeepsie, then under the care of that accomplished teacher, Mr. Bartlett, that Oliver was fitted for College. His boyhood was characterized by a quiet and thoughtful turn of mind, by a spirit of filial reverence and obedience, by a uniformly amiable and blameless deportment, by the strictest adherence to truth, and by an uncommon facility at acquiring knowledge.

On leaving the Albany Academy, he received a gold medal in token of his being the best linguist in his class.

In the early part of 1843, a revival of religion occurred in the church to which his parents belonged, and he became hopefully, no doubt really, a subject of it. His mind was powerfully wrought upon under a sense of his own sinfulness, and he paused long, and was most diligent in the work of self-scrutiny, before he could believe that the mercy of God had been extended to him in his forgiveness; and even when he made a profession of religion, as he did in April of that year, it was evidently not without many misgivings in respect to his qualifications for being enrolled among the followers of Christ.

About the time that he became connected with the church, he joined the Sophomore class of Union College, Schenectady. But it was not long before his mind, under the combined influence of a nervous temperament and impaired health, became greatly disquieted in regard to his spiritual state, and for some time he believed that he had been the subject of only a spurious Christian experience. After a while, however, the cloud passed off, and he was enabled once more to repose with a good measure of freedom and confidence in the gracious promises of the Gospel. Having maintained a high reputation as a scholar during his whole course, he graduated with honor, in August, 1845.

Before leaving College, the question what profession he should adopt, urged itself upon his thoughts, and his own predilections were, as might have been expected from the earnest tone of his piety, for the Gospel ministry. His father, from an apprehension that the difficulties and trials commonly incident to that profession would act unfavorably upon his nervous temperament, his health, and ultimately his usefulness, preferred that he should study Law; but while he expressed this preference, he allowed his son to decide for himself. The son, confiding almost implicitly in his father's judgment, and recognizing in his wishes a law, resolved on devoting himself to the legal profession; though still holding fast his deep convictions of the importance of a godly life, and his earnest purpose to serve his Master faithfully in any condition in which he might be placed. Accordingly, he entered on the study of Law, and having gone through the usual preparatory course, was admitted a member

of the Bar in 1848. In this profession he was engaged for some two or three years; but his heart was not in it after all—he felt that the ministry was the profession of his choice, and that his mind would never be at rest until he should enjoy the privilege of preaching the Gospel. Having again referred the case to his parents, and obtained their acquiescence in the proposed change, in view of his own earnest and persevering desire to make it, he dissolved his connection with the Bar, and entered, as a student of Divinity, the Seminary at Auburn. In 1852, he was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Cayuga, and, in June of the next year, completed his course of study at the Seminary.

During the fall of 1853, and the following winter, he preached as a supply, to the Congregational church at Sherburne, N. Y. In September, 1853, he was married to Miss Annie Lightbody, of Utica. In March, 1854, he received a call to the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in Kinderhook, and, having accepted the call, was ordained and installed by the classis of Rensselaer, in May following. The congregation to which he was now introduced was a large one, requiring a great amount of pastoral labor; and he addressed himself to his duties under a deep sense of their momentous import, and with a zeal mounting up well nigh to enthusiasm. In connection with his elaborate preparations for the pulpit, and his diversified pastoral labors, he prosecuted vigorously a systematic course of study, including all those branches which he regarded as having a more immediate bearing upon his profession. At length his physical constitution began perceptibly to realize the effect of his manifold labors; and, in the early part of 1857, his general health, and particularly his nervous system, had become so much affected, that he was obliged temporarily to intermit his services in the pulpit. He spent a little time with his parents, in New York, without any improvement of his health, and then returned to Kinderhook, and tendered the resignation of his charge. His congregation, who were most devotedly attached to him, remonstrated against the step, and did their utmost to induce him to remain with them—they earnestly proposed that he should take six months or a year to recruit his health, they, in the mean time, paying his salary, and supplying the pulpit. But his noble sensitive nature revolted at the idea of becoming burdensome to his friends, and he persisted in the purpose of dissolving his pastoral relation. In

June, 1857, he was attacked with a hemorrhage of the lungs, which entirely prostrated him, and brought him near to the gate of death. The Classis now, by his urgent and persevering request, met, and agreed that his official relation to his people should be dissolved.

In August following, his health had so far improved that he was able to travel, and he resolved on trying the effect of a Western climate. He spent, I think, two or three days in Albany, and seemed so ill, that I greatly feared that he had come hither to die; but he soon rallied so far as to be able to prosecute his journey, and he gradually moved onward until he reached Janesville, Wisconsin, where he had relatives living, and where he found his last earthly home. His parents had expressed to him the wish that he should not attempt to preach in less than a year, nor until his health should be fully restored; but so intense was his desire to be about his Master's business, that, before many months had elapsed, he had come under an engagement to supply the pulpit of a Presbyterian church in Janesville for a year. His services proved so acceptable that the people soon became desirous of securing them permanently. Accordingly, they extended to him a call to become their pastor; and, having accepted it, he was installed by the Presbytery of Milwaukee, on the first of October, 1858. With this congregation his connection continued—a source of mutual comfort and satisfaction to him and to them—until it was terminated by his death.

Mr. Bronson suffered several attacks of bleeding, after leaving Kinderhook, two of which were of an alarming character; and his nervous system never fully rallied after his first prostration; but still he was able to perform a considerable amount of pastoral duty. During his last three years, he suffered, much of the time, intensely; but so completely was his spirit disciplined to his Heavenly Father's will, that those who knew how bitter his sufferings were, recognized in his experience a marvellous instance of the sustaining grace of God. The following is the testimony of his physician, Dr. C. G. Pease, illustrative of his mature preparation for Heaven:—"His disease was of long standing, an affection of the heart, inducing hemorrhage from the lungs, followed by extreme nervous prostration. It was never my lot to witness greater suffering from nervous irritability—but he bore it uncomplainingly. His anxiety to recover his health seemed to be nothing else than an intense desire to preach the Gospel. And when asking my opinion as to the result

of his illness, he often said, 'I wish to know, not that I may have time for preparation—that is all settled—but can I preach again?' On the last Sabbath that his mind was clear, the next to the last Sabbath of his life, I was in his room as the bell began to ring for service, and, as its tones reached his ear, he exclaimed with deep feeling: 'My soul thirsteth, yea longeth for the courts of my God.' His family, though aware that he was in a very feeble and alarming condition, did not apprehend that he was very near the close of life, until three or four hours before his departure. A sudden change of symptoms took place, and he seemed to recognize the fact that the hand of death was upon him. Thenceforth he remained silent until his voice mingled in the song of seraphs. He died on the 10th of January, 1860. His remains were brought to New York, and now repose in the Greenwood Cemetery, where his friends love to go and linger about his grave, in that bosom of natural beauty and loveliness, and think of the glorious resurrection.

In person, Mr. Bronson was of about the middle stature, of a rather slender frame, with a countenance indicative of thoughtfulness and stability, which, however, easily lighted up into a benignant and winning smile. His manners were quiet and unassuming, without any lack of self-possession, and though his conversation generally indicated an habitually grave tone of feeling, it often revealed a vein of sprightliness and good humour, which made him specially attractive in the social circle. His natural modesty kept him from being a great talker, but his good sense, and quick discernment, and bland and dignified manner, rendered him an exceedingly agreeable and useful one. He never allowed himself in random or indiscreet remarks in respect to others, which were adapted to wound either the present or the absent; while yet, on the other hand, he never withheld his honest opinion when he believed it was called for, much less attempted to conciliate regard by the arts of flattery. No one could converse with him without being impressed at once with his intelligence, his prudence, and his integrity.

Mr. Bronson's intellect was undoubtedly one of marked superiority. It was clear, discriminating, comprehensive, powerful. It was eminently suited to investigation; and it never accepted anything as true, without being able to give what was to itself a satisfactory reason for it. This feature of his intellectual character was discovered especially in the formation of his theological opinions—

he believed nothing, because other men, even the wisest and best who were uninspired, believed it; but he betook himself immediately to the original sources of proof, and carefully traced every link in the chain of evidence, pausing at every doubtful point until a full measure of light shone upon it; and thus, when he reached his conclusion, he was able to receive and hold it as a point demonstrated. In this way, he placed in the balance all the various forms of infidelity, and found them wanting. In the same manner also, he tested various other forms of theological error, and threw them aside as worthless and dangerous. And his faith in the various doctrines of Christianity was the result of just such an intellectual process—he had considered each in its various relations and bearings, and in connection with whatever objections had been urged against it; and had finally received it, with full assurance, as a Divine verity. It was owing to this strongly marked characteristic of his mind, that his faith, not only in the general system taught in the Bible, but in each particular doctrine, was not qualified even by a doubt; and for the same reason he was remarkably prompt and skilful in defending the truth and in exposing error.

And he was not only highly intellectual, but highly imaginative also; and it was the peculiar combination of these two qualities that gave to his mind an uncommonly inventive and original character. His thoughts, even where they had existed substantially in other minds, could not fail to receive a hue of individuality from the distinctive action of his own mind. And the same was true of his mode of expression—his language, especially in his written productions, though free from even the semblance of affectation, was strikingly characteristic. In the use of his pen he showed himself at once profound and brilliant; equally at home in the depths and in the heights.

Mr. Bronson, considering his age, had not only attained to great maturity of mind, but to very liberal mental acquirements. He was a proficient not only in the Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages, but also in the French and German, and had made some progress in the Italian. He was familiar also with the best writers on Theology, and the kindred branches of learning. His mind had, in accordance with its natural bent, been trained to a habit of ceaseless activity; and he was always enlarging the sphere of his knowledge, either by means of books, or by his own spontaneous intellectual operations.

No matter whether he was taking a solitary walk, or visiting a friend, or travelling in a rail car, he was almost sure to have his Greek Testament or some other book in his pocket, upon which he might employ any moment of leisure that might occur; and even if he had no book, his ever busy and well disciplined mind would be at work in some way that would serve either to quicken its powers or to increase its resources. He was accustomed to carry about with him a small memorandum book, and to note down whatever of importance came to him, in the way either of observation or of reflection, that he might have it ready for future use. When the book was filled, and had accomplished its end, he destroyed it, and provided himself with another. The last which he used, happens to have been preserved; and I have seen some extracts from it, which are indicative alike of profound thought, and elevated, earnest piety.

Mr. Bronson's Christian and ministerial character was not less strongly marked than his intellectual. What first impressed you here, upon an intimate acquaintance with him, was his deep humility. He had had long protracted seasons of self-communion, in which had been laid open to him depths of evil in his own heart, to which his unexceptionable exterior had been no index; and he was bowed in the dust, not for the time being only, but through his whole life, by means of these revelations. But there was nothing of ostentation or self-righteousness in his humility—he contended vigorously with his own corruptions, but he did not blazon them abroad that the world might see how humble he was—indeed he spoke but rarely, and then diffidently, of any thing pertaining to his own Christian experience; but the sense of personal unworthiness before God breathed in all his actions, and gave a complexion to his whole character. But in nothing perhaps was it more manifest than in his prayers—when he approached the throne of mercy, it was evident that it was the contrite heart that was in communion with God, and that the only plea which it dared or desired to urge, was the merit of the Redeemer's sacrifice. And, besides being characterized by great humility, his prayers were remarkable for simplicity, comprehensiveness, and appropriateness—in his own family especially, there was a warmth and tenderness in his devotions that often made them quite overpowering. His faith, which was identified with his humility, was the most simple trust in his Redeemer—he never felt spiritually at home except when he was

near the Cross; and in that he recognized at once the emblem and the source of righteousness and strength.

Nothing pertaining to Mr. Bronson's religious character, during the later period of his life, was more remarkable than his unbroken cheerfulness. In the earlier stages of his experience, he had passed through the deep waters of religious despondency, and had taken lessons from within and from above, and had studied and practically solved problems connected with God's deep and gracious work in the heart, the result of all which had been that his own peace had become as a river. It was not merely when external circumstances seemed propitious, but in seasons of darkness and sorrow, especially when his health was waning, and that darkest of all days seemed to be drawing near, that he was the very personification of grateful and cheerful trust. He seemed always to be looking out upon bright and glorious heavens, and to feel happy in the assurance that everything in relation to himself, his family, the Church, was under the direction of a wisdom that never errs. He could look fearlessly, joyfully into the future, because he knew in whom he had believed. His cheerfulness lasted till the death sleep came over him, and that quickly passed off, when his cheerfulness was turned into heavenly rapture.

Mr. Bronson had an intense love for, and was earnestly devoted to, the duties of his calling. His ruling passion was to preach the Gospel, and be instrumental of saving the souls of his fellow men, and thus glorifying the Master whom he served; and he regarded the former simply as a means of accomplishing the latter. His discourses, though highly intellectual, and sometimes grand and even gorgeous, were far enough from being with enticing words of man's wisdom—they were simple, earnest, powerful exhibitions of Divine truth, designed and adapted to find their way through the intellect to the conscience and the heart. They were not cast in any particular mould, in which one school or another would be recognized, but they took their hue from the peculiar character of the author's mind, or perhaps the peculiar mood in which he was when they were written; and therefore had a freshness which belongs to comparatively few of the productions designed for the pulpit. His manner was removed as far as possible from every thing like display. His voice was not particularly musical, but it was sufficiently loud, and his utterance was always rendered impressive by the manifest

solemnity and fervour of his spirit. His preaching, while it was highly acceptable to the humbler classes, in whose edification he especially delighted, was yet so intellectual and often so striking that men of the most gifted and accomplished minds, who had heard him once, would be very likely to be upon the lookout for opportunities of hearing him afterwards.

In the more private duties of a Pastor, Mr. Bronson greatly delighted; and no one could be more faithful than he in performing them. Being possessed of strong natural as well as Christian sympathies, he was especially qualified to mingle with the poor and the afflicted—he knew how to speak to them the most fitting words of counsel and consolation, and they welcomed his visits as though they had been the visits of an angel. Even after he had himself got near to the dark valley, he knew that certain individuals who had been, or then were, of his pastoral charge, had just been visited by bereavement; and in some cases he addressed to them notes of affectionate condolence, and in one, noticed in his memorandum book the purpose to do so, but died without being able to accomplish it.

In all the domestic relations, he was at once affectionate, dignified, attractive and endeared. In his own happy home, it is for widowhood and orphanage now to tell what a husband and father he was. His only child, a little boy of but five years when his father died, was trained to such loving obedience that his father's expressed will was always a law to him; and if the father could have foreseen how soon he was to become a glorified saint, he could hardly have crowded into that brief remnant of life more of earnest and well directed effort to prepare the child for Heaven. Those also, who occupied the place of servants in his family, always honored and loved him as a friend and benefactor. It may safely be said that he was a favorite in every community in which he lived; and that when he died, a glorious star sunk beneath the horizon, or rather rose to a higher and brighter sphere.

The following hymn was a special favorite with Mr. Bronson, and he was fond of keeping it within the range of his eye. His mourning widow has sent it to me, as being more expressive of the habitual state of his mind than any words she is able to command.

Oh not to fill the mouth of fame  
 My longing soul is stirred;  
 Oh, give me a diviner name—  
 Call me thy Servant, Lord.

Sweet title that delighteth me,—  
 Rank earnestly implored;  
 Oh, what can reach my dignity?  
 I am thy Servant, Lord.

No longer would my soul be known  
 As self sustained and free;  
 Oh, not mine own! Oh, not mine own!  
 Lord, I belong to thee!

In each aspiring burst of prayer,  
 Sweet leave my soul would ask  
 Thine every burden, Lord, to bear;  
 To do thine every task.

Forever, Lord, thy Servant choose,—  
 Nought of thy claim abate!  
 The glorious name I would not lose,  
 Nor change the sweet estate.

In life, in death, on earth, in Heaven,  
 No other name for me!  
 The same sweet style and title given  
 Through all eternity.

The Discourses in this volume are a fitting, as I have no doubt they will prove an enduring, memorial of their author. Though they are printed under the disadvantage of not having been designed for the press, or undergone the author's revision, it is believed that they will take rank with the ablest and best published sermons of the day. It is no small satisfaction to me that a young man in whom I have had so much reason to be interested from his early years, has had so honorable, though brief, a career, and that it has devolved on me to pay a tribute to his memory, by rendering this public testimony to his extraordinary worth.

W. B. S.

ALBANY, September, 26, 1860.

## I.

### IGNORANCE THE FRUITFUL SOURCE OF EVIL IN THE CHURCH.

HOSEA, iv: 6.—“ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

The Israelites, at the time when these words were spoken to them by their prophet, had become greatly corrupted and enfeebled, by their continued departures from God. There were among them persons of true faith and pure lives. But their influence was overborne by the unbelief and licentiousness that prevailed around them. It was a time of trouble and perplexity and danger,—a time that called in a peculiar manner for consolation to the faithful and devout, for warning to the lukewarm, for the denunciations of God's wrath against both secret and open wickedness.

It is not necessary, in order to a profitable consideration of the prophet's language in this place, that we make out an exact and literal parallel between the condition of the Church in his time, and its state at present. It is enough that the Church is now, as it was then, in a state that demands special instruction and warning; and that the words of the pious and faithful Hosea, if they cannot be used in reference to precisely the same evils and dangers which they indicated then, are yet strictly and sadly applicable in their principle. Whether a want of spirituality in the Church make itself known, in one way or another, is

a question of comparatively little moment. But this dark and enfeebled state is itself a thing to be well considered and earnestly deplored. "My people," said the prophet, "are destroyed for want of knowledge." And throwing this thought into a form in which we may more readily come at its meaning, we say that Christians are brought under the power of their spiritual enemies, through the ignorance of things which they ought to know.

It is impossible, of course, to distinguish in every instance, between that defect of knowledge that belongs to an early stage of religious experience, and that which arises from neglect. But an honest conscience will, in almost all cases, apply the truth wisely.

1. We say, then, in the first place, that Christians are often troubled in mind, and weak and unstable in their lives, through ignorance as to the true sources of their strength. It is probably, with many, an habitual impression, that the great means of personal advancement in the religious life, and the chief instrumentality for giving the Church an influence with the world, are to be found in preaching, and in social gatherings of the Church and congregation,—in measures that strike the imagination, or appeal to the senses,—in things that belong rather to the form and the machinery of the Church, than to its inner life. Do not understand me to speak disparagingly of any of these means of good. No church can be in a healthful and flourishing state, unless the objects which these means contemplate, are in some way secured. But observe the distinction between

an instrumentality by which a devout and spiritual mind carries out its purposes, and this same instrumentality, used heartlessly, and as a form, or employed as a mere contrivance for entertainment. Preaching is certainly one of the appointed means of religious instruction and quickening. And yet, where it is relied upon, as having a power in itself, so that the Church measures its prospect of success entirely by the logic, or the brilliancy, or even the faithfulness of the weekly addresses from the pulpit, a very large part of the truth that is presented will fall to the ground. A convenient and tasteful place of worship is undoubtedly one important auxiliary to success. And yet, because in itself it is nothing but a house made with men's hands, any undue reliance upon it will, eventually, be disappointed. And the same is true of every means, through which Christian zeal and energy put themselves forth. Let it be contrived by the wisdom of an angel,—let it be as completely fitted to its purposes as any mere instrumentality can be,—and while it may do something, that particular thing it was meant to do, it will never accomplish, except it be used by pious souls, in pious dependence. And the reason is plain. When the mere mechanism of religion is unduly valued, we are doing what the disciples did, when they “spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts.” We are forgetting the very thing which it is the object of all these forms and arrangements to help us remember,—namely,—our constant need of Divine teaching and support,—the utter impossibility of leading a Christian life, except in communion with “the Author and

Finisher of our faith." These things, necessary though they are, are not to be simply admired or enjoyed: they are windows in our prison-house, through which we are to look at things beyond. Our life is Christ, and Christ alone. "I live," says Paul, "and yet not I; but Christ liveth in me." And, again, hear the language of his strong confidence,—“I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.” And what shall we say of that promise of our Saviour Himself,—“If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it?” The whole story of a Christian experience is this, that they who truly believe in Christ at the first, and continue steadfast in that faith, living in constant expectation of the things He has promised, will find themselves instructed, encouraged, protected from the influences of error, and the power of temptation. They will “grow in grace,” because they grow in “the knowledge of the Lord.” And these, contrary to a very common impression in respect to faith, so far from being listless and inactive, are the very ones, who use all the various means of good, with the most effect. In the expressive language of the Scriptures, they are “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” When the Christian is doubtful, lukewarm, unable to stand against the power of temptation, and without influence over his fellow-man, let him not imagine that either his own spiritual state, or that of others, will be somehow brought up to a higher level by anything, no matter how good, short of a new dedication of himself to his Master. When any who profess to be following Christ, fail of that light that is promised to His followers,—and when they look about them, and

see others apparently suffering a like experience,—while it may be a duty to take up some new line of Christian activity, yet let not the dependence rest on this. Let them be sure that until the fire in the heart is re-lighted,—until they have come back to the deep, simple earnestness of their first love, (if such a love they have ever known,) all other means will be as a multitude of gold and silver goblets, to a man dying with thirst,—beautiful indeed in themselves, but, because they are empty, worthless to him.

2. Christians are often troubled and hindered in their course by a mistaken impression as to the uses of trial. Hardly any person can have failed to observe that men commonly speak of their perplexities and misfortunes, not barely as having been many or great, but as having in them something strange. Thus, after one has told his story of trial,—let it be sickness, poverty, the loss of friends, or the failure of great hopes,—he will say, Had the circumstances been different,—or had the trial come in some other shape,—or had it not been so continued,—or had it occurred a few years earlier, or later,—or had I not been entirely without any dependence,—or had I only known beforehand that it was coming,—it would not have been so heavy,—I might have endured it. Now that Gospel which was sent to men by Him who made them, and proclaimed by a messenger who could be “touched with the feeling of their infirmities,” shows us, in the most express manner, a meaning and a use in the ills of life. It does not tell us that they come by chance, but affirms that they are the results of sin.

And this, of itself, is much toward a full knowledge of the way in which they are to be met and borne. But more than this, it constantly reminds us that what we suffer is known to God; and that if we truly believe what He has spoken, and commit ourselves to Him, as to a faithful Creator, He will not only save us from being completely overwhelmed by trouble, but will even turn it by His secret power, into a means of strength and blessing. I do not say that this is easy to believe: it is not. But it is true, notwithstanding. And it is because those who have set out to follow Christ, have so little experimental knowledge of this truth, that they so often murmur, and wonder at the ways of Providence,—are restless and unhappy in their present situations,—envy those who seem to be more fortunate,—and appear, from all they say, to regard the idea of any good in suffering, as a fancy that may well enough be wrought into poetry, but not as literal truth, fitted to the common necessities of life. “I know their sorrows,” said the Lord to Moses, when He called him to be the deliverer of His people. Isaiah, recounting all the goodness of Jehovah, in His dealings with the nation, says with touching pathos, “In all their affliction, He was afflicted; and the angel of His presence saved them. In His love and in His pity, He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.” Hear James, saying to the twelve tribes, scattered abroad, “My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” “Beloved,” writes the warm-hearted, sympathizing Peter, “Think it not

strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Says Paul, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. But afterward, it worketh the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby." And again he says, "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." It was a true knowledge of all this, that enabled David to exclaim, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes." It was a knowledge of this that caused Paul to feel that his prayer had been abundantly answered, when the Lord, instead of removing the "thorn in the flesh," gave him grace enough to bear it. How simple the truth, and yet how hard of comprehension to one who lacks religious knowledge, that if the trouble were modified in such a way as to meet the taste, or the convenience, of the one upon whom it comes, it would for that very reason be no trial, and because it was no trial, would give no exercise to faith, and bring no blessing.

3. Christians suffer also from ignorance of the ways in which religion is to be commended to the world, and made influential. They are sometimes too little aware of the necessity for stability and decision of character. They stand fast by no clear principles, and follow no settled courses of conduct. "A double-minded man," says James, "is unstable in all his

ways." The want of definite, settled ideas, upon some of the most familiar points of Christian duty, renders them fickle and unreliable in conduct. And those who see them are tempted to think lightly of a religion that is so lightly worn. Sometimes they are timid, and cannot quite persuade themselves to stand up against opinions and usages which prevail in their own immediate circle. They fear that anything like a strict obedience to the command requiring Christians to be "separate from sinners," "a peculiar people," will not only bring ridicule upon themselves, but will impair the influence of the truth over men's minds. They are ignorant of this,—that there is a Power back of themselves, which will always act through them, upon the world, if they faithfully and courageously obey the Divine command. "We ought to obey God rather than men," said the bold apostles before the Jewish magistrates, when a few smooth words and fair promises would have gained them instant favor. Does some one say, But they were preachers, and bound to testify to the truth? And where is it written that any one can be a follower of Christ on easier terms?

Christians are often surprised, thrown off their guard, and hindered in good works, by conduct in others for which they have made no suitable calculation. They think, for example, to carry forward some good enterprise. But, being unexpectedly met by opposition, or finding even some upon whom they had counted, becoming indifferent, they immediately lose all heart, and fall back into a state of listlessness. Or they have seen some persons evidently impressed by the truth; and, looking upon their salvation as almost

certain, they have straightway lost well nigh all faith in prayer, and Christian effort, when they have seen such persons fall back to a state of worldliness and unconcern. They place too much confidence in human nature. They are too little acquainted with the devices of the Devil; and, like some of whom we were speaking a few moments ago, they have too little faith in the power of truth, and the constant, silent, mighty operation of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us, beforehand, to expect precisely those occurrences, and those developments of character, which actually fall under our daily observation. "I am for peace," complains a good man of old; "but when I speak, they are for war." "It was thou," said David, complaining of the instability of human friendships, "a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company." "Demas," Paul writes to Timothy, "hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." And again, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. . . . Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me . . . and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom." And then, you remember how the Pentecostal outpouring was viewed by some of the unspiritual multitude, with gaping wonder, while others even said, mocking, "These men are full of new wine." A true knowledge of Scriptural teaching, and even a common acquaintance with the ways of the world, cause Christians to look for things of a

contrary and discouraging nature; to take them as matters of course, and in the very midst of them, to labor and pray, with a cheerful, steady faith, that circumstances cannot conquer. It is necessary to lay so much stress on religious teaching, upon influences that are purely spiritual, that Christians are in danger of forgetting how strongly the world is impressed by that calm, continued, equable energy, that bespeaks a deep belief in the truth, and a genuine love for all the ways of Christian duty. "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

4. Again, the Church suffers a diminution of its proper strength and influence, through ignorance of Christian doctrine, and a consequent readiness to be swayed in one direction or another, by the novelties of the time. There probably has never been a time, not even excepting the very period at which the words were written, when the exhortation of Paul to the Hebrew Christians was more needful, "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." There is an unusual number of orders of infidelity, having a more or less systematic organization, and some sort of creed, and ostensible purpose. And their views have, within the last twenty or thirty years, been so diligently propagated, and brought before every class in the community in forms so subtly fitted to their purpose, that a large class have been brought into a position of doubt; in which,

without inclining strongly in any one direction, they are carried alternately one way and another, according to the influence which chanches to be in the ascendant, realizing the description given by Paul; "tossed to and fro, and carried about, with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

Now it is important to observe in respect to this class, that while probably the larger number are found outside of the Church, among those who respect Christianity, and the ordinances of religion, there are many also among the open professors of Christianity. We speak not now of hypocrites,—men who have used their membership in the Christian Church with deliberate reference to personal ends,—but of those who have made their profession of religion with vague and imperfect notions of the truth, and who honestly imagine that they are Christians, while yet they are not. Occasionally these persons come out openly in favor of some one of the new forms of erroneous teaching. But commonly, a feeling of shame and irresolution keeps them in their connection with the Church, and while they are conscious that the truth has little, if any, practical influence over their hearts, they are yet afraid to renounce that truth openly; and, therefore, remain where they are, with a confused idea that they are safer in their present position than in any other. It is a very common and a very dangerous mistake, to measure the strength and safety of the Church by its numbers. It ought to be kept always in mind that, as an individual is what he is, whether for good or for evil, not by virtue of something he has taken

up, barely as a theory, but by reason of the hold that theory has upon his heart, and the open manifestation it has in his daily life, so the Church, as a power in the world, is not to be estimated by the number who have suffered some temporary excitement of the religious sensibilities, and professed their belief in the Christian system, but by the number who, in the sight of the Master, do feel the truth as a life within them, do walk with Christ, do "live by the faith of the Son of God," do count themselves "as strangers and pilgrims" here, and esteem this present world as only the road to a "better country." Now, regarded thus, are we not right in saying that the Church, in the common acceptation of that word, is enfeebled, hampered, brought into a state of distress and of danger, by reason of its ignorance of the full scope and force of Christian doctrine? Whatever may be said of the numbers who crowd into the churches, in these days in which the Church is popular and respectable, it is yet a melancholy and alarming fact, that the faith of those who seem to be true Christians is often found to waver, and have its seasons of darkness and decline, under the unhealthful influence of surrounding error. And it is a fact, yet more to be deplored, that of those who are called by the name of Christ, many seem to have so little impression of the truth in its spiritual import, even where they are morally correct, that with all the allowance of the tenderest charity, we tremble for their souls, and pray in our hearts that the Lord would grant them a re-conversion from their dangerous state. We say, in

view of these things, that the nominal people of God are "destroyed for lack of knowledge."

It is necessary that men should have knowledge of two things, in order to their spiritual well-being;—first, of those principal truths expressing the relations of men to the Deity, which are familiarly known among all denominations, as the fundamentals of Christianity; and secondly, of the wonderful subtlety and power of error. As to the former of these, a clear, well digested knowledge is not so common as many suppose. Christians are often troubled and confused in their own minds, by apparent contraries in Christian doctrine, when a careful, patient, prayerful reading of the Scriptures, a reference to almost any practical commentary, or a statement of the case to some religious adviser, would result in a clearer impression, and a corresponding peace and strength. Going, as they often do, for months together, and not seldom through life, with confused and shadowy impressions of religious truth, they are so far weak, vacillating, unhappy; and so far defenceless against the invasions of error. And as to an acquaintance with the different forms of infidelity, we are far from saying that every one might attain such knowledge. We mean only this, that a regular and devout reading of the Bible, and that common observation of men and things which all persons exercise in reference to common interests, would show the Christian, that error may be expected to wear at times almost the precise form of truth; and that hence he should not conclude hastily in favor of some new and plausible teaching. It is one of those things

unexplainable on any human theory, and yet of itself alone an overwhelming proof of that unwelcome doctrine of the Bible, the blindness and perversity of the human heart, that men whom it is impossible to blind and impose upon in their business, will yet, in religion, shrink from the labor necessary to get some true understanding of a book like the Bible; and take up with some trivial, empty teaching, that comes to them with no authority, that sustains no vital relations to human life, that takes no one, clear, intelligible shape in which it may be tested; of which no man can give any rational account, after he has heard it; and which has in fact but this solitary and dangerous recommendation, that it relieves the conscience of all feeling of responsibility, and holds the fancy, by exciting and deceiving shows. And yet, what is especially necessary to remember is this, that whether such teaching take one name or another, whether it be gross or refined, whether it appear in the periodical, or the novel, or the popular lecture, or the lay-preaching done in bar-rooms and saloons, and back offices, under the bad inspiration of ardent spirits, it almost invariably contains something that sounds true. It quotes the Scriptures—"wresting them, and handling the word of God deceitfully,"—it states some well known fact of history,—it addresses some deep instinct of human nature,—it throws in some shrewd compliment to men's common sense,—it speaks with that confident assurance which, to many minds, has all the force of argument,—and from first to last, it keeps clear of that one idea, which is so unpopular, that if men did not in their consciences feel it to be

true, no one could preach, in the pulpit or out of it, but at the risk of his life, the final accountableness of all men to God. And this something, made up of unconnected scraps and fragments, and fluently spoken, some men, of good sense in common matters, will take for their religion. These things might be well known to the Church, if they but duly observe what is going forward in the world. And knowing it,—being practically familiar with the plausible ways in which error commends itself to the mind, and the loose and unthinking habits of men in estimating religious truth, they would be less liable to any disturbance of their faith, by the attractive forms of falsehood, or the fact that so many around them are taking this falsehood for truth.

But especially would it strengthen the Christian, to read with care those portions of Scripture, in which this very state of things is described; sometimes, as then existing, and sometimes as to come, in future ages of the world. To the Thessalonians, in one place, we find Paul speaking of “the working of Satan, with all power, and signs,<sup>4</sup> and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” From his exhortation to Timothy also, it appears that there were in that day, as at present, “profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called:” and likewise that even in the grossest errors, and the most pernicious practices, men often retained, as we have already intimated, “a form of godliness.” Jude speaks of certain men of his time as “speaking evil of those things which

they know not,"—a designation which applies in a remarkable manner to that large class who at present revile religion, without having taken any pains to understand what it is. "Raging waves of the sea" he calls them, "foaming out their own shame," as though he had lived eighteen hundred years later, and heard the vehement zeal with which some of these false prophets pour forth teachings, at one time without meaning, at another, with meanings only shameful and profane. Among the Corinthians, we find "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ," of whom Paul says, "and no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." You remember that in our Saviour's warning to His immediate disciples, against the false teachers who should appear before the destruction of Jerusalem, He tells them, "there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect." And it is a matter of actual history that such deceivers appeared at that time, and that partly by their delusive teachings, and in part by their extraordinary powers of sorcery and magic, great numbers who were not well established in the Christian faith, were drawn away. And without the slightest exaggeration,—regarding the facts that fall under our daily observation, or are matters of current report,—are they not numbered at the present time by hundreds and thousands, who, in the fearful words of Paul,

“will not endure sound doctrine.” For plainly it is a matter of no practical moment, whether the misleading come in the form of delusive teaching, or of false miracles;—or as to the latter, whether they are wonders of true science, or “lying wonders,” executed by the direct power of evil spirits through human agents,—or of both, whether they are in every instance put forth with deliberate intent to mislead, or whether, according to the Scripture account of some, these teachers deceive others, because they themselves are first deceived. The great, solemn question is this,—do any of these inventions of the time make an equal claim upon our respect with the “truth as it is in Jesus?” And we say that the Church is crippled in all its energies, by reason of its ignorance in respect to these things. If it were open apostacy, of which we are speaking, the case would be far different. For then, every defection from the faith would be made known at once, by a withdrawal from the Church, and an open avowal of infidelity. But the evil is silent and unperceived: it lies in a gradual unsettling of the belief in God’s Word,—a leaning toward these startling and delusive novelties, of which the person himself is hardly conscious,—a state of mind that may never ripen into positive infidelity; but which all the time hinders prayer, paralyses effort, obscures the truth, hedges up all the ways of Christian experience,—causes the disciple to follow Christ “afar off,” at the best, and keeps it constantly a matter of painful doubt, whether he is really a follower at all.

And now, my Christian brethren, let me urge upon you the importance at all times, and the special im-

portance at a time like the present, of having the heart fortified with solid religious knowledge. I say to you in the language of Paul, "Watch ye: stand fast in the faith." And I do not mean by this, that there is reason to fear that any of you will ever openly withdraw from the communion of the Church, or that you will hold your place, and yet cherish in secret an infidel creed. But I would have you "stand fast in the faith," in the sense of making religion a study, and holding those same clear impressions as to what it is, and the ways in which it is to be used, which you find essential to success in what are familiarly known as the practical concerns of life. Religion is in reality the most practical of all things; or it is nothing. If it do not help you, it is a positive hindrance. If it be not a life within you,—a daily means of strength, and wisdom, and comfort,—then it is just what infidels and gain-sayers declare, a mass of useless doctrine; and it is idle to think of gaining the favor of God, and securing a seat at His right hand, by merely carrying it in the mind. But in order that it may be to you what our Saviour intended, and in order that through you, it may shine out upon a darkened world, it must be understood. When you go home to-day, let me ask you to inquire of your own heart, whether you are really holding the truth thus intelligently, and in a way to make it available for your daily duties, and daily trials. And if it be not so, let this Sabbath bear witness to a new beginning. Henceforth, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life." "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom." "Be ye not unwise, but understanding

what the will of the Lord is." You remember the friendly rebuke of Paul to the Jewish Christians, "We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God." "Be ye transformed," he writes to the Roman Church, "by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." And when he commends the love and faith of the Colossians, he says to them, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with all the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." When shall that reproach from the lips of our Saviour cease to be true,—“The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light?” Let us not, my brethren, think so lightly of our faith, as to suppose that, having once made an open profession of Christ, we have no longer any more to do with Christ. Let us not think that the life divine will grow up without culture. Let us “forget the things that are behind,” and “press forward.” Let it be our daily aim to add to our store of spiritual learning,—better to understand the Bible,—better to understand our own hearts. Let it be our daily prayer, “Teach me Thy Statutes. . . . Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law. . . . Let my heart be sound in Thy Statutes, that I be not

ashamed. . . . Give me understanding; and I shall keep Thy law: yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. . . . Order my steps in Thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

## II.

### ETERNAL LIFE THE CROWN OF EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE.

ROMANS, ii:7.—“To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality; eternal life.”

The general truth under which these particular words occur, is, as you will perceive by reference to the two verses which immediately precede, that, in the awards of the coming life, every man will receive simple justice. We will consider this truth at present only in its reference to Christians.

At the first reading, and particularly if taken apart from other passages of Scripture by which their meaning is somewhat restricted, these words would seem to establish the principle, that men may secure the favor of their Maker by the excellence of their lives. This, in the sense in which it has sometimes been understood, the Scriptures everywhere expressly deny. Before the coming of Christ, a system of sacrifices was appointed, which, although of no direct and inherent value, served to keep alive for the time, the idea of guilt, and that other truth which it clearly implies, the impossibility of obtaining salvation by any endeavors that lie within the circle of human virtue. And then, when the human mind was ready for a higher order of teaching, and the fulness of time made a way for the fulness of God's wisdom and glory,

that great and wonderful Sacrifice came into the world, to which all former offerings had pointed for their explanation, and to which all future self-sacrifice should look back, for the only ground of its acceptance. "For it is not possible," says Paul to the Hebrews, "that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not; but a body hast Thou prepared me. In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin, Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo! I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O! God. . . . He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second." Accordingly, when we speak of well-doing, we mean, not the forced but unavailing effort of an unsanctified virtue, but that line of endeavor which, because it is conscious of failure and of guilt, falls back upon faith, and finds all its hope and all its impulse in "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world." Was it not very plainly this, to which our Lord once pointed his hearers, when, in reply to their question, "what shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" He said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."

Lest, however, it should seem that faith being a mere exercise of mind, affords no field for the practical outgoing energies of the nature,—lest one should say that although there may be a sentiment of faith, there can be no such thing as a life of faith,—observe that the Object upon which this faith fastens, is a living Person, who, as soon as a soul has taken Him for its

only guide and deliverer, dwells with that soul as a spiritual presence, and henceforth is to that soul, a perpetual light, and energy, and peace, in the room of all the former gloom and want. It is for this reason that Christ is called "the power of God, and the wisdom of God, to every one that believeth." It is therefore we are told that "to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." And hence also it is, that without anything of exaggeration or mysticism, but in a sober and intelligent use of words, Paul declares, "The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God;" and again, "I can do all things, through Christ which strengtheneth me." If then the inquiry come, why this emphasis upon faith,—this ceaseless repetition of the name of Christ,—let it suffice to say in reply, that actual trial has shown men unable to work out their own salvation, except as God is found working in them to will and to do; that Christ is God, and that hence, by logical consequence, to point men to Christ, is to show them the only means of deliverance and of hope. Or, if the question shape itself thus, If faith be sufficient, why the necessity for a "patient continuance in well-doing?"—we answer, that here, as in all things, faith commits men either to a truth, or a person; and thus accepts whatever the truth may involve, or the person require. But it is a requirement of Christ that we follow Him, that we keep His commandments, that we constantly put forth our own powers, as He diffuses through us the power that belongs to Himself alone. For does He not say, "If a man love me, he will keep my words?" In words that may be plainer, faith in my

guide accepts his directions: faith in my physician, accepts his counsel and his remedies: faith in my friend, commits some interest to his care; and precisely thus, faith in Christ enjoys every promise of Christ, bows to every command, heeds every warning;—and so grace for grace receives of His fulness, from the feeble beginnings of that faith in a world of trouble and of darkness, to its end in the long rest and joy of Heaven.

The well-doing then, which is here commended to us, is not the weary, fitful effort of human helplessness, always trusting in itself, yet always failing,—but the calm, steady action of a soul, that has found its unfailing impulse in a power divine,—the life that consists in keeping itself always open and passive to the life of Christ,—that life whose natural language is, “when I am weak then am I strong.” “I glory even in infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Having said thus much upon faith, in order to prevent misapprehensions to the sort of personal endeavor enjoined in the text, there will be less occasion to explain this endeavor in detail. The root naturally lives upward and outward, into all the outspread variety of branch and leaflet and bloom and fruit. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” Does the Apostle then urge us to a “patient continuance in” all the ways of the Christian life? It is as if he had said, Listen attentively to Christ: keep your eye upon His pure example: “let the same mind be in you, which was also in Him: let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom:” He is your “way”

in which to walk,—the “truth” you must obey,—the “life” by which alone it is possible for you to live.

And now, it is time to observe how little there is in the idea of “seeking for glory, and honor, and immortality,” which ought to appear difficult, or even strange and remote from the familiar ways of life. For although the thing sought is indeed sublime, the means by which it is to be attained are already furnished, in the simple but wonderful power of faith:—“Patient continuance in well-doing.” In these days, in which almost all the great public instructors, the press, the periodical, the lecture, and to some extent even works upon religion, represent man as being the author not only of all that he is, but of all that he can hope ever to become, words like these fall heavily upon many minds, and not unfrequently upon minds profoundly thoughtful, and acquainted with themselves. For, naturally enough, but most injuriously, they interpret this language by the general current of opinion and feeling, and suppose that nothing more is intended, than the steady, determined use of their native powers, in the line of certain great ideas. But a wearisome and painful experience in this mode of life, has made them distrustful of that truth, which seems to have so little of practical power, and dispirited in reference to everything like personal endeavor. They have thought, and tried, and failed;—they have looked back, and reconsidered, and given themselves to a new experiment; and this, because it was grounded in the same mistake, had its issue in another failure. Then they have passed a season in trouble and perplexity, a time of weakness and doubt, a time in which all the good

influences, instead of being near to the soul, and warm with a power divine, shone only as cold and distant ideas, like the stars in a January midnight; and when on the other hand, those evil agencies which they most fear, have had a strange deadly beauty, which they dared not trust, and yet could not turn away from. Happy is that disciple, who, in times when faith is accounted foolishness, shall go clear of this deep mistake, this bitter experience.—Now the error here does not lie in any over-estimate either of the object sought, or of the necessity for a vigorous and constant use of the powers for its attainment. It is indeed “glory, and honor, and immortality,” (in truth and not by a figure,) which every true Christian pilgrim is seeking; and in the strictest sense also, it is through spiritual strife and tribulation that we enter the kingdom. But the mistake is in regarding Christ only as an agent by whom men are saved, after they have made themselves fit and proper objects of salvation, when in truth He is that very power within the soul, by which the soul begins to be saved. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Whatever we imagine well-doing, which yet is done by ourselves, is not well-doing, but a mistake. And like all mistakes, its operation is desultory, confused, altogether unsatisfactory. It is a subtle misapprehension, that finds its way more or less perhaps into every Christian experience, that the life of sin consists in obedience to the unworthy impulses of the nature, and that the new life lies therefore in following those impulses which are better:—faith being somewhat added to this, only to serve some purpose of the Divine government, delivering from the desert

of sin, those who have already delivered themselves from its power. But surely the Scriptures give us no such account as this, of the life in Christ. On the contrary, they require us to renounce what we have valued as our goodness, no less than what we acknowledge as our sin. They tell us that, however different in shape and tendency, they are the same in their root; and hence both, alike to be repented of and put away. Thus, Paul, you remember, declares of his brethren yet in the dark in respect to Christ, that although they had a certain sort of religious earnestness, it was uninformed, and therefore misdirected. "For they," he says, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth." But if any labor of a native virtue were good as far as its influence extended, even though not enough, why not suffer men to cultivate it to the utmost? Why not divide between the evil in human nature, and the good; and direct them while they repressed the one, to cherish and develop the other?—Observe also that wherever men are represented as inquiring the way of life, the substance of the answer, whatever the form, is always the requirement of faith in Christ. For "repent and believe," means simply, repent of your unbelief. Repentance has reference to sin. But the sin was unbelief,—a want of settled confidence in whatever God had made known of Himself. And this want of confidence, is plainly equivalent to a want of knowledge; because nothing is ever true to us, until we believe it. And

this lack of knowledge, by necessity, leads astray. Hence the brief description of our fallen state is, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Paul, you remember, counted "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ." Our Lord also declares, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." Again, he says, "The truth shall make you free." And yet more plainly, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Now we say, that because faith in Christ, as a new wisdom, a new strength, a new form of practical goodness, is both the beginning of all well-doing and the means of maintaining it, (for Christ is the author and finisher of our faith) no one who is ready to accept this view, need falter and doubt, on account of his own weakness and ignorance. It is true that the prize is great, true that the way is long,—true that no one can walk in it, without the ready, persevering exertion of all his powers. But for all this, the ambition to secure the prize is not too high for the most simple, the most timid, the most *guilty*, of all who dwell in this state of snares and darkness. "With men,"—men in their sin, their blindness, their sorrowful estrangement from the Father, their fall from the former peace and glory,—men with the darkened understanding and the hard heart,—"with men," this is impossible. But with God, "all things are possible." And yet we "are

all the children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ. . . .  
. . . and if children, then heirs;" if children, then at the very onset, and from the moment of that blessed adoption, coming according to our various needs, into an actual participation of the life and the peace of God. What else than all this can Peter have intended, when he said, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be made partakers of the divine nature." Hence if the desponding Christian would at any time have a brief, yet full and satisfactory account of the "hope that is in him," and his prospects for the life to come, let him remember, and not only remember, but with a resolute and courageous faith apply directly to himself, the triumphant words of Paul, "I live, yet not I; but Christ liveth in me." It is a life within a life,—the Holy Spirit abiding in the human spirit, and making that also holy, as the invisible, kindly energy of the summer, enters silently into every dry and creaking branch, and comes forth again in beauty and fragrance. And whenever one who has set out to follow Christ finds any shape of evil too much for his courage, or his strength, let him remember that question of our Lord to His astonished disciples, when He had spoken down the storm on the lake,—“where is your faith?”

We say then, comprehensively, that all Christian well-doing begins and continues in faith; and also, on the other hand, that it demands the most earnest

exertion of the native powers. We may say, that it is only by keeping distinctly before the mind this twofold view, that any Christian can maintain patient continuance in well-doing; and that with it, such long, steady, and victorious patience, is possible to the weakest, and the worst. It is as if I should say to the sailor, vain is your labor, if the breezes do not blow; and vain are the breezes, if your sail be not spread. It is as if I should say to the scholar, sitting by the midnight lamp, useless are these mines of learning,—these quarries of the world's thought,—except you bring to them the spirit of scholarly love and diligence. And yet useless all your toil and patience, to think out for yourself such wealth of wisdom, without these silent teachers. We have as human spirits, one dependence, and one independence,—one feebleness, and one strength. One of these leans upon Christ, while the other grasps with resolute hand all the appliances of its nature, and all the opportunities of its condition, and so lays out its energy in the direction of the promises.

And how plain from all this what is meant by *eternal life*. If you call the better world a place, only remember that it is a place whose surroundings we ourselves create. From this world we carry with us the things that are to grace and gladden the unbuilt houses of Heaven. "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality." They are the men who go to enter on eternal life. For they, even here, have known God, "whom to know aright is life eternal." When they go hence, "their works do follow them." And their life

of glory, is only the natural outgrowth of their life below. The kingdom of God is a state within them, at least as truly, as it is a local realm to which they go. And as Christ in them is their hope of glory while they are here, so Christ in them is the glory itself, when the world and the grave are passed away. They who shall have a part in those good things to come, will take with them out of this world, some small beginnings of that which, under other airs, will ripen into fairer and greater,—as they also who fall short, will carry with them beginnings,—but not those beginnings, that can ever ripen into life and glory,—only the seeds of sorrow and the roots of death. “For what a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” And hence the final sentence is only this, “He that is holy, let him be holy still. And he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.”

And what an inspiration of peace and satisfaction unspeakable, in these words of holy encouragement! There is no path among all the courses of this world that runs smoothly, and without peril and without obstruction. If it ever seem to us otherwise, and we envy for a day the man of wealth, or station, and think in our ignorance that a situation like his must be as untroubled and as safe, as it is lofty and attractive, a nearer view will bring out that in the delusive picture, which until then we had not seen, some subtle nameless sorrow is preying on the heart,—some danger lies in ambush for the unwary feet,—some shape of trouble there is, to make us tremble, and be glad in our hearts that our lot, after all, is what it is. The business man does not find in business, all that his soul desires. Neither does the scholar find it in his library, nor the

farmer in his waving fields, nor the young in their youth, nor the aged in the beautiful fiction of life's calm decline. *Seek* we all must; for we have not found. And if any will still turn from the preacher, and insist that life is something better, after all, than this melancholy picture,—that it brings its own remedy for its own evil,—that its poetry and philosophy are more than enough for all its bitterness,—before the short revolution of a week, some sharp experience, piercing like a spear through the tenderest places of the nature, some visitation that undeceives a too trusting friendship, that wounds the honor, that quenches some pleasant light shining in the household,—something of this world's tribulation, shall cause that man to bow down his head in anguish; and but for the fear of something worse to come, to pray for the untroubled rest of the grave. Again we say, we must seek; for what we would have, we assuredly have not found, And what a joy it should be to every inhabitant of such a world to know, if his seeking be for that which alone is true and good,—“glory, and honor, and immortality,”—he shall receive an eternal life of peace, in exchange for so short a course of faith and struggle.

When the hard and difficult ways of life tempt you to be weary in well-doing, when the blessing upon prayer is long delayed, and you are ready to cast away your confidence in God; when evil is strong, and you half persuaded to lay off the Christian armor, and give way,—remember what it is that lies waiting but a little farther on, for the patient and the faithful. Consider

that this promised reward is not one of the empty compensations of this world;—riches that will fly from you, you know not how soon,—honor that you buy with tears and toil, and find to be no wondrous thing, after all,—popularity like the unstable wave, or the vanishing cloud,—friendship that burns like a meteor, and is gone as soon. “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you,” is the promise.

Remember, too, that it is not some vague and unreal thing, this life eternal;—a sphere of silent, bodiless ideas, without the palpable exhilaration of visible companionship, and the substantial realities of speech, of occupation, of scenery, of motion and of rest. Our Lord assured his early followers that He returned to the unseen world, in order that He might “prepare a place” for them. And surely it were a mockery of the very hopes which He Himself has awakened within us, should we find the homes of the other world, however fit for some different order of beings, yet empty, and unfurnished, and unhomelike to us. He who has walked once these ways of human life,—reasoned with the wise, instructed the simple, rejoiced with the happy, and wept at the grave, must well know how to shape all the appointments of that other life, to the wants of those who are so soon to find there, their eternal home. In what strange ways of wisdom, all this may be done, it matters not. How far soever we ourselves may undergo some changes of form and physical sensibility, the realities of that new existence will be adjusted to that changed condition. And to those for whom mansions are made ready on high, Heaven, whatever it is, will be *Home*.

Look up for a moment from the dusty way, and carry your view across the intervening months, to the dim, but glorious land of everlasting consummations. Here, in the house of worship and sacred meditation,—while the din of the street, the strifes of business, the cares of the family are for one day shut out,—forget that you are travelling through a world that lays its heavy burdens on the patience of the saints, forget for an hour, that to-morrow you will be out again among manifold cares and temptations; planning, toiling, hoping, suffering, and wrestling with the subtle foes that are stronger than flesh and blood:—remember only that this must all end; and that afterward, you are always in Heaven. Remember that not forever we are here, but only as it were for a moment. Consider how short, after all, are the struggle and the fear, and how long and how full the rest will be. Measure these little spaces from morning to night, and from year to year, against the long joy of an eternal life. Look at the narrow range of this lower world, where some shapes of trouble and grief lie in every man's path, and we are all alike horizoned by uncertainty; and by a strange, sad law of our lapsed humanity, grow melancholy as we grow old, and with the gathering wisdom of years, long yet more and more for the thoughtless happiness of childhood,—and contrast it all with the wide fields, and the bracing airs, of that country that lies beyond the flood.

Think what it will be to shed no tears over the errors of yesterday, and to look forward with no dread to the possibilities of to-morrow,—to walk at last in freedom from the besetments of all unholy impulse,—

to have the long darkness of the mind lighted up,—now at last to have some of these sad questions answered,—to see now what life was all for,—to know “as also we are known,” to understand that the world’s distressing dream is over forever, and that this joy unspeakable is no dream, but the morning reality of Paradise. Think of these things,—so true,—so cheering,—think of the Great Forerunner already entered there, and waiting for you in His Father’s house; and then, the patience will not be hard,—the continuance will not be long,—and at last by the rivers of Canaan, you will forget forever the bondage and the desert.

### III.

#### THE DIVINE SYMPATHY ILLUSTRATED IN THE INCARNATION.

1 TIMOTHY, iii: 16.—“GOD was manifest in the flesh.”

We have here a statement of the most wonderful fact in human history. It was wonderful, because men had sinned against God; and in the regular course of justice, could expect nothing but punishment. It was wonderful, because even if the Almighty should be inclined to mercy, it would hardly be supposed that He would make so great a sacrifice as this. And it was wonderful, because it could never have been supposed beforehand, that a Being invisible and eternal, the Maker and Sustainer of the vast creation, was able to make Himself known as a visible, human friend.—Is the great and awful Creator merciful? And if He be merciful, how merciful? How much will He be willing to do, to save the creatures who have broken His laws? And finally, is there any way in which He *can* save them, if He would? These are questions, which the wise and thoughtful of all ages have painfully asked themselves,—questions answered, at the first, dimly and partially, to the men of former times, by types and resemblances of better things to come,—and at last, fully and forever in Jesus Christ, “the brightness of the Father’s glory, the express image of His person,” His own dear Son, our Saviour. “GOD was manifest in the flesh.”

The three great particulars of this manifestation are, the justice of God, His mercy, and His sympathy for human suffering. The two former of these have reference to men as sinners. The latter regards them simply as sufferers. Of the two former also it is to be observed, that they are often made the subjects of religious meditation; while the latter, in comparison, is rarely noticed. For this reason, we will attend at present to the latter only. And this particular passage is chosen for a starting point, as suggesting, not barely the general subject of the benevolence of God, but also one particular and remarkable exhibition of it. We are constantly reminded of the Divine displeasure against sin, of that justice, which in some practical way must be satisfied, and of that mercy, which, notwithstanding, desires to save even the chief of sinners. And all these truths we see represented in the Son of God, sent to be the Saviour of the world. But it is important to consider and keep in mind all the truth, which a merciful Father is pleased to set before us. And we should be careful, therefore, not to lose sight of that sympathy and tenderness, which our Saviour everywhere exhibited toward those who suffered, and which, because we see them in Him, who was the very manifestation of the Deity, we know to be feelings of the Almighty Himself, toward a race whose sins are blossoming every day into untold shapes of suffering and shame. Our fall from the state of purity and happiness in which we were created, has made a fearful breach between ourselves and our Maker. The confidence that once existed, has turned into suspicion and distrust. And it is a thought that rarely crosses

the minds of most men, and one of the last to be warmly and constantly held even by a Christian, that the Being who made us, is near at hand, perfectly acquainted with our most secret wants, and tenderly interested in all those things that tell upon our happiness. It is far easier for us to think of the Maker of all the worlds and all that dwell in them, as seated on a lofty throne, and so occupied with the more important concerns of His limitless empire, that the trivial affairs which concern the well-being of His creatures,—disease, and pain, poverty, and mortification, and disappointment,—pass wholly unnoticed, and uncared for. We do indeed feel that a minute and particular providence in relation to human concerns, would bring the Deity nearer to our hearts; and still more, it is part of our theoretical belief, that such a providential care is actually exercised. But our faith, after all, too often holds this comforting truth with but a feeble and timid grasp. The Christian is afraid to believe in all the fulness of that love, which a Heavenly Father has offered him. And those who feel themselves still unreconciled to God, are yet slower to understand how much even they are pitied and cared for, by the Being who is notwithstanding displeased at their sins. And thus it happens, that no small part of that love and sympathy, poured out from on high upon a suffering world, is as little felt and valued as sunshine in the mines and caverns of the earth. Now Christ was the manifestation of the Deity, so far as He could be manifested under the limitations of a human form; and hence what we see, in the character of Christ, we know must be found also in

the great unseen Being, who sent Him into the world. And what was Christ, for sympathy with human suffering? He did not believe, we must remember, that the outward condition of man was a matter of the first importance, and by His contempt for the luxuries, and even comforts of life, He taught continually that the one thing about which the thoughts should gather and cling, is holiness of heart,—that, however desirable happiness may be, and however right its pursuit, men ought to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” His philanthropy, in weeping over misfortune, never made light of sin. And when He rebuked some of the grosser and more prominent forms of evil, He did not suffer men to overlook public honor and purity, and fireside faithfulness and love. And yet, what quick and tender sympathy for human woes, blooms green along the path of those thirty years, during which the Son of God was a dweller among men! How many a long-darkened eye, touched by the finger of the great Physician, opened suddenly on the flowery earth, and the cheerful day! How many a one, who did not know when the birds of the spring sang their early song, or the thunder rolled its awful music through the sky, or the word of love and tenderness trembled on the lip of friendship,—stood, all at once, entranced by the strange melodies of nature and of speech! How many a bent and withered cripple leaped up, at the Saviour’s word; and how many a pale face and sunken eye grew bright with sudden health, as the sick man took up his bed, and went away to his house, blessing and praising God!—It was a sight which the Galilean mothers

remembered long, when the Lord entered one of their cities, as a funeral-train passed out, to lay to his rest the widow's only son. It was long ago, and the country is far off. But the thing was the same that it now is; it was mother and son,—that dear relationship,—and death had broken it. The widow had bent down over the cold face of her child,—the last look had been taken,—the last kiss pressed upon the dead lips; and now she was going out to bury him. But who is this, that bids the train stand still? Who lays His hand upon the bier? And what sight is this upon which the mother gazes? "For he that was dead sat up, and began to speak."

Thirty and eight years, the cripple at Bethesda had groaned under his infirmity; and even now, in sight of the healing waters, there seemed little chance of his restoration, when there came one day into the market-place a stranger, who, as His eye fell upon the unfortunate man, said to him "Wilt thou be made whole?" He was a poor man, and had no friend to assist him in getting into the water; and he was so crippled, that he could not go himself; and he answered accordingly. Then the stranger said to him, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk;" and in that instant, the dead muscles sprang from their long paralysis, the stagnant blood leaped once more along its courses, and the lame man stood upon his feet. And we may be sure that the friendless beggar was as joyful, released from his long bondage to helplessness and pain, as one of us would have been; and wondered as any of us would have wondered, at the strange

humanity that should bestow so great a blessing on one so poorly able to make any return.

And now again, I behold the Saviour entering one of the Samaritan villages; and just outside, a group of lepers call to Him from a distance. They are abhorred and shunned by all men,—not permitted to come within the walls, nor to approach a person in health. Their loathsome appearance chills and represses pity, even in hearts that are not unmoved by a distress that appeals to the sympathies, while it offers no offence to the taste. But they have heard of the new prophet that is risen up, as one who feels for others just as they feel for themselves, and who knows, what so many who would be thought benevolent do not know, that the sharpness of an affliction is nowise softened by the consciousness of being an outcast from the sympathies of mankind. Therefore, they cry to him with all confidence, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” At His answer, straightway they feel their old strength creep along the sick and aching limbs, and they are lepers and outcasts no more.

There was joy in the bosom of the Canaanitish woman, when the word of Jesus restored her child; and in the house of Galilean Jairus, when his only daughter, snatched away by death, was given back again by the Saviour to his bosom, and his hearth.—And what a scene was that, when, as the sun went down, the multitudes flocked to Christ, on the green, sloping shores of Gennesaret, bringing their sick, and halt, and blind, and lunatic, to be healed! And how many went back to their homes, that night, weeping for joy, and blessing the name of Nazarene Jesus,

while some of them no doubt called to mind the saying of their prophet, "Himself took our infirmities, and bear our sicknesses."

And to cases like these we might add those instances in which our Saviour extended His sympathies and His aid, even to the lighter and more common troubles by which humanity is encompassed. Known, as He was, to be at the least, a great Teacher and Prophet, men would not naturally invoke His aid in matters of trifling moment. And it is not improbable that the main object for which our Saviour came into the world, would have been seriously interfered with, by a minute attention to those common interests, which men themselves can ordinarily maintain, in the exercise of good sense and good feeling. Accordingly, we find Him evading the question of the man who thought himself wronged by his brother, in the division of the paternal estate; and also the complaint of Martha against her sister; and instead of entering into the merits of either case, offering to each a mild rebuke, intended to fix their thoughts upon higher things. But where He could display His sympathy, without risk of impairing His influence, and moving counter to the great end of His mission, He enters with the utmost quickness and delicacy of feeling, into the circumstances of those about Him. How many hearts did He comfort and make stronger by those beautiful words, "Take no thought for your life. . . . Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" He knew that in the vast multitude

before Him, there was many a heart that trembled with anxiety, as it looked forward to what remained of the bitterness and the perils of life; and He knew that all the supports to be found within the narrow range of human philosophy,—even had they these supports,—were weak and worthless, compared with the sure consolations of a Christian's faith. And with an aptness of imagery, which no written record of His word can describe, He stretched out His hand toward the flowery plains that lay around, and bid them consider how the grass grew green, and the wild lilies bloomed gaily on the margin of Lake Galilee; and then pointing them upward to the serene sky that bent over the fruitful fields of Palestine, He reminded them of One, who cared for the flowers, and fed the birds of heaven; but who loved with a love beyond this, the unhappy children of men, and beheld with the constant and tender interest of a father, all the manifold evils under which they mourn,—of One whose ever-open eye marked all their sorrows, and whose outstretched hand was filled with blessings. And who can doubt that, as they sat there under the open sky, and the words of the new Prophet fell upon their ears, the tear of joy ran down many a care-worn face, and many a troubled and doubting heart grew still with trust?

And how beautifully, albeit how painfully, is our subject illustrated by the interview of our Saviour with the disciples, just before His death! It might have been supposed that at a time like that, His thoughts would have been mainly occupied with the evil that was so soon to befall Himself. But although

we know, from His own conduct, and His own declarations, that He shrank as any of us would shrink, from the dishonor and pain that lay before Him, He remembered that His death would take from His followers a support upon which they had long leaned, and that unless they were now, at this time, specially instructed and encouraged, they would be wholly without consolation, and unfitted for the solemn work they had to do. They were few in number, and surrounded by enemies—they had but a very imperfect understanding of our Saviour's teachings—how they were henceforth to be instructed, and how to be supported under their manifold trials, they did not well understand; and, although the daily and patient instructions of the Saviour had done much to confirm their faith, it was now to encounter a trial far more severe than any to which it had yet been subjected. All this our Lord remembers; and telling them plainly that the time was now near at hand when He must leave them, He addresses Himself with the most touching and delicate regard, to the work of preparing them for the loss they are about to suffer. "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me; and as I said unto the Jews, whither I go, ye cannot come, so now I say to you: Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God,—believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. . . . I will not leave you comfortless,—I will come to you. . . . These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all

things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid." Who cannot imagine how, in the stillness of that upper chamber, not a word is lost, as the eyes of the listening group are bent upon the face so soon to be hidden from their sight? There are some things He has said, which they cannot as yet understand. But these will be made plain to them by the Spirit of truth, after their Master has ascended. And this at least they do understand, that their Master leaves with them His blessing, and His promise. They are not alone, for although the Saviour's face is no longer to be visibly among them, His unseen presence will be with them everywhere,—before the magistrate, or in the dungeon,—in the isle of banishment,—or at the martyr's stake. But not to dwell upon illustrations like these, it seems to me, my friends, that there is something here for all of us.

1. To you who call the Lord Jesus Christ your Master, let me commend most earnestly these evidences of His warm and constant sympathy for those who are beset by any form of suffering or danger. Since He was the veritable Son of God, come down to reveal to us a knowledge of the Father, these numberless kindnesses He showed, mean just this; that the Almighty, great as He is, and far removed in knowledge, and power, and glory, beyond the utmost sweep of human or angelic thought, is yet as closely acquainted with all our most secret sources of disquietude as we

ourselves are, and that He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" more deeply than we are even moved by the sorrows of our fellow men,—that, as we are told of His people when they went through the pathless desert, and afterward when they dwelt on the Judean plains, and among the mountains of Galilee,—“In all their affliction He was afflicted; and the angel of His presence saved them. In His love, and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old;” so now, from His unseen and awful throne, He bends downward to the souls that fear Him,—pities every struggle, and fear, and doubt, and pain,—listens to every prayer,—bears in remembrance every infirmity,—and day by day uses all His wondrous wisdom to smooth their pathway from a world of sorrow to a life of untold rest and joy. If you can believe this, I have no fear that the manifold and bitter ills of this present life will crush down your patience and your courage into the dust. I have no fear that you will carry with you through the world a troubled and fainting spirit. “The peace of God, that passeth understanding,” will “keep your mind and heart.” You will be always brave and cheerful. The consolations of God will throw their light along the tangled and crooked way you journey, and cover even the gloomy gates of the tomb with their splendor.

2. And as for you who hold to-day “neither part nor lot” in the Christian’s hope, I would have you consider that you, too, are remembered and beloved by the Being who made you. Do not think for a moment

that He holds any light impression of the sin you are committing, in withholding from Him your affections. Think not that in some way this benevolence of God will procure for you at last a place in the kingdom of Heaven. Not a soul will be saved, but through repentance and faith. But it may be something of which you have not thought, and something that will cause all your hardness and ingratitude to appear in a light in which you have not hitherto seen them, that even in the midst of the evil and disobedient life you are leading, the long-suffering love of your Creator follows you everywhere,—that He pities you even in your sins, because you are one of His creatures,—that in all the dangers and sorrows that belong to this life, His thoughts toward you are only thoughts of compassion,—and that most of all, He mourns over the dreadful ruin you are bringing on your soul. It may be something to you to know that you are remembered and cared for by One whom you are strangely forgetting, and that even when you are finally condemned, and the just punishments of the other world are resting on your head, it will be only because the goodness of God could not move you to repentance.

## IV.

### FAITH, THE PRINCIPLE OF ALL HOLY LIVING.

JOHN, vi: 28, 29.—“Then said they unto Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom he hath sent.”

Probably no thinking man ever passes through life, without asking himself, at one time or another, the question contained in the text. But unfortunately, although there is a definite answer to it, this answer is not always returned by those to whom the question is put; and oftentimes the sincere questioner feels himself chided rather than enlightened, and turns away perplexed and sad, and possibly not far from angry.

For my own part, I have a great respect for what is called a “moral man;”—I mean a moralist, not in doctrine merely, but in fact,—a man who, in a world of selfishness, craft, money-hunting, and envy, and oppression, is rigidly upright, honorable in intercourse with enemies, open handed with his means, kind to the poor, the sick, the unhappy of every name. I think the community can ill afford to lose such men. And I do not hesitate to say, that I believe the censures of which this class of persons are sometimes made the subject, are at once unjust in themselves, and injurious to the truth. A moralist, so far from

being a bad man, on account of his morality, is for this very reason a better man; and the real ground upon which he is to be censured, is that he is not something more than this. A person who, taking the commandments as rules for the outward conduct, can say with truth, "All these have I kept from my youth up," has done well. Honesty is not wicked—it is dishonesty that is wicked: generosity and gentleness are not wrong—it is narrowness and passion, the opposites of these, that are wrong. We make no headway toward the truth, so long as we neglect so important and obvious a distinction.

Where, then, is the defect in what is called morality? I reply, It is not in the life without, but the spirit within,—it is not in the branches, but in the root. The man of a fair and beautiful life comes to me with the question, Am I not just, pure, temperate, and, as a citizen, neighbor, and friend, a man to be relied upon? And if so, what evil will you say of me? The answer is, I say no evil of what you have done. But I blame you in that there is something you have neglected to do. You have done many works, all of which I not only willingly, but gladly, acknowledge to be beautiful and good. But you have not worked "the works of God." For, by the definition in the text, the work of God is to receive God's messenger; and this, in the peculiar, Bible meaning of the words, you have not done. What you have done is well. But it is not enough. Nor do I say it is not enough, because there is not a sufficient amount of it, but because it is not right in its kind. A tree

is a beautiful thing, and a mountain is sublime. But neither of them is virtuous. So it is with you: your works are fair to the view, and are, no doubt, the offspring of noble impulses. But they are not the "works of God," or godly works, because they have no reference to God. And if you reply that you may as truly obey and honor God, by the life you are leading, as by any other, I point you to the passage before us,—"*This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.*" A work may be good, in the current acceptation of the term; and yet not good, in the true sense; the sense in which it occurs in the Bible. In order to understand Bible truth, we must take the words of the Bible in that sense which the Bible itself prescribes, whether that be their common signification or not. For example, the word "*belief*" has, in ordinary usage, the restricted meaning of opinion, or the intellectual assent to the truth. But in its application to Christ, and the gospel He preached, it is very plain, from the connections in which it stands, that it signifies not merely the opinion that there was such a being as Christ, and that He was a messenger sent from God, and that His teachings are true, but love for Christ, and the warm reception of His teachings, as the rule of life. So those various terms expressive of right emotions, or of a right and worthy character in general, such as love, charity, or uprightness, righteousness, goodness, although restricted in their common use to the relations that exist between man and man, are carried a step farther in the Scriptures, and made to signify the attitude of the heart toward God. Therefore, although my conduct be

good in a superlative degree, as far as all my human relations are concerned, it is not good in any degree in reference to God, unless the spirit of obedience to God is the spring out of which it arises. If to my question, "What shall I do that I might work the works of God?" my Maker replies, "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He hath sent," of what avail is it, that I do everything else but this?

It is a great mistake, my friends, to suppose that when God enjoins a specific duty, the doing of some other thing will answer as well. Nothing can ever meet God's commands, that is not obedience to those commands. We have no right to consider one injunction of our Maker as less important, or less binding than another, and to conclude that because we see the practical utility of one commandment, and do not thus understand the reason for the other, we may obey the one, and disregard the other. It was this irreverent and dangerous reasoning, that misled the dwellers in the ancient Eden. The command was, "Ye shall not eat of it." The appearance of the case to human reason was, that the tree was fair to behold, and "a tree to be desired to make one wise." So they turned away from the commandment, and followed their own misleading judgment. Saul, you remember, had been commanded utterly to destroy the Amalekites, and all that was theirs. "But Saul and the people," the narrative reads, "spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them;" but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly." And when Saul excused him-

self to Samuel, saying that the sheep and oxen were reserved for sacrifice to the Lord, mark the answer of the prophet.—“Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. . . . Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.” It is a very natural, but also a very dangerous mistake, to suppose that anything whatever can be more acceptable to our Maker, than a prompt and childlike obedience to His commands. He knows the reason there lies hidden under what seem to us the most unreasonable, or at the least, the most unnecessary requirements. And I am sure we should have no just ground for complaint at the inequality of God’s ways, if we should hereafter learn that some of His injunctions have had in them no other fitness whatever, than that which lay in their power to test our willingness to obey. Was there anything to be gained by the offering up of Abraham’s son? Evidently not; or God would have suffered the proceeding to go forward to its consummation. But there was something to be gained by the command: it proved to Abraham’s own mind, and to that of his son, that whatever his own view of the case might be, it was enough for him, that God had commanded him; and in his noble obedience, he manifested to all coming time, the sublimity there is in faith. If the command had come to Adam’s oldest son to sacrifice one of his children, murderer as he was, he would have rejected it, on the ground that it was wicked and unnatural to slay his child. But to the father of Isaac, this very

command had in it an authority, to which he willingly and with holy reverence bowed his human reason, and his fatherly affection; and the act to which it pointed him, instead of murder, was a sacred offering to God.

I have dwelt upon this matter of simple, unquestioning obedience to God, because I think that one of the most serious hindrances in the way of men who profess to be seeking the truth, is a defect of reverence. They are apt to conclude, that a given passage of Scripture does not enjoin a certain duty, because they are unable to see the propriety of such an injunction, instead of taking the natural and obvious meaning of the words, and concluding because they evidently point to a given duty, the thing enjoined must have its reason and its fitness, even though they cannot see them. In our text, there is something so clear and explicit, as to leave the mind no choice. To believe in God's messenger, (whatever that may imply,) must be the only thing that can properly be called obedience. There is no condition, in any way limiting, or modifying the command. The words are clear of all embarrassment. The questioners, evidently full of the idea that some outward performance was to entitle them to God's favor, inquire what particular thing it should be. And what is the answer? No work of your hands, but a work of your heart. No obedience that lies in the tongue and the fingers, but an inward bowing of your spirit, to the authority of your God. "This is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent."

But although it must be insisted that no argument

can be appropriate, which goes to discredit the plain meaning of the words of Scripture, on the ground that they imply an unnecessary, or even an unreasonable duty, let us look for a moment, at the reasoning employed by those who belong to the class of which we are speaking. The essence of it is this, that their view of the matter is practical, while that of their opponents is theoretical; or at the best, that if their opposers are practical, they embarrass themselves with a mass of theory, which is wholly unnecessary; and what they refer to as thus theoretical, is the Scriptural belief in Jesus Christ. Now what says the text? Theory is better than fact? Doctrine is superior to work? By no means. But this very thing which you call a theory and a doctrine, is in reality a work. Do you ask me what you shall do in the way of good works? This is the great first work you have to do, to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. In any right sense of the word, faith in Christ is more truly a work, than any other you can perform. I say this with all confidence, and without stopping to dwell upon the reason for it, because it is the uniform testimony of those men who have actually tried them both. You, by your own account, have tried but one. How then can you properly contradict what I have said? Here are men, who when they were first led to think soberly of their duty, and their highest interests, sought refuge from an accusing conscience in a compromise, and clung for a time, to the idea that morality was the fulfilling of the law; and yet, now, having forsaken this opinion, and exercised the true faith in Christ, they tell us that difficult as were the works of morality,

all combined were nothing, to the one comprehensive work of Scriptural belief. Now men who are true thinkers always reverence a fact. Here is one for you.—It will not answer to say that nothing is a work which is not visible. These outward acts which you call works, are strictly speaking only the effects of work: the work is within. If by an inward battle with yourself, you have put down pride, envy, hatred, your conduct will be well enough. There will be no work, or labor, in the doing of that to which a just, and humble, and benevolent mind, is prompting you. The work lies back of that,—the labor is to get your heart into that state in the first place. Sow the grain, and you do a work; but it comes up of itself. Plant your soul with true thoughts, and right affections, and you do a weary, difficult work. But this once done, right conduct springs up of itself. There is comparatively no difficulty in carrying out a resolution. The work lies in really forming one. If you can control your mind, you will have little trouble with your hands, or your tongue.

But I am willing to believe that there are men calling themselves moralists, with whom morality is something more than a doctrine; and who actually practise in some good degree, the virtues of self-control, and self-improvement;—men who beholding the morally beautiful, endeavor to realize it in their daily lives.—Such persons will maintain as earnestly as a Christian, the need of constant effort in the regulation of the thoughts and affections, self-watching, self-stimulating, self-control. They believe that the only true works are works of the mind and the heart: they go some-

what deeper than the generality of those who hold their doctrine: they are not merely ever-talking, ever-disputing moralists,—they are actually moral men,—a difference as real, as the difference between good and evil.

Now holding this earnest, and so far as it goes, truthful view of moral obligation, they inquire with all sincerity of those who hold the Christian faith, In what do we differ? You are for a right heart: so are we. You think it necessary to hold a certain doctrine; but you acknowledge that the doctrine is of no consequence in itself, and is valuable only because it leads to a right life. We believe with you, that all the worth there is in a doctrine is that it tends to some good practical result: we disagree with you, merely in believing that we come at the same end without the doctrine. To such the Bible answer is twofold.

*First*, if a right life is the object aimed at, and a right life consists in obedience to God, and God has commanded, as the very first item of obedience, that we yield our faith to a certain doctrine, it is a logical consequence that there cannot be even the beginning of a right life, until this commandment is obeyed. The deliberate neglect of any one command positively proves that the spirit of obedience to God is not there. It is not only a mistake, but a fatal one, to believe that I may select from among the requisitions of the law of God those which appear to me more directly practical, and leave the others unattended to. In our endeavor perfectly to obey *all* God's commandments, we may fail more decidedly in relation to one command, than another, and yet be truly obedient. But

when we deliberately pass one injunction by, do what else we may, we are thoroughly disobedient. If the motive which prompts me to observe one commandment is the genuine spirit of obedience, then plainly this same spirit will incite me to the observance of every commandment. "He that offendeth in one point, is guilty of all."

But, *secondly*, and more particularly, I think it may be shown that these efforts toward an inward reformation, which characterize the life of a truly moral man, are not calculated to produce, and therefore never do produce, a right life, and that therefore the heart of a moralist is not right in the sight of God. And here, my friends, I should rejoice if I could but make you know with how great reluctance, I endeavor to show deformity in that of which the outward appearance is so fair. And I will even say, that, as I should be more sorry to know of a lofty and spreading tree, that a principle of death lay lurking within its massy trunk, and that very soon it must fall from its glory, and sink into decay, than if it were a leafless and fruitless stump, without use or beauty, so I am more saddened by the consideration of that destroying error, which preys upon the heart of the mere moralist, than by the outward and visible deformity, of the shamelessly bad. And yet the truth is more beautiful than all things else; and to the truth let us appeal.

It must be granted, at the outset, that every effect is of the same nature with the cause from which it sprung. Therefore, a right life is the product of true impressions, and holy feelings. There can be no such thing as a right life, which has no beginning in the

mind and the heart: the acts are only the outward form of the thoughts and emotions; and "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." And, according to the Bible, what is the true view of the gospel, and what are the feelings that correspond to such a view? Taking them together,—for they belong together,—they may be expressed in this one word,—self-renunciation. This implies the giving up, for one thing, of one's natural wisdom, and receiving with humility that which God has declared to be the true wisdom. Now let the moralist explain the Bible as he will, I cannot but think that he always so explains it, as to divest of their plain and natural meaning those passages in which the necessity is intimated for something more than an outwardly blameless life, as a condition of acceptance with God. He may believe in Christ in some sense. But it is in such a sense as virtually reduces Him to a level with the great and good men of every age,—a sense that makes Him only a new teacher sent to enlighten the world, and win men to the truth and the service of God, by the allurements of a bright and lovely example,—a sense that may awaken in his mind a respect for the man Jesus Christ, but forbids anything like reverence for the "God manifest in the flesh." But when I look into the Bible, I do not find Christ thus spoken of: I cannot, from the extraordinary language there used, receive any such impressions of the Savior, as those I have described. He is spoken of as the very centre of a new system; but, by the creed of the moralist, He is made only a new preacher of an old system. He is set forth as a necessity to the race; but they virtually, if not avow-

edly, dispense with Him. He is represented as the embodiment of a truth which can be received only by receiving Him; but they accept only such fragments of His truth, as have been taught before, by human preachers, and virtually, if not avowedly, reject that which is peculiarly His own. There is in their way of viewing Christ, a spirit of reluctance to yield up their preconceived opinions, and to believe that Christ is in some peculiar sense the wisdom of God. They cannot give up what they have been accustomed to regard as sound reasoning, and commit themselves without reserve to the teachings of the Bible. If the question should be asked one of them, will you take the Bible, and, reading it as nearly as may be, with an unbiassed judgment, honestly and at once give yourself up to what your conscience may tell you is its teaching?—he would hesitate before he would say,—I will. Not that men must forbear to reason, as they read, but only that there can be no solid reasoning against the plain command of God. When we *think*, we should not cease to *reverence*; and while we seek to explain what is dark, and to supply what is wanting, and even with an humble and reverent curiosity to inform ourselves upon certain subjects of religious inquiry, upon which the Bible is wholly silent; that which is plain and explicit, we must always take as it stands. Now I appeal to the moralist, to know if the Bible does not abound in representations concerning Christ, which he cannot receive just as they stand, without allowing that Christ is the depository of a wisdom and knowledge, which are superior to his own, and which are absolutely necessary to his salvation?

“The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” And so shrewd a reasoner as Paul acknowledges, after his conversion, that Christ was made of God unto him, wisdom. But can the moralist say that there is any such sense, as these, and many other passages plainly intimate, in which Christ is his wisdom? If he cannot, it is because he has not believed on Him.

But self-renunciation implies a giving up of one's natural goodness, and receiving in its place the righteousness provided by God. Now the true moralist believes in the necessity for a righteousness of some kind; and he labors diligently to create and maintain this righteousness within himself. But he does not receive that righteousness which God has set forth as the true one. He is perfectly correct, in saying that men can be no better for the holy and spotless character of Christ, so long as they themselves are destitute of moral rectitude; and mistaking some of those terms, in which the writers upon this subject, have spoken of the transfer of character, from Christ, to the believer in Christ, they conclude naturally enough, that the whole thing is a matter of useless, if not injurious speculation; but they under-estimate the sanctity of those commandments which they have disobeyed, and forget that, do what they may, they can never make good their past short-comings, nor even live perfectly for the time to come. They hold the best they themselves can do, to be enough; when it is a very

plain teaching of the Word of God, that their very best is nothing, because it does not emanate from a spring of pure and holy feeling: it is but the effort of what is often called a self-righteous spirit, and what we may as appropriately term, pride of character. But this pride of character must be out of place, in persons of whom the Bible says, "all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags." There can be no ground for self-complacency in a character, which, however beautiful without, is corrupt at the core; and though green and flourishing to the view of man, is only weakness and decay to the piercing eye of God. Now the moralist cannot believe that this fair show in the outward living, is all worthless, and that his first duty is to cross out from the estimate of his own virtue, those very things which have heretofore constituted his only reliance, and receive the righteousness of God, which is in Christ. I am not now setting forth any special theory of the atonement. I am not undertaking to tell how it is, that Christ becomes the righteousness of an unrighteous man. Nor is it a matter of vital importance, so long as we truly receive Christ. But I believe the plain representation of the Bible to be, that men are altogether lost to the sort of goodness which God requires, and that the only way in which they can secure it, is through faith in the Son of God. That they have a certain sort of goodness is not denied, and that they have the power to cultivate this goodness to a very high degree of moral beauty, is by no means denied. All that is insisted upon is, that this is not the goodness which God requires, and that if so, no matter how great its amount may be, it

is utterly useless, toward the end of meeting God's demand upon human obedience; and farther, that God in His wisdom and His mercy, has set forth one Jesus Christ, to be in some way the substitute in this matter; to be in the place of that righteousness of which men are destitute, but which they yet must have, before they can be accepted of God. Now all this the moralist, either openly or silently, either consciously or unconsciously, rejects. He does not assume to be perfect; and yet he believes that the goodness of character which he actually possesses, is right in its kind; and as for this offering of Christ for the sins of men, and this necessity on the part of men for letting their own righteousness fall utterly out of their thoughts, and submitting themselves to the righteousness of God, which is in Christ, he does not understand its meaning,—he does not receive it as a practical truth,—and hence it is not incorporated into his character, and all the goodness he possesses, is such as men, in their melancholy blindness, can make for themselves.

And we might say, still farther, that self-renunciation gives up all dependence upon its own strength, and receives thankfully, the strength that comes from God. To the Christian, Christ is a power in the soul; and as day by day, he moves on, through the paths of earthly trial, and tempting; overcoming, where he well remembers he was once overcome; supported, where he remembers that before, he fell; he feels that it is not true of him that *he lives*, but rather that it is Christ who lives in him. But the moralist is conscious of a certain sort of moral power within him; and he mistakes it for the energy of spiritual life. He believes

that he can walk, unguided and alone, through the perilous places of the world, and battle single-handed and shieldless, the evil powers that beset him all around. Or if he entertain some notion of an enlightenment and a strength from on high, it is a dim and shadowy impression, which has in it no practical power to mould his character, and leaves him as truly to the darkness of his own misleading, and the feebleness of his own unaided powers, as though he had it not. But Christ is held up in the Scriptures as the power of God. We are told, not only that there are certain truths taught by Christ, which are a source of strength to the human spirit which receives them,—but also, that Christ taken to the heart by a heart-faith, is Himself a new life in the soul. The belief which truly receives Christ, does not merely take up a new theory of morals, or institute a new system of outward practice, but absolutely substitutes Christ in the place of self,—puts away forever self-teaching, self-righteousness, self-help; and in their room, takes the offered wisdom, righteousness, strength, that are in Christ. This is the doctrine of Christ, as taught in the Bible. Therefore it must be true: therefore the moralist must be under a serious, a destroying mistake. As to Christ, “there is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”

And now, although we have not particularly examined into the doctrine of which Christ is the embodiment, I think the references that have been made to the general tenor of the Bible representations, will suffice to show that the moralist does not receive this

doctrine. The argument he offers is this, that he is practical; because his hands are so full of works. The argument with which the Bible meets him, is that his works are thoroughly unpractical, and valueless, because they are not the works of God. He insists that he is doing well, because he is doing much. The answer is, that do what he may, he cannot be doing well, so long as he is not doing the particular thing commanded.

If there is a man here, to whom what has been said has a just application, let me say to him one parting word. My brother, you and I are going together to the invisible world: there, before the judgment seat of Christ, we are to be tested by the words of this Book. I think you have mistaken their meaning, and mistaken it in such a way as not merely leaves your mind in darkness, but leaves the deep evil of your heart untouched. I am sure you cannot go on in this way, and be safe. And the time hastens: you have not long to think of these things. I would advise you to look at this whole matter again, and to do it without delay. If you would "work the works of God," you must "believe on Him whom He hath sent."

## V.

### THE CHURCH THE DEPOSITORY OF THE WORLD'S STRENGTH.

ISAIAH lii: 1.—“Awake, awake: put on thy strength, O! Zion.

All parts of the Bible claim our reverential regard: the doctrines are pure, the promises are adjusted to our hopes, the warnings are fitted to our fears, the rules of life are clear, concise, easily remembered, simple in their application. Everything agrees with the subject, the time, the people and the end.

Hence we are both irreverent and unwise, when we imagine that the significance of any portion is to be caught at an idle glance, and all its practical uses made sure to the heart, by that hasty and unthoughtful perusal, that so often passes for the reading of the Bible.

Isaiah had been apprising the Hebrew people of the calamities which at no distant day were surely to befall them. But being instructed by the Spirit, that denunciations, fitted to excite a rational fear, would need to be balanced by considerations that should tend to stimulate and sustain, he reminds them that although exiled, they would still be God's people, and that in the deepest sorrows, they should find deliverance, if they would but rouse themselves to duty and to hope,—if they would remember their strength, and call with all their former trust upon the name of God.

It is probable that a reference is here intended, under terms of a local and restricted meaning, to that final enlargement and glory of the Church, in which all her enemies shall be put down, and Christ shall be the only potentate of a ransomed world. But even aside from this supposition, we are warranted in using these spirit-stirring words, to awaken our own indolence, to dissipate our own doubts, and build up our own flagging and doubtful strength, into the proper energy of a Christian Church.

The words before us, although the language of poetic fervor, convey none the less a truth, as definable and precise as any formula of science, and one which for its sacred importance, as far transcends any fact of science, as science rises above the shallowest fancy,—namely,—that the Church is the world's great depository of spiritual strength. By the Church, we mean the great company of those who, throughout the world, obey and worship the true God. When we represent the Church as the world's depository of strength, we mean that it is that agency, without which the world's utmost resources would not suffice for the attainment of that happiness and dignity, which belong to uncorrupted humanity. And in saying this we but affirm what the Bible authoritatively declares, and observation and reasoning combine to prove.

In general confirmation of this, it might be urged that, in all ages, those laws, and customs, and institutions, which have involved the plainest recognition of an overruling Power, have held the most beneficent and the most enduring sway.

Farther, if we speak of philosophy, notwithstanding

the errors which the Church itself has sometimes held and defended under the name, yet disjoined from religion, it has been found self-contradictory, variable, and out of harmony with the general order; and even in its truest forms, it has never involved a recognition either of the original dignity, or the actual depravation of men,—the true dependence, and the proper independence, of the soul; and has therefore never met the deepest wants of human nature.

Again, as regards the state, its sphere of operation must be narrow, for the reason that, occupying itself with conduct instead of motive, it can exert no immediate influence upon the higher sentiments.

And finally, if we come to the laws, and usages, and schemes of social regeneration, which form the boast of these later ages, it should be remembered that whatever their influence, they are themselves but outgrowths of the popular mind, and thus presuppose some subtler agency than their own, which has first worked within, and made the popular mind what it is.

Every one will allow that money would not be wealth, if it could not be brought into circulation; that muscle is not strength, when it is smitten with paralysis, or shrunken with age; and that in general, nothing is of value, save as it answers a purpose, or satisfies a want. But the useless gold, that finds no market, and the helpless muscle, that has no motion, are fit emblems of a world without a Church, and humanity estranged from God. Doubtless there can be life and activity without religion; and the Bible reveals to us an entire world, where an intense and ceaseless industry goes forward, under the guidance

of error, and the weight of an eternal cendemnation. But there can be no life that is natural and true, in a system of things in which there is no manner of the Divine presence and co-operation. Men were made to find the dignity, the safety, and the peace, of life, in union with the Deity; and no provision was made, within the compass of their own nature, for any departure from this condition of a wise and happy existence. Hence the Scriptures, which always represent man as he is, and speak to him as he is, pronounce all the unregenerated dead; and regard the act by which men are converted, as a "passing from death unto life." The Christian is constantly spoken of as one in whom there is a manifestation of the Holy Ghost. And the Church is declared to be the "light of the world." Sundered from God, men are cut off from all spiritual truth, and all holy impulse; and since this is utterly contrary to the will of their Creator, and since it renders impossible a true and natural development of character, they are not really men. And if a single soul is thus degraded and lost, by a reversion of its law of life, so likewise must it be with a world of souls. And as an individual may live and act, and yet as to all true and natural life, be wretched and helpless, so a world might be, in which men should move to and fro in all the enterprises of a mortal ambition, while yet for order and truth, and security and hope, it should be a world unnatural and infernal. Religion is the life of the soul, not because it keeps the soul in existence, but because it renders that existence true and happy. And the Church is the strength of the world, not because there could be no art, no com-

merce, no literature and no government without it, but because the truth which the Church at once represents and preserves, is the only agency which can guide the impulses of humanity, to safe and noble ends,—because it alone can save the powers from a disordered and perilous action, and keep both thought and feeling, in the line of truth. We have but time to say briefly this, that without religion, philosophy wanders: without religion, art comes short of its highest meaning, and its purest uses: without religion, commerce is no better than a shrewd and splendid bargain: diplomacy is a courtly trick; and government but a cage, and a chain, and a bundle of faggots, set off with the name of authority, and the glitter of an unsteady crown. And as the materials of a yet unsettled and unmoulded world were “without form and void;” and depth and height alike lay under the cover of primeval darkness, so if the Spirit of wisdom and of love should cease from its brooding providence, even the little of truth and purity that we now behold, would vanish away: mistakes and sorrows would grow rank in the ground that God had cursed: chaos would sit in the abdicated throne of order; and the very light and sunshine of this lonely world would be despair.

But let us now inquire in what the strength of the Church consists. And here I hardly know how so to speak, as to convey my own meaning. It is evident that spiritual life, whether in an individual, or an organization, must have two sources, and can have only two, namely,—*prayer and labor*. But although these ideas are sufficiently intelligible, there is too much reason to fear that a large portion of the Church

receive but little of their true force and meaning. We all need to reconsider, at times, the significance of these simple and familiar terms, lest we lose their power, by becoming hardened to their sound. That such a loss to the spirituality of the Church has actually been sustained, is evident from the current mode of speaking. For these two ideas, instead of being apprehended as but two different forms of the same thing, are viewed almost as mutually opposite and hostile, or at the least as totally distinct, and unlike. In truth, prayer is the beginning of labor; and labor is the consummation of prayer. Prayer is the impulse: labor is the motion which the impulse gives. Prayer is the rising of the sun,—labor is its long, splendid circuit through the sky. All the world's great public movements, whether in the circle of government, of trade, of economics, or of education, demand two sorts of men,—those who search out ideas, and those who apply them; and these two classes, although apparently distinct, are practically one. For before any useful work, there must always be a wise plan. But as the work requires hands, so the plan demands thought; and as the idea is nothing, if it be not carried into useful application, so the work will surely be empty and fruitless, without an idea to shape it. Action is great,—but never unless knowledge go before it. Knowledge is sublime,—but never except it go forth into action.—Now in just this way, the living prayer, and the prayerful life, are one. For it will be found impossible to name a single element of prayer, that does not point to some form of outward action. For example, the man who prays confesses

himself a sinner. Now he realizes the truth of what he is saying, or he does not. If he do not, then his confession is hollow, and what he says is not prayer. But if he do, then he justifies God, abhors himself, feels unhappy and ashamed. And what is this, but wishing that he had not sinned? And what is that, but hoping that he may not sin again? And since his conduct is his own, what is this again, but determining in the strength of God, that he will not sin? And finally, what is a fervent and vital resolution like this, but that wholesome root, that never yet lay in the soil of a human spirit, without springing into flower and fruit? Or, to come at it from another point, the praying man ascribes to God all honor, and majesty, and excellence. He looks up to Him, as to a great, overshadowing, awful Nature, never to be fully known, but inexpressibly worthy to be loved, and glorified. There, in the stillness of his shut closet, he avows the Almighty to be his Teacher, his Guide, his Sovereign, his Redeemer, and his only Joy. Now all this he feels, or he does not feel. If he do not feel it, it is not prayer, but taking the name of God in vain. But if he do, then he literally loves the Deity, as a man loves wife and child, and fireside and native land. And what is this, but the desire to do His blessed will? And where was ever that desire, that it did not spring into obedience?

Prayer is a wish; and the words of Prayer are the expression of a wish. And if we use the words without the impression of necessities which we desire the Father of spirits to supply, and of sins which we would have the God of all grace pardon and forget,—without

desiring a closer and dearer walk with His guiding Spirit, and hoping by our godly lives to stir up others to a like feeling and a like obedience,—without just such a longing for all these things as the merchant has for the safe arrival, and the advantageous sale of his goods, and the husbandman for clear skies, and a plenteous harvest, and the long-absent traveller, for a sight of the dear faces around his hearth-stone,—then our prayers are but so much breath blown from the lungs, and fashioned by the vocal organs into heartless phrases. Prayer without desire, is like a furnace with the fire out: it is sand, in which neither shrub nor grain will grow: it is water without inlet or outlet, poured mechanically into a hollow place, muddy, dead and stagnant: it is a solemn, dreadful lie, and mockery in the guise of worship. Prayer, as the Bible describes it, and as every true Christian knows it, is a longing after God, a forgetting of self, a hatred of evil, and a thirsting after all purity and truth. “As the heart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O! God.” “Behold, I have longed after Thy precepts.” “I hate every false way.” “I will love Thee, O! Lord, my strength.” “I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.”—Prayer that is not prayer, prayer of which every word and syllable, as it is uttered, falls like a stone into the dust, instead of rising like a flame toward Heaven, is offered to quiet a restless and unhappy conscience: it is used as a drug, which however unpalatable, must yet be taken: it is a ceremony, by which one would persuade himself that he is a Christian.

In a word, my brethren, if prayer be what we repre-

sent, it is not otherwise distinguished from action, than as the soul is distinguished from the body. One is the inward life,—the other is the outward shape: they are related as that which causes, is always related to the thing caused,—as light and heat are related to the vegetation they produce,—as a blow to the motion it excites,—as the blood pulsating through the veins, to all physical strength and beauty. When prayer has not led to action, we may be sure it has not been true prayer. It may have sounded like it; and every word and every tone may have agreed with the proper subjects and temper of prayer. But that nameless, indescribable sincerity, without which prayer cannot be, has surely been wanting.

And this unity may be seen equally well from another point. What is action? It is the application of the powers. What then is religious or Christian action, but the religious application of the powers? But what is religion, save the presence of the Holy Ghost in the soul? And how is the Holy Ghost there present, except as He is communed with? And what is communion with the Holy Ghost, but prayer? In other words, all conduct which is right in the sight of God, is thus right, because it arises from a right feeling within. And this right feeling is nothing else than the feeling of oneness with God. And this oneness with God is the very heart and core of all praying. And hence, while conduct may appear to be Christian, when it is not so, all conduct that is Christian betokens a prayerful mind, as its only possible source, as truly as an earthquake, breaking up the surface, testifies to an earthquake all the way down.

For what, indeed, is all Christian conduct, but prayer bursting through and coming to the surface ?

Agreeably to this view, it is a good test, both of prayer and of action, to inquire whether each assists the other. We know that breathing quickens the pulse, that the quickened pulse strengthens the muscle, and that the play of muscle enlarges, in its turn, the capacity for breathing. We cannot say that either of these functions was designed barely to minister to any other: each, while it renders a service, receives also a service: each exists for the whole, and the whole for each; and the harmonious play of all is human life. Now, if we find that prayer has not made us readier than we were for the common experiences of life,—if, as we go out from the closet into the crooked and troubled ways of the world, we are not the stronger and the more hopeful,—the gentler and humbler, where we ought to be gentle and humble; and the braver, where there is call for bravery,—more vigilant, diligent, firm and pure,—then we have been praying amiss; for we have prayed without any sincere wish, or definite intention. And, on the other hand, if, as we turn aside from labor or diversion, prayer has no pleasure,—if it do not bring us near to God,—if it be done drily, as a duty, and not cheerfully and with relish,—if it be a matter of words and ideas, without faith and holy joy,—then we may know that we have that day lived amiss: for we have lived without the spirit of prayer. The two things blend, like kindred colors and according sounds. They act together. In their strong and beautiful agreement they make up a

holy life, as dew or sunshine transform themselves into verdure.

And now, having considered wherein the strength of the Church consists, let us look for a moment at the actual condition of the Church, and inquire what is implied in the injunction of the text. And that our investigation may not be an empty ceremony, let us conduct it with that boldness of humility, which dares to look steadily even at the most mortifying truth.—Within a few months past, a most gratifying state of religious feeling has pervaded the community. Its two great leading features are,—first, that its origin cannot be traced to any of what are commonly understood by the means of religious awakening; and secondly, that it acts quite as powerfully in stimulating the lukewarmness of the Church, as in arousing to life those actually “dead in trespasses and in sins.” For these hopeful indications, let us lift up our hearts in gratitude to the Lord of the Church, and with new fervor pray, “Thy kingdom come!”—But, on the other hand, let us remember how short a time since, the Church was buried in a profound and shameful slumber; let us consider how many are even now as stupid, and as forgetful of their solemn vows, as ever: let us weigh well the probabilities that meet us even now, that the Church will soon again be found as little regardful as in days gone by, of its own lofty and sacred character, and its momentous relations to a perishing world. With all that is fitted to encourage, there is too much that ought to stir up our fears: and we have less reason to rejoice over that which is, than to weep over that which is not. It is not to be denied

that the Church, as a body, has only a feeble impression of the sources of its own strength,—that it realizes but poorly the vitality of prayer, or the solemnity of labor,—still less the harmony between the two;—and that, notwithstanding it represents all the spiritual life the world possesses, it yet offers many a defenceless point to the arrows of infidelity, and feeds with a half-shut, sparing hand the necessities of a perishing race. When the Church prays without heart, and adds a few stunted labors that are also heartless, and does both in a painful and halting way, neither the prayer nor the work, is worth the room it occupies. When men pray to be delivered from sins which they are under no temptation to commit, and forget altogether the sin which so easily besets them, or, whatever they pray for, when they only say the words, because they have the habit, and because it sounds better to others, and enables them to feel better satisfied with themselves, but do not really hate their sins, and wish they were dead, and do their honest utmost against them,—the praying is vain, and will never spring up into anything good. When men, even in their social or private devotions, confess that they are sinners, without being well aware that they really are so; and pray that the heathen may be given to Christ, while they suffer the Devil to snatch men from their very doors; that the reign of peace may everywhere prevail, while yet they daily hate and devour one another; that they may be more and more weaned from an inordinate love of the world, while yet they do not mean in their hearts to abate one jot of their parsimony, or be a whit more sober and self-sacrificing;

and that the blessed and glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ may come, when in all honesty they do not feel that they have anything to do with making it come, and are so feeling and living day by day, that if all should so live, that kingdom never could come,—“all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” There are some things we can do as effectually in opposition to our own tastes and wishes; as if we loved them. If a man have business to transact, at a distance from his home, and the night be dark and stormy, he can nevertheless compel himself to go; and if the work be done at all, it will be as well done, as if he had gone in broad daylight and with a willing mind. But it is not so with the life of faith. That cannot be propped up from without: it must stand by virtue of a strength within. No man can do his work as a Christian so *skilfully*, that He who sees the heart will not discern between the outward appearance, and the inward spirit. Be it prayer or labor, so long as it is heartless, the man might as well have been asleep, or even dead, for all the favor it will find with a holy God. When the Church relapses from its proper dignity, and abates something of its vigilance, its diligence, its attitude of warning and command,—when it looks with approval upon courses that deceive and hurt the soul,—when, far from the Jerusalem of its purity and its vigor, it falls in with the gross and destroying ways of a Babylonish world,—then it is that for a season all things go backward. The rude and violent in the community run riot: the gay are louder in their revelry: the scornful laugh: the listless fold their arms to a deeper slumber: the hypocrite and the self-

deceived forget that they ever were called Christians: the faithful few weep and wonder, and pray with doubting minds. It is to the Church in this condition that the call comes sweeping down, like a trumpet-blast among the graves,—“Awake, awake: put on thy strength, O! Zion.” And woe to the Church, when it looks for its strength to its denominational name and history, or to the rite of baptism, or to the privilege of membership, or to any merely outward and visible difference between itself and the world. The teacher is despised, if he be found ignorant, or if that which he knows he is unable to impart. The physician is not esteemed for his diploma, or his noisy pretensions, if his medicines do not cure. And the Church, claiming to be the world’s great centre of instruction and of healing, is not powerful by reason of its claims, or its ordinances, or its history, but just as every other agency is powerful, by virtue of what it is able to do. All the external distinctions of the Church,—its Sabbath services, its meetings for prayer and Christian converse, its missionary movements, its round of family devotions, so often dead and wearisome, its Sunday-School instruction, so often stereotyped and listless, its many ways of keeping up the outward appearance of solemnity, its hollow mourning over the very evils it has itself created,—all these things are but the bare and sapless branches that creak and rattle in January winds. They are not the life of the Church, even when the Church is strongest. But when it is weak and spiritless, they are so many signs, that draw the notice of a scoffing world to its helplessness, and its shame.—No profession of faith can ever overcome the world.

The fearful thoughtlessness of men will never be aroused by the heartless round of Church usages. Deceit, and gainsaying, and skepticism, and barefaced vice, will never yield before the timid and soft-spoken ways of an emaciated and pulseless orthodoxy. Words will not do. Forms will not do. The supplication that has no sincerity, and the labor that has no soul, will not do. We are wont zealously to cry down images and pictures, and Latin prayers and priestly decorations. But, my brethren, these things are not worse in a Romish Church, than the same things in any other Church. To Him who looks past the altar, and the rite, and the spoken words, and bends His burning eye upon the soul itself, what matters it, think you, whether we mock Him in one way or in another? What difference, in the just and awful estimate of Heaven, between one who worships a cross, or a painting, and one who worships a sermon, or rests his hope for eternity on doctrines and sacraments? It is vain to say that these things never happen where men are enlightened, and that none of us could fall into so gross an error. For, brethren, whatever differences there may be among us in mind, one man's *heart* is as treacherous and deceitful as another's. We are all by nature in the same darkness. Paul, the wise and the eloquent, was as far astray before he knew the Lord, as Lydia the seller of purple, or Peter the fisherman, or Cornelius the soldier. When a Pagan bows down to a tree, or a star, or a wooden idol, or another man adores an image or a relic, or another still, abides by a creed, and comforts himself in a profession of faith, and some wonted round of social observances, there

is a difference doubtless in culture and capacity, but not a particle of difference in spirit and in character. Is the Wisdom on high deceived by names? Can a formalist hide away, where the eye of the Almighty shall not see him? No, my friends, no: in the judgment, it will be no avail for any of us to say, "True, I was envious, proud, soon angry: I gave little of my substance to the Church, and even that, only because I was ashamed not to give: I did not visit the sick and the fatherless; and the world said I was somewhat spotted with its own evil ways. But I came always to the House of God: I observed the Holy Supper of Christ: I believed what the Church taught. And more than all, I was a Protestant." No: in that day, we who live in this place shall be asked, not whether we attended on the services of this house, not whether our names were written on the Church-roll, not whether we believed in the infallibility of some Synod, or the inspiration of some catechism, but whether with heartfelt faith we received the Lord Jesus Christ for our Redeemer, and walked in His footsteps through the world, whether we were kind and honorable in all our associations with men, whether we loved the poor, and provided for their wants, whether we gave liberally to the Church, whether we were pure in heart, peacemakers, merciful, willing to endure reproach for the sake of Christ, full of faith and good works. Let no one fancy that the battles of the Church are all fought, and that the self-sacrifice and courage of apostolic days were enough to last the world until the end of time, and that we have nothing to do but admire the virtues of the dead. Neither let it be imagined

that we can buy off our common daily obligations, by money given for the heathen in some distant country, and that if we pray for India and Japan and send thither our offering, He who sees everything will never call us to answer for the works of mercy and judgment, that we neglected in our own streets, and at our own hearth-stones.

There are those among whom we move, who are not yet in a state of acceptance with God. Some of them are persons over whom our business relations give us peculiar influence. Some of them are called by the dear names of sister, and husband, and wife and child. For them, as well as for us God has lifted up a cross, and opened a way of life and glory. They, with us, are going swiftly to the grave: with us, they will shortly stand in the judgment. And how shall we be clear, if we have not warned them?

There are in the Church those who are ignorant and weak in the faith; and those who are enlightened ought to instruct them. There are those whom God has been pleased to afflict with bodily pain and weakness, or whom He has visited with heavy bereavement; and the Church ought to comfort them. Some are in circumstances of peculiar temptation: their feet are beginning to slide: the world is getting the upper hand. And it is the duty of some in the Church to warn and exhort them.

There are great social wrongs and dangers. The world is full of false and hurtful ideas that need to be corrected. It is full of all reckless and passionate ways, that need to be restrained. Men are earnest about things that last only a lifetime, and careless

about their condition in another world. They have oftentimes low impressions of duty, gross and superficial ideas of the Bible, and of God. And they need to be apprised of their errors, and pointed to "the truth as it is in Jesus." All these necessities of a fallen world it belongs to the Church to consider, and supply. For the Church is literally under the guidance and teaching of "the living God;" and therefore it is "the pillar and ground of the truth." Paul expressed the whole idea, when he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." If the truth of which the Church is the great supporter, were a doctrine of men, or depended for its success upon the unaided power of men, it might indeed be held a bold assumption, that the Church is the world's strength. But when we allow that this body of men calling themselves the Church, are not in themselves, either wiser or better than other men, and that the spiritual insight and energy which they represent, are only a light and a power from above, dwelling within them, by faith, and that all they claim to know and to do in the world, they know and do only through a teaching and a moving that are not their own, it is plain that there is no assumption whatever. If the Church be affirmed to be the only life and hope of the world, it is only because "God in Christ" is the only life and hope of the Church. It has pleased God that the Redeemer of the world should continue visibly among men but for a little space, and that afterward those whom He had taught, and those who, in their turn, should be taught by these, should themselves

carry forward the great work of human regeneration, taught and influenced by the invisible Spirit. Once, this idea was clearly seen and warmly embraced; and those who enrolled themselves with the Church, understood that their relations to the world around were altogether new, as men who leave the farm and the workshop to become soldiers, feel that they have a place to occupy, and a work to do, different from any they have thus far known. But a long season of prosperity has made the Church heedless and unspiritual. The examples of other days are deemed romantic, and few essay to copy them. The labors and struggles of a bygone time are too rough for the sensitive helplessness of a later piety. When duty is named, the Church looks grave and doubtful, as though this were too much to expect: and each assigns to some other the unenvied post of trouble, or of danger. Is labor called for? The Church believes in labor, but has not time. Is money required? The Church believes in religious charity, but is too poor to give. Are the ignorant and depraved to be sought out and provided for? The Church believes there ought to be men of self-sacrifice and benevolence enough to undertake the work, but does not know where they are.

Oh! my brethré, let us awake and put on our strength. Let us rise up from the dust, and throw off the world's chain and the world's contempt. Too long we have been satisfied with a shameful bondage. Jerusalem is in the hands of scorners, and Zion weeps for her recreant children. The world is dark because our light is not shining. By reasoning, by rebuke, by expostulation and appeal, and most of all by the silent

energy of a godly life, we ought to be helping an enslaved and blinded world. The long prosperity of the Church may be drawing to a close. What may be coming no man is wise enough to foretell. But that something is only a little way before us, for which we all have need of a special preparation, I hold to be beyond all reasonable doubt. The signs of it are everywhere. In their several ways, the statesman, the philosopher, and the poet, prophecy it. And we who have "a more sure word of prophecy" than any philosophical insight, or political forecast, ought to be armed with the might of Christian men, and ready for the coming, and the battle call of Christ.—At all events, so much as this is certain,—we all have a fight to fight, and a race to run, before we die. This life, to all of us alike, will soon be over, and on another stage, and amidst other scenes, we shall renew our existence. And, however it may now appear, I am sure that in that other world, it will seem to have been a dreadful error to lay up treasure on an earth that was destined to destruction, and in the cares and diversions of life, to forget the soul.

## VI.

### GOD, THROUGH CHRIST, DWELLING IN THE HEARTS OF BELIEVERS.

\* JOHN xvii: 23.—“I in them, and thou in me.”

Our Savior had been living in the world, a man. In this way He had drawn the attention of all, and gained the friendship of a few. If any saw that He was more than human, this number was very small; and even with them, the idea was crude, and had little influence. They had known Him, as Paul expresses it “after the flesh,” that is, as a visible human friend. It was necessary now, that they should learn to think of Him as an unseen spiritual presence. In this lay the expediency of His going away. For when, as their human Guide and Helper, He had passed from their sight, He would return to their souls in the person of the Comforter. And since this Comforter should take of the things of Christ, and show them to the disciples, and should bring all things to their remembrance which had been spoken by Christ, and, in a word, should keep alive in their hearts the memory of Christ, and in everything second and carry out the work which He had already begun, it is plain that the Comforter was the same great Being, who once taught by voice

\* Communion sermon.

and outward sign, drawing near to the spirit ; in pure, and tender, and speechless influences. Well might the Savior say, as He bade His astonished followers farewell, in the mountain of Galilee, "*Lo, I am with you always.*"

During the whole life of our Lord, He appears to have sought, first to fix the attention of the world upon Himself, and then to transfer it from Himself, to God. In the chapter from which we have chosen the text, this design is peculiarly apparent. And in the text itself, the entire meaning and purpose of His life, is brought within the compass of seven simple words, "*I in them, and thou in me.*" We have not time to develop this point. But every reader of the Bible will see its truth. The primitive, natural state of man was happy, dignified, and pure, for this single reason, that man was at one with God : the second state, contrary to nature, is unhappy, ignoble, degraded, and hopeless, for the simple reason that men are now estranged from God. If the world was ever to be restored, communion must be re-established between the Creator and His children. Now this was not so light and simple an affair as men are wont to regard it, now that it has actually been accomplished. If an old man, lame and blind, should draw near to a precipice, and just as he was taking that last step which he never would be able to take back, a little child near by, should spring forward, and seize him by the arm, that man would not laugh at the danger, because he had escaped it, nor would he despise the little child, whom God had appointed to be his deliverer. So it is here. Men have disobeyed the Deity ; and this is not like

disobeying a father, a master, or a king: it is a serious thing: the first time it was done, when it was seen in vivid contrast with the preceding purity, it filled the soul with shame, and bewilderment, and fear; and the creatures whom God made to love, and to *love Him*, hid themselves, when they heard His voice. Do you say, but all this is past,—God has shown Himself merciful,—we have no more any reason to fear? All this is true: But suppose it were not past; and you did not know that God is merciful, and you were at this moment full of remorse and apprehension, and would give the whole world if you could only go where your Maker could not find you. This is the way to understand the danger we have escaped.

Looking back to a cross, and taught from our earliest years to think of the Almighty as full of compassion, it is natural for us to think lightly of transgressions which God has been willing so abundantly to forgive. But it is a question which we should do well often to ask ourselves,—what would be my feelings to-day, and what could I do, if God had not been willing to forgive? It would be well often to picture to ourselves a world, in which there is no promise, no cross, no “teacher come from God,” no sacrifice for sin, no mention of a crown, and a rest, and an “inheritance that fadeth not away: but for our only revelation, a handwriting on the conscience telling us of a “wrath to come.”

Nor is this all. For even supposing our Maker to be favorably disposed, men are not so. They do indeed wish to be forgiven, because they wish to be saved. But they do not desire to be like God, in their

characters. Each in his own way, they feel the enmity of an unspiritual mind; and holiness has no attraction: and yet "without holiness, no man can see the Lord." What shall be done? What *can* be done? Who shall make love grow up out of this enmity? Who shall make the impure pure? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? It is necessary then, that something be done to reconcile men to God, even though He be already reconciled to them. Is there one in this assembly who imagines that he can cast out the love of sin, and compel himself to be pure in heart, and stimulate his affections to the cheerful and loving service of God, all without God's aid? Let him try. Men are not saved, merely because they are forgiven. If they are not made better, they are not in a condition to enter the kingdom of God. The wrong of their sins is passed by. But the power of these sins remains what it was. It is cheering news to the prisoner that he has received a pardon. But what does it avail, if the magistrate who grants the pardon, have no power to compel the keeper of the prison to set him at liberty?

Now Christ was a man; and therefore, coming among men, and taking up their modes of life, and sharing their sufferings, and submitting to their contempt and cruelty, they learned to look upon Him as a friend. But then also he was much more than a man: in a sense which has never been explained, He was the Son of God, and thus in a peculiar manner God's messenger. Therefore, when men listened to His words, and beheld His life, their thoughts were carried higher than a merely human being, like them-

selves. And after He had left them, and returned to His ancient glory, and they had nothing of Christ but the memory of His life, and the silent indwelling of His Spirit, they began clearly to understand that the only Son of God had been among them. A *man*, offered to their respect and affection, would have been no new thing, and would have produced no new result. God manifested, would have been no new thing, and would have produced no new result. But the Deity present in man,—this was new: "God in Christ" might be expected to reconcile a hostile and perishing world. The man spoke to their sympathies and their senses: the Divinity addressed their reverence and their sense of duty.

It was, therefore, that all men were bound to honor the Son, even as the Father. It was, therefore, that whosoever denied the Son, was declared also to be a rejecter of the Father. It was, therefore, that Jesus said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." And, therefore, it was, comprehensively, that no man could come to the Father, save through Christ. Immanuel was "God with us;" and hence in turning away from Christ, men turned away from God. In one single word, Christ appears to have been made known as the only means of that communion between God and men, which sin had broken, and which sinners could never restore. "I in them," said our Savior, "and thou in me." And it is the whole of salvation, that in receiving Christ, we receive also God.

What is it to receive God? God is a Spirit,—a Spirit of purity, strength, justice, love and truth.

When we receive Him, it is just as it is with an earthly companionship,—we receive whatever He is. It is possible to hold intercourse with good men, and yet from lack of sympathy with their excellence, derive from it no solid benefit. There is such a thing as believing in a God, and sometimes thinking of Him, and sometimes even praying to Him, and yet from lack of faith and the pure heart, receiving no impression of His excellence, and feeling no emotion of awe, or love. But those who receive God, open their hearts to His influences. And as the light takes silent possession of every place that is open to the sun, so the good there is in God finds its way to every soul into which it is invited. Speaking of Christ, one of the Apostles says, "In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." And another says, "Of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace;" or excellences of character, corresponding to the excellences in Christ.

Communion is a community of thought and feeling,—an interchange of ideas and impressions. That which is in each mind passes out into the other, and thus each mind becomes acquainted with the other. Hence, when our Savior says, "This is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent," He is but saying, since the knowledge of God is obtained by communion with God, that eternal life lies in that community of feeling between God and men, in which the human affections move toward the Deity, and the Divine excellences come and abide with men. Hence, also, it is said of our relation to God in another state,

"We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is;" and again, "We all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into that image, from glory to glory,"—of which passages the evident meaning is, that we are made more and more like God, by an increasing knowledge of God. But we have seen that the knowledge of God arises out of communion with God. Therefore communion with God is the source of all spiritual life.

But, farther, Christ is "our hope of glory; not merely because He has suffered for our sins, and we believe that He has thus suffered, but because we have received of His spirit, and are in some degree like Him. For He is none other than God Himself, manifested as far as the nature of the case would permit, in the form of a man. And hence, if Christ be in us, God is in us; and if we are Christ-like, we are God-like. "I in them," said our Lord: this is the first thought; and by itself it has no great depth of meaning. But when He says, "thou in me," here is a meaning whose depth we cannot sound, and whose invisible shores we can never reach. Christ might have been a man; and then His power to do anything for His race would have been limited, like the influence of any other man. And if He should dwell in the hearts of men, He would inspire with wisdom, courage, truth and purity, only until, in the progress of the ages, some loftier spirit should arise, and draw men away from their former adoration, by the superior power of His character. But no such man has appeared. And four thousand years of prophecy look forward, and two thousand years of fulfilment look backward, and agree

upon Him, as the Savior of the world. For God was in Christ: and when Christ dwells in men, God is present with them; and thus the word of Christ is fulfilled, "If any man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And thus also the words of Paul are shown to be true, when he speaks of Christians as "partakers of the Divine nature." For God does not dwell in men as a barren idea, or a system of doctrine. If we have received Him at all, we have received of His purity, and truth and light. "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" If God dwell in us, then just so far, all that is contrary to Him, is displaced and cast out.

To-day, my brethren, we engage in a ceremony which bears the name of Communion, as though it involved in some special manner that approach to Christ, which the true disciple is making in some sense, and some degree, in every Christian act of his life. And so, indeed, it does. For while we are to maintain habitual oneness of feeling with Christ, we may expect to realize His presence in a special manner, when we unite in the celebration of that simple and touching rite, appointed by Himself, to maintain in us the remembrance of His sufferings and His love. And let me offer you, Christian brethren, two thoughts; holding a natural connection with the foregoing train of remark, and fitted, as I trust, to aid us all in the right observance of this holy sacrament.

1. *First.*—This Christ with whom we profess to hold communion, is not merely the name connected with an

unmeaning ceremony,—nor is it the term by which we refer comprehensively to a certain system of doctrine ; it is a living personal Savior, the “only begotten of the Father,” “full of grace and truth.” Communion with Him, implies, at all times, and, as we have just said, peculiarly at this time, that He is in us, and that we have His spirit ; as the branch is in the vine, and partakes of its life. “*I in them,*” are the plain, intelligible terms of communion. If we look no higher than the perishable elements,—if we do not feel in our hearts the meaning of the symbols,—we may, indeed, draw near the table of the Lord, but the Lord Himself we do not see. He will, indeed, be here ; but our eyes will be holden that we shall not know Him. He will speak to us ; but we shall not recognize the voice. And, after what will be to us, a weary, hollow, senseless ceremony, we shall go away unblest.

2. And secondly, let no one fear, in the use of this ordinance, to take the full import of the Scriptures, and to believe that in communing with Christ, he communes with God. “*I in them,*” not only, but “*thou in me.*” Christ is only another name of God. Christ is God coming nearer. Christ is only the Great Unseen, making Himself manifest. Christ is only the “express image” of that glorious person, who Himself is eternally hidden from our senses. If we commune with Christ according to His own expressed intent, we shall not only remember that He was the propitiation for our sins, but an inexhaustible source of spiritual blessing. Since He is “the way, the truth and the life,”—in a word, our only method of understanding and ap-

proaching God, and God has not "given the Spirit by measure unto Him," but has ordained that in Him should "all fulness dwell," He is wisdom for us, if we need wisdom,—purity, if we are debased,—strength, if we faint,—and consolation, when we mourn,—the wisdom, strength, purity, and consolation, of God Himself. O! my brethren, if we could but have the vigor of faith to believe all the Gospel! If we could only understand not the words alone, but the reality, of *God in Christ*,—if we could wake up courage enough to receive that which is freely offered us,—and when we name the name of Christ, could see how much this Christ actually is; and that what He is, was meant for us,—and that it is our privilege to have our lives identified with Christ, even as Christ Himself is hidden in God,—how dear and holy would be the communion of this sacred hour! How earnest and beautiful, and at the same time how happy would be our lives! In every fear, temptation, doubt, and sorrow, what an inspiration would it be, to remember that God is in Christ, and if we will, that Christ is in us!

## VII.

### FALLACIOUS HOPES, SUCCEEDED BY UTTER HOPELESSNESS.

EPHESIANS ii: 12.—“Having no hope.”

Despair is the next thing to death. It is silent and motionless. It speaks no word. It stretches forth no hand. Let the interest be what it may, the absence of hope is the absence of effort. When the man of business has suffered some sudden reverse, if he have wisdom and energy, he will apply himself at once to the work of recovering his former position. But let the morbid impression fasten upon his mind that all is lost, and that the endeavors which were once crowned with success, would now be wholly unavailing, and no consideration can arouse him to action. When we have watched long by the sick bed, and now at length the signs of the last fearful change begin to creep over that pallid face, we do not cease to ply the appointed remedies, because, however unconsciously to ourselves, we are still hoping. And it is only when the heart has actually throbbled out its last pulsation, that we give over hope, and with hope give over effort.

Now this principle applies as well to things spiritual. We all, at times, look forward to the hour when we must exchange the things of time for the scenes

of eternity. And when we thus look, on one ground or another, or perhaps vaguely, and without any well defined reason, we hope that our lot in the coming world will be a happy one. It would be difficult to find the man who could say with honesty, that he has no expectation of going to Heaven. And should such an one be found, it would be easy to show that he held a mistaken impression as to the meaning of his own words. For either language or conduct would surely reveal something, which in the absence of hope could never have existed. Probably there is no person living, to whom the words of the text have a literal application. The apostle is evidently speaking, in the text, of a well-grounded hope,—that hope which “maketh not ashamed.” And it is a truth, my friends, which ought to be carefully remembered by us all, that, although it is a rare, and perhaps an impossible, thing, to be absolutely hopeless in the present life, it is quite possible and quite common, to entertain a hope that has no good foundation.

1. One of the most common of these fallacious hopes, is grounded on the design of future repentance. It is the hope of having a hope, by and by. Of such an expectation as this, the following things are to be observed :

In the first place, it differs from all other false expectations, in not even claiming to have any actual and present basis. If one disbelieve the Scriptures, or if, professedly a believer, he subject them to some unfair interpretation, agreeing with the bias of his own mind, the hope he holds, false and destroying

though it be, grows out of his present character: his passport, worthless though it be, is actually in his hand. And in a position like this, there is at least a show of wisdom. But so serious a thing as a hope for eternity, resting upon no actual fact, but only upon another hope, is one of those melancholy absurdities, at which the Scriptures point, when they say, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil;" and "madness is in their heart while they live." We need not dwell upon those statistics of mortality, so familiar to all. I need not take any of you with me to the silent graveyard, and ask you to note what proportion of the sleepers there, closed their eyes upon the world, while yet their life was in its early morning. I need hardly ask you to recall those unlooked-for, and startling deaths, whether of the young or the old, that have occurred within the circle of your own friendship and acquaintance, so bitterly mocking all that fond reliance upon a better time for doing what ought to be done now. It will require but a moment's thought to see that a course like this is a folly that would be impossible, but for the misleading of an evil and deceitful heart. For doubtless there is more than one person here to-day, who, if it were suddenly told him in how many weeks or months his life would end, would turn pale with terror, and in this very hour begin to seek his God.

But farther, it is a serious delusion, to suppose that some future day, even should it be reached, will afford greater facilities for the work of conversion than the present. Every day that comes and goes, is rooting and fixing the character. Every hour winds about the

man another length of chain.. Once, humanly speaking, he might have freed himself with comparative ease: to-day it is a task: at some future time, it may be an impossibility. This has actually been the experience of thousands, who have taken the course that some are taking now. It is imagined by many that those who, through infirmity or sickness, are withdrawn from the scenes of active life, find it an easy and natural thing to turn from sin to holiness. But it is a very great error. The *endeavor* is indeed often made at those times; for men are more likely under such circumstances to be thoughtful and anxious. But there is far less probability than at other times, that such endeavor will succeed. The heart may not cling to the same objects, in sickness or in old age, which it loved before. But in one way or another, it cleaves to self, and resists God, as earnestly as ever. And difficult as it is for the delaying and temporizing to believe this, there is yet the greatest danger that the truth so unwelcome to their ears to-day, will be found yet more so, when their "convenient season" has come round, and more so still, at the next "convenient season," and so on, until all the opportunities, they were ever to have are passed away..

But, once more, it is probably truer of this form of self-deception than of any other, that it absolutely mistakes the nature of religion; and thus prepares for itself a disappointment of peculiar bitterness. For it implies that religion is not regarded as a thing that is excellent in itself, but viewed barely as a means of warding off a threatened evil. The reasoning is, that a Christian character is a weary burden, at the best,

and that it cannot be desirable to assume it, if anything else will answer the purpose; but that since it is made an absolute condition of acceptance with God, it will be necessary to take it up at some time between this and the end of life. The great Creator commands; and the creature reasons with himself, that although the command is of no consequence, it is important to avoid the punishment that will follow its transgression. The Creator gives His Son to die; and the creature argues,—Now God's love I do not care anything about; but in some way I must provide against His anger. Any time is as good as the present, so long as it meets this end. There is no need of making preparation for death, so long beforehand. And I will begin to care for my soul, when sickness or old age warns me that it can no longer go uncared for with safety. Not a word in all this about duty, reverence, affection; but a cool and wicked calculation for personal advantage. Does some one say,—And may I not desire and seek my own happiness? Beyond all doubt. But no one ever yet became a Christian, until he had learned to find his happiness in loving and obeying his Maker. Happiness, apart from God, is a wicked happiness; and it can never be right either to seek, or even desire it. Religion is as far as possible from being a means to an end: it is the very end itself in which every truly converted person finds his highest joy. Let the sinner wait as long as he will, he must come at last to a state of total submission to his Maker: he must hate what he now loves, and love what he now hates: he must think differently and feel differently, as well as do differently. Instead of gaining the favor of God

by a reluctant reformation made through fear, he never can be saved until he has exercised a true repentance, born of reverence and love. In the brief, but significant language of the Bible, he must be a "new creature." And those who have not done so, would do well to ask themselves, before going any farther, whether this work of conversion is not likely, after all, to be more difficult than they have been accustomed to suppose.

2. In the second place, a delusive hope is sometimes based upon a wrong interpretation of the Bible. We speak not here of any false system of doctrine, but barely of those loose and inadequate impressions of the truth, which arise from an unwillingness to admit the full force of Scriptural language. There are great numbers who would be shocked at the intimation that they do not believe the Word of God, who nevertheless receive some of its most important teachings, only in that modified and weakened form, in which they are divested of very nearly all their meaning, and rendered powerless over the conscience. They believe in the difference between right and wrong. But they do not regard sin as by any means so evil and detestable a thing, as the plain language of the Bible makes it. That the Almighty cannot "look upon sin," that He "is angry with the wicked every day," and that "He will by no means clear the guilty," are declarations which they dare not wholly reject, but which, on the other hand, they certainly do not receive in the stern and solemn meaning of the words. So also they believe in the necessity for repentance and faith,

in order to salvation. But that "godly sorrow" that renounces all sin, and makes an honest and total surrender to God; that faith, that loathes the very thought of meriting a free salvation, and sees absolutely nothing toward hope and peace, but in Jesus Christ, they know nothing of, save the naked meaning of the words. And, in like manner, they hold to some sort of punishment, reserved for the impenitent in another life. But here again they manage to evade the proper force of that Bible language, in which this solemn truth is taught. Not only do they first dispose of the subject in a general way, by pronouncing the language highly wrought and figurative,—which indeed is probably true,—but they forget that the Word of God contains no exaggerations; and that where it speaks by a figure, the figure never goes beyond the truth; and they are so little disturbed by these alarming representations, as to make it too plain that, in their real impressions, there is no Hell.

But without particularizing farther, there are two or three questions which it can never be amiss to ask ourselves, and which are peculiarly appropriate in this connection.

In the first place, when you consider in how many places, and in how large a variety of phrase, the Bible declares the deceitfulness of the heart, and when you remember on how many occasions you have known men reason falsely, through the influence of hope or fear, or anger, or pride; and when you recall some instances in which you yourself have been led aside from the way of a sound judgment, by one or another of those strong influences that for a time carry captive

the reason, does it not seem to you, at the least, that in adopting opinions which fall in readily with your inclinations, and cause you no manner of disquiet or alarm, there is ground to fear that you are not reasoning honestly? Is a criminal the most impartial judge as to the degree of his own criminality, and the measure of punishment it deserves? And if the murderer, left to judge and sentence himself, should speak leniently of his bloody deed, and pronounce upon himself some mild and trifling penalty, would any man not himself a criminal, believe such judgment to be perfectly unbiassed?

But again, is it not a significant fact that the very truths so repugnant to many, and therefore received by them only after so much abatement of their real meaning, are held and loved in their full significance by persons to whom they were once as distasteful as they now are to any? Was there anything in these humbling and alarming doctrines that was fitted to attract the self-righteous Saul? And yet who, whether in doctrine or in life, has ever given such powerful testimony to their excellence? And even within the range of our own familiar acquaintance, where is the true Christian who will not tell us that those doctrines and those courses which are now the very life of his soul, were once regarded with utter detestation?

Should it not then be a question with every one who is not conscious of holding the great leading statements of the Bible, otherwise than in some loose and general way, whether the vagueness of his belief be not owing to his utter ignorance of the teachings of the Holy Spirit, and whether therefore it is not justly

to be apprehended, that in the last day he will be found of that number who hold "the truth in unrighteousness?"

Yet farther, are your impressions of Bible truth such as a simple and ingenuous interpretation of its language honestly appears to you to demand? If you were to write out in your own words some of the more prominent of these truths, would your language be as explicit, as pungent, as humbling, as alarming to an unquiet conscience, as the phraseology of the Bible? And if not, does not this go far to show that in your reading of the Scriptures, you have silently brought down their meaning to a milder and less urgent tone, and translated, as you went along, all their stern and solemn force into a language that agreed with your native impressions and desires? If the views you habitually entertain on some of these momentous points be true, then is not the language of the Bible loose, exaggerated and fitted to mislead? On the principle by which you read the Bible, do you not really think that almost any doctrine might be drawn from it, which an evil nature loves and craves? When you read, do you find a pleasure in the words that meet your eye, or do you many times find yourself uneasy and troubled under their searching power, and glad of any suggestion that may break somewhat their natural and proper force?

In a word, the hope of which we are just now speaking, is grounded in certain impressions of Scriptural truth. But an impression or belief that is not correct, is manifestly no better than none: either will certainly lead astray. The comprehensive question then, which

ought to be considered at this point, is not whether we have read the Bible, and have some definite belief as to its doctrines, but whether we have received it with an humble and honest mind, and hold concerning it those impressions which are true.

3. In the third place, there is a class of persons who hope, upon the general ground that they are not worse in character, and therefore have no less encouraging a prospect, than many who are called Christians. But these persons should try to understand that important fact, so often overlooked, that the world, in its misapprehension of the Christian character, subjects it oftentimes to very unfair tests, and passes upon it the most ill-considered and shallow judgments. It is right, beyond all doubt, that men should estimate every man's religion by the fruit it brings forth. But, on the other hand, it is a point in all true philosophy, as truly as it is a dictate of common charity, to make large allowance for human infirmity, to believe that if a character display some noticeable faults, so also there may be within, a profound consideration of these faults, a deep repentance, and a daily, painful struggle, which are not the less real because they are unseen. Before one takes up the hasty and flippant conclusion that he is as good a man in the sight of his Maker, as some one else who makes a Christian profession, let him stop a moment and ask himself the simple question, "Have I the means of knowing whether this is true?" But farther, to take those cases in which a Christian profession is accompanied by none of the evidences of a Christian character, how much is that hope of Heaven

worth, which is no better than the hope of certain others whose hope is palpably worthless? Is it a good basis for the hope of a long life, that your chances are as good as that of some poor invalid, who at farthest cannot live a year? Would you go alone, by night, unarmed, through a forest infested by wild beasts and robbers, on the assurance that some persons had been foolhardy enough to do the same thing before you, and not one of them had ever lived to see the end of his journey, and your chance would be fully equal to their's? But again, the vague idea sometimes entertained, that the inconsistencies of one will modify in some way the punishment of another, and the impression that a doom which falls upon many at once, will be but lightly felt by each individual of the mass, are serious mistakes. No person will be punished, unless he have deserved punishment. But if he have deserved it, the guilt of some other person, will have no more to do with this one's punishment than if he were the only person in existence. The warning runs thus: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself before God." Each one will be judged by himself, and according to the deeds which he himself has done in the body. Whatever the particular process of the judgment, every man's thoughts will be held closely to the contemplation of his own character: every one will see himself clearly; and so seeing, he will perceive that so far from having any claim upon the leniency of his Judge, by reason of the deficiency of other men, one of the greatest sins he ever committed, was that of setting up a human being for his standard.

4. But finally, there is a numerous class who resemble all those of whom we have spoken, in the fact of their having no good hope; but differ from them, in being destitute of any definite ground of confidence. There are those who hope on account of the favorable comparison they are able to make between themselves and others. There are those whose confidence rests upon mistaken impressions of the Bible. There are those again, whose hope is derived from the promise of future faith and repentance. But those we now speak of, occupy no one of these positions exclusively. By turns they take refuge in each, as they are successively driven from all the others. They take no one ground, but rest vaguely on the general thought that the field is wide, and that there are so many ways of escape from truth and God, that they can hardly fail to find safety somewhere. They partly suspect that they are not, after all, so guilty as the Bible represents. They partly imagine that their chance of reaching Heaven, is as good as that of many who have a Christian hope. They try to doubt sometimes, whether so heavy a punishment awaits the wicked in another world. Then there are some mysteries they do not understand. They would like to be informed how the Deity came into existence, and the precise manner in which He framed His decrees, and the reasons which have moved Him to do all that He has done, and is now doing. Then again, Christians are sometimes very inconsistent; sometimes unhappy, sometimes stupid, and anything but good company. Moreover, the message from the pulpit is not always happily presented; and how can they be expected to repent, when

they have poor preaching? Besides this, there are many who ought to speak to them on the subject of religion, but do not; and on the other hand, among those who have, some have spoken injudiciously. And then, last of all, they dimly think sometimes of a day when all the present obstacles to faith and repentance will in some mysterious way be removed,—a time when the world will lose its charms, and the power of temptation will be broken, and their evil hearts, will all at once begin to hate the evil, and love the good. And so the wicked heart ranges on through a series of excuses without end; resting nowhere, but always holding fast to this one simple article of belief, that, in some way, it will certainly be well with itself hereafter. Argument does not touch these persons, because they forsake their position as soon as they see it approaching; and even when driven to what, to an honest mind would be the last possible resort, find refuge still in some childish and unmeaning generalities.

But not to enumerate any more of these fallacious hopes, one thing is plain, that although they are really hopes, and as such do bring some sort of peace and comfort, inasmuch as no man can live without hope, yet they are not genuine; and hence the condition of those who hold them is precisely analogous to that of persons who receive counterfeit money, believing it to be good; or purchase for diamonds, some worthless and perishable imitation. Cases have sometimes occurred in which true Christians have for a time been almost hopeless, and have therefore suffered great distress. But during all the time they thus suffered, their condition was one of perfect safety; and had it pleased God to take them out of the world while in this mel-

ancholy and half-distracted mood, they would straightway have found all their fears to have been groundless. But whatever present enjoyment a spurious hope may bring, it is a sad and lamentable experience to carry it to the judgment seat, and there for the first time discover that it was worthless, when it is too late to exchange it for a hope in Christ.

And now, to as many of you, my friends, as have never yet gone the whole length of that great Divine requirement, "Repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," let me offer one closing word. Whoever you may be, I am certain that you have some sort of hope. But I am equally certain that in the Scriptural, and therefore, the only genuine, sense, you have no hope. And tell me if it does not sometimes seem even to yourself, that you have not even been seeking so much for a good hope, as for something that might keep your mind quiet, in the absence of a good hope? Has it never flashed across your mind, that you are like a man moving swiftly toward the edge of a precipice, who, although warned of his danger, shuts his eyes, and still moves on, satisfied to perish at last, if only he may be saved the sight of what lies before him? Do you never seem to yourself to have chosen, not as any wise person would, that path which all things conspire to show the safest, but that one which has the most numerous windings, and the largest variety of empty pleasures, although you know that death is at the end of it, so that you may keep that end as long as possible out of sight and out of mind? But whether you have ever seen your condition in this light or not, be assured of this, that in the evident meaning of the text, you have "no hope." The hour is rapidly drawing

near when you will need hope, if you do not need it now; and yet with every day that passes, the prospect is as rapidly diminishing that you will ever know what hope is. Very soon your earthly life will be forever ended: its gay attractions will grow dim to your dying eye: its work and its mirth will be all forgotten: the gate of the future will be open for you; and you will go away, never to return. Yet the trifles of life, whether sensuality, or gay society, or fame, or business, or adventure, are engrossing all your thoughts; and you have no hope. You know that you are wrong, and God is right. You know what you are required to do, and you know that very soon the opportunity for doing it, will have passed away. And yet you have no hope.

When I think how many have taken the very course which you are now pursuing,—how many have flattered themselves that the hopes which have deceived others could never deceive them, and that, at all events, they might safely put off all preparation for death, until death's footfall was heard at their very door, or his icy breath blew chill upon their brow, and yet have found at last that they had been mistaken, and all was lost,—when I think of this, I seem to see you without hope, not to-day only, nor to-morrow, but forever. The excuses with which you cheat yourself, the coolness with which you calculate the chances of life and death, the steady indifference with which you meet all the appeals to your conscience, your affections, and your fears, make it only too probable that you will pass along hopeless through all these changing scenes below, hopeless lift up your troubled eye in death, and hopeless stand before the judgment seat.

## VIII.

### THE SINNER'S INABILITY A MATTER OF THE HEART.

JOHN 7:40.—“Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

The Bible represents men as lying under the influence of a spiritual stupor, which it calls death, and at the same time holds out to them the offer of an entire release from this condition, at once so miserable and so guilty. A portion of those to whom this message comes, believe it, and gladly avail themselves of the proffered aid. The remainder, either pay no attention to these offers, or else regard them as involving conditions which are unreasonable, hard, and well-nigh impossible. Our Savior, in the words just read, declares that the only reason why any are not saved is, that they are not willing to seek their salvation from Him. It would seem, so plainly do the Scriptures tell us of the love of God, of the sufferings of Christ, of the way of life and peace open to all footsteps, as though no reasoning could possibly be required, to make these words of our Savior plainer, and that no appeal would be needed to bring home to any mind, their warm and touching earnestness. Yet such are the darkness and coldness that reign within our souls, that even this truth, so plainly and so often told in the Bible, told in ways so various, so affecting, so fitted both to convince

and to move, needs to be defended at times, against those subtle objections which spring up rather in the heart than in the understanding, and are not so much distinctly thought as vaguely felt.

We will not stop, at this time, to speak of the various reasons which actually do prevent the salvation of some persons, but barely try to make plain the general truth that, whatever these reasons, they arise out of an unwillingness to seek salvation from the Savior whom God in His mercy has appointed. "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" were the words of the Lord Jesus, to the multitudes gathered in the Jewish temple. This, my friends, is just what He would say, if He were standing here to-day, to any of you whose peace is not yet made with God.

No matter how little any one may have been accustomed to observe and to reason, it is impossible either to read the Bible, or to look into our own hearts, without seeing that two things are necessary to our final safety and happiness,—in the first place, the forgiveness of sin,—in the second place the removal of sin. Some of you may be familiar with these ideas under the terms Justification, and Sanctification. It must be plain to every mind that if our Maker be willing to forgive all sin, and can find any suitable way of doing this, so that His law, pure and high as it is, shall no longer have any demand against us, and if also He is willing to deliver us from the control of sin, so that by degrees we shall cease to be sinners, and become like Him, everything is done that need be, or can be, for our restoration. Now how is it as to these two necessities of our condition.

I. As regards the moral change in us, that is necessary,—how evident, from the very character of the Deity, that He must desire His creatures to be good and pure, and so far from withholding from them the means of becoming so, must, from the very nature of the case, afford them every assistance. “The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works,” says David. And by the Prophet we are told yet more pointedly, that the Being with whom we have to do, is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.” After enumerating some of the leading forms of human transgression, Paul says, as you will remember, “for which things’ sake, the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.” What a solemn and what a broad commandment was that, in the direction given by Jehovah to Moses, “Speak unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy!” And hear the same command again from the lips of our Savior, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.” If words like these have any meaning, must we not conclude that, in the fullest possible sense, our Creator desires us to be holy, and will aim by every means that His wisdom may suggest, actually to make us so? Is it natural for a king to be utterly indifferent as to the loyalty of his subjects? Does a father feel no concern whether he has the respect, the confidence, and the affection of his children? And how then shall we suppose that He who is the King of kings, and the Father of spirits, whose love goes out toward every creature, but whose pure eye at the same time turns away from sin, as

yours or mine from a loathsome and deadly reptile, should suffer us to remain in a condition of sin, if we really wish to be delivered? Must we not rather suppose Him ready to remove every hindrance from the path of those who would come back from their wanderings? Must we not think of Him as watching for the first faint risings of penitence and of faith, and holding out to them every encouragement that might lie within the compass of His boundless wisdom?

And in harmony with this view of the character of the Almighty is the record of what He has actually done, to make men's characters like His own. When Adam and his companion disobeyed the Divine command, they might have been immediately pardoned, without receiving any token of the displeasure of God; or they might have been punished with the last degree of rigor; or they might have been dealt with, in a manner that should involve both punishment and mercy. This last was the method actually taken. And observe in this, a most evident token of a desire, on the part of the Almighty, that His creatures should be brought back to holiness. Had there been no punishment, how evident from all we know of the workings of the human mind, that man both at the first, and in all successive generations, would have held in light esteem commands, which might thus be violated with impunity. How plain that, with this view of the law, and of the great Lawgiver, they would have followed every prompting of their nature, regardless of those prohibitions which they had learned to despise; and that, being thus utterly ignorant of the majesty of God, and the awful sacredness of the law, their restor-

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ation to holiness would have been impossible, because the very idea of holiness was destroyed from the mind. On the other hand, if we suppose human transgression to have been visited with the utmost rigor of retribution,—to have received a punishment which represented the full displeasure of an offended God, and in which therefore there was no hint of anything like mercy,—must we not suppose that the utter hopelessness of their condition would have made men reckless? Do we know any instance in which despair ever put forth an effort? Does not the Gospel make at least one of its appeals, to our need of the Divine mercy, and our longing for Heaven? And is it not expressly declared by one of the apostles, “We are saved by hope?” We conclude then that, under one of these methods, men would have sinned without fear, and that under the other, they would have sinned without hope. Mercy without justice, would have induced presumption: justice without mercy, would have brought despair; and holiness cannot grow under either. But the treatment actually employed by the Almighty, represented both His anger and His love, and for this reason was fitted to bring men back to the way they had forsaken. Look at that child, stubborn, disrespectful, selfish, unlovely. Why is this? He has been suffered always to take his own courses, without any serious and felt rebuke. Commands have indeed been laid upon him. But they have never been enforced. The right has been set before him. But he has never been made to honor it. And in consequence, his character, instead of being shaped by a true standard, has grown up unchecked into a bad luxuriance. Observe now another, sullen,

unhappy, doing whatever he does unwillingly and through fear, and thus even under the outward guise of obedience, hiding a spirit of slavishness and insubordination. How shall we explain this? He has always been treated with severity. His better tendencies have never been encouraged by any promise of parental favor, and never rewarded by any sign of parental gratification. And on the other hand, every shortcoming has received immediate and rigorous punishment. And perhaps the punishment has even been so prolonged, as to cover indiscriminately the periods of obedience and those of rebellion; so that virtue has had no other inducement than the reward it carries in itself, and the ceaseless temptations to evil, have been balanced by no incentives to what is good. And the character has gravitated with a constantly increasing power in the line of its first wrongdoing. In one of these cases, the child has despised the parental authority: in the other, he has lost all confidence in parental affection. And yet how often are the most stubborn and untractable managed by a treatment in which all needed punishment excites a wholesome fear, while kindness and forbearance move upon the affections!

Agreeably to this view we find the parents of the race laid under a weight of displeasure which taught them that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against the Lord. But then, on the other hand, this punishment was not unmingled with compassion; the guilty couple were made to feel that their Maker had not deserted them: hope did not wholly die out in their bosoms; they heard the curse and trembled; but they

listened also to the gracious promise, and were filled with joy.

And so it was with God's ancient people. The alternations of judgment with mercy, throughout the entire course of that remarkable history, tended, on the one hand, to prevent despair, and, on the other, to repress presumption. This view is finely illustrated in the one hundred and sixth Psalm, where we find a graphic description of the passage of the Israelites through the wilderness.

And how has this principle of God's government been exemplified, my brethren, in His dealings with us, who live under the light of a milder and happier dispensation! We find ourselves, it is true, suffering the Divine displeasure: injustice, oppression, the bitterness of open enemies, the faithlessness of professed friends, pain, poverty, sickness, death, are all forms under which we continually perceive the great truth,—that God will be obeyed; and so long as these fearful ministers of His, visit us at our firesides, and at the corners of the street, in the fields, and on the deep, there will be some, who will learn their bitter, but salutary lesson; for "when God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." But then, how clear and how comforting the tokens of God's fatherly regard, which we are permitted to enjoy! It is a doctrine of the Gospel, and not less a truth inwrought into our daily experience and observation, that we have to do with a Being, who cannot be deceived, and who will not be mocked;—a Being who marks our most secret purpose, and who will not long suffer us to slight His truth, and throw

off His just authority. But this fearful God has been manifested under a human form: He has come forth into the sphere of our daily sufferings, and our daily sin: He has beheld our sorrows in compassion, and our sins in mercy: He has exhibited Himself to our souls in the manner best calculated to draw forth our love and our trust: He has approached us, not only as our Judge, but as our Savior,—not as a Lawgiver merely, but as an almighty and ever-present Friend: When we look upon Jesus Christ, we feel that God is placable, although just,—that He is long-suffering and tender, while He is still righteous and impartial. Thus, each side of His character is modified, to our apprehension, by the other: love without fear, would soon degenerate into a sentimentality which had neither reverence, nor affection: fear without love, would fall into slavishness and an overpowering dread; but under the joint influence of the two, fear becomes a warm and trusting reverence; and love, a devout and up-looking affection. Thus it is that *holiness* is secured, and a foundation laid, upon which man, by the abundant grace of His God, can rear the structure of his own well being.

II. But in the next place, God might have refused to pardon those who were penitent; and notwithstanding the full, and explicit, and repeated statements of the Bible upon this point, there are very many who find it difficult to receive, in all the wonderful depth and compass of its meaning, the truth, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto any.”

We have seen that God loves and requires holiness, and that all His dealings with men, since the world was made, have had holiness for their end; and this fact, of itself, carries the probability at least, that He intended to pardon all who might be reclaimed. But we have evidence that is more direct than this. The language which inspiration attributes to God, either in the way of direct communication from Himself, or as the expression of His will through His selected instruments, is everywhere the language of a disposition to pardon. God seems desirous,—not theoretically, or by a figure, but really and earnestly desirous, to secure the holiness of men, and through this, their forgiveness and eternal life. “I, even I, am He that blotteth out the transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins,” is the language of God to His idolatrous people of old. “Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Where, my hearer, do you find so great tenderness and forbearance, as in those strange words, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim! How shall I deliver thee, Israel! mine heart is turned within me: my repentings are kindled together.” How did God,—the great and terrible God,—follow after His wandering and thankless people, in the days of old, holding out to them the precious gifts of His favor, and His loving-kindness! How He spoke to them words of the most melting pathos, and placed Himself before their eyes in the dear and intimate relation of a Father, holding back His terrors, that they might not be

afraid, and strewing the paths of their waywardness with mercy and with blessing, that they might be won! With how strange condescension did He stoop to their reason, and their human sympathies! With what wondrous pity and forgiveness did He pursue their continual backslidings!—But not more pitiful and gracious was the God of the Hebrew, than is our God. Not more was He a Father to the stubborn Israelite, than to you, my brother, and to me. For “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “For God”—O! blessed, and thrice-blessed thought!—“for God sent not His Son into the world, to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” Therefore it was that Jesus, whether in the Temple, or the street, or on the mountain, said to all men, “Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out.” “He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” Therefore it was that He charged His followers to go forth into all the world, and preach to every creature, His blessed and life-giving Gospel. Therefore it was that John, the beloved, said to his brethren, and not less to you, and to me, “This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in His Son.” Therefore said Paul to the trembling jailor, and as well to every seeker after the way of life, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Therefore Peter declared to the men of his time, and of every time, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing

that any should perish." And therefore, my friends, the Spirit of grace whispers in the heart of every one of us, to-day, "Whosoever will, let him come."

Some one may be ready to say, admitting all that has been affirmed, still, man has an Adversary to contend with, who is vastly his superior in intelligence, and whose whole power is constantly devoted to the malignant purpose of effecting his ruin; and that this fact affords some excuse for his continued impenitence. It is true, indeed, that there is a Prince of darkness: it is true that he is wily and strong; and true that he and his host roam unseen and with noiseless footfall, up and down the world, on a ceaseless mission of malevolence: it is true that throngs by throngs of the inhabitants of this smitten planet, are cheated by his comely falsehoods, and lured away from all peace and light, and happy expectation of a life to come; and that, day by day, through the circuit of the year, he has his sickle in, among the strong and the wise, and the lovely of the earth, and is reaping in every field of life, for that last, sad harvest of shame and tears. All this is true. But it is not true that this great seducer ever compelled a creature of God to sin. The Devil tempts men: this is his sin. And men freely yield to the temptation; and that is their sin. For if, as we have endeavored to show, God does not directly embarrass and hinder the person who would return to Him, but on the contrary desires both our holiness and our forgiveness, and in all His dealings with us, is constantly aiming to accomplish these ends, we are obliged to conclude that there is no other being in the universe, who has the power to prevent our salvation.

For this would be to suppose another being, as powerful as God Himself: moreover, if God be holy, He could not give up one of His intelligent creatures into the power of an unholy being; "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth He any man. But every man is tempted, when he is led aside of his own lust, and enticed;"—a declaration which would plainly be untrue, if God ever so indirectly hindered men from becoming holy. And listen to the Scriptures: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil:" "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you."

The question is sometimes asked, "Why, if God desires the salvation of all men, does He not effect it, by the direct exercise of His omnipotence?" And if there be among you, my friends, any who are disposed to harbor this view of God, and sin, and the heart of man, I also will propose a case for your solution. If you had an enemy, and possessed the power to force him into a friend, so that if the thing were possible, he should be your friend against his will, how much value would you set upon his friendship? And have you an idea of religion, which would lead you to suppose that it can be bound about your soul like manacles, or seize upon your unwillingness like a sudden paralysis? With the Word of God open before you, dare you imagine it to be anything else than the voluntary turning of yourself away from sin toward God, in humble dependence upon His grace?

It is evident, as well from God's Word, as from His testimony written on the soul, that we have been left

to choose our own courses, and that we are held responsible for the use we make of our liberty. My friend, yet unreconciled to your Maker,—let me tell you with all freedom,—on you—on you alone, rests the sin of not complying with God's demands: you *will not* come to Him. It is a truth of Scripture, and a truth of your own consciousness, that as to all spiritual things,—God, and death, and the strange unknown hereafter that lies before you, you are either wholly unconcerned, or, at the most, so little anxious, that these high and fearful themes hold but a narrow place in your thoughts. In a sense fully up to the expressive figure of God's Word, you are "dead" to all these things: they are to you almost as though they were not. Now God is calling you, by the voice of Jesus, and the voice of His preachers, and the voice of His continual providence, to come up out of this fearful and guilty state. He well knows the desperate condition into which your sin has plunged you; and His compassion has removed every obstacle from the path of your return; and with a voice of the truest and tenderest regard, He calls continually to your deaf and earth-bound spirit, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light." But for some unworthy reason, which your heart, and not your understanding, has framed, you will not come. Is it the controlling love of this present world? But that passion does not hold you against your will: you will not come. Is it the fear of ridicule? But who, my misguided brother, has taught you to fear man, rather than God? You will not come. Is it want of faith? But the assurances of the gospel

are as clear and as strong as God Himself could make them: if you have not faith, it is not your failing, it is your sin: you will not come. And believe me, in whatever excuse you intrench yourself, it all amounts to this,—you will not come. Your Christian friends, as they look with pain upon your careless unconcern, or upon the frivolous and unworthy pretences in which you take refuge from a faithful conscience, say of you in their hearts, “They will not come.” And doubtless the glorified spirits of the upper world, if they are permitted to behold you, as they wonder with trembling hearts how long God’s forbearance will yet spare you, whisper mournfully to each other, “They will not come.” And O! I know there is one, who, if He were standing here to-day, would bend upon you a look all radiant with God’s own tenderness,—a look that would seem at once to love you and reproach you,—to command and to entreat,—to condemn and yet to pity you; and as He looked upon you, He would say, in what tones of urgency and compassion, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life!”

## IX.

### BREVITY OF LIFE.

I Cor., vii : 29.—“The time is short.”

We measure time, not by an invariable standard, but by the particular circumstances of each case. Thus, we do not regard a day as absolutely and invariably short, because it embraces a smaller amount of time than a year, or a century: if we have work to do that commonly occupies two days, and have but one in which to do it, a day is short: if the work ordinarily take but an hour, a day is long. And if we reflect, we shall find that all our estimates of time involve, consciously or unconsciously, reference to the amount of labor to be done: or, where the time spoken of is indefinite and contingent,—to its probable duration.

No doubt it is the failure to perceive this principle, which makes men so slow to believe that the present life is passing away as rapidly as it is, and that there is urgent need, therefore, to do at once whatever they design to do at all. They look upon ten, or twenty, or fifty years, entirely aside from *their relation* to these several periods,—as if one should estimate the *time* it would take him to cross the Atlantic, solely by the number of miles that lie between point and point;

throwing out of the account the size, and build, and present condition of the vessel that is to carry him, the winds that prevail at that season of the year, and the dangers and obstructions that lie in the particular route he has chosen. "Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?" "Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able, with ten thousand, to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" But by a strange mistake, men consider, in the subject of repentance, only the inherent character of the work itself, without attending to those facts which render it so unlikely that this work will ever be actually undertaken,—as if the builder, confident in his skill, and thinking only how simple an affair it will be for him to erect an edifice, after the preliminary steps have all been taken, should overlook the difficulties that might attend the selection of a site, and the gathering of materials, the varying prices of labor, and the peculiarities of climate,—or as if the king, forgetful of possible embarrassments in reference to time, and place, and numbers, and tactics, should found all his calculations upon the most favorable, and therefore uncertain suppositions, and go forth to fight, armed only with hope that had no reason, and strong only in contingencies and dreams.

If an angel should come out from the world of light, and pass the ordinary space of a human life among the children of men, his earthly life would not be as short to him, as one of the very same length is to one of us. For with his angelic character, so pure and high, so

true to every conviction, he would stand very differently related to life, from ourselves. He would be vigilant and thoughtful, that the objects and pursuits of time might not gain too strong a hold upon his regards. If there were work for him to do, before he was called back again to his former home, he would not forget it, and he would not neglect it. His life would be uncertain as to its duration; but it would not be short, because each one of its hours and moments would be given to its appropriate work; and although life would be only so many days and years even to him, it would be long enough, because from the hour of birth to the day of translation, it would be the life of an angel.

We must be careful to avoid the error of supposing that life is not long enough for the fulfilment of its great end. For this would be to charge God with injustice, in laying upon us a work which He had not given us the time to perform. And besides, the great work of life is no more than simply to do in each day and hour of life, whatever we ought to do:—the number of months and years through which we are required to do thus, in the present world, is a matter over which we have no control; the life therefore of a little child, so far as the object of life is concerned, is as long as one that measures three generations. Life is long enough for every one who will use it rightly. But it is not long enough for him who throws away its golden hours as fast as he receives them; nor would it be for such a one, though it were stretched out through the interminable years of God Himself. We have been told, on authority we cannot question, that such men

as would not listen to Moses and the Prophets would be deaf also to a missionary from the world of despair. And it is no less true, and on no different principle, that they who squander the life God gives, be it longer or shorter, would waste another, if they had it.

All men sometimes reflect; and when they reflect, they commonly take those views of life and character, which are substantially true. Some affliction is sent,—some sudden reverses overturn their schemes of business, or of pleasure,—or they are withdrawn by sickness from their wonted associations and pursuits. And then, they see life very much as it really is,—see that the fashion of this world is a shifting and unsubstantial thing,—see that it would be well for them to give some sober thoughts to the affair of getting ready to go into another world. But a few days or months go by, and all this momentary wisdom, this disposition to look at things honestly, and to act agreeably to their convictions, has also passed away. The business man resumes his former activity. The enterprise is set on foot, by which,—if all go well,—he is to be made rich. Diligently, every day, he strengthens himself against those sudden reverses, that so often defeat the larger and more extended operations of business. And now come the sleepless nights, and the days that are full of care: now that feverish solicitude comes,—that eager reaching out for gold, or place, or honor. And now time is getting short to that man. An hour, if he would but honestly give it, would be time enough in which to think truly, and determine rightly. But it is too short for him, because the chances are all against his doing any such thing. Life does not any

longer appear to him as it did, in that sober hour, a month ago. Then he perceived clearly, he reasoned well. But now,—alas! the darkness that sometimes comes over a human spirit!—he sees dimly,—he reasons, not truly,<sup>2</sup> but ingeniously, and so as to please himself. There is time enough to look at all these serious concerns. Meanwhile, an hour taken from business, may defeat the undertaking to which he has given so many days and nights of anxious thought. Religion is good in its place; but then the counting-room, or the farm, or the office, or the shop, is *not* its place. It must not be neglected; but he has no thought of neglecting it. It must not be driven from the thoughts; but then it must not be allowed to interfere with trade, or politics, or litigation: a man must keep an eye upon his business: even the Bible enjoins promptness and diligence in the common affairs of life. And so he sees,—and so he reasons. I said an hour is too short for him. But if you follow him a little space, till, on his dying bed, the hopes, and the gains, and the lofty enterprises of this mortal scene are all forgotten, in the pains that are rending his frame, and the visions of terror that throng about his tortured spirit, you would find that a life-time has not been long enough, and that after all the teachings of parental piety, and all the sacred lessons of the house of God, and all the signs and warnings of a good Providence, he is going at last, unwilling and unfit into the presence of his God.

And so it is with the man who seeks as the chief end of life some one of the thousand forms of pleasure. He sometimes thinks,—thinks honestly and to the

purpose,—and sees that life, although long enough if he would use it rightly, is likely to prove too short for his habitual thoughtlessness and unconcern. But his sober hour goes by; and the old habitual thoughtlessness comes back again. In the places where men go who do not think and do not pray, he forgets what he just now believed and felt, concerning life. Yielded up to the pleasures of sense, and determined, come what may to-morrow, to enjoy to-day, he no longer remembers that when a few more to-morrows have come and gone again, the whole of life will be over. Religion has its claims; but they will be attended to another day. Pleasure is as important to him, as business to the man of business. To him, as to the business man, the evil day is far off; and there is time enough: as one who wakes, and thinks it is only midnight, when it is but an hour to the day-break, so when he thinks a moment of duty, and futurity, and God, he imagines, between sleeping and waking, that the judgment-morning is yet far-off, and turns back again to his fatal slumber.

And so it is with all men, who put off, from one day to another, those concerns, which ought to be considered first of all,—they are as truly mistaken concerning the real length of life, as though they believed it to contain more days and hours than it does. They understand the meaning of three score and ten years, as a space of time, compared with some other space of time, but they do not see life in its only important aspect, its relation to character and destiny. They do not consider that even the longest life is so beset

with temptations and snares, that the world is so full of error, and the heart of man so fond of the world, with all its error, that, whether the time given them be longer or shorter, it is very uncertain how it will be employed: they do not see that mere time is of no value, so long as they have no disposition to use it; and that the unwillingness which they indulge to-day, is likely to be yet stronger to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow still, until life is ended; and the sinful bias of the soul has gained an eternal ascendancy. They first fancy that they are to reach the utmost limit of human life, and then suffer themselves to confound a life whose limit is so far off, with one that has absolutely no limit. It sounds like exaggeration,—and yet it is only truth, that although they know it is not so, the practical and habitual impression is, that time is eternal, and they shall never die. And this, too, when they cannot but remember that the time already past, flew by them as a dream, and left undone upon their hands many a task, which they had hoped easily to bring within its compass. So intent are they upon the things that are temporal and seen, and that perish with the using, that they forget one of the leading principles even of a worldly wisdom, to judge of the future by the past; and although the time that is gone slipped by them so silently, and so soon, they fancy that they hold the present with a firmer grasp, and believing that the work they ought to have done yesterday, will surely be done to-morrow, they determine to seize whatever of gain, or honor, or sensual delight the flying hours may bring, and yet give a few years at the farther end of life, to the things of the

future, of duty and of God. And the essence and poison of their error, after all, is not so much, that in imagining they are to live up into manhood, or down into the valley of old age, they unwarrantably stretch out a mere contingency into an ascertained fact,—though this is something to be considered,—but that they make so little account of the innumerable dangers with which all this way of life is beleagured, and confidently suppose that whatever they may do for a time, they will surely have the resolution and the honesty by and by, to break away from all the countless entanglements of earth and time, and give themselves in sober earnest to the long-neglected work of life. Oh! the emptiness of earthly joys, that keep the soul out of Heaven! Oh! the unutterable blindness of worldly wisdom, that leads forever astray!

When we see the sun rise, we do not know that we shall behold its setting: much less do we know, when the warm and fragrant summer is with us, whether we shall ever again feel its genial breath. And there is something in this,—something which, as we think of it, on the Sabbath, or in any hour of soberness and honesty, it would seem that even the noise and hurry, the pleasures and the cares of a world like this, would not wholly drive out of our remembrance. That before the day has risen again, we may be grasped by the hand of Death, and drawn before the judgment seat; and that we have a work like that of repentance to perform before we are called away, or never, is a fact which no man who is unprepared for so solemn an event can think of with composure and unconcern. But this is not the most important consideration,

involved in the truth that the present life is to be a short one; and, if I do not greatly mistake, men deceive themselves in laying so much stress upon the mere *uncertainty* of life. This truth is solemn enough. But to my own mind it is not so solemn as that other truth, that even when life is lengthened out beyond its average duration, there are men who give no more thought to the unending future, than multitudes who are taken away in manhood or in youth. For the reason of their neglect is not that they are fully determined to make no preparation; but that while they know the limit of life to be at the longest so near to its beginning, and know also that a work is to be done at some time within that life, which must determine the eternal destiny, they still suffer those things that, at the least, are trifling and transitory, to divert them from what they themselves acknowledge the primary concern of life. It is not so much that the life of any particular man may not turn out to have as many days or years in it as he imagines,—though there is something surely in this,—but it is, that supposing the range of seventy years secured to him at the outset, yet, with all the indisposition to serious thought of which he is conscious, and with all his restless reaching out after earthly good, and more than this, with the fact ever before him, that this condition of things is, month by month, and year by year, growing to be more and more the settled habit of his soul, and still farther, and still more than all, in full view of the significant fact, based upon the broad ground of actual human experience, that the probabilities of repentance diminish with every hour of delay, he does not once suspect

that possibly he may never be more willing to repent than he is to-day. Well does the Scripture say, the "heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live."

Some one will perhaps say that, in strictness, if a man could know that his life was to be prolonged through any given period, and he should put off repentance till near its close, he would certainly turn at the last, and that therefore the *uncertainty* of life is the only item to be taken into the account, in a cool consideration of the risk that waits upon the wicked experiment. But not to dwell here upon the question, how many of the apparent conversions that take place on the death-bed, are anything more than the relinquishing of that which it is no longer possible to retain, the forced and spasmodic action of a soul harassed with fear; and not to inquire whether it is absolutely certain that God will extend mercy, at the eleventh hour, to one who, up to that hour, *deliberately presumed* upon it; and not to speak of those cases, in which the force of disease, or the infirmity of age, left the mind stupid, and unsusceptible of impression;—but to suppose, that the utmost duration of life is positively secured beforehand, that God still calls,—that the man is conscious of his state,—that his intellect and will retain their wonted vigor,—and that all things are as he could wish them, except that he must die,—even then, it is not certain,—even then, it is not *probable* that he will repent. It is a fact which those who know nothing of such cases will have no right to deny, however strange it may seem to them, that a drunkard has sometimes reached a point in his career,

when his own companions have been heard to say of him that if he knew one solitary indulgence more would destroy his soul, he would have it, notwithstanding. This is strong testimony, coming from such a quarter. And those whose vocation calls them to the bedside of the dying, will tell you, that many, with death as plainly in view as it is to one who has already leaped from the edge of a precipice, will display in reference to the realities that lie before them, a stupid and appalling indifference. Talk as men may of preparing for death when it comes knocking at the door, there is no truth of science more thoroughly established, than that men,—men of blameless life,—men of feeling and sentiment,—will sometimes approach the dizzy brink of life, and look down with as little thought of seeking God's mercy, as though the whole of life lay yet before them. This is what a human being may come to : and who shall say that this awful fate will not come also on himself?

Paul, speaking to the Corinthians upon the subject of providing for the wants of the present life, urged the higher claims of religion, by the consideration that the present life would very soon come to an end. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not. . . . For the fashion of this world passeth away." It is as if he had said,—the life you are now living has its wants, that must be supplied,—its pursuits, that are honorable,—its pleasures, that are innocent and pure. You

are not out of the way, that you marry, and are given in marriage,—that you weep when you are sad, and rejoice when you are blessed,—that you buy and sell,—that you build, and plant, and plan: all this is well. But there is danger that these things will crowd out of your thoughts that which is higher, and that, being engrossed with the cares of this life, that day will “come upon you unawares,”—so that in truth you ought to regard your time as short, and begin at once to employ it to earnest purpose.—And, brethren, if it be indeed true that all this various and busy scene is soon to give place to another order of things, so different,—if we are soon to leave the world, and go before the judgment seat,—and if the state we are to be in forever, depends upon the character we take with us to that high and solemn tribunal,—it is well we should give these things our serious attention: it is well we should look honestly at heart and life, and see whether in heart or life we are what intelligent beings ought to be, in view of issues that are so momentous.

My friend, if you are engaged in the accumulation of *wealth*, I do not say that you are doing what you should not be doing: if your calling is a right one, and if you prosecute it upon principles that are right, it is well. But I am here to tell you, that there is something more important than the gains of business,—something that will be of more consequence to you, by and by, than your position, or your influence, or any of those thousand things your wealth can purchase. While your fields are waving with the abundant fruits of your thrift and skill, or your warehouse groans

with piled-up merchandise, day by day, with the flying hours, your earthly life is sweeping toward its end: "the time is short:" have you thought of this?

Are you a pleasure seeker? But have you no fear that when these springs of earthly enjoyment have run dry, you will be left to an everlasting thirst? "The time is short:" the days are close upon you, when your nerveless fingers will drop each glittering toy, and your satiated and tired soul will turn away from the things of earth and time forever.

Oh! my fellow-man, be you who you may, if you are looking with an over-curious and eager eye at "the things that are seen," I am here to tell you that "the time is short." A few more hours and this Sabbath's light will be gone down in the West. A little more, and this new period of seven days will have slipped away. A little farther on, and the whole of life will be lying behind us. Our mornings and evenings here upon the earth will be numbered: to us the sun will rise and set no more,—for us the busy sounds of human mirth and human industry will cease,—for us the light of day will be darkened,—our faces will be cold, and our beating hearts will be still. And therefore, I counsel you to use with wisdom the hours of your short sojourn on this side the grave,—I counsel you to lay up your treasure in Heaven. I counsel you, "by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory and honor, and immortality," that you may gain "eternal life."

## X.

### COMPLETE MORAL INSENSIBILITY THE LAST TOKEN OF FINAL PERDITION.

EPHESIANS IV:19.—“Being past feeling.”

It is one of the teachings of the Bible, that men are visited with pure and benevolent influences from God, and that when these influences are resisted beyond a certain point, they are withdrawn, and the heart left to the helplessness of its own unaided endeavors.

In many ways, God had shown His power and glory to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh was not moved by them; and day by day hardening his heart, he perished at last, in the very act of persecuting God's people.

“Amon trespassed more and more.” Saul grew prouder, more jealous, more resentful and more stubborn against God, until, in his extremity, calling to his aid the ghost of the departed prophet, he heard with dismay the bitter words, “Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?” In that observation of Paul to Timothy, “Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse,” there seems to be implied a law of spiritual deterioration in the bad, just as such declarations as “The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger,”

point to a law of spiritual advancement in the good. The Bible teaches that God, who is perfect in wisdom and in justice, and full of long-suffering compassion, uses different methods of persuasion with different persons, and that when they rebel and resist the Holy Spirit to a certain degree, and it no longer consists with His glory to deal with them in mercy, He withdraws His aid, and leaves them to their own desires. And practically at least, it is the same thing whether God depart from us, or we by our own hardness and impenitence, depart from Him, so long as the separation actually occurs; and when it occurs, admits of no remedy.

Where one has long been given to the pleasures of the table, or where through long cherished indolence, half his powers have been suffered to lie useless, or where a hard and irritable temper has for years held a prevailing ascendancy, we are accustomed to hope for little in the way of reform, because in these several directions, we regard the person inaccessible to persuasion; or, as we have it in the passage cited, "past feeling." Concerning the profane, the drunkard, the gambler, our impression is peculiarly strong, that they are too far gone, to be wrought upon by any elevating influence. And when one has taken the road of shame and ruin, and some such powerful motive as the happiness of his family is used in vain for his restoration, there is less hope from any appeal that may be made to some other feeling, as for example self-respect. And if such appeal be actually made, and made in vain, still less is to be expected from any argument addressed to his fears. And so the possibilities of his recovery dimin-

ish with each new instance in which he withstands persuasion.

Now precisely in this way do the Scriptures teach us that men sometimes lose what quickness of conscience, and what sensibility to sacred things, they may have possessed and come into that state in which, so far as religion is concerned, they are "past feeling."

They have been placed, in the providence of God, in a variety of situations, and wrought upon by many influences designed for good. But they have neglected the advantages of all these conditions, and have resisted all these influences, one after another, until at last no religious sensibility remains, upon which other instrumentalities might act.

This truth being so plainly taught in the Bible, and so consonant with reason, and being, moreover, so fearful in its nature,—why is its influence over men so feeble ?

1. In the first place, it is imagined by many that they will perceive when feeling begins to subside, and thus be enabled to arrest their course, before they reach the fatal point.—But those who think thus, should remember how difficult it often is for us to believe that we are in danger. They should recall some of those cases in which they have been unwilling to believe in the warnings of ordinary evil, and remember how they have sometimes resisted such evidences, until the threatened calamity absolutely came. And then they should remember the *peculiar* difficulty they have always found, in making any truth of religion appear

real,—the slowness with which they receive impressions from the preaching of the gospel, or from the private exhortations of Christian friendship, or from the providences of God: they should think how readily they dismiss all solicitude about the interests of their souls,—how easy and agreeable they find it to live without thought or caution. And then to this they should add the secret and deadly schemes of their great enemy,—the arts by which he makes the false seem true, and the true false,—the devices by which he quiets apprehension, and overpersuades the sensitive conscience, and keeps men, by one excuse or another, from resolutely choosing the good part. And not until after they have duly estimated all these things, should they conclude that they are safer than those were, who have perished before them.

Moreover, there is no outward sign of this danger, at all proportioned to the danger itself. There are signs, which the quick spiritual insight of a Christian can perceive. For he has been taught of God. But there are none which stand conspicuously out to the natural mind. "For the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit;" and this is a spiritual danger, and has for the most part spiritual signs. Those indications which can be understood at all, by the subject of such danger, are so slightly marked, that he deems them unworthy of thought, and scarcely brings them into the account in the estimate of his spiritual state.

The traveller passing from one country to another, comes straightway into the midst of new associations and new laws, confronts new perils, and experiences new enjoyments. And yet the separating line is

quickly crossed, nor does it hold out any sign by which it may be known. It is a fearful change that carries the sick man beyond the point of hope, and causes us to take leave of him in our thoughts, even while life yet lingers. And yet the sign that marked that change is so subtle, that only the experienced eye of the physician can discern it. It is an awful moment, in which the unconscious fisherman lets his skiff float down across the line, beyond which there is no escape from the furious waterfall below. And yet there is no beacon just upon that line; and that last boat's length, seemed as safe as the one before it. It is a change that no language has ever described, from a condition of feeling, of mercy and of hope, to that in which feeling is past, and mercy and hope forever departed. And yet the hour in which it happens, is not different from the hour that preceded; and there is neither light nor land-mark, to proclaim the danger.

But farther, in those who are "past feeling" as regards religious considerations, there is not of necessity any decline of feeling upon other subjects. The instinct which binds us to home and friends, does not depend for its growth upon the state of the heart toward God. And hence a final separation may occur between God and a human soul, while yet all the native impulses of that soul retain their strength. The attachments to locality and kindred are a part of the mind, as truly as the judgment, the imagination, and the will. And there is no reason why the decay of the religious sensibility should affect one part of the mind, more than another. If the perceptions be not blunted, if the judgment be not impaired, if the fancy be as

quick, and the reason as profound, it is to be supposed that the heart also, so far as all natural feeling is concerned, will remain what it was, and offer no evidence of the silent and dreadful fate by which it has been overtaken.

Yet again, the heart may be past religious feeling, while, notwithstanding, there is no violent and open opposition to religion. The particular connection in which the words of the text occur, intimates that in the case of these there spoken of, this extinction of religious feeling displayed itself in the grossest outrages against common morality. But it is to be remembered that these were Pagans, and therefore knew little of those restraints, imposed by a pure public sentiment. The spirit of religion assumes the form which agrees with temperament, taste, and outward condition. And so the spirit of irreligion, will be violent, bitter, and reckless in one ; while in another, it will take the less conspicuous shape of simple indifference. We should remember that there are some things from which we are restrained by our fear of consequences to business or reputation,—and others from which we are held by innate refinement,—and others for which we have no natural relish,—and others still, in reference to which we are upright, only because we have not the means of being otherwise,—and yet others, which we avoid under the influence of a native conscientiousness, which makes the mind sensitive to all the common forms of moral evil. But none of these restraining influences are religious in their character. They may therefore remain in life and vigor, after all possibility of religious impression is at an end. And

hence this fearful insensibility may, in one, be displayed in a fearful way, while in another it may give, whether to the subject of it, or to others, no evidence that it exists. Our Savior said, "He that is not for me is against me." And while, of necessity, the Bible characterizes the wicked mainly by the more conspicuous forms of wickedness, it leaves us no room to question that final hardness of heart is the same thing when silent, unseen, and even unsuspected, as when it proclaims itself by open signs. Whether Simon who offered money for the Holy Ghost, or Alexander who resisted Paul, or Gallio the careless, or Agrippa who listened, or Felix who trembled, were past all religious feeling, at the time when the Bible record takes leave of them, we are not told, because it is not necessary we should know. But we are taught that men may be "past feeling," and yet present the very same condition with either of these.

2. A second reason which interferes with the proper influence of this truth, is the idea so generally entertained, that by a simple effort of will, one may turn to God, at any time. That we have the power to repent is plain enough. But whether we ever employ this power as we see that we ought to, will depend entirely on the state of our hearts. The ability to repent is not repentance, any more than the power to labor is industry. There must be the wish. But when the heart has been often appealed to in vain, it feels less deeply, and its feelings are less permanent; until at last, the most weighty considerations, and the most moving appeals, fall upon it as dew and sunshine fall

upon a rock, without causing anything to grow. So that if one should resolve to repent at some given time, it would not be at all surprising, if, when the time comes, he should find that he had unconsciously crossed over the line of feeling and of hope, and although his apprehensions urge him to repentance, his heart recoils, and what he would not do once, he cannot do now. There never was an injurious habit that could not have been broken. But there have been many that never *were* broken. And the reason was, that they had gained so powerful a hold upon the heart. The power to break loose was left; but the wish to do so, was gone forever. Thus it was that the drunkard, the spendthrift, the gambler, went down to dishonored graves. Thus it is that men who harden themselves against the Holy Spirit, reach at length that degree of hardness, which no power can overcome. No argument, no appeal, is strong enough to excite to holy action. The feelings are fixed in one direction. The man has not been forcibly overcome with evil; for then his God would not hold him accountable. —But he has freely given evil an advantage over him, until at last its hateful embraces he cannot uncoil; until that which he once held at a distance, has now twined itself among all his thoughts, and impulses, and desires, and he is forever past the possibility of yielding himself to truth and goodness. “They are joined to their idols: they have learned to do evil; and they cannot now learn to do well:” once they were but drawing near to the danger, and they might have returned,—now they are on the edge, and going down the slope. Could we know positively

which these cases are, we should see some among the old, and some among the young,—some of the gross, and some of the refined and delicate,—whose sin is unto death, and for whom it no longer avails to pray.

3. Again, the power of this truth is weakened in the minds of some, by the hope of being powerfully wrought upon by religious influences at some future time. Those who would not trust to the native force of their own resolution, not unfrequently trust to the occurrence of some religious excitement, upon whose current they will be borne irresistibly along into the kingdom. But this hope involves a mistake as to the nature of religion. For men never are made Christians against their will. They are not frightened into religion. Fear may come first. But religion itself, is a thing of love and choice. God will never accept anything but genuine faith, and reverence, and total submission. If one should still argue that persons are often wrought upon by powerful influences, who have been unmoved under weaker ones, this we allow. But if one should entertain the thought of walking along the edge of a precipice in the night, he would at least wish to consider beforehand the chances of his coming out safely. And it should be remembered here, if it be possible to gain the attention of any whose reasoning is so irrational, that such powerful influences rarely occur. They are not ordinary, but extraordinary. Times of more or less religious interest are not so unusual. But awakenings deep, long continued, diffusive, sweeping everything before them, are seldom seen at the present time.

Farther, should such extraordinary influences appear, those who are depending on them may not come within their reach. They may be so circumstanced that they cannot be present. They may have gone to their long home. If the grace of God should be displayed in the most striking way in a neighboring state, of what avail could that be to us? If it should appear in this very community five years from this time, of what advantage would that be to those who are this year to die?

Farther, even at such a time, it is very far from certain that these persons will be affected. It always happens that great numbers are not. They may be already "past feeling." Of any who may be resting in this hope, probably there are those who can recollect occasions of religious feeling which produced no effect upon themselves. They cannot be sure that another, should they live to see it, would be more powerful. And if they could, there is great fear that, with the lapse of time, their hearts will be as much harder as these new religious influences are greater, and that thus what they resisted once, they will resist again.

But more than this, on occasions like these, no small proportion of those who are aroused, sink back again into their former listlessness. Many of the blossoms of the spring never come to fruit. Many a feeling never rises into a purpose, and many is the purpose that dies before it becomes an act. The history of these occasions of religious agitation, would show that if many are called, but few are chosen,—it would show that many seek to enter in, and are not able,—

it would show that many mistake emotion for principle, and tears for obedience, and come out from these scenes, whether with hope or without it, as ignorant of the grace of God as they were before. And why should these depend upon a result which so many before them have failed to realize?

4. And this leads us to speak of the very common misapprehension in reference to hope. It is a familiar way of speaking, to say that while there is life there is hope. And there is no doubt a truth in this. But what little truth it contains, is unwarrantably extended so as to cover more than its proper ground. If any one will look a little into its meaning, he will see that it refers to a condition of things rapidly becoming desperate. It is when all particular and definite grounds of hope are taken away, and we can point to no one thing that is encouraging, that we fall back upon the general reflection that as long as life itself does not fail, possibility does not die out. When we have any specific reason for hoping, we never depend upon a general one. And therefore the expression indicates not so much an expectation, as a very strong wish that there were some ground for expectation. Hence the person who comforts himself with this thought, in the secrecy of his soul, admits that he has no satisfactory reason for expecting that he will ever repent, but only that he wishes it might be so; and rather than repent now, is willing to let the wish stand for the expectation. Now we all know that this is true reasoning as applied to any other case. And yet we do not see its force, in the most important concern

of life. Can any one doubt that "the heart is deceitful above all things?" Under certain circumstances hope does not imply a great deal. A ship has taken fire at sea: desisting at length from their vain endeavors, little by little the crew have been driven toward one extremity of the vessel, and the flames reach out toward them, every moment coming nearer. Now there is doubtless a possibility that the work of ruin will stop, before it reaches this last refuge of the terrified throng. And then, if it should not, there is a possibility that, casting themselves into the sea, they will all be saved from the monsters of the deep, and from cold, and hunger, and fatigue; and attract the notice of some friendly vessel, and get safely to land. But who would wish to be placed in such a position? And if he were, who is there that would feel like calling by the name of hope, that bare possibility of escape?

5. One more reason, and we have done. It is sometimes supposed that whatever danger there may be in other cases, there is none so long as feeling actually continues. But see how the deceived heart is continually turned aside.

For, in the first place, we have already seen that it is a very common thing for religious feeling to subside so gradually and quietly, that the person is not aware of the change going on within him. Knowing, therefore, that he is the subject of some emotion to-day, and noticing no marked alteration between the feeling of to-day and that of yesterday, and being conscious of no serious change from one day to another for longer

periods, and knowing nothing rightly of the deceitful heart within him, he naturally concludes that there has really been no decline of sensibility. And yet should he bring his feelings to any fair and practical test, he would immediately see that he had all the while been moving silently down the stream.

More than this, it is not unusual for *extraordinary* feeling to come to an abrupt and sudden termination. "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Feeling which is intense, is likely soon to exhaust itself; and as the overwrought brain gives way sometimes in an instant, and sudden paralysis seizes on the frame, or as a candle low in its socket, flames high and bright for a moment, and then quickly goes out, so the heart full of emotion to-day, is often found as hard and as cold as a stone to-morrow. If all those who have taken the wrong path through life, could give their testimony here to-day, not a few of them would say that their struggle against God came to as sudden and violent an end, in settled hardness of heart, as if in a single hour, July had turned into Winter.

And more, what if this condition of feeling should last through life, so long as it is not that sort of feeling which causes repentance? The great reason which causes us to desire feeling, and shrink in horror from the thought of getting beyond it, is that we hope such feeling may at some time be wrought upon to our salvation. Supposing therefore that some sort of religious sensibility actually continues to the end of life, what does it avail, so long as it *never* grows into love, and

faith, and obedience; and the person dies as he had lived, unrepentant? One may retain a quick sense of right and wrong, and clear impressions of Bible truth, and be convinced that he ought to love God, and yet be past any feeling that might have been wrought into piety.

In a word, while with one, this dreadful fate comes as swiftly as a tempest bursting out of a clear sky, it settles down upon another as silently and slowly as day wanes into twilight, and twilight deepens into night. We ought to speak with caution of things so fearful. But a fair and simple interpretation of the Bible, and of the course of human events, makes it probable that there are persons in this assembly who are "*past feeling.*" Who they are is known only to God. But they are here, listening unmoved to the Gospel. Some of them, it may be, will be blasphemers, haters of good and good men: others will spend their lives in shrewd cavilling and disparaging criticism upon things which are sacred: some, of more thought and culture, will remain intrenched in fatal errors: some will be drowned in gayety, and some absorbed with cares: some will be simply indifferent; and some (a class not small) will linger always on the threshold. But they will all come out at the same point. It is not unlikely that some of this number will die without any sign of emotion, so that there will be "no bands in their death." Others will, at the last, be filled with fears, and will endeavor to repent. But God requires the heart; and with them the heart will be "*past feeling*" toward God; and even though they should seem to repent, it will be only a seeming; and

they will "die without wisdom, and in the greatness of their folly they will go astray."

The Bible teaches us that men do cease to feel: it does not give us any certain sign by which we may know when this event is taking place; but it plainly intimates the probability of its occurrence, at a time previous to the closing days and hours of life; and therefore pointedly discourages those hopes which some indulge, of a death-bed repentance. And as to that solitary case by which so many fortify their expectation of mercy at the eleventh hour, it would afford little encouragement to any, if it were considered fairly, and just as it stands in the Bible.

I know my friends, that truths like these are not fitted to soothe and quiet a guilty conscience, or to leave in peace those who are putting off till to-morrow, what they ought to have done yesterday. But then the Bible was not designed to comfort any who are not yielding to its requirements. Here is the sum of the whole matter: to love God with all the heart: and the commandment is "*holy and just and good.*" God has had compassion on our guilt in disobeying this commandment, and given His son for our redemption; and He has pitied also the darkness and hardness of heart to which sin has brought us, and given His Holy Spirit to help us. He is kind even to the "evil and the unthankful," and would have all men to come to a knowledge of the truth, and in many ways, suited to the minds and the circumstances of men, He is seeking to draw them to His service. But He is not a Being of weak benevolence. He will not be mocked. If any will fancy that God is altogether such an one as him-

self, he will live to find out his mistake. A certain time He will plead with men,—with some a longer and with others a shorter time, according to His own wise pleasure; and when all has been done in vain, the possibility of salvation to that soul is ended. And now, does any one imagine what are some of the signs by which we may know that this calamity is approaching? They are many, my friends. But it were a waste of time to enumerate them. For those to whom they really apply would be the last to see their meaning. They are as different as the minds of those to whom they belong: they are as different as the different diseases that end in death. But there is one sign, which, if it were rightly understood, would appal every heart, and hang like the blackness of a gathering storm over the gladdest scenes of life,—it is that at this moment, some of you know you are not God's children, and yet the knowledge does not move you to shame and sorrow,—it is that you will go from the Church-door as lightly as you came, and when the sun rises to-morrow, will be as happy as though you had made "your calling and election sure."

## XI.

### FAITH AND SALVATION.

*Acts xvi: 31.*—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

The circumstances under which these words were spoken are so familiar, no doubt, to you all, as to require but a word in the way of reminder.

Paul and Silas, in the course of a missionary tour, having entered the Macedonian city of Philippi, used their miraculous power to disenchant a certain woman of a Spirit of Divination, who was a means of great gain to her employers. These latter finding their lucrative business thus suddenly brought to an end, raised an outcry against the apostles, and bringing them before the authorities, on a false charge of disturbing the peace of the city, procured for them the double punishment of beating and imprisonment. Nothing daunted by the outward aspect of circumstances, but full of the inspiring belief that the truth they preached would finally prevail against the most formidable shapes of earthly opposition, the imprisoned preachers beguiled the midnight hour with prayers and cheerful songs. Ringing out loudly on the silence of the night, and echoing from cell to cell of the gloomy dungeon, the note of their pious cheerfulness startled the prisoners, with a reality stranger

than their strangest dreams; the voice of joy and praise, from men who like themselves were lying under condemnation, and loaded with chains. Those simple words, which at first view seem hardly to have any significance, "And the prisoners heard them," have always had, to my own mind, a peculiar and touching interest. For I have thought, what if every man and every woman who has taken up the life of faith, should so appear before the world, for cheerfulness and courage, in the thick crowd of life's disappointments and dangers, that their lives should be as one constant song of joy and thanksgiving; by its sweet and holy influence teaching the restless and unhappy prisoners of this burdened world, how good a thing it is to be able to rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of our salvation. But to return to our narrative; suddenly, while the praises of the Christian prisoners are yet ascending, and their astonished companions in bondage are listening to the sound, the strong foundation stones of the prison are shaken by an earthquake, the doors fly open,—the shackles drop from every fettered hand and foot,—and the terrified jailor, starting from his bed, and seeing his charge at liberty, is about to destroy himself, to avoid the sure punishment that fell upon a Roman jailor. Clear and loud above the tumult, the voice of Paul cries out to the bewildered man that his prisoners are safe, and bids him forbear his wicked and desperate intent. Restrained for a moment, the jailor calls for a light, and coming half in hope, and half in stupid wonder and fear, inquires of these strange prisoners, brought thither yesterday by the mob, what he shall do to be saved. The in-

stant reply is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

It is not at all unlikely that the jailor was terrified by the prospect of immediate death, and had some vague idea that he was safer in identifying his interests as far as he could, with those of his mysterious prisoners. Probably, too, he was not quite assured that none of those under his charge had escaped, and that he might not be cited for neglect of official duty. But neither of these could, from the nature of the case, have been referred to, in his trembling question, save in the most general and confused way. It is evident that his thoughts were mainly occupied with his character in the sight of God, and the account he would have to render, whenever he should be called away from life. No doubt he had heard the soothsayer, as for many days she followed the apostles, and cried after them, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." Then he had seen the apostles calm and untroubled, when they were thrown into the inner prison; and then he had heard in wonder their sacred song in the dead of night. And now, when a sudden and startling providence awakens his fears, he feels as by instinct, that these persecuted, manacled men, are the only ones who can tell him what will save his soul.

It is worthy to be observed how quickly men think of their Maker, and their duty, in times of danger. As it was with the keeper of the prison in Philippi, when the earthquake came, so it seems to be with men everywhere, in times of sickness, or sudden accident; or on any occasion that causes death to seem near at hand.

The particular manner in which this apprehension is expressed, is not, of course, always the same. One will express the inward fear openly: another will disclose it only in indirect and partial ways; yet another, will perhaps until the last, try to conceal under a forced and unnatural calmness, the real agitation of his mind. But the dread of some unknown woe to come,—the shrinking back from eternity and judgment,—the strong desire that life might be drawn out yet a little longer, and the day of final account be set forward, at a remove of some months or years, in which preparation may be made for that last great change,—in a word, the unwillingness to die, we have reason to regard as a universal feeling, with those who are not conscious of having made their peace with God. And there is here a very important testimony to the fact that men have a deeper belief in the principle of duty, and the awards of another life, than they commonly acknowledge, or perhaps than they are even themselves aware of. It would seem that notwithstanding the apparent carelessness of each day,—the devotion to business,—the abandonment to pleasure,—those thoughts must certainly be moving often through the mind, which are so readily called to the surface: notwithstanding the easy and half indifferent way in which men often speak of those realities which eternity will disclose, they must yet be genuinely impressed with truths, which the most sober and honest hours of life invariably lead them to acknowledge. If, in the immediate view of death and the judgment, one should be seen every way as satisfied with himself, as he seems to be at other times,—if, when he believes that he is

just going out among the tremendous solemnities of a future world, and about to confront, at the great tribunal, all the deeds done in this mortal body,—to answer for thought and impulses, for motive and desire, through the long and diversified years of the earthly sojourn,—he is found calmly assured of a welcome to those seats of rest and bliss where angels sit; as sure—no matter how he may have lived—that the strict record of God's awful book will utter no word of shame and censure against his soul,—then indeed we might well say, either that right and wrong are words without meaning, or that, whatever meaning they may have, man has no power to understand it, and is under no obligation to duty and to God. But when, as men draw near to death, provided they have the full possession of their reason, they so frequently show in some way that death is not welcome,—that they distrust, now at the last, any goodness in which they may have been wont to boast,—that they hold in doubt those doctrines with which they once flattered their pride, and fed their self-indulgence, and lulled into silence the reproaches of an angry conscience,—that they choose now, in the moment of departure, the faith and hope of the humblest saint in all the world, rather than the shallow dependence which satisfied them in their days of health and courage,—what does all this mean, but that down in the deep places of all hearts, there lie witnesses for truth, that may indeed be silenced for a time, but will be heard at the last? What does it mean, but that men are after all more truly convinced of sin, and understand better their need of some great redemption, than they are

accustomed either to acknowledge or suppose? What does it mean, but that their instincts are truer than their arguments,—that they feel what they try to disbelieve,—that they remember in some degree all the time, what they are all the time doing their utmost to forget,—and that with all their mad and reckless devotion to the ways of a perishing world,—their investments, their ambitions, their lofty projects and their lawless pleasures, the only question after all which they feel that they must have answered, as they are going into eternity, is, “What shall I do to be saved?”

And now, to this solemn question, what answer do the Scriptures give? Is the answer long, and difficult to comprehend? Or is it brief and level to every capacity? Does it require some long and painful work which few have the power to perform? Or is its demand only for something so simple, that ignorant men and little children can take it up, and do it, and save their souls? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Now would it not seem that, being pressed by so great a danger as we really are, and having before us a direction so clear in its idea, so simple in its observance, that all men would quickly and gratefully seize upon the blessing, and make sure, at some early hour of life, their calling and election to a better world? It is not so. Sin has made spiritual things dark and difficult. Warnings, so terrible that when rightly considered, no imagination can grasp the fulness of their dark and woful meaning, are held as light as the harmless flash that plays along the horizon in a summer evening. Promises, so large and blessed that it would seem as though

they must almost take away from men the very power to refuse, and force themselves upon human acceptance, are heard with dreamy indifference, and forgotten in an hour. And invitations, warm from that Heart in which no creature is ever forgotten, and speaking as much more love and tenderness than any that a mother can know for her child, as the mind and the ways of God are greater than the mind and the ways of men, are as little valued, and wake up in the heart as little of returning love and penitence, as though the Son of God were some false deity of the old religions, and the salvation that He brought into a perishing world, a worthless thing, which no man needs. "For we hid as it were our faces from Him. Yea, He was despised; and we esteemed Him not." When we ask, then, if the way of salvation is simple, while we say it is simplicity itself, and the very daylight does not go beyond it for clearness and beauty, yet man, with his darkened understanding, and his misplaced affections, his remoteness from the heavenly light, his sad habit of groping around in the gloom of his own reason, and taking the phantoms of his own earthly imagination for the celestial shapes of truth and good,—man is constantly misunderstanding, and misapplying it. And in truth, the way of life, plain as it is, is dark and crooked because men are wiser than God, and put themselves and their worthless offerings, in the place of Christ. There is a class who mistake the way of life, by making it more complex and mysterious than the Bible makes it. They hear it preached month after month, from year to year, and never suspect that it is something intended for them to consider and understand, like any other truth that speaks in a plain

and simple way to the feelings, and the judgment. Often they wonder in their minds whether the revelation of its meaning will ever come to them. Often, when others have seen it, and been made glad by the new light in their souls, they have wondered why no such experience could happen to themselves. Often, they think almost despairingly, that it is something they never shall understand; and are almost ready to give over entirely all thought of that which occasions them so much perplexity and distress. And yet the requirement all the time is barely this, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." There are others, who for some reason view the matter very differently, and make, if possible, a worse mistake, in the other direction. They think lightly of salvation, because it is so freely offered, and so easily understood. The more earnestly this salvation is pressed upon them, the more do they reason with themselves, that they must be safe in rejecting, for the present, that which their Maker is so desirous they should at some time receive. The more simple it is made, the more do they incline to set aside until some season of convenience, all thought of that which at any time, can be so easily understood and applied.

The mistake in one of these cases lies in fear: in the other, it is found in presumption. But in both alike, it is unbelief. And so this most simple, most touching, most powerful of all truths, preached every Sabbath in all the Christian churches, and thrown into a thousand different forms by the press, and as one might say, passed from mouth to mouth, all round the world, is understood and felt by only a handful of the

whole human race. And why? Only because on the one hand we add something to the simplicity of the truth, to make it more awful and imposing; or, on the other hand, we will not believe that anything so simple can be a matter of immediate and pressing concern. Under the lead of one or the other of these false ideas, we make for ourselves ways of salvation, upon which no light from Heaven will ever shine. We fancy vainly, that if we can but waken these slumbering emotions of ours into some manner of life and feeling, and have some experience of agitation and tears, then surely all will be well. Or we think that if so many times a day we pray, and so much time give to the Bible, and keep up a steady course of inquiry and struggle, then certainly in a little time the obstacles will all disappear. Or we suppose that the great work will be accomplished by the acquisition of religious knowledge; and we read with eagerness every good book that falls in our way. Or possibly we say, This great and solemn consummation is from God. The time is not yet. I will wait until the heavenly influence comes. Or yet again, we actually believe,—not however in Christ, but only in a scheme of doctrine which relates to Christ, as if one should hold firmly to a celebrated system of medicine, yet resolutely refuse ever to employ a physician by whom it is practised. Now in all these expedients for securing salvation, there is some truth, and a great deal of the appearance of truth. But the truth itself,—that which neither goes beyond the Bible requirement, nor falls short of it—is *this*, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Everything that ought to come after that,

will come in its own time. But it can never come first. For if that were so, then the Bible would not uniformly point men to Christ, as the first great work, out of which all the other works of the Christian life are to spring.

Nor let this requirement of faith seem strange. In the first place, we ought to think it a wise and good arrangement, barely because our Maker has appointed it. You remember that when Peter saw the beasts descend from Heaven in a vision, and heard a voice saying to him, "Arise, Peter, slay and eat," and he in his wisdom said, "Not so, Lord; For I have never at any time eaten anything that is common or unclean," the answer that came to him was, "That which God hath cleansed call not thou common." Now it is most expressly taught us in the Word of God, that, without the sacrifice of Christ, no person could be saved, and that even with it, no one will be saved who does not believe in this Sacrifice. Before the coming of Christ, an order of animal sacrifices was maintained, because, as we are told, the world was not yet fully instructed and disciplined, so as to understand and value the sacrifice which Christ Himself was by and by to make. But during all this time, men were taught, as far as their unenlightened state allowed, that these ceremonies were designed to answer a temporary use, like the early steps of childish learning; and pointed forward to something more complete and glorious, of which these things were but the signs. And then, when at last the fulness of God's good time was come, and He sent the Lord Jesus Christ forth into the world, He said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well

pleased. Hear ye Him." Now is it not enough, aside from all other reason, that this Christ is "the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth?"

But in fact there is a reason that comes nearer to our understanding than this, and one which if it were well considered, would make unbelief well-nigh impossible. There are evidences in ourselves, and all around us, in our fellow-men, that we are under a peculiar blindness and lack of sensibility on the subject of our dearest interests. We absolutely need both light to see, and stimulus to do. We have indeed every necessary power, but none of the divine skill to use the power. And this want of skill, lies entirely in our separation from God, who is the only wisdom and strength for every creature He has made. Reason of this as we may,—resist the thought if we will,—that guilty estrangement from God is the only thing that keeps any of us from the path of life, and the hope of Heaven at this moment. And if there is any man who thinks otherwise, and hopes to conquer himself by his own power, I say this,—let him try. And one thing more,—let him try soon, so that after he has found his mistake, there may be time left to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Alas! how many spend the golden time of all their earthly life in these fruitless efforts, always hoping to succeed at last, and yet growing blinder and colder, and going farther and yet farther from the light of Heaven, and the cross of Christ, until at last their unhappy footsteps tread among the shadows of the outer darkness!—We say to you that there is a reason why you should believe in Christ, in

this which many of you, I know, will be ready to admit, that even now, at the end of twenty summers and winters, or thirty, or fifty, after all the appeals made to you by the ministers of Christ, after all the persuasions of Christian friendship uttered in your ear,—although you have sometimes, it may be, been alarmed, and sometimes affected,—though at one time your judgment has been convinced, and your conscience goaded; and at another, all your better feelings have been touched, and at another still, you have even perhaps gone the length of making some secret resolve upon a different life, and actually taken some steps in the way of outward amendment,—you yet do not feel to-day that your heart is right before God,—you do not dare to-day to think yourself a Christian. If you have done everything you could think of, or at the least those things which seemed to you to hold out the largest promise of success, and you feel that, after all, you have but been going around in a weary circle, and never making any real advance, then for you at least, there is a reason in faith,—you surely should begin to suspect your own wisdom, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

But you will say perhaps, this direction is good in general. But for myself, I have not yet come to the proper point for faith. Perhaps you will say that you have a speculative instinct, which must first be satisfied, or that you must have a complete and consistent system of truth presented you, before you can properly think of faith. There are many things you would like to learn first. Well, there are many things belonging to religion, besides faith. But if you suppose that a

knowledge on these points is necessary to faith, you are under a serious error. Your curiosity would be gratified. But you would not be brought any nearer to Christ, except as the empty and unsatisfying nature of religious knowledge by itself, might convince you of your mistake. Did the time and the object in view permit, gladly would I reason with you about all these things. But if I did, it would be only because I could not in any other way show you how necessary it is you should believe in Christ. And at every step, my purpose would be to show you that all true reasoning ends in faith, and every path that leads through the Bible at all, leads directly to the hill of Calvary and the cross of Christ. The road that conducts to that blessed spot is short and plain, from every man's door. If you will go into every untrodden desert and jungle of the world to find it, yours must be the folly,—yours the loss.

But I think I hear another say, If I am to be a Christian, I must be holy. But I plainly am not holy now. I have much to do before I can come near to Christ and call myself a Christian. You have indeed something to do in order to become holy. And glad am I, and thankful, if you feel that you are now unholy, and because unholy, unworthy. But tell me what it is you propose to do, in order to set yourself right. Will you read your Bible? Will you pray? Will you be regularly in the house of God? And what if you should discern by and by that these things have not brought you out of the darkness, but rather convinced you more than ever, that you are in a position of the greatest difficulty and danger? Do you say, But this

will not be my experience? To you I say, as a moment since to another,—try it. We offer you no theories: if you would know the truth, test it. The whole of the religious life is involved in its beginning. In other things we are obliged to make a distinction between the outset and the issue. A journey may be undertaken, but never completed. An investment may be made, but may come to nothing. A friendship may be formed, and broken. All things earthly are uncertain. But in religion it is not so. If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you commit yourself to Him; and after that, the only question is whether He is able to carry you safely through the world. But of this, of course, you have no doubt. If you regard Him, for example, in the light of a Sacrifice for your sins, then the moment your soul is committed to Him, you are holy in the sight of God. For He is none other than the “Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world.” If you look upon Him as your Physician, then because you are committed to Him, He will surely effect your restoration,—by methods, no doubt, which will sometimes seem strange to you, simply because you do not understand the subject,—but surely, notwithstanding. Or if you take Him for your Teacher,—your Guide out of all the darkness and confusion of mind you are in, then by slow, successive lessons, but nevertheless surely, He will teach and lead you. Or if you look to Him as a Deliverer from sin, then from sin He will assuredly deliver you,—it may be, in part, by suffering you now and then to fall under its power, so as to teach you some necessary lesson, but surely, safely, notwithstanding. On the other

hand, anything but this commitment of the soul to the Son of God, supposes that finally, by some imaginable endeavor, one will render himself somewhat more acceptable to God than he was at first, and that when some proper point of self-culture and improvement has been reached, then will be the time to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. How shall we show men, except through their own wretched and weary experiences, that this is not so? If any man be "*in Christ*," says the Scripture, "he is a new creature,"—not if he have gone through some struggles, or made some resolves, or performed some works of amendment.

Is it then asked why we urge men to repent, to submit themselves to God, to cast away their transgressions, to make to themselves a new heart? Because these all are but different ways of saying the same thing, or else different methods of coming at the same end. For example, do you repent? But no true repentance ever was known, save in view of Christ, or in former times, through the sacrifices in which Christ was dimly represented. Do you submit yourself to your Maker? Then you submit to His way of salvation in Christ. Do you renounce sin, and make yourself a new heart? Never, except as you in some way receive strength from Christ. And if you do not see it at first, you will see it afterward, that if your heart is really changed, it is because either clearly or faintly, you have seen Christ; because either feebly or heartily, you have trusted to His divine assistance. You remember that when the Jews once said to our Savior, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God," the reply was, "This is the work of God, that

ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." And now, as then, no amount of endeavor really accomplishes anything, until Christ is received; and, on the other hand, in accepting Christ, everything is done that can be done. For "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." And if I could know that the most indifferent, or even the most profane and vicious of men, had come here to-day, been impressed with the truth, and fixed his confidence in Christ, I should say of that man, his soul is safe for the unnumbered ages of eternity.

But here another objection arises. This, you may imagine, is making religion a hasty, ill-considered affair. You will say that it is too solemn to be treated in a way so summary,—that it requires thought, and sober resolve. And you will point me to those persons who have wholly mistaken what religion is, and prematurely taken upon themselves the vows of a Christian. You would come gradually and quietly into the Christian state. I have grouped just here several ideas, as belonging to the same general class; and finding their appropriate answers in the same facts.

In the first place, every one can see how important it is, not to distrust any doctrine, because some men have misunderstood and abused it. If, because some thoughtless persons have imagined that they had faith in Christ when they had not, we are to conclude that faith would have been of no use to them if they had really had it, there is an end at once of all reasoning on any subject.

And this leads us to say that we do not pronounce positively that one is truly converted, as soon as he

thinks he is. We only say that to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ will invariably save the soul, and that one may put such confidence in Christ, as easily in one moment as in six weeks.

Further, to speak more particularly of this matter of haste, let it be borne in mind that many of the most important things in the world are done in very brief periods of time; and that the true question is, not, How long a space did the work occupy? but, Was it properly done? A sick man, for example, is long perhaps in making up his mind to send for a certain physician. But all this delay does not help him in the least. On the contrary, every moment that passes before he comes to his conclusion he is drawing nearer to the grave. And, observe also that however long he may debate the matter, the determination itself is formed in some particular moment. Suppose, now, he should reason with himself, This matter of perfect restoration to health is very serious: it would hardly seem appropriate to be getting well at all rapidly: no doubt this physician can restore me: but I must try some few remedies of my own first, and see if I do not get a little strength, so as not to be in quite so feeble and alarming a state when he comes: then I shall feel that I have not been making light of an important matter, but treating it as its gravity demands. Ah! you will say, no man could ever reason in that way. But, believe me, that is exactly your reasoning, when you are afraid of placing a hasty and inconsiderate faith in Christ. The truth is, however it may appear, that there is no such thing as becoming a Christian by degrees. A moment's thought will show this. One

may be gradually coming to the determination to be a Christian. But all the time previous to that determination, he is not a Christian. And is it not indeed as absurd to suppose that one can somehow be a Christian without at any particular point beginning to be one, as to think of getting to the South Pole without crossing the Equator? But if religion be nothing until it is begun, then surely the sooner it is begun, the better. And also when begun, the character is as truly Christian as at a point twenty years farther on.

But do you ask, yet again, If faith be all that is necessary, why do we urge the necessity for prayer, and self-denial, and effort afterward? I will ask you a question: When you have seated yourself in the public conveyance to go upon a journey, why is it that you choose that particular mode of transit and that route? Plainly because you believe them to be the best suited to your purpose,—because you have faith in them. But why do you not, at some point upon the road, abandon the conveyance, and try some other method of getting to your journey's end? Because you started with full confidence in that method, and have seen no reason to withdraw that confidence. But suppose I should say, The way is long and crooked, subject to certain inconveniences, and the conveyance is not as swift as it might be,—you have occasion for a great deal of patience, and suffer a great deal of fatigue—would my reasoning alter your purpose? Probably not. You would reply to me, All you have said is very true. But this is the only road there is.

Just so it is with the path I would have you enter. Hear the express words of Christ: "I am the way, and

the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me." If you believe in Christ, you believe in Him as the way; and if you believe in Him as the way, it follows that you will continue in that way, unless you see occasion to think your faith was misplaced. You receive Him as the truth, and therefore "the truth as it is in Jesus" is the rule by which you go, as a thing of course; unless you abandon your faith. You trust him, as your life, and thus your heart is open to His influence. And thus in believing in Christ, you are committed to an acceptance of all the incidents that may belong to that way divine,—all the precepts of that heavenly truth,—all the conditions and requirements of that life eternal.

In a word, belief in any case implies that the fact believed, controls us. Thus, from time to time, during some weeks past, parties of our fellow-townsmen have been seen taking their way to the foot of the Rocky Mountains in the Western part of Kansas. They were suitably armed, clothed, and provisioned. They set out with some definite purpose as to the place they were to seek, and the roads by which it was to be found. And as we hear from them, from time to time, we learn that they are encountering, without any surprise or concern, the various inconveniences and perplexities of the journey. And all this for the simple reason that they had, and continue to have, faith, that there is gold by the head waters of the Arkansas river, and that if they would get their share of it, they must take this route, meet these difficulties, perform these toils. O! if men could but be as easily induced to seek the wealth that will not perish when

the world burns up! But look at the illustration here of our subject. All the plans, labors, privations, expedients, necessary to a long and difficult journey are comprised in faith, as a seed, just as all the stately, wide-branching beauty of an oak, with its hundred roots grappling the earth, and its hundred arms flung abroad to the summer's sun and the winter's blast, lies gathered up in a beginning which an infant can hold in the hollow of its little hand.

How does faith save—do you ask? Why should my confidence in a teacher help me to acquire vast stores of knowledge? Because I want the knowledge,—because this teacher has the knowledge to impart,—because he is willing to impart it,—because in taking him for my teacher I acknowledge my ignorance, give myself to his methods of instruction, patiently, faithfully, hopefully perform all the tasks he may appoint, and thus at every step, get the benefit of his knowledge and wisdom. Or if I would go through a wild and dangerous region, that has neither path, nor landmark, how does my confidence in my guide carry me safely through? Simply because I abandon all my own knowledge of the way, for his,—now going cheerfully up the steep side of a frowning mountain, when according to my judgment, it had been better to wind along its base,—anon—taking a wide circuit to avoid something in which I could discern no danger,—again, turning aside from a path that is smooth and plain, to go down through a dismal and tangled glen,—and now again, starting out across the open plain, under the burning sun, when it would have seemed better to take in our way the cool shade of yonder grove, or sit

awhile by this fountain that bubbles at our feet. Sure of my teacher, I am sure of my knowledge. Sure of my guide, I am sure of the way. And this is faith.

How idle then the idea that faith is not enough,—that it is too simple,—that some other things must come before faith,—or that one may have a true faith in Christ, and yet get from it no practical impulse! For if one should call it faith, barely to believe that Christ once lived on the earth, let that person ask himself if he would so use that word in relation to any other matter. And if, on the other hand, by faith in his friend, his legal adviser, his teacher, his physician, he invariably means that sort of confidence that leads him to depend upon these persons,—actually to commit some interest to their hands,—to believe their counsel and to follow their directions,—and to look confidently for the results they promise, then why should he attach some distorted and unnatural meaning to the word, the moment he applies it to religion? Observe then—

1. That faith is not a mysterious operation of the mind, which cannot be understood until one has learned the meaning of some technical terms; but the simple feeling of confidence. Faith in one's self, is self-dependence, self-righteousness. Faith in Christ, is honor paid to the righteousness of God.

2. Again, there is no virtue in faith. It leaves no room for pride or boasting. It is simply availing one's self of an offered remedy for a pressing evil.

3. Farther, faith is a most solemn act. It implies the last thing any man is willing to do, the renuncia-

tion once for all, of all that constitutes himself,—the giving of his whole self to God, as made known to him in Christ.

4. Again, the only thing that hinders faith is want of faith.

5. Again, this doctrine of faith shows us plainly the great kindness of God, and His desire that all men should be saved. For in faith, everything is easy to understand,—easy to do. We have only to come to Christ, leaving our pride and wisdom behind us.

6. Yet farther, if conditions so simple and so kind are rejected, how can it be hoped by any one that his Maker will deal mercifully with him in the world to come? “If we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.”

7. And finally, will not some of you, my dear people, in whose ears the Gospel is preached from Sabbath to Sabbath, put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and so begin that life here on the earth, that ends in life eternal? How many shall they be? And who? Any of you who have lived nearly or quite to the middle of life without God? Any of you with whom life is just beginning? Any of you men, so full of business plans and cares? Any of you mothers, whose children are growing up without any of the warm influences of parental piety around them? Any of you who are letting your early years go by, without any Savior, or any hope of Heaven? How many of you shall they be? And who?

## XII.

### TRUST IN GOD THE ANTIDOTE TO DESPONDENCY.

ISAIAH 1:10.—“Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.”

There is a class of Christians, who are habitually anxious and desponding, and find it difficult quietly and cheerfully to commit their interests to God. To such, the words we have just read were addressed by the prophet, during one of the darkest and most trying times in Jewish history. Allow me, my Christian brethren, to commend them to any among you,—if any there are,—“that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? *Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*”

This passage very plainly implies that trust in God is a sure, and also a complete remedy, for the solicitude we sometimes suffer in reference to the dealings of God. Not by any means that a knowledge will thus be communicated to us, of the secret reason for everything He may do; for this would be to take away the very ground of trust. But, in the first place, that we shall find ourselves contented to do without the reason, in those cases where the providence of God does not in some measure explain itself; and also, that the

quick spiritual discernment, which the exercise of Christian trust invariably imparts, will often enable us actually to understand the providence.

And this truth, that light and comfort are promised to every one,—simple or learned, poor or rich,—who can trust God, appears to me one of the deepest possible interest, and fraught with an encouragement that ought to assure the most fearful and desponding. Let us consider some of the means by which Christian trust may best be cultivated.

1. It is necessary to obtain a clear and definite view of the great Object of trust. "Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." God should be apprehended, not vaguely and in some theoretical manner, but clearly, as a living personal Being,—intimately, as directly related, in friendship or otherwise, to each individual of the race,—constantly, as being everywhere present, beholding all, controlling all, and judging all.

And in order to this intelligent and vivid apprehension of God, it is necessary that we be familiar with the Word of God. Here we shall find repeated assertions and repeated illustrations, of His power and His willingness to comfort the afflicted, to guide the doubting, to rescue the tempted, and teach the simple. No other book contains so many or so positive assurances on this point: no other book conveys these ideas in language so well fitted to awaken and keep alive the principle of Christian trust. The declarations are more full, more pointed, more clear and intelligible than we can find anywhere else. This is very clearly

proved, by the fact that men commonly find it easier to credit their religious teachers, than to place implicit confidence in the Bible;—the Bible too greatly taxing their feeble faith, by the greatness of the gifts it holds out, and by the wonderful freedom with which they are offered. Men cannot find it in their earthly and doubting hearts to believe that God is really all that His Word represents Him, for ability to understand, and readiness to supply all their spiritual needs: they believe the declarations of Scripture, too often, with only a dim, theoretical impression of their true force: if they say they receive them, they too often make some secret abatement from their fulness, before actually taking them to the heart, as objects of simple faith: there is more in them than their confidence can grasp. Now in order to the full and healthy development of Christian trust, there must be a vivid and definite idea of God, as He has exhibited Himself in His Word. Here we shall see that the highest flight of our faith ever falls below His goodness, His wisdom, His almighty power. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in His way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is staid on Thee." These are some of the assurances which God offers for the support of Christian confidence. And I think, if we were wont to read them oftener, and more thoughtfully, and with a more hearty belief that they are literally true, we should know

something less of that fearfulness, and heart-sinking to which the text refers.

We shall find, too, in our reading of the Scriptures, that these declarations have been actually verified, in the experience of multitudes of Christian men and women in every age. Does some one say, as he reads of Joseph, and Daniel, and Paul; of all who have "obtained a good report through faith," that they were sustained by some miraculous exertion of God's power, and that this is something which we are not warranted to expect? But, my brethren, we must remember that these earnest and trustful saints did not know, when they placed their confidence in God, what the issue would be; for then there would have been no trust. They had not been told, one, that the lions should not harm him, another, that he should pass unhurt through the fire, and another still, that his prison-door would be swung wide open at the hour of midnight. They only knew that there is a God;—that He is wise, and just, and infinitely kind, and that He had commanded them to honor Him with their confidence; and they did thus honor Him, and their names remain to this day, that we also may learn the wisdom and the duty of trusting God. Moreover, what if it pleased the infinite Wisdom, in one age of the world, to teach men by miracle, and in another age, to teach them without it—are His power and His faithfulness therefore the less? Does not God understand the human heart? Does He not know how best it may be instructed,—how best it may be moved? And still more,—how often, think you, has God effected by the direct interposition of His power, far back in

the region of remote and invisible causes, that which has appeared only as the ordinary result from some natural and familiar agency? He does not send the raven to feed you. He does not raise you by palpable and apparent miracle from a bed of sickness. But how do you know how often, in answer to the believing prayer of yourself, or another, the Almighty has turned back the currents of nature, that you might have bread, or that your life might be brought up again from the borders of the grave?

In order also to that acquaintance with God, which is the very soul of Christian trust, it is necessary often and intimately to commune with Him. When we approach a friend, for the purpose of requesting a favor, there is that in His face, which draws forth our confidence: we behold there the expression of good-will; and our trust springs up on the instant. And so, my brethren, is it with our Friend above. As to Himself, He is always equally worthy to be confided in,—He knows no variableness. But when we do not approach Him in direct communion, or come,—if coming to Him it can be called,—thoughtless and undevout,—with eyes averted from His face, either in fear, or with gazing after worldly objects, we lose that look of invitation and of deep regard, which, if we would but see it, would rouse up our feeble and timid confidence; and we go forth from His gracious presence, actually believing—although we should shrink from saying so much in words—that it is a vain thing to wait upon God. But when the earnest reverent eye of faith is bent upon the great Invisible, we behold that in Him, upon which all Christian trust is based: we perceive

with clear and vivid insight that wondrous knowledge, that perfectly understands our subtlest and most secret want,—that power, which commands unlimited resources for our supply,—that deep and overflowing tenderness, of which every living man is invited to partake. And seeing all this, we trust, as readily as nature receives the rain and the sunshine. We trust God in proportion as we know God; and we know Him, not by a cold and critical analysis of His nature,—not by a formal assent to the doctrines of the Bible concerning Him,—but by that direct, and warm, and living intercourse, without which there is no such thing as prayer. Hence the sacred writer says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.”

Once more, we shall obtain a clear impression of God's character, and thus of the ground of Christian trust, by the careful study of our own Christian experience. We are to learn trust in God, by considering those facts in our own personal history,—whether great or small—by which He has actually proved Himself worthy of our trust. I do not know, my brethren, the history—the inner, heart history—of any one of you. But I know *this* of each of you, that if you are one of God's children, there have been times when you have found, as a matter of personal experience, that “it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man.” God has not dealt with any two of you precisely in the same way; nor has He delivered any of you out of every trouble. But when, notwithstanding all your diligence, and all your foresight, your worldly affairs have become so embarrassed

that you could neither eat, nor sleep, nor enjoy the converse of friends, nor the delights of home, because you saw the skeleton form of poverty stalking toward your dwelling, you have bethought you of your God; and at your earnest prayer, the spectre has been turned away from your door. Or sickness has brought down your firm and vigorous health to the gates of the grave, and the prayer of faith has been heard in Heaven, and you were made whole. Or death has made a vacant place at your once happy fireside: there was a form you will see no more,—there was a voice whose tones were inexpressibly dear, that is speechless in the grave; and yet, in your hour of bitterness, God has not left you quite alone. And so, at some time, you have prayed against a wild, and domineering passion, and God has given you the command of it: you have asked for patience, and He has made you strong to endure whatever His wisdom saw fit to send: you have besought Him for a faith that should rise above the tumults of time, that should unseal the eye of your soul to all spiritual things, and help you to walk securely the narrow and perilous way of life; and, in one way or another, this faith has been given you. Now, my Christian brother, you may have allowed yourself to regard these providences lightly; and gradually, it may be, they have well-nigh passed out of mind. But if so, you sinned against God, and wronged your own soul. For the faith with which you prayed was not equal to these wonderful displays of God's goodness, but He has been better to you than your faith, in order that so He might strengthen and build it up. The great and fearful Being who framed

all worlds, and breathed life into every creature, has put forth His wondrous power in your behalf, that He might teach you how to trust Him. Retrace the way you have come; and see if here and there along its winding course, there be not other footprints than your own, as though God's angel had there walked by your side. Consider your present state, and see if it offer no signs of a wise and ever-watchful Providence. And from all these things, learn to put your whole confidence in God.

And here it is proper to throw out a caution against an error that sometimes creeps in, to mar the Christian's peace,—that of being led by self examination into self dependence,—to mistake for trust in God, a reliance upon our own Christian character. Now God doubtless intended that, if faithful, we should enjoy the assurance that we are His children: doubtless He intended it for one of the chief springs of our encouragement. But when we find our hope and our enjoyment so far arising from this source, that we build our expectations of God's favor upon what we behold in ourselves, instead of what we see in God, we are losing sight of the true ground of Christian trust. And, my brethren, when we view the subject rightly, we shall see that the fact of our not being allowed,—or, I should rather say, obliged,—to depend upon ourselves for hope, is one that ought to afford us the greatest encouragement. For notwithstanding our tendency to self-trust, a tendency which is often operating, when we do not suspect it,—how bitterly are we often made to feel that there is no ground broad enough for our confidence, out of a Wisdom that is

boundless, and a Forbearance that never fails. When we find ourselves limiting God's goodness by our own desert, we always find our trust growing feeble and sickly: the source of our confidence is as truly out of ourselves, and in our Maker, as the life of a plant is out of itself, and in the atmosphere. It should be our continual joy, my Christian brethren, that our Father above does not point us back to our weak, and ignorant, and sinning selves, as the ground of trust;—it should be the very life of our confidence, that it is fixed upon the everlasting God.

“ From Thee, the overflowing Spring,  
Our souls shall drink a full supply,  
While those that trust their native strength,  
Shall fall away, and droop and die.”

2. In order to the cultivation of Christian trust, we are to keep trust in constant exercise. “Let him stay upon his God.” One method of exercising trust has already been indicated, in what has been said upon the subject of prayer. “For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him.” But more particular reference is had here to those forms of Christian exercise, which are outward. In reference to the concerns of every-day life, we are, in the simple, but powerfully expressive language of the Scriptures, to be “careful for nothing.” Not that we should relax anything of that diligence, or dispense with any of those precautions, upon which, under God, our temporal prosperity depends; but that, having done all that a right and Christian view of our secular affairs may

demand, we are quietly to leave the issue of everything with God. Diligence, and caution, and calculation, are duties: an ever-wakeful interest in whatever pertains to our several callings is a duty, and these imply an earnest desire to succeed, and the constant use of all honest and honorable means of success. But when this lively interest runs into anxiety, or disappointment rises into distrust and murmuring, we are become judges of God,—we are no longer children.

There is such a thing, my brethren, as carrying on the business of each day with an activity that never tires, and a vigilance that suffers no opportunity to pass unimproved, and at the same time, having performed each action with a Christian motive, so also, to commit its result to God, in the calm but joyful spirit of Christian trust. There is such a thing as rejoicing in the gifts of a kind and watchful Providence, without suffering a constant fear lest they be withdrawn. There is such a thing as suffering the severest loss, and yet holding fast to our belief that the event did not happen without God's wise appointment. And in this spirit we are to enter upon every undertaking, to discharge every duty, to submit to every grief. Our business enterprises will not always succeed; but there will always be a reason for it,—God's reason,—when they do not. The face we have loved to look upon will be taken from our sight, but never until God's time comes. And, my Christian brethren, we are to do all things, as in God's sight, and as subject, willingly, gladly subject, to all His wise appointments. We are never to shrink from a position to which God's providence may call us; we are never to regard the

course of duty as dangerous, or difficult, or wearisome. We are to perform each labor as for God, and not for ourselves. Without stopping to parley with our fears, we are to step confidently forward in the dark, knowing that if God has pointed us to the path, He will see that our feet do not stumble.

And to sum up all in a word, we are ever to bear in mind the power, and the wisdom, and the goodness of Jehovah; and to open the whole soul to the health-giving influence of such contemplation. We are to think what might that must be, that built the heavens, and lighted up their dark expanse with suns, that sent out the winds, and walled up the stormy deep with eternal barriers,—that opened through the crowded sky a highway for every star, that bid the thunder roll and the lightning flash out from its cloudy home, and the storm do its terrible work of death. We are to think whose wisdom it is that planned this mighty frame of things,—and what awful vision that, which, piercing through the universe, beholds alike the sweep of a comet, and the falling of a leaf, and the secret thought of every human heart. And we are to remember that this wisdom, and knowledge, and fearful power, are all enlisted on the side of truth, and virtue, and that as long as God lives, “all things” must “work together for good to them that love Him.” We are to believe that we can be placed in no situation, but He is perfectly acquainted with all its bitterness, and all its danger. “For we have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” We are to believe,—not in some vague manner, as though it were a theory only, but with the whole soul,—

that God's heart is continually open to the story of our every need,—that though we see Him not, He is near us,—that He is as merciful and tender as He is just and holy,—that He is not powerful only, but benevolent,—and not more wise than He is kind. “For He knoweth our frame : He remembereth that we are dust.” We should take heed lest our fear dishonor His goodness,—lest we regard Him altogether as a King, and not at all as a Father,—lest the clouds of a gloomy imagination come up over the brightness of His glory, and He who has proclaimed Himself the Condescending and the Merciful, be viewed rather as the stern and rigorous deity of the heathen. We should reflect, also, that if we be not tried, we shall never learn to trust,—that unless we suffer, we shall not know how to submit,—that except we are sometimes left alone, our proud and self-reliant hearts will forget their true dependence. “For tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience, and experience, hope ;” and so, by His own wise and mysterious methods, God is every day and every hour bringing us on our upward way. “For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even unto death.”

### XIII.

#### THE LOVE OF GOD, THE SUBSTANCE OF TRUE RELIGION.

MATT. xxii: 37, 38.—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.”

The question is worthy of consideration,—Why is the entire extent of such a book as the Bible occupied with setting forth in various ways the nature of so simple a thing as religion? Why should we have history, biography, poetry, general principles and minute details, letters, sermons, conversations,—in a word, every vehicle in which it is possible to convey truth? Why should not God make known to men, in one brief, simple statement, the sum of all religion, and leave this germ to ripen into all the forms of human personality?

The reason would seem to be, that men have different habits of mind, so that a representation suited to one, would be powerless with another; and also, that each mind has different moods, so that a view which would move to-day, would be utterly ineffectual with the same mind to-morrow. One is drawn by invitations. Another is overpowered by argument. To one mind, truth is clearest in its principles: with another, it is hardly perceived until thrown into some palpable shape. There must be abstraction; and there must

be illustration. There must be vigor of thought; and there must be beauty of form. There must be, in the great landscape of truth, hill and valley, river and forest, the green grass, the rugged rock, and the shoreless, wide-sweeping sea.

But we must not forget, in the variety of the Bible, the unity in which that variety is all expressed. The whole of the natural world, embracing land and sea and sky, every flower, and every star, and every influence, is indicated in the one thing called matter. And if we could know concerning anything that it is not matter, we should know that it does not belong to the outward world. Now the whole of what we call religion, involving all the variety of Christian affections, and all the forms of Christian effort, is expressed in the single thought of love to God. When the lawyer asked our Lord, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" the answer was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Now it is to be observed here, that our Lord declares the second of these injunctions is *like* the first. But it plainly is not like it, in words; and it plainly is not like it, in the object of which it speaks. He must have meant that they were the same in their spirit, and that, as different branches spring from a common root, so these two sorts of feeling are but the offshoots of a single impulse. As every branch of an oak is oak, because the root is oak, so all the forms of

conduct that belong to the Christian character are Christian, because they all alike arise from Christian feeling. If one love God, he will love his fellow-man: if he truly love his fellow, then he loves God. Hence John declares, "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." And on the other hand, he says, in speaking of love for one's race, "Every one that loveth is born of God;" and again, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." These two commandments, presenting the two great aspects of religion, embrace all that is written in the Scriptures, and all that can ever be conceived, in reference to religion.

At present, we wish to view human obligation only upon that side which stands immediately related to the Deity. And hence we take the first of these commands by itself. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." The natural and true relation of men to God,—that relation which was marred and broken by the fall, and which the gospel aims to restore,—is all expressed in the single idea of *love*.

There is reason to fear that this truth is not held as it should be, even by many of those who are far enough from rejecting it in theory. No one will deny that love is beautiful as a sentiment, and that it would be a happy thing for all men, if they were bound to the Deity by the strong tie that held such men as Abraham, and David, and Daniel, and John. Yet it may well be doubted whether any large number hold such love to be an *essential* of religion, and strive for

its practical realization, in the daily experience. Too often a silent distinction is drawn between a religion which is enough to satisfy the Divine requirement, and that constancy and fervor of religious feeling enjoyed by some. The former is thought to secure salvation: the latter is held to be something over and above all positive obligation, and something for which those who reach it have some natural taste, or some special capacity. It would seem that to some minds there are two religions; one that barely saves, and the other that saves by a long distance,—one that occupies some place in the mind, and another that holds the first place;—one that provides for personal safety, and delivers from Hell, and another that delights itself in God, and takes the form of practical holiness. Those who, consciously or unconsciously reason thus, sought religion, at the beginning, under a mistaken impression of its nature, and have held it ever since with this same idea. And hence, while they insist upon the necessity of religion, they esteem it necessary, barely as the only means of warding off a threatened calamity—they hold the religion of earnest and devout persons beautiful, and perhaps on the whole desirable, but do not regard it as necessary, and are strangers to the feeling which cried out of old, "O! Lord! how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day;" strangers to that experience of sin, which exclaimed, "O! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death."

Now the Scriptures teach very plainly that love for God is not a particular form of beauty which religion sometimes takes,—as a costly building, or richly-bound

book, is more elegant, but not more useful, than those in plainer style,—but an element that belongs to the very nature of religion, just as heat belongs to fire, or fragrance to a rose.

To such a view of religion all our most familiar ways of reasoning bring their strong support. For such is the spiritual blindness of men, that it is quite possible to hold erroneous and even gross ideas of spiritual things, while yet the impressions upon other subjects are healthful and sound. It is far from being unusual for a person of strong good sense, to apply to spiritual things, principles, which, in any other department, that same sense, would quickly condemn. It is one of the world's familiar and settled maxims, that friendship lies not wholly in the conduct, but first of all in the feeling; and that it only finds in the conduct its outward sign. And hence protestations of good-will, and even actual services, where we have reason to think there is no real friendship, are regarded by us all as hypocritical.

Again, there is in all men more or less of the desire for outward distinction. And yet, there are few who would not shrink with loathing from a position in which they should receive every external sign of homage and regard, and yet know that they were objects of universal indifference, or possibly of hatred. And under any circumstances the pleasure to be had from association with our fellow-men, is in the exact ratio of our confidence in their attachment and esteem. Now if a principle like this be good, as between man and man, much more should it be recognized in the relation of creatures to their Creator. To call that the

service of God, in which there is nothing but a dead belief, or nothing but a selfish desire for personal safety, or nothing beyond a weary routine of observances, or nothing better than all these combined, is an affront to the Majesty on high, for the reason that it offers to God that which would be rejected by men. Such an offering, soulless and formal, yet claiming to be religion, is one of those things in which the intellectual contradiction and the moral perversity, form so strange and fearful a combination, that when it is fairly considered, men can hardly believe it possible that they have been so foolish or so heartless as such conduct declares them.

But that which we are taught upon this important subject by reason, is confirmed by all parts of the Scriptures. Every one will allow that all the Bible contains toward a description of religion, may be embraced under the head of *faith*, or that of *works*.

To speak of these in their order, it is very plainly taught in the Scriptures that the faith which stands connected with the favor of God, and eternal life; always works in union with that feeling of complacency and delight in God, which we understand by *love*. At a time when the Gospel was new, and had not yet been shown to hold a vital connection with human dignity and happiness, and when its profession was attended with violent persecution, it was not unnaturally presumed that any who forsook the religion in which they had been educated, for the Gospel, were moved by some worthy impulse; and hence an acknowledgment of the Christian system, was taken for a reasonable evidence of the Christian spirit. We find

therefore in the epistles of Paul, such a declaration as this:—"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And again, we read in one of the letters of John, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." On such confession, accompanied by a life that was not reproachable, they were admitted to membership in the new Church. But all the religious teachings of that day, as we find them recorded in the Bible, hold up prominently this thought of love toward God, as the test by which every man must estimate his own character. In addressing the Church at Ephesus, Paul unites the ideas of faith and love, or rather takes their unity for granted; in the compass of a single verse, praying that Christ might "dwell in their hearts by faith," and that they might also be "rooted and grounded in love." And summing up all religion in one single thought, John says, "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God. For God is love." "Unto you, therefore, which believe," writes the warm-hearted Peter, "he is precious." And elsewhere, when he would encourage them under temptations, he says, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen ye love: in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." We are taught, by James, that the faith of Abraham was counted to him for righteous-

ness, because it made him the "friend of God." When we read, in one place, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" and elsewhere, "Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus," what must we infer respecting the relation constituted by faith, but that it has all those feelings of nearness, confidence, and devotion in respect to God, that exist between the dearest relations of this lower world? And when it is affirmed, "the carnal mind is enmity against God," what is this, but an indirect and yet plain declaration, that the faith which saves, changes that enmity into love? And what shall we infer but the very same thing, from the words, "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing?" And what but this, from the words, "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love?"

And now, to take the other general term under which the Bible speaks of religion, what is implied by *works*? Have we in this word a description of religion, or only an indication of the results to which religion gives birth. In answer to this question, we say that there is not a passage in the Bible, which represents the conduct as religious, except in so far as it proceeds from a right state of the heart. On the contrary, we are expressly told that "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin." But we have just shown that faith implies love, as truly as it does belief. Therefore no works can be good, which do not arise from love for God.

The Bible always represents religion as first of all a certain state of heart; and whenever it speaks of religion as a course of outward conduct, it is not the thing done, which the Bible calls good, but the warm Christian affection, out of which the conduct may have arisen. If it sprang in reality from some other impulse than Christian love, then, although it may be a useful, and even necessary work, it is never called a good work. Accordingly, we find Paul saying, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity it profiteth me nothing." When James, endeavoring to show the absurdity of that faith which consists in mere speculative belief, says to an imaginary objector, "Yea, a man may say, show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works," the line of thought is plainly this: You can give no other proof of what you call your faith, than a life conformed to such faith; while I, on the contrary, put my faith beyond all question, by the fruits which it is daily bringing forth. James does indeed argue for works, but never for any other than good works. And in this he harmonizes precisely with Paul, and Peter, and John, when, in speaking of faith, they show that it implies that love, out of which alone good works can ever arise. Paul and others speak of the nature of religion, within: James fixes our attention upon the shape that religion will always take without. But they are speaking of the same thing. For the one only affirms that faith is a thing of love; and the other declares that because it is a thing of love, it is for that very reason active and practical. Nehemiah,

Stephen, Elijah, Moses, were men who abounded in good works. But their good works are as directly traceable to the spirit of a devout regard for God, as the rivers are traceable to the distant hills, and the rays of light are referable to the sun. We are told of those who were stoned, sawn asunder, driven away into deserts and caves, and made to suffer universal shame and hatred, on account of their religion. And then we are told also that they did and suffered all these things through the power of faith.

But to suppose that a life is acceptable to God barely because it is full of sacrifices, when the sacrifices have been purely selfish, and employed only as a means of warding off the Divine anger, is to suppose that men can deceive their Creator, and make Him think that they are serving Him, when they are not; whereas, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." And again, "God is not mocked." The Bible writers have so spoken upon this great, and many-sided, yet simple subject of religion, as to show that to their minds there was no one word, or form of statement, which fully expresses it. Nor can we, at this day, do more than they did. We can only say, without analyzing the mystery, that we are joined to God only by a loving faith, and a believing love; and that the evidence of such inward feelings, is always found in the conduct. And then, if one who is not conscious of any such nearness to God, should encourage himself with the thought that religion after all is not a thing of feeling, but of action, let him remember that no man ever acts without feeling of some kind, and also that the action is always exactly like the feeling out of which it springs,—

good, if that be good,—evil, if that be evil. Let it be kept carefully in mind that if we call religion, faith, then it is a faith that loves to believe in God,—or if you call it works, then these works are the works of one who loves to obey God.

Let us notice very briefly the manner in which this general principle is illustrated, in two or three of the familiar phases of religious feeling.

1. In the first place, what is *reverence*? When we think of the majesty and glory of God, and consider how feeble and how impure we ourselves are in the contrast, the instinct awakened by such thoughts is that of shrinking and dread. But along with this, there will be in our mind, the quick inference that it must be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of such a Being; and the thoughts will gather more about the matter of personal safety, than the question of personal obligation. This mind has not yet come out of the region of selfishness: it does not reverence. But with another, this powerful impression of the glory of God, is accompanied by a disposition to draw near to Him. The reasoning in such a mind is,—Surely so august a Being has a right to my highest regard: henceforth I am His: show me what it is He would have me do: tell me how I may glorify so great excellence: "O! come let us worship and bow down—let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God." In this case, there is love: as in the former instance, awe without love filled the soul with fear, so here, awe in harmony with love, inspires it with reverence. And hence, when James, arguing for the works that arise

from faith, says, to the objector, "Thou believest there is one God. Thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble," he means that even though the impression of God's greatness were as vivid in any human mind as it is in that of devils, it would not be a true faith, working by love, so long as it induced no other feeling toward God, than that of selfish dread. And to the same general purport, although differently applied, is the remark of John,—“Perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment.” Many is the man who comes as far as Mount Sinai, and turns back to Egypt again. And sometimes even those who have passed in safety the quaking mountain, and are moving slowly through the desert to the land of promise, know but a part of that “peace which passeth understanding,” because fear at times gains an ascendancy over love, and they are more concerned for their own interests than they are for the honor of their Lord and Master.

2. Again, if it be asked, What is *zeal*? We can make no true reply which will not bring to view the same principle. There is a spirit of activity, a love for outward, practical results, a disposition to plan, to execute, to apply means to an end, in which men sometimes think they have an unmistakable proof of Christian zeal. But, in certain instances, this spirit is seen to act irregularly, varying with the moods of the mind: it is strongly persuaded, too, of its own views, and violently attached to its own modes of action: when it can be suffered to do that particular sort of work which harmonizes with its taste, and to do it in a way

that also agrees with its taste, it will labor with every outward appearance of zeal: otherwise, it is either idle, or occupied in some way that is positively hurtful. In other words, this activity arises from constitutional impulse: it has no real love for God and holiness; and therefore it is not zeal. On the other hand, there are those who, whatever their circumstances, or abilities, are always found doing that which they are able to do, for the honor of God, and the welfare of the Church and the world. If Providence call them to a post of influence, they do not shrink: if, on the other hand, a private and humble station be assigned them, they do not murmur: they know "how to be exalted, and how to be abased:" they do not care about being seen of men, and having their activity praised: they *enjoy* a life of Christian effort; and are happy to be occupied anywhere in the Master's service. The spirit which moves them is zeal, because it is a spirit of love.

3. Again, if we speak of *self-denial*, the distinction under notice is equally plain. To the minds of some, this virtue consists in the doing of enough to avoid final condemnation. They know that the Christian life is spoken of in the Bible under the figures of a warfare and a race. They know that they must strive if they would enter in: they remember that they who are Christ's, have "crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." They see that the idea of leading a Christian life without self-denial is unscriptural and absurd. Hence they compel themselves to do some things which are at variance with their tastes, precisely

in the same mechanical way, and with the same exclusive view to personal advantage, with which they would pay the stipulated price of a purchase. That which they do, is commonly but little; and even that is done wearily and with reluctance. To any among them who have by nature a sensitive conscience, suggestions of duty will constantly arise; and the painful tormenting questions will be ever recurring, Does God require of me so great a sacrifice? May I not in this instance turn aside with safety? If I deny myself in this thing, may I not indulge in something else? And so, during their whole lives, they are harassed beyond the power of language to express, between a predominant love of the world, on the one hand, and a purely selfish desire for Heaven, on the other. Self-denial has no pleasure to them: it is a price they pay to buy off something worse; and they pay it with many a sigh, and many a longing after the forbidden things upon which their affections are really fixed. It is a sad picture,—too sad to be drawn thus plainly. And yet we must see ourselves, or we cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven.

But, on the other hand, there are those who know,—strange as the unspiritual may think it,—a true pleasure in self-denial. They feel that it is only their reasonable service to obey and glorify God. They do not indeed invent methods of self-denial, beyond those that the Lord has appointed them: this were superstition, or self-righteousness. But they do cheerfully, and bear cheerfully, all He has appointed. They endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and never think the ways of Providence unnecessarily severe.

They remember how Christ has suffered in the flesh, for all; and they go continually armed with the same mind. They "glory in infirmity." When they are weak, then are they strong. They do not feel that they lose anything,—be it riches, talents, time, worldly portion,—by giving it to God. They are not so much occupied with the sad inquiry, How much must I do, to escape the wrath to come? As with the cheerful, animating question, How much *can* I do, to show forth the glory of my Maker, and testify my love for the Lord Jesus? They have struggles of their own. But as they pass through them, they are comforted and supported by the thought, that in this way they may honor and please God. They find the spiritual life a warfare: but it is not wearisome. For they do not fight for hire, but out of loyal devotion to their leader. It is a "good fight," because it is a "fight of faith." They do all things heartily, because they do them to the Lord. And if all fear of a coming judgment were taken away, they would still do and suffer, with a cheerful mind, whatever might be appointed them; because they have found that in the very keeping of God's commandments, (cost what it may) "there is great reward." In such a life as this, there is self-denial. For in such a life, self is forgotten, and love goes forth, and fixes with a supreme devotion upon God. It is a *happy* life, for those who lead it, have the Spirit's own witness that they are children of God.

And now, two thoughts suggest themselves as an appropriate ending to what we have said.

1. God is great; and religion, so far from being a

mere arrangement for personal advantage, is nothing less than a total surrender of self to God. It does not consist in religious knowledge: it does not lie in religious observances: it is not created in the soul by baptism: it does not arise from connection with the Church. It is that impression of the Deity which makes His service delightful: it is that state of the heart, in which the highest desire is the desire to please and honor God,—to obey Him with all the powers, and day by day grow into His likeness: it is that state of feeling to which even difficult and trying duties have a pleasure, because it has pleased the Wisdom on high to order them.

2. But, in the second place, if religion be so far beyond all mere belief, all form, profession and pretension whatever, so on the other hand, it is simpler than to some minds it is apt to seem. The change that takes place in conversion, is the greatest of which it is possible to conceive; and yet nothing can be more intelligible. No outward visible change can be more decided than occurs when a traveller suddenly turns about, and retraces his steps. And yet, what can be more simple? Thus it is, precisely, with the change that brings men out of darkness into light. At first, their condition, with all its guilt and want and danger, was all described in this one fact, that they did not love God. And hence, the thing that will alter that condition, and bring them right, is to cease from this evil way, and love God. Whether we speak of religion under the term faith, repentance, submission, good works, or any other, it matters not.

They are but different ways of describing the same thing. Either implies a measure of all the rest; and each also involves somewhat of true Christian love. There is no need to go far, and perplex one's self with words and distinctions. The command is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." And if every wanderer from God in this house to-day, should in this hour turn from himself to his Maker,—should cease from his selfishness, and fix his love upon his Creator and his Savior,—every one would go from this place a Christian, and every one would come at last to Heaven.

## XIV.

### THE DEATH OF CHRIST, THE HIGHEST EXPRESSION OF THE DIVINE LOVE.

ROMANS V:8.—“God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

It is very difficult for us to feel that we are sinners. We understand very well, and readily enough confess, that we are imperfect; that we display some defects of temper, that we are not entirely free from pride; that we do not always respect the feelings, or the interests, of those about us. These facts are continually forced upon our notice; and since it would be a palpable dishonesty to deny them, we often go to the opposite extreme, and make a virtue of the candor with which they are admitted. But we have naturally no true understanding of sin. Conscience accuses us,—we know that we are guilty, and that we ought to repent. But what it is to hate and disobey God, we know only as a deaf man knows what thunder is, by the feeling,—not by the sound. So ignorant are we upon this point, that nothing is more common than for one who readily admits what he calls imperfections and infirmities, to deny that he is wholly destitute of love for his Maker. He does not know what love to God really is,—he does not know what is implied in hating God,—because he has no right impressions of

God Himself. When a man regards the Deity as a Being who is too mild and benevolent to be perfectly just, is it any wonder—since benevolence is a quality which sin has no occasion to fear, and justice an attribute which it cannot but fear,—that he should fancy himself a lover of God? God, as he views Him, he certainly does love: for he regards God as altogether such an one as himself. Of what God really is,—so far as any other than a dead, intellectual idea is concerned,—he is totally ignorant. And since the nature of sin depends upon the character of God, and God's law, a wrong idea of God, absolutely necessitates a wrong impression of sin.

It is necessary for us to remember that sin is not a misfortune, but a crime,—that it is not a condition into which we have been plunged by another, and for which we are at the same time held responsible,—but a state, however brought about, of alienation from God, which implies on our part as real a guilt, and as real a worthiness of condemnation, as rests upon the violator of a human law. It is therefore a state which in itself does not call for pity, but for punishment.

Then we are to remember, also, that in punishing sin, God does not act from the promptings of revenge, but purely from a respect for what is right and just: sin ought to be punished, because it is sin; and so God punishes it, because He always does what He ought to do. "God is angry with the wicked;" but not angry, if I may so say, on His own account,—not angry because He has suffered a personal injury,—but angry, because He loves the truth and right,—angry, because He is holy and good,—angry, because He

ought to be angry. His anger is not the less terrible on this account; but we see that it has in it nothing of what we should call in a human being, revenge.

And yet again, to say the same thing in another way, it must be borne in mind that justice is not a rigorous, iron principle, which we have a right to regard as oppressive, and unworthy of God. It is neither more nor less than the rule, by which every man receives just what he deserves,—if good, good; and if evil, evil. It is one of the simplest of all ideas; and as a principle, it is one to which our minds give the most hearty assent, as a true and right principle, in all cases where interest does not bribe the judgment. Who of us assembled here to-day feels the law against murder to be burdensome? But the murderer is crushed down into the dust, by its terrible weight. He does not desire the sentence to be executed: he has no admiration for the law which takes his life. And yet that law is just,—it gave the man a fair trial, and found him guilty of the crime called murder; and now it gives him just what murder ought to have. Had he been found innocent, the same just law would as readily have given him his freedom, because he deserved it, as it now gives him death, because he deserves that. Can anything be more fair? Do we not instinctively feel this to be so right and fitting a mode of procedure, that whenever we look at it honestly, and without bias, we can scarcely conceive how mercy should be possible? We have learned from the Scriptures that God is merciful, and that He has opened a way of escape to us, which does not involve any breach of practical justice; and as we are con-

scious of being sinners, and therefore of being condemned, we instinctively fly from the thought of God's justice, to that of His compassion; and so strong is this tendency with us, that very many, I do not doubt, find a difficulty in understanding how God should be otherwise than merciful. We have become so accustomed to the idea of mercy, that perfect justice is something of which we rarely, if at all, form any distinct conception. Mercy, we are apt to regard as a matter of course, and justice, on the other hand, as a stern, rigorous principle, that involves something of tyranny. But let us go back to the days when men, so far from regarding compassion as a necessary thing, could not even persuade themselves that it was possible. Let us remember that to them the principle of justice,—a fair award to every man of that which he had merited,—was the great, leading principle of all religion, and that when they thought of mercy, it was only as a shadowy, uncertain thing, upon which they could rest no hope. Many among them, it is true, looked forward to eternal life: but they always grounded their expectations in the principle of justice: they had no true impressions of sin, and therefore believed, that while there was no hope for the profane, and dissolute, and cruel man, the externally virtuous, would enter upon a glorious immortality, purely as a matter of right. Let us imagine what would have been the feelings of one of these unenlightened men, had he been suddenly made to see that sin is not merely an affair of the outward conduct, but a thing of the heart,—of thought and feeling,—and that the true desert of sin is an everlasting punishment. He

has not been told that God is merciful: even if he could know that God is benevolent, and would be glad to avert from him the consequences of his sin, if He were able, still he would not see how God could do so,—could justly and rightly. He would reason thus: justice is a fixed principle,—it must prevail, come what will: therefore a man who violates the law of God in any particular must receive upon his own head the penalty that stands connected with the law; and I have violated the law,—therefore the penalty must fall on me,—there is no escape. The idea might cross his mind,—possibly the Being with whom I have to do, will pass my sin by,—and for a moment he might hope. But then the thought would come back upon him, like the black shadow of despair,—No: no: for justice must be done: God can no more help me, than I can help myself: I have sinned,—I must perish. Now, my brethren, here is precisely the situation of every one of us, so far as regards any claim we have upon God. We have sinned,—we must perish. Does any one say, But we have a claim on God's compassion, if not upon His justice? The thing is impossible: if we could have a claim upon God's compassion, He would be absolutely bound to bestow it: a claim is always founded in simple justice, whereas justice is the very thing we desire to escape. We are positively and hopelessly lost, so far as justice goes,—so far as claim and right are concerned. What shall we do? We know now that God can be just, and yet justify us. But we did not know it, until He revealed it. Suppose we did not know it now—what if we knew to-day that there was no hope for the man who had

sinned, and that for us, therefore, being sinners, the wide universe offered no way of escape. Not one of us would have come to this sacred place; for it were all in vain to offer up our prayers,—in vain to lift up our eyes to Him whom we now know as the God of mercy. The present would be so embittered by the thought of the future, that it would become the height of wisdom to forget that there is a future, and a God, and to drown all reflection in the cares, or the enjoyments of passing life. But reflection could not be wholly repressed: the vision of the dark future would sometimes pass before us; and in the agony of our spirit we would gladly give a world, or a universe, were it possible, to catch one momentary gleam of hope, amid the awful darkness. No light shining on the cloud,—no voice of compassion falling on the ear,—no Savior coming toward us over the stormy water! This is justice,—this is what each of us has merited.

There is no way in which we can obtain a juster idea of sin, and of the punishment it deserves than by considering the judgments of God against it: these are so many pointed declarations of the estimate which He entertains concerning it. I open the Bible, and I read that God made man upright, surrounded him by outward beauty and magnificence, and blessed him with the consciousness of his Maker's favor. And I read, still farther, that when the heart of man grew proud and self-dependent, and he turned away from his God,—in that hour, a deep and awful shadow fell upon his path: the ground he trod upon lost its fruitful warmth, and grew hard and barren under the curse

of God : he was driven from the groves and the streams of Eden, and, hand in hand with his sinning companion, went forth a remorseful and shame-stricken fugitive in the earth. And this was because of sin. And a little farther on, I read of certain cities, in the vale of Sodom, upon which the Almighty rained a terrible tempest of fire and brimstone, because of the wickedness of their inhabitants ; for in the chief among them all, there were not ten righteous men. And then I note also the strange dealings of God with His own people,—how in one day three thousand of them fell by the sword, in the Arabian wilderness,—how the earth swallowed up the host of Dathan and Abiram, and fire from the Lord seized upon those who offered up strange incense,—how the twenty and four thousand fell by the pestilence, in the plain of Moab,—how the fiery serpents came among them, by the Red Sea,—how they wandered, and hungered in the pathless desert, and how they fell into the hand of enemies, so that they who hated them ruled over them. And all this because of sin. What then is sin? What must it be, to bring down from the hand of a benevolent God such strange and terrible visitations of wrath? And aside from such examples, what mean those declarations, which it is one of the fashions of the day to pass over lightly, as being the language of a heated fancy, among a people who dealt in tropes and exaggerations, but which, I confess, I cannot read without being awe-struck and afraid, in the presence of my God. “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” “The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment.” “Upon the wicked

He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." "To me belongeth vengeance and recompense: their foot shall slide; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste."

"Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord, have spoken it, and will do it." I say what does all this mean? What can it mean, but that sin, is of all things the most fearful,—of all things, most to be abhorred and shunned? Is the God with whom I have to do a just God, and will He thus punish my sin, if it be not repented of? Then I perceive what sin deserves. For He will not lay even upon the wicked more than is right. Is the God with whom I have to do a benevolent God; and will He thus punish unrepented sin? Then still more clearly do I understand the evil of transgression. I read that God is "merciful, and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin:" but I remember also this,—that He "will by no means clear the guilty." I know that "God is love." But I know, too, that He is "a consuming fire;" and that it is a fearful thing to fall into His hands. To deny these things, is to put away from me the Word of God. But to admit them,—what is it but to allow also that sin,—sin in act, or speech, or thought,—sin in public, or sin in solitude,—sin everywhere, and forever,—is worthy only of God's terrible and everlasting punishment! This is a fearful thought, but it is true.

And now why not let it stand thus? Why not let

justice take its course? We have hated and dishonored God: why should He seek to release us from the consequences of our own voluntary evil-doing? Why? Because He is God,—because His love rises above our hatred,—because He would have us return to Him, and become His children, that He may reward our unthankfulness with blessings,—that He may meet our disobedience with mercy, that He may have us evermore under His blessed guidance and protection. This is the reason. “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: but God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were *yet sinners*, Christ died for us.” I had done that for which I ought to die: no human hand could help me: no angel, could do more than pity me, and tremble at the doom that hung over my head. I was alone, and helpless, and despairing. Then He who made me, and blessed me, and against whom I had sinned, put forth the hand that was to save me. Nothing in me moved Him to do thus,—nothing but my helplessness and misery. No angel interceded for me; for no angel knew but that my doom was fixed forever. But God loved me, and had compassion on me, because He is a glorious Being, who loves to forgive; because He knew what it is for a human soul to be cast out forever from the presence of its Maker, and desired, if it might be, to save me from this fearful doom.

As I stood upon the brink of death—the gulf yawning under me—all above and around only gathering darkness and despair,—suddenly the clouds parted, and light streamed all around me; and I heard a voice, saying, “Deliver him from going down to the pit; for

I have found a ransom." My friends, the love of God is not a matter of speculation, but a fact: it is not a cold abstraction, but a warm and living reality. It is not true, merely as a part of some theological system, but true as a matter of personal interest and concern, to every one of us. It is as real as the light and the air, and as free: it is for all men,—it is for all men now,—it is to be had without money and without price.

God commends His love to us in this, "that while we were *yet sinners*, Christ died for us." It is a love which, finding in our characters nothing upon which it could fasten, passes by the character, and considers only our sad condition; and this, let us remember, while at the very same time the character itself is deeply, utterly disapproved. We have a widely different idea of God's love from the Scriptural one, if we regard it as a sentiment that goes blindly forth toward every object, just as the sun shines alike upon the barren sea-shore, and the blooming garden. And when we read that God is "kind, even to the evil and unthankful," and that He "sends His rain upon the just, and upon the unjust," we must not for a moment imagine that He is therefore indifferent to the characters that lie before His all-seeing eye,—we must not for a moment forget that "the evil and unthankful" are the objects, not of His approval, but of His compassion, and that even while He blesses, He turns away His pure eye from their sin.

God commends His love to us by the sacrifice that it has led Him to make,—a sacrifice, which, however lightly we may regard it, and however coolly we may

speculate concerning it, was yet as real as if it had been made by one of ourselves. When I read those words, so familiar, even to children, so imperfectly understood, even by the best and wisest men,—“God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son,” I know that He has parted with something for my sake. What may be the import of this mystery, Father and Son,—God, the unseen, and Jesus Christ, the Living Man,—I pretend not to know. But this I know, that God has been wounded by my transgressions. For it is not love, that God has caused a man to be born into the world, and laid upon him a heavy weight of ignominy, and reproach, and pain. But it is love, that He has joined Himself to us,—that He has crossed the invisible portal of His high pavilion, and putting on the outward form, and bowing Himself in the inward feebleness and infirmity of men, has suffered with us, and suffered for us, “the just for the unjust,” that so He might win us to Himself. There, in the streets of Jerusalem, by the well in Samaria, on the banks of Gennesaret, in the Garden, and in the judgment hall, and on the solemn hill of death, behold God’s only Son, our only Savior. For He came “not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” “Herein is love,—not that we loved God, but that He loved us.”

And now, dear friends, I leave this thought with you. We cannot in any true sense read the Bible, cannot in any true sense pray, cannot even truly think concerning God, or concerning human life, without feeling that a sacrifice for sin is a necessity, as truly as it is a doctrine. When I speak to you of this high

theme, I seem to forget all those distinctions which human society makes for itself. I seem to lose sight of those differences in character, which I doubt not actually exist among you: I no longer behold you as the poor and the rich, or the evil and the good: I know you not by those names of intellectual power, or social ascendancy which may distinguish you among yourselves. I see you all alike, as together with myself, the disobedient and unhappy children of a common Father, wanderers and yet not given up,—evil and unthankful, but not forgotten of Him who sends the sunshine and the rain,—condemned, but not punished,—slaves to the great Enemy, and yet prisoners of hope. Be you who you may, you want the sacrifice for sin, and the helping hand of your God.

You may have learned to think of this thing as something without meaning, and without practical bearing upon life; or you may have held it off, and made it a subject of cool speculation. But your *life*—and this you are in some degree conscious of,—your life is unreal and unpractical; and your heart is unmoved by all those truths which are most calculated to move, for the reason that you do not better understand this very thing. You do not know what the sacrifice for sin could do for you, because you do not know what it is; and you do not know what it is, because you have not given yourself up to it, mind and heart. Can I describe to you a taste, or a color, or a sound? If you are to know them, must you not know them by experience? Can I tell you so that you will understand it, of that which passes understanding, because it is the largest gift of God?

But one thing I can say. If you have until this hour, held the sacrifice for sin to be a light matter, I care not whether it be because you have esteemed it a fiction of Jewish fanatics, or because you have thought it only a doctrine to be laid away in the mind, or because you have not understood the whole of its mystery, and have been afraid you should compromise something of your intellectual dignity, by receiving from God what God has not given you the ability to explain,—follow this course no longer. It is not right,—it is not wise. You are not profounder than some of those who have seen in the offering of Christ, a wisdom deeper than they could fully understand. You are not better, than some of those who have tremblingly asked themselves the question, “How shall man be just with God?” You are not *worse*, than multitudes who have been driven well-nigh to despair, by the tormenting consciousness of sin, and yet at last have found peace to their troubled souls, in beholding “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.”

## XV.

### THE PRODUCTIVENESS OF SIN.

JAMES iii: 5.—“Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.”

It is one of the commonest, and one of the most injurious of human errors, to estimate things by their outward appearance, instead of measuring them by what they have the capacity to become. A spark of fire is apparently an unimportant thing: it is small and easily extinguished. Let fall somewhere, by a careless hand, a single drop would quench it: a little child might tread it out. But because it is so insignificant, it is left to die out of itself. And now an hour has passed, and now another hour, and another: night has come,—men have gone home from their labor and lain down to sleep; and all is still. But suddenly the quiet of midnight is broken; and on the ear of every sleeper bursts the startling outcry, *Fire!* That spark, which no one took the trouble to extinguish, has had life enough in it to kindle the thing it touched; and this in turn has seized upon what lay beyond; and the night-winds have fanned the heated and smoking mass into a flame. And now, you can no longer quench it with a drop of water,—the foot will no longer tread it out. Now it roars within,—now it bursts through door and window,—now it

glides beneath the rafters,—now it hisses like a serpent along the roof,—and now, laughing at the feeble efforts of a hundred men, it wraps the ruin in one terrible winding-sheet of fire. Is this that little grain of danger? Yes: that spark was a seed; and this scene of desolation is its fearful harvest.

Just so, my friends, it is with sin: its beginnings are almost always small, and either unperceived, or lightly regarded: its issues are always in shame and trouble,—many times, in calamities that pass the power of tongue to tell. We may well say of it, in any of its innumerable forms, “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.” Long before these words were written, the prophet Isaiah had cried in the ears of a stubborn people, “Wickedness burneth as the fire.” And the figure is not too strong. For, like the fire, it is easily communicated,—once at its height, it is rarely controlled,—and its work is always a work of ruin. But especially does the parallel hold, in the one particular alluded to in the text,—a wonderful fruitfulness,—the prodigious power for mischief concentrated in a trifling space.

1. What an insignificant thing, sometimes, is the beginning of a bitter and settled hatred. Two men talk together pleasantly, until the course of conversation brings them to a topic upon which they differ. The difference is only one of opinion; and for a time they so regard it, and discuss the matter calmly. But soon the friction of conflicting arguments generates heat; and an uncivil and disparaging remark is thrown out. Here is the first sin: it is not a great one: a

friendly word would quench it,—a prompt and manly apology would trample it out. But it is left as it is. And now the men separate,—the one feeling that he has been misunderstood and injured, and the other, conscious of a wrong done, but unwilling to own it. Hereafter, if they speak one to another when they meet, it is coldly, and in few words. If they speak no evil one of another, they at least say no good, and think no good. The irritation of a moment grows slowly into settled estrangement. The fire burns with a hidden half-smothered flame; but it burns, gathering heat from every little circumstance that reminds them of their alienation, widening its sweep with every day it is suffered to go unchecked, until at last, it has become a well understood thing in the community,—a thing which the men themselves no longer try to conceal,—that they are enemies. “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.”

2. Observe, again, by what a trifle the causes are set in motion, that finally destroy a good name. Somewhere the remark is dropped, and perhaps without the slightest feeling of unkindness, that a prominent person in the community,—perhaps a leading man in the Church,—has done something of which the least that can be said, is that it is quite unaccountable. The narrator has no idea that it originated in any unworthy design; or, at all events, he thinks he has not. And yet, it is a thing somewhat difficult to explain, on any other supposition. The observation is barely thrown out, without comment; and the speaker, if his attention should be called to it, just at that time,

would no doubt regard it as a matter from which no evil could possibly arise. This is the spark: now mark the slow, secret kindling into something worse. One of those who heard the remark, improves an early opportunity to repeat it, slightly modifying it as he does so, by his own way of viewing it, and representing not barely that the man did the thing alleged, but that he is strongly suspected of doing it for a reason unworthy of an honest and pure-minded man. From this third person it spreads to a fourth, with this unimportant addition, that instead of the mere suspicion of a sinister design, such design has been very plainly proved by circumstances, and is now beyond a doubt. And the step is natural to the report that the man himself was actually heard to say what amounted to an open avowal of his own dishonor. By the time the rumor reaches the subject of it himself, all explanation is vain. It is thought, of course, the most natural of all things, that a man who has done what is mean or wicked, should deny it; and so his denial goes for nothing. Besides it is impossible to trace the story back from point to point, to its origin, and destroy each separate branch and twig of the spreading falsehood. The work is 'done. However guiltless the poor man may be of the injurious charge that lies against him, henceforth, in the minds of many who but lately esteemed and trusted him, he is set down as one of those characters who are not all that they appear to be,—a man to be watched, and dealt with cautiously. All this mischief from an idle word. "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

3. Again, here is a family, who, never having duly considered the important truth we are urging, indulge themselves in all manner of extravagant and ill-considered language, when under peculiar excitement. "Whatsoever is more than yea, yea, and nay, nay, cometh of evil." But they understand this only of lying and profanity, not at all of that out of which lying and profanity so often spring. A child grows up in this family, entirely unchecked in the use of language which comes so near to these vices as painfully to suggest them. Exaggeration in statement and violent protestation in support of anything he may have said, are forms of speech with which he gradually becomes so familiar, that plain, direct language, expressing the precise truth, is absolutely tasteless. In particular instances, where the influence of this habit is not calculated for, the words of such a person mislead and injure those who hear them, constituting sometimes a foundation for those melancholy misunderstandings, that separate not only individuals of a community, but even members of the same family circle. And finally, as its general result, the person sinks from that social dignity and influence, which nothing but truth and directness can ever hold: it becomes an instinct with those to whom he is known, to make large abatements from everything he says: while he imagines, in the midst of his loose and extravagant way of speaking, that all he utters is received for truth, it is listened to in reality with doubt: it is tested by independent means of information, as the testimony of other men, and the nature of the case: whether any doubt be expressed, or not, his state-

ments are inwardly pondered and estimated by those who hear them, as we scrutinize a suspected bank-note, or try the weight and ring of a coin. There are not a few, even among those who are not called liars, who yet are so careless in respect to truth, and many also who are not directly profane, who still are so much in the habit of using, on light occasions, that language which ought to be appropriated to concerns of weight, and even solemnity, that it may well be questioned whether their influence for evil is not as great as that of many, who are chargeable with positive lying and profanity. And if we add to these the number who, from an equally slight beginning, have actually become liars and profane, here again, we may well exclaim, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

4. Or, again, the child is not made to respect parental authority, and to submit to the salutary restraints of home. His waywardness and want of filial respect produce, however, at first, and in the narrow circle of home, results so trifling, as compared with some other things that might be named, that they pass, if not unnoticed, at the least uncorrected. But the same insubordination that marks his conduct at home, displays itself, as he grows older, toward his instructors. He either refuses altogether to conform to the regulations of the school, or obeys them reluctantly, peevishly, and in a spirit of actual disobedience. From being stubborn and intractable at school, he grows into a headstrong, opinionated, difficult member of society. Everybody wishes to avoid dealing with him. He

cannot be made to understand how others should differ from him, and yet by any possibility be in the right. Or, what is more likely, he does not care who is in the right, but in all matters pushes on stubbornly and selfishly, in the line of his own unregulated impulses, making his own humor the law of his own conduct, and the rule also by which all other persons are approved or condemned. The spoilt child has grown into a spoilt man; selfishness, passion and conceit, in the green and tender slip, which might easily have been rooted out, are now become selfishness, passion and conceit, brought stage by stage through a bad development, until they have reached the ripe and sturdy strength of manhood. They have become the settled and steady habits of the soul. The spark that glimmered, is the fire which no human power can now extinguish. And now, leaving wholly out of view those cases, not a few, in which the progress of this evil carries the man at last to the point of crime, and thus ripens into a life's disgrace and wretchedness, and possibly even death, and regarding only these lighter and commoner results, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

5. Look, yet again, at the illustration our subject so often finds in the ways of business. The boy looks out now and then upon the world, and is fired with an ambition to do and to be, what others have accomplished and attained to, before him. He would live in a great house. He would surround himself with the elegancies and luxuries of life. He would be known as a man of standing and influence in the world

of business. He cannot endure the thought of drudgery: he will be one of the foremost,—dependent upon none, accountable to none. Observe that we do not censure this ambition. It would be well if there were more boys and young men in the world, who had the spirit of a just and manly independence. But follow this aspiring spirit. He is grown up to the state of manhood. A hundred paths of enterprise lie out before him. We will suppose him not to be destitute of moral sense. He does not intend either to choose his business, or to conduct it, without at least some general reference to the standard of uprightness. At the same time, as he looks over the field, he sees that many things which he would hardly have thought of doing, without the warrant of some example, are very generally regarded as allowable. There are few who hesitate about them at all: of these few, a large proportion make but a feeble remonstrance, and fall in notwithstanding with the general usage; and the rare instances in which the true standard of right and honor is held to with undeviating firmness, are regarded as strange, and even when spoken of with respect, as evincing principle and independence, are yet set aside, in all the practical calculations of life. The young man is content to be as honorable as the multitude. He thinks it unnecessary to be better than the average. His father, not unlikely, was an honest man. But then, he reasons with himself, his father belonged to the old school of business men. Things have changed. There is, no doubt, such a thing as justice, and such a thing as benevolence, and such a thing as forbearance and unselfishness. They are good things, and ought

to be kept up. It is well for any community that it should have some men who not only admire these virtues, but actually exemplify them: But then they are rather stiff, unbendable elements to carry into business; and perhaps it is not necessary that every one should show them so much respect. In fact, he reasons, it may be a mistake with these men of strict integrity, that they attempt actually to use in the daily business of life, principles which are good only in theory. Truth and righteousness were not meant to stand like a steeple, but to accommodate themselves to circumstances, like a weathercock. And while he is engaged thus in a skirmish with his conscience, some tempting offer comes before him, which ambition would embrace, but the strict rule of right calls evil. Probably another opening like this may not occur for years. Why should he be a fool? There are enough to tell him that a man of any sense would seize such an opportunity at once. And so at last the struggle ends. He enters on the doubtful course.

And now observe how sad a thing it is, sooner or later, for any man, to let his desires get the upper hand of his conscience. He has taken the first step: the second is not so difficult. The successful conduct of this new enterprise demands a certain measure of that business virtue, which under the vague appellation of tact, is positive dishonor and meanness, and only not ranked among the things indictable, because it cannot be brought under any form of strict definition. These initiatory sins of business, he commits at first reluctantly, and with his eyes turned away. But soon, example and habit bury these scruples under their

overwhelming weight. Then, by and by, comes an enterprise, involving something more of that which no man of "clean hands" and a "pure heart" will touch. And now, who shall tell the long, and crooked, and ingenious reasoning, by which the man, no longer innocent, reconciles himself to fresh dishonor. The men who propose the thing, are respectable citizens: they would not engage in an undertaking which they held to be of doubtful morality: there are men enough on this side and on that, who are already occupied with such forms of business, and reaping the magnificent advantages: besides, it is not much more questionable than the last thing he was engaged in: if that were anywhere near right, this cannot be so very wrong: then, the law does not actually recognize it as an offence; and if it should at any time be brought in question, there are plausible grounds on which it may be defended: if it should operate to the injury of any of his fellow men, this is not his fault,—every man who undertakes to do business must keep his eyes open, or take the consequences: then, too, there are men all around him who will take up this brilliant scheme, if he should not: and then, for the strong argument that sweeps the last weak scruple before it, like dead leaves in the gales of autumn, it will make him a rich man. It would not be untrue to the history of such cases, if he should farther propitiate an angry conscience, by the plea that this wealth, once obtained, can be used for a variety of praiseworthy ends, and make this piracy upon the rights of his fellow-men, look to his deceived imagination almost like a mission of benevolence. We will not follow such an undertaking to its

issue. Suppose, not failure, but success: suppose the scheme to work well,—suppose wealth to come in like a river,—suppose the admiration of all men to point at our young adventurer's business tact and energy,—suppose the highest in society to number him now in their select company,—say not one word, of that melancholy defeat by which a just God sometimes sets His terrible mark on bold iniquity, but let it be what the world calls a "brilliant operation;"—yet recollect the lost purity of that human soul,—remember the fall from manly innocence to meanness,—consider the wounded self-respect,—the consciousness of being no longer among the honorable and high-minded men of the community,—of having deliberately set aside his honor, and brought upon himself the inward censure of all pure men, and walked in a crooked path of sophistry, and meddled with things that belittle and corrupt,—and tell me if, in sober truth, and without a figure, that success is not the blackest of disasters.

6. And to carry these melancholy reflections one step farther, look at the familiar history of the man who, from a beginning not unpromising, goes at last the drunkard's downward road. First comes gay and beautiful childhood, as full of promise as the apple-blossoms, and the green fringes of the starting corn. Then follows youth, a little sturdier,—then early manhood, hale and ruddy, like young David, sling in hand. What loves of many kindred are centered there! What mother's tenderness, just touched with pride, what father's pride, softened with tenderness, rest day and night on that head, as yet in happy ignorance alike of

the cares and the perils that lie farther on! What expectations gather there! What inward prophecies of a golden future! And now, passing by the well-known scene, in which the young man leaves his home, and enters upon life,—the fervent counsel,—the quick unthinking promise in return,—the entrance upon new scenes and companionships in some distant place; and coming at once to the hour when he stands facing his first temptation,—mark the case that offers itself to our view. There he stands, solicited by evil. He has been tempted, of course, before, and has sinned before; but never until now has temptation taken just this shape; and never before has any temptation assailed him, at a time when he stood entirely alone, and with none of those defences against it, which are found in the healthful influences of home. His dependence now is himself. Will it be enough? We shall see. First comes the desire. There is no harm done yet. It is nothing to be tempted, so long as one does not yield. Then, too, until after some sad experience, one never thinks himself in danger of yielding, no matter how near he stands to the temptation. The thought implied in that Bible warning, "Pass not by it: turn from it and pass away," is not at all understood: one of the last sentiments that ever finds its way into any mind is a suspicion of one's own self. Now comes the old, familiar, melancholy sophistry. This thing is not quite right, and probably it is not safe; and I remember to have been warned against it. But this warning against the very beginning and shadow of evil was given, not so much on account of this beginning itself, as with a view to

what may come after. Suppose one short step towards evil actually taken, there is no mischief done unless this first step be followed by a second, and a third. I can approach a precipice without stumbling over its brink.

And now again, without following the long and sad detail of fall and repentance, of half-reforms and broken resolutions, of tears, and shame, and agony, and at last, despair,—behold the youth of so brilliant promise, an old man, while as yet he has not reached middle life,—shrinking away with morbid suspicion, from his dearest friends,—lost to every consideration of love, and every motive of religion, with no home but the street, or the abominable haunts of shame and death; caring for no man's contempt, and no man's friendship,—neither hoping for Heaven, nor fearing a Hell,—scarce a tone of the voice, or a lineament in the wild and haggard face, by which even the quick eye of a mother could detect her son,—the manly beauty all marred and shrunk, the genial sympathies of former days long dead,—the memory of home, and the very idea of home, blotted out;—in a word, a human soul, the seat of generous affections, and the dwelling place of lofty purposes, and the centre of boundless expectations,—turned into a sepulchre, in which hope itself lies dead. Is not here a mighty and appalling desolation, sprung from the merest spark of evil?

7. But after all we have said, the most fearful illustration of our subject has not yet been presented. We have spoken only of the consequences of sin which are seen so often in the present life. We have meas-

ured the dangers of sin altogether by that which it is able to do before eternity begins, and the condition of the soul is fixed forever. But let each one of us carry his thoughts forward to that coming day, which will bring with it a change too vast and full of mystery to be told in any of the forms of human language. As the men of other generations, whether good or bad, have one by one been withdrawn from the scenes in which they once appeared, so it will be with each of us. As it happened to every man of the former ages, on some one day to look for the last time upon the sun, and speak the last words, and bestow the last thoughts upon all earthly concerns, so it will happen to us. So many days and weeks will come and go, and I shall be where I have never been: so many days and weeks, and I shall be beyond the scenes of this present life; its pleasures and its pains, its mirth and its mourning, and the sound of its various industry, will alike have passed away. I shall be beyond the last wrong deed, and the last right deed, that I am ever to do in this life,—beyond the last temptation to sin, and the last opportunity to repent,—the struggle of death, and the gates of the grave! This is a part of what it is to die! But we must remember that the same solemn march which is taking us to our graves, will carry us also to a world of light, or a territory of eternal sorrow. And will it be nothing to those against whom the door of Heaven is shut forever, to remember that a cause which they might once have destroyed as easily as the foot tramples out a grain of fire, has involved them at last in so dreadful a calamity? This everlasting prison,—this evil companion-

ship,—this frown of God,—this utter hopelessness,—all because I thought I was strong and safe, and would not believe that sin is dangerous: all because I did not take my Maker's warning,—because I did not watch my own soul,—because I would tamper with temptation,—because I did not *put that spark out*, when I might!

My friends, when you hear the invitations, or the warnings of the Gospel, and you say in your hearts,—to-morrow I will repent,—remember that your to-morrow may never come, and that if it should, you may be farther from any thought of repentance than you are to-day. It may seem to you a little thing to procrastinate for a day only. But it may cost you a home in Heaven, notwithstanding.

My brother, called by the name of Christ, when you feel troubled in your conscience because your Christian profession seems to you so hollow and unreal, and so many dark signs appear in your daily walk, and you think in your heart,—I am doing well enough; by and by, when my time comes to die, I will think of all this more seriously,—beware of that deceiving thought: you think it a trifling matter that you are so little in earnest in the Christian life. But the day may come when this trifle will crush you down like a mountain, as you hear the awful words, "I never knew you."

Oh! these earthly riches,—if they are destroyed, they can be replaced. But if the treasures of the soul are lost, by whom shall they be restored? Let fire sweep over these prairies, and these busy streets, and

destroy every store-house and barn and dwelling and Christian temple, but a little time would go by, before the energy that built them at the first would bring back again all the former life and beauty. But there is no insurance on the riches of the soul. If they are lost, they are lost forever !

## XVI.

### THE GOOD FIGHT.

1 TIM. vi: 12.—“Fight the good fight of faith.”

It has always been an interesting question, whether the writers of the Bible, spoke their own words, under some general enlightenment from above, or whether the language, as well as the idea, is supernatural. One thing we may safely say, that they were so filled with the spirit of the truths they uttered, or, as we should say of any common matter, they were so clear and so much in earnest, that their words always have a singular fulness, point, and adaptation. There is no reason to think that they spoke as forcibly in their private capacity, as men, and about the affairs of each day, as they did in their special and public office, as religious teachers. Within the brief space occupied by the text, we have a reference to three great truths, without some knowledge of which no man can live wisely, or die in hope.

1. The first is, that the true life of man upon the earth is a struggle.

There would seem to be but one opinion in the world, as to the need of exertion, in reference to all the common interests of life. And whether in one

field or another, the man is held to have reckoned most unwisely, who hopes for any lasting advantage, without the steady application of his powers.

It is also a very general law, that the effort must be proportioned to the anticipated good; and the energy that would secure some low and common advantage, would be quite unsuited to an enterprise of difficulty, and of moment. Analogy would lead us to infer that the escape from so great an evil as "the wrath to come," and the securing of an everlasting citizenship in the realm of Heaven, would demand unusual strength of purpose, and constancy of endeavor. And so indeed it truly is. We should greatly misrepresent the Gospel, and unwarrantably discourage the sincere inquirer, should we make salvation so difficult of attainment, as to cast uncertainty over any case whatever, of earnest effort. For the Scriptural call is to every man; and the promise belongs to the highest and the lowest, in a perishing world; and whosoever will, may come, and drink, and thirst no more. And yet the necessities of our souls do demand thought, determination, and endeavor; and the true life of man upon the earth is a struggle. And it is a struggle, for the simple reason that it is opposed to the natural life, and consists in nothing else than the destruction of that life, and the setting up of a new habit of thought, and a new rule of action;—the ingrafting upon a well-nigh ruined nature, of purer tastes, and nobler anticipations. It is a serious fact, that before men receive the grace of God, their thoughts are fastened upon earthly things, and that, not in the way of a just and becoming earnestness, but with an exclu-

si~~v~~e and idolatrous devotion. "God is not in all their thoughts;" and they "love the world;" and "the love of the Father is not in them." It is difficult to gain their attention to the claims of duty. Yet more difficult is it to hold their attention, until some one of the great, vital truths, shall have gained a lodgement in their souls. Yet more arduous is the work of bringing them to a definite and honest resolve, in the line of their new convictions. For "the carnal mind is enmity against God." And they who are unenlightened from above, are blind to the things that belong "to their peace." When, therefore, one would be saved, he must compel himself to think; and when the solicitations of a gay, but perishing world accost him, he must yet hold up to his mind the truth, and determine that by that truth alone, he will be guided. And this he will rarely do, without a struggle. So also when truth becomes clear, and he sees what it demands, and to what it conducts, he must not be content to acknowledge that which he can no longer deny, nor imagine that the bare admission of the truth will stand with God for the action which that truth requires,—he must carry out this sober conviction into a corresponding life: he must put from him his former ways of sin, and set out in a new path: he must go wherever duty leads: he must strive and struggle, if he would "enter in at the strait gate."

All this, however, may be allowed by some superficial and self-indulgent one, and yet he may aver that this first effort once over, all necessity for struggle is over; that he may now regard the great fight of faith as ended; that he has been made in one brief hour

“ more than conqueror ;” that danger is now no more, and salvation certain. It is to be observed, therefore, that the struggle which begins the Christian life accompanies it to its close ; and that such is that life, both according to reason and the Bible, that the continued absence of endeavor is proof that no true endeavor has ever gone before. The traveller who has started right, will come in safety to his journey’s end. And the pilgrim who has set his face toward Heaven, will surely come to Heaven, at last. But the traveller by the highway will get home at last, only by keeping upon his journey. And in like manner the traveller toward the “ better country,” will attain to the glory and the rest of Heaven, only as he runs “ with patience the race that is set before” him. But even should we allow that, after one has really entered on the Christian course, no farther endeavor is required, yet this one significant fact requires explanation ; that those who have given the most unmistakable evidence of Christian character, have always maintained such a struggle, and have waged a more and yet more vigorous conflict with the powers of evil, just in proportion as they have “ grown in grace.” They have given all diligence to make their “ calling and election sure :” they have sought “ for glory, honor, and immortality,” by “ patient continuance in well-doing :” they have felt it necessary to continue “ steadfast unto the end :” they have forgotten “ the things that are behind,” and pressed forward : they have feared, “ lest, a promise being left them of entering into rest,” it should seem doubtful, in their departing hour, whether they had not “ come short of it.” So also, on the other hand, it has

been true of those who have made no effort, but have held themselves safe in a profession made, and an experience gone through with, at some certain time in the past, that they have utterly failed to realize in their lives the Bible representation of a Christian. For the Scriptures declare that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,"—and has purer tastes and aims, than those he once had; whereas, as a matter of palpable fact, this is not true of the persons we speak of. The Bible affirms that one who has a genuine Christian hope in him, will purify himself, and strive to be less and less what he was, and more and more like the heavenly image of Christ. But this is not true of these persons. The Bible declares that religion in the heart will invariably transform and make men better. But this transformation plainly has not taken place with these persons. The Bible asserts that the prevailing love of sin, and the love of God, cannot have place in the same mind. And yet these persons are most justly chargeable with their love of sin. For notwithstanding some trifling changes of conduct, on one pretext or another, they leave many of the plainest Christian duties undone; and what they do, their own words and actions show that they do reluctantly, and because they must. Now, what does all this mean, if it be not, either that the Christian life is not what the Bible represents it, or that, from first to last, through all the diversified ways, of hope and apprehension, of temptation and triumph, of trouble and of peace, it is one life-long struggle? "*Fight the good fight of faith.*"

But let no one shrink disheartened from the Chris-

tian course, because it involves so much of watchfulness and effort. For they who fight in *this* conflict, do not fight alone. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty *through God*,"—*through God*. It is a fight, but a fight of *faith*. Any sort of effort is made under the impulse of some belief, or faith. The husbandman toils, in the conviction that a harvest will yet wave, where to-day he is turning up the ground, or casting in the corn. The mariner walks the deck tranquilly, or rests in his hammock, confident that the well-tested timbers will withstand the sea, that the stars will keep their wonted courses, and the needle be always true to the Northern point. And what is faith, in its Bible sense, but faith like this, transferred to things unseen,—to Heaven, and to God. Men are strong to do some things: they can build, and barter, and plant, and think, because the Deity gave them the needful faculties, and these faculties they have never lost. But they cannot work out their own salvation, unless the power of God be in them, to keep down their own evil thoughts and feelings, and to will and to do according to His own good pleasure. But, by a firm faith that this is really so, we come into possession of this strength of the Almighty, and find in our own experience, that "the things" which are impossible with "men, are possible with God." We often hear men say that, by the wise application of their powers, by coolness, by patient thought, by courage and strong determination, they have done many things. And so indeed they have. But a Christian believes—and any other man will believe it also, after the experiment—that he might as well turn back a river to its source,

or make the sun rise an hour before its time, or stop a star in its journey, as reverse the current of his nature, without the helping influence from above. And it is the mistake of many that, while they believe all this, they do not believe it deeply enough. They obey a part of the exhortation; but they forget another part. They *fight*; but the fight is not a fight of *faith*. They struggle against sin, with a weary, painful, harassing effort, that uses up the total strength of their nature, and makes their lives bitter with a hard bondage; and when they fail, they are downcast and discouraged, as though the truth itself had failed, and all the beauty and joy of the Christian life were nothing but a splendid fable. But they have failed, not because truth has given way,—not because the heavenly grace is too weak,—not because the Father of spirits has either forgotten, or neglected them,—not because there is anything peculiar in their circumstances, or their minds, to which the word of God, and the ways of God cannot be adapted, but for the simple reason that they have not faith.

If it be only, as we all hold, by believing on the name of Christ, that we receive “power to become the sons of God,”—if, at the onset, the case be utterly hopeless, without the aid of some spirit, purer and stronger than our own, why should it be so difficult to understand that this very aid is needed to the latest moment of life? The sick man is sick, because violence has been done to some law of his nature. And therefore he can be cured only by bringing back this law to its former activity. But if, when fairly restored he should imagine that he might safely disregard the

laws of his constitution, and should return to those very courses by which his strength was at the first broken down, should we not say that he was doing most unwisely? And yet, this is just what we do, when we forget that faith, by which our cure was at the first wrought out, and go back to those ways of unbelief and self-dependence, in which all our guilt and misery consisted.

When we say that the struggle of the Christian is maintained by faith, we are far enough from implying that it is one of mere thought and feeling. For the faith of which we speak never exists, save where the man is conscious of his own lost condition, and desires deliverance. But where there is this desire, and in consequence, a looking up to God for aid, the heart is open to heavenly influences; and it is the nature of those heavenly influences to strengthen, purify, adorn and bless: they cannot lie still in the soul, like pearls at the bottom of the sea: they must put themselves forth; and this is the ground upon which James could say, "Faith without works is dead." In other words, the indwelling of the purity and the power of God is the life of a Christian. When this is seen and joyfully accepted, as a truth of the very first practical importance, that purity and power enter in, and the heart is possessed by the Holy Spirit, as truly as it ever was possessed by the Evil Spirit. The man acts; but he no longer acts unnaturally, and apart from God; as though one should undertake to breathe independently of the atmosphere. Now he may be said absolutely and truly to live, because he does not live of himself; but Christ lives in him. Now he is a par-

taker of the Divine nature: now he is a temple of the Holy Ghost: now he bears somewhat of God's own image, and receives continual supplies from God's own fulness. Fight then, but do not fight without your armor: struggle, but struggle in God's strength: run with patience the race that is set before you, but look always to Jesus. We have said that the only true life on the earth is a struggle, and that this struggle is carried forward by the Almighty Himself, acting through the powers of men. For one, who does not know for himself what this contest is, it is impossible fully to understand, either the pleasures which belong to its progress, or the glory and felicity in which it is finally to end. At times, even the Christian himself, but dimly perceiving, and therefore but imperfectly appropriating, the strength by which the earthly warfare is conducted, and falling before temptation, bemoans the hardness of a lot requiring so much of vigilance, and courage, and endurance; and the voice that ought to be heard chaunting some brave battle-hymn, is lifted up in lamentation and complaint. But read again, my brethren, the terms of this most comprehensive exhortation: "*Fight*," it says. But this is not all. "The fight of faith," it farther specifies. But this is not all. "*The good fight*," it reads. "FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH." Go to one of the grey and scarred old men, who carried the sword or the banner, in the days of our Revolution, and ask him what it was that nerved him for the fatigues and the dangers of those trying times, and he will tell you, with trembling lip and kindling eye,—it was the thought that my country had need of me. He will tell you that, when

the drum beat, and the bugle sounded, he never was fatigued, and never was dismayed, because in every nerve, and in every impulse of his nature, he felt that he was fighting a good fight. What, my Christian brethren, is to prevent *us* from deriving strength and courage from a thought like this, amidst all the weariness and dangers of our mortal contest? I do not say that it is good to be called one of Christ's soldiers, and yet spend a lifetime in cowardly inaction. But absolutely to put on the armor, and go forth to the field, absolutely to confront the enemies of our souls, and the enemies of Christ, *this is good*.

It is a good fight, for the reason that the cause is good. It would be too much to say that no other purpose can be good, save the one to which this contest refers; and, in exalting the great aim of the Christian life, to condemn all the honest industry of the world. But we may say that no other purpose which ever occupied human contemplation, and no other purpose which the human mind can imagine, is, for a moment, to be compared with this. It is right that the minister of Christ should put this first, when he speaks to his fellow-men; and it is the duty of all to see that neither pleasure, nor business, nor social custom, nor anything that can be named, be suffered to interfere with its prosecution. It is the object of this contest to free us from that deadly influence which has already cast down and degraded, and which, if unchecked, must finally destroy. Its object is to put down everything that is hostile to the will of God, and thus opposed to our own moral dignity, and security, and peace. Imagine the order, and beauty, and universal

happiness, that would arise from the overthrow of sin, in this sinning and suffering world,—no more fraud, no more lust, no more brawling and excess, no more bitterness and abuse,—no more covetousness, cruelty, dishonor, or pride,—but each man loving every other man, and all men loving God. What a spectacle this,—a sight we hardly dare to think of, for its strange and heavenly beauty! But nothing less than this, my friends, is the aim of that great contest, which every Christian daily wages, and which, Paul has called the "*fight of faith.*"

It is a good fight, moreover, because we have a good Leader. It is the only war on record, in which the General laid down his life for his soldiers; and, instead of leading them by appearing at their head, commanded and encouraged them by mysterious supplies of knowledge and power from the world of spirits. This peculiarity of the contest has sometimes made it appear unreal. We are accustomed, in the earthly conflicts of ambition, and of pride, to follow a plumed and daring leader, and to step to the sound of bugle and drum; and many, not beholding their commander, find it difficult to conceive that he is really among them, knowing their every move, and perceiving their every danger, and their every success. Yet so it is. "The Captain of our salvation" is no other than God's own Son,—appointed to be the one who should "bring many sons unto glory," He has called many already to his standard,—from time to time He calls yet others,—and as many as come, and stand up for "the help of the Lord against the mighty," He enrolls as His, and from that time forth, guides in

every way of doubt and darkness, defends in every danger, supports under all privations and fatigues, and makes at last "more than conquerors" in an everlasting realm of rest and joy. The leaders of this world miscalculate, and go astray; but to Him "all things are naked and open." The leaders of this world are sometimes faithless, and desert their post, or betray their charge to an enemy; but He is ever present with His toiling and weary host, even to the end of the world; they are "graven on His hands:" He loves them as the apple of His eye: He will bring to naught all the wisdom and pride of their thronging enemies, and show them at last how much better it is "to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes." The chiefs in all earthly warfare, even when they are wise, and brave, and faithful, die at last, like other men, and are laid in the grave; and then the enemy gather courage, and come up with new ardor to the flagging contest, and hearts that but a little before were strong in the presence of a loved and honored leader, are now downcast and spiritless, because they see him no more. But not so the great Commander of the faithful. He did indeed die. But He is risen, and lives forevermore. When the wise and the pure are taken away from earth, there may be cause for tears, but no cause for misgiving and alarm. For the Captain of the host is yet there, and no power can destroy or conquer Him. When, from age to age, new reinforcements pour in to aid the enemy,—when infidelity puts forth some startling invention,—when crime walks unblushingly in honorable places,—when openly, or in secret, men band together, to destroy the Church, and the Gospel,—

when subtle and venomous errors creep in among the believing, and many are dying of the poison,—when evil signs are springing up all over the earth, and all things are ominous of disaster,—in such times there is need of new watchfulness, new diligence, a truer self-devotion, a more united endeavor. But there is no cause for the anxiety that possesses so many minds. For Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.” “No weapon formed against” Him “shall prosper.” No power can strike Him to the earth. He never again can fall into an enemy’s hand,—never be betrayed, or crucified. All power is given into “His hands,” and He is doing, and will ever do, His own blessed will, both in the heavens and the earth. . Happy the band that follow such a Leader.

But it is a good fight, because it has its issue in an everlasting peace. Even with men, ever since the morals of Christianity have been accepted for the social and the civil code, the avowed object of war has been the establishment of peace. And every man who loves his country and the world, regards it as one of the chief glories of that better time, shortly to come, that “the nations shall then learn war no more.” And when we speak of the great warfare of faith, we should always remember not only that it has its glory, and its peace, and its victory, all along, from stage to stage, and from field to field,—that it is noble in itself, and conducted by a wiser and better than any human commander, but also that, day by day, and struggle by struggle, it is tending towards a glorious and eternal scene of rest and peace. It is good to fight, if fight we must. But what will it be to cease

from the march and the battle, and dwell forever in a kingdom that cannot be moved? To-day, it is toil, and alarm, and strife, and sorrow. But soon it will be rest and victory, and everlasting joy. Now, we must watch and pray and strive, and as good soldiers of Jesus Christ "endure hardness." But in that day, soon to come, we shall walk by the rivers of the "better country," and lie down in its peaceful shades, and hold a long and dear companionship with the pure and saintly, now sleeping in the graves of the earth. The hopes that stimulate men to earthly enterprise are clouded with fear, and oftentimes the bright expectation of the morning lies marred and broken on the ground, at night. But no calamity can ever come between the Christian soldier, and the crown of life. It is as sure as the stars, in their everlasting courses. It is as certain as the fact of present temptation, and struggle, and disaster. For He who is for us, is stronger than he who is against us. And when we have passed our appointed time of toil and danger, the sound of the battle will be still, and the weapons of our warfare will be laid away, and the enemies we feared and fought with, will trouble us no more. The noises of the camp and the fight, will be turned into songs of thanksgiving and deliverance: the night will be gone: morning will rise from behind the mountains; and "the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." It is a good fight. Dear friends, we are all struggling for something,—for what?—for that which must perish, or for that which will last forever?

## XVII.

### HARMONY BETWEEN THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR.

**ZECH. xiv : 20.**—"In that day, shall there be upon the bells of the horses Holiness unto the Lord."

This passage plainly refers to that anticipated period of strength and glory, in the history of the Church, commonly known as the millennium. It suggests, however, the more general and more practical thought of the harmony there is between religion and all the conditions and pursuits of life. And to this latter subject I invite your attention. The text does indeed speak of a time to come. But we ought to remember that the future begins in the present, and that if there is to be a better order than the one we now see, it is only because there are men and women now living on the earth, whose faith, and patience, and holy ways of life, are the very roots out of which that fairer time will spring and blossom. We speak of a millennium to come. But, indeed, my friends, we ourselves must rise up and go to the millennium. If any circumstances of miracle are to introduce that happy dispensation, or to mark its progress, of this at least we may be sure, that the spirit which alone will make it a millennium, will never come, but as the genuine and steady outgrowth of Christian faith and zeal. It becomes us, therefore, whether the question be concerning the

future or the present, to know the connection between religion as a sentiment in the mind, and life as an outward reality.

Not so much for the purpose of proving that which probably no one will be found to deny, as in order to deepen an impression which is sometimes vague and weak, we will name a few of those considerations from which it appears that religion is suited to every position in life, to every form of honest industry, and to every variety of mental exercise.

1. This is the only supposition that will harmonize two very important truths. On the one hand, we are endowed with certain active powers. Now it is one of the first principles of human belief, that the adaptation of a thing determines its use,—that it was designed to act agreeably to its nature; and therefore each power of the soul must have been designed to act in the line of its own impulse,—the understanding, for example, performing one office, and the imagination another, and the affections a third. But then, on the other hand, we instinctively recognize the duty of obedience to a higher Power, and feel that whatever our endowments, of body or of spirit, we are bound in body and in spirit to glorify God. But if it is true that each faculty was designed to act according to its nature, and the will of God, there must be a harmony between the two. And religion must be a principle which enters into every form of industry, and blends with every mental exercise.

2. This truth is sustained also by our experience in

the acquisition of knowledge. There is no other time when we more clearly perceive any great truth, than when it is thrown into some palpable form, as that of a painting, a statue, or a living example. Which inspires us with the livelier emotions of delight, and gives us the more vivid impressions of the power and wisdom of the Creator,—a labored description of some beautiful scene in nature, or the landscape itself, visibly spread out before us? How slowly would men realize the moral beauty of honesty, purity, and benevolence, if, instead of witnessing these virtues in the men they meet, they were obliged to obtain all their knowledge of them from books and sermons? Does not a child very early become acquainted with some of the leading principles of science, in precisely this way? In so simple an affair as that of preserving his own balance, does he not find that there is a law, which he will by and by learn to call gravitation? In measuring the most familiar distance with the eye, does he not discover principles, which the profoundest philosopher cannot wholly explain? Now, just as we become acquainted with some of the great truths of natural and moral science, because, turn which way we will, they force themselves upon us, so it would be rational to suppose beforehand, that, in the Divine system of instruction, we should learn the spirit of religion, and many of its most important truths, through the occurrences which come within the range of our daily observation,—the industry of one, the patience of another, the meekness, or the courage, or the self-denial, of a third,—and all these Christian graces, in

connection with the trivial and familiar things of the household, the shop, the market, the counting room.

And this idea derives additional force from the consideration that religious truth is vastly more important than any other. When we remember that a knowledge of our relations to our Creator is the only knowledge that can make "wise unto eternal life," and that, in the eye of God, an ignorant and simple man is just as truly a human being, and just as worthy the teaching, as one who is wise and learned, can we well avoid the conclusion that He who "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto a knowledge of the truth," will convey this truth to men through those instrumentalities which are best adapted to its transmission?" Will He not pour it through those channels of communication, that are broadest, and always open? Will He not cause us to perceive it, just as He teaches us that health and vigor lie hidden in the atmosphere, by surrounding us with its genial and bracing influence?

3. And then observe also the remarkable fact, that religion has spread itself, and is still spreading through all classes of society. How is it, that it has forced itself upon the attention of the indifferent, and made itself understood by the ignorant and humble? Whatever advantage any of us may have received from books and public discourses, have not their teachings been confirmed to us, and made to seem true and vital, by the knowledge that these truths were more or less realized in the common experience of those around us? Is there one of us to whom the truth

would have any reality, if it had not in one way and another been visibly embodied before us, and made its appeal, not to the understanding only, as a doctrine, but to the very senses, as a fact ?

4. But reasonings like these are not important, except to show us how largely the Word which God has been pleased to give for our guidance, commends itself to the understanding, as well as to the faith. And we should be careful not to rest our conclusions upon them, but upon the express teaching of the Bible. And what does the Bible teach us as to this point? It continually reminds us that, in every concern, and in every situation of life,—in business, in friendship, in the family, in the council, in prosperity and in trouble, religion ought to be an abiding element. It teaches us that no sentiment, and no work, can possibly be religious, except as it tends to some practical use in the common walks of life. We cannot read our Bibles with an earnest desire to learn the will of God, without being taught that the separation men make between religion and any position in life, or any right employment in life, however humble, is not grounded in the Word of God.

What if over the door of every house, were written those golden rules for household peace and order:—“Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them”—“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord,”—“Children, obey your parents in the Lord,”—“Ye fathers, provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” What if the

relation of master and servant, or laborer and employer, were universally shaped by the principle, "Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant, that is poor and needy: at his day, thou shalt give him his hire: neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it!" What changes would be wrought in our halls of justice, by the recognition of that rigid law, "Ye shall not respect persons, in judgment; but ye shall hear the small, as well as the great: ye shall not be afraid of the face of man." Are you moving, my friends, in the walks of active life? I commend to you the words of Solomon, "In all labor there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." "He also that is slothful in his work, is brother to him that is a great waster;" and in the name of Paul, I say to you, "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands." Would you have rules for the choice of your society? "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare unto thy soul." Does sanctified friendship-call for maxims, or examples? "Faithful," said the wise man, "are the wounds of a friend." "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not." You have read the account of the last interview between the great Gentile Apostle and the Ephesian elders, when "they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." And you remember the strange and

touching devotion, which broke out into those loving words, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried."

If we speak of religious charity, who was it whom our Lord declared the largest contributor among those who were casting their gifts into the treasury? And if the question be of fervent love and zeal, what more can be said of any disciple, than our Saviour said of the woman who poured the precious ointment on His head,—“She hath done what she could?” You remember, too, the warm-hearted industry of the men and women, who, in the days of Moses, employed their strength and skill for the building and decoration of God’s house—“Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise-hearted man, in whom the Lord put wisdom and understanding, to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary. And all the women that were wise-hearted did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun, both of blue and of purple and of scarlet and of fine linen. The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the Lord, every man or woman whose heart made them willing to bring, for all manner of work, which the Lord had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses.”

And now let us attend to one or two conclusions involved in what we have been saying.

1. In the first place, we perceive the error of those who place religion merely in acts of devotion, or religious effort. Prayer and religious meditation are necessary to the support of the Christian life; but they are not the whole of that life; and the very same spirit which enters into them, ought to be, and can be, carried into every thought, and feeling, and action, that is not positively wrong. Religion is not all crowded into the Sabbaths of the year, nor into the prayers and meditations of each day, leaving the rest of life a dismal waste, in which no "fruits of the Spirit" blossom, no fragrance of true piety mingles with the air. It is required of us to distribute our spiritual life throughout the entire circle of our daily activity, and that we even so "eat and drink," as to "glorify God."

It is doubtless true that in the common labors of life, no matter how right, and even needful, they may be, we are not acting religiously, except as we perform them under the influence of Christian love and obedience. But it should always be remembered that it is this lack of the Christian spirit, that makes these labors irreligious, and not the fact of their being so common and familiar. It should be borne always in mind, that nothing we do can be judged from the outside. Let the appearance be what it may, if the actuating impulse be good, the thing is good. And whatever the appearance, if the moving impulse be bad, the thing is bad. Work is as pure and as pleasing to God, as prayer. And neither is worth anything, except it be engaged in with love and devotion. If one imagine that he is serving God in some special man-

ner, when he prays, or reads his Bible, or attends a prayer meeting, or teaches a class in the Sabbath School, and thinks of the familiar ways of every hour, as things in which religion has no part, let him inquire whether, after all, he is not formal and heartless, even in those things upon which he lays so much stress. There is a strong temptation to regard actions as good, because they are performed with all the external signs of devotion, or in the midst of associations that are sacred. But it should be remembered that nothing is easier than to go through with the forms of religion, without the beginning of a religious spirit. Neither the Sabbath, nor the house of God, nor even the privacy of the closet, the bended knee, the most humble words, can make anything sacred. Nothing is good, into which the heart does not enter. Nothing is evil, where the heart is full of faith and love.

2. Again, our subject affords great encouragement in our daily labor. It is not an uncommon thing for Christians to think meanly of the work in which they are engaged, and imagine that they are doing nothing as Christians, nothing that benefits others,—nothing that pleases the Master,—because they have so little time and strength for works which are specifically religious. Now such as these should settle in their minds the broad principle, that if they are doing the things which God in His providence has given them to do,—and doing them patiently and cheerfully,—and because they love Christ,—they are directly honoring the truth, and obeying God. For observe

that truth is taught, not in words only, or in books, or sermons, or Sabbath-school instruction, but also in facts,—the beautiful shining examples of Christian patience, meekness, diligence, heroism, fortitude. Observe also that Christ is honored, not in professions alone, as when we come to the sacramental table, or take our part in the praying circle, or talk upon religious themes, but also and mainly, in what we are, and what we do. I am not offering you, my Christian brethren, any overwrought picture of the fancy, but the express teaching of the Bible, when I say that if you are doing with steady faithfulness the duties of your situation, your work is as truly acceptable to Christ, as that of the most devoted missionary. Do you ask how it can then be that all unite to commend the self-sacrifice and heroism of the missionary, as something extraordinary? Barely because it is more conspicuous. The traveller is full of wonder and admiration at some lofty peak that towers up into the sky, while the ground that supports his footsteps, and yields him the bread of every day, he scarcely sees. But is not the level ground as important as the proudest mountain top? And does it not, as truly as the mountain top, contribute to the total use and beauty of the world? But do you still ask, whether the work of the missionary is not after all more acceptable to God, than that of another Christian who stays quietly at home, and manages the affairs of farm, or household? I say without hesitation,—no. It is doubtless the duty of every one to consider what he knows how to do best,—in other words, in what way he can do the most good to his fellow-men, and

render to Christ the largest service. No person has a right to shrink from any given work, on the ground that he can be doing good in some other way. For we are bound to be doing the *greatest amount* of good, which our talents and our situations allow. But supposing the powers employed to the best advantage, let one person be a missionary, another a lawyer, a third a school teacher; let one be occupied in a bank, and another on a railroad, and another yet, with the management of a household, and making daily provision for the comfort of husband and children, keeping up the sunshine of home, and showing to all beholders how purity, and truth, and affection, can be made to grow even in the chilly and ungenial soil of this world: there is no difference,—they are all alike in the estimate of Heaven. To be in your *proper place*, doing your best, and doing it because you love Christ, and love your neighbor, is all that Moses did, when he led the people of God from Egypt to Canaan,—all that Paul did, when counting “all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus,”—he became a wandering, persecuted, homeless man, that he might do his all for a perishing world. There is a wide difference between one man and another, in what they are able to do. But each doing the thing he is able, the difference between them in true piety is just nothing. They are on the same level, just as an apple tree and an oak are equally needed, notwithstanding one is low and the other lofty, and one used for fruit, and the other for timber. Whatever takes place in nature,—be it the bursting forth of a volcano, or the silent opening of a rose bud,—

involves the operation of a principle. And in like manner, every action has its character. The life that lies in the heart, flows out into the most trifling item of the conduct; and religion is found in the common acts of every day, no less than in things special and distinctive; just as a river is the same, where it tumbles over the rocks with foam and splendor, and where the noiseless ripples break upon the shore.

My Christian brethren, if we can take, and hold constantly to our minds, this view of the subject, religion will be real to us, because no part of life will be without it. It will not be a set of doctrines merely: it will not be a round of hollow and spiritless observances: it will be life itself. The commonest labors of the day will shine with a beauty beyond all the outside show of what we so often call "great deeds." We shall find religion, not in prayer and praise alone, but in what so many shrink from, as drudgery; and even in those innocent recreations by which taste is gratified, or labor refreshed. We shall find it by the fire-side and in the field,—in the sanctuary, and the office, and the street, and the workshop. Whatever our work may be, it will have its dignity, for the reason that it is Christian work. It will have its delight, because it is done "heartily, as unto the Lord." For let it never be forgotten that when we are in heart what we are by profession,—when "the same mind is in us that was also in Christ," when we stand in our appointed place, and do our designated work, patient, cheerful, steady, glad to be doing our Master's will, then each enterprise of business, each household care, every stroke of the pen, every swing of the axe, every blow that falls

upon the ringing anvil, is as pleasing to the Lord as a psalm, or a prayer. Let the world see that "holiness to the Lord," can be maintained in the midst of life's cares and vexations. Let no one infer from our indolence, our fretfulness, our pride, or avarice, or selfishness, that religion, instead of a spirit flowing through the life, is a dress of melancholy hue, worn upon the Sabbath, but laid aside during the week, as unfitted to common and familiar uses. Let us prove to all men, how any powers, and any occupation may be made to show the dignity and beauty of a Christian's faith, as the dark and wormy ground sends up fruits and flowers.



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**FOUR SERMONS ON REFORM.**

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## XVIII.

### ON REFORM.

GENESIS xi:9.—“Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.”

The passage of Scripture just read, has been chosen for a general basis to the present discourse, as illustrating that restless and unsatisfied spirit in man, which prompts to the various enterprises of ambition, and of gain; and as suggesting also the truth, that human wisdom can avail nothing for human dignity and happiness but through the blessing of the Almighty. The builders at Babel were evidently proud, ambitious and atheistical. They cared for no other means of success, than those they could find within the range of their own faculties, because they believed in no other. Their labor was without faith, and without prayer; and it ended in confusion and in shame. Discarding details, and considering only the principle, it has always been thus, when men have endeavored to better their condition, without reference to the will, or the assistance, of the Being who made them.

The subject of Reform, is occupying at present, a very large share of the general attention: it has given occasion to the widest possible range both of thought and experiment, and, as will always be true of those

topics which treat of the deeper and more enduring interests of men, it can be viewed aright only in the light of religion. It is, therefore, a theme upon which, so far at least, as great principles are concerned, no Christian minister has a right to be altogether silent. In the treatment of a topic involving so many subordinate inquiries, it is evident that everything must be said in as general a way as may consist with perspicuity. And, on the other hand, if certain portions should seem to bear but remotely upon the subject, or should possess but little interest in themselves, these facts may find some explanation, in the importance of precision in the earlier stages of any discussion, and in that diversity of apprehension, which renders necessary various aspects of the same subject.

With these preliminaries, the first point which will naturally occupy our attention, is the inquiry,—*What is Reform?*

However men may differ in the practical application of ideas, there is probably less diversity among them as to the ideas themselves, than is commonly supposed. When they differ, the probability will always be that they are unconsciously talking about different things, or unconsciously attaching different ideas to the same language. A definition that embraces the thought, and nothing but the thought and tells that thought so that it can be understood, would destroy the necessity for many an argument, which, beginning in nothing worse than mutual mistake, has ended in irreconcilable enmity. But to our question. Reform is simply the forming over again, or, the giving of a new form. Systems of philosophy, types of personal character, the

forms of society and of government, have always been more or less defective ; and hence, in desiring a change of form, men have wished not merely for a new form, but a better one. And since the coming in of the Christian era in history, the changes that have transpired, have actually moved in the general line of improvement. For these reasons, the word reform is now universally employed, not in the general sense in which it may signify either good or evil, but with that special and favorable meaning, which makes it a thing to be desired. Reform is therefore the introduction of a better form of things. This is a view, in which, so far as general terms are concerned, we shall agree.

This definition corrects the error, absurd enough in itself, and yet not infrequent in a practical shape, that change itself is almost necessarily reform. When Ahaz, the idolatrous king of Judah, restored the groves, and rebuilt the altars, and established again all those appointments of Pagan worship which his pious predecessor had so zealously suppressed, there was certainly a very great change, both in the form and the spirit, of the state religion. And yet, it was hardly an advantageous change. And therefore it could not be called a reform.

This definition stands opposed also to the idea that the movement of large numbers must of course be of a reformatory stamp. When Nebuchadnezzar sought to introduce the worship of the golden idol, on the plains of Dura, the edict obligated to this hideous idolatry "all peoples, nations, and tongues," who should be found within the circle of his vast empire. And there can be little doubt that an overwhelming pro-

portion of his subjects could obey the mandate without violence to their own feelings. But three men stood alone, against this invasion of the rights of conscience. And not only do we, in this age of enlightenment, pronounce the edict of the Pagan king a moral and political mistake, and the action of the three young Jews truly reformatory, but even the king himself was brought over to this opinion, before the furnace had begun to cool.

Yet further, it is to be observed that an advantageous result is no certain evidence of reform. When Saul, under commission from the Jewish rulers, went about, affirming the authority of the Jewish religion, and, by the most vigorous measures, everywhere suppressing the new sect called Christians, so far as his zeal tended to elevate Judaism above the religions of surrounding Paganism, he may be said to have done, although in an unwarrantable way, a useful work. But when we remember that he placed Paganism and Christianity upon the same level, we are obliged to regard him as having done, at that time, far more of evil than of good, and must therefore deny him the name of a reformer, until after a reformation of spirit had first come over himself.

Still further, it is no evidence that a movement is not truly reformatory, that it gives rise to incidental evils. When Nehemiah, in the days of Artaxerxes, undertook the re-establishment of the Jewish religion, and the Jewish polity, all will allow that the enterprise in itself was one of true reform. And yet, as you will remember, it gave occasion to the Jewish money-lenders, and men of influence, to practise the

most cruel exactions upon the people. In a word, reformation is that which, on the whole, carries men toward the truth: it is that which, in some direct and explainable way, furthers the true purposes of society, government, philosophy, trade, or individual life. It sustains the same relations to the departments in which it occurs, that growth does to a tree: it is the life within, going forth into new shapes of power, and use, and beauty.

Thus far we have been speaking of reform in its practical result, or outward manifestation. Let us now inquire what it is in its beginning, or in that inward principle by which the outward result is produced.

An idea is never so thoroughly understood and believed in, as when it takes some outward shape. But, on the other hand, no outward and palpable fact is fully comprehended, until we have perceived the idea, or feeling, or principle, out of which it arose, and of which it stands the visible sign. For example, the love of liberty, in a brave people, is a sentiment intelligible in itself; and yet it is not so vividly realized, while it remains a sentiment, as after it has led that people to take up arms against their oppressors, and in a long, and bloody and determined war, to give expression to this inward instinct. But observe, on the other hand, that the naked information that such a war once took place, without any reference to the causes which gave it birth, would be a fact without meaning, and therefore destitute of all practical utility. It is only when we have the two, in one vital organism, that we have the whole. Or, to take an illustration of a very different

sort,—the love of God for a sinful and perishing race is an idea not at all difficult in itself to grasp. And yet, how much more distinct and palpable is the idea, since the Deity became “manifest in the flesh,” and we can say, with the Apostle John, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.”

Having viewed reformation then as a result, we observe now, in the second place, that its internal force, is that which meets the necessity of the case. There are many things which the world needs, in a low and subordinate sense. But there is one comprehensive necessity, which has been felt alike by all, and will continue to be felt, amidst all the vicissitudes of human experience, and all the wanderings of human thought. Oftentimes falsely named, oftentimes poorly understood, at times denied, at times resisted, whether in the pride of philosophy, or the stoicism of despair, it has yet ruled the helpless world, like hunger in a ravening brute. It has been as if the Jewish host, wandering in the desert, had been struck with sudden blindness, and remembering the fiery column, and recalling the golden promise of a home in Canaan, had groped about from barrenness to barrenness, tormented with visions of that which they were never to see,—having within them an impulse that would not suffer them to rest, and yet because that impulse had no sight, and went without landmark or star, destined never to end their wanderings, but in the sepulchres of the desert.

The poor have lain in the dust, and wondered whether the proud and the fortunate should forever keep them thus crowded down among the shadows and the bitterness of life. The ignorant and the oppressed, all over the world, have felt their way aimlessly, and in silent sadness, toward the light, or have beaten wildly against the salutary barriers of society. And, on the other hand, the rich, the learned, and the powerful, have struggled with the cruel instinct of tyranny, or the desperate endeavor at self-defence, to keep the turbulent multitude in ignorance of their rights, and thus in alienation from the true sources of their own power. Even under the most benignant administrations, the rulers have too often found it their interest to blind, or to browbeat the people, as we practise either upon the understanding or the fears of a powerful and ferocious brute. And the multitude, in turn, with keen impression that somehow they have been wronged, yet without the judgment to understand how, or by whom, and imagining that any change must be for the better, because persuaded that it could not be for the worse, have clamored like maniacs for new masters, and other laws.

We have spoken here of different necessities; and yet we have said that the race has been weighed down by one great, common want. And this is true. For that which would meet the particular form of evil which afflicted one class of men, would remedy also the evils that were suffered by every other. For if we inquire, for instance, what it is that has been necessary in the department of labor, and the science of the creation and distribution of wealth, the answer

is plainly this,—the establishment of truer relations among men; and this again renders necessary truer ideas of the capacities, the rights, and the destiny of men. And if again it be inquired what is most demanded in the region of pure ethics, or the science of right and wrong,—it must be answered, Those lines of reasoning that shall introduce healthier elements into human experience, by first attaining to a truer analysis of the human soul, and a deeper insight into the meaning of human life. And what is this, but the same thing, in a modified form, which we named as the vital and necessary one, in another department. The great question has always been, and will always be, How does this philosophy, this scheme of social economics, this measure of legislation, this mode of instruction, this new executive force, stand related to that which is the same in all men? Viewing men as a social aggregate, that which is on the whole good for one, is good for all. For that which makes it good for one, is its harmony with the other parts of a system, in which all others would be represented. That which the short-sightedness of the selfish esteems good, merely because it meets their own personal necessity, at the present moment, sooner or later proves itself to have been evil, by inducing, either a violent recoil, or at the least a social derangement, which is worse even for itself, than the condition that went before. But that which is *truly* advantageous to any, will show its adaptedness to all, by its gradual diffusion over other fields of labor or of thought, than that in which it first appeared. An element really foreign, though apparently good, refu-

ses to assimilate, and sooner or later is thrown out: but what is healthful, although at the first it seem to be otherwise, will work its way silently and kindly into the social circulation, and in the fulness of time, become an undistinguishable part of the general life. Everything that is good at all, is good, not by virtue of its adaptation to this man, or that class, but because the organic connections of human society are such, that if it be truly adapted to one, it must, for that very reason, be suited to all.

And thus individual, family, state and nation, are one race, and live by one common vitality; and when they suffer, although in different ways, still suffer from the same general cause, viz: the withdrawal of the general vitality, just as root, trunk, branch, twig and blossom, are one tree, and are fed by one life, and lie under the same liability to harm, and demand the same essential means of restoration.

We have said that reformation, as an outward result, is a change for the better; and that the inward principle which produces this, is the necessity of the race. It is implied in what has been said,—although our view will be clearer and more complete, for a distinct and separate statement,—that in a true reforming, the outward shape will be determined by the inward force; and will exist as its expression, and its servant. There must be between the two an inner relation, by virtue of which they shall act reciprocally. To illustrate my idea, a river, at the point where it trickles down the sides of the hill, can scarcely be said to have a channel. But farther on, receiving gradual accessions, its weight, and breadth, and swiftness, cause it to wear

its bed into a marked and determinate shape; and if all the rivers of the world should be dried up, and their localities forgotten, nothing would be easier than to mark the places where they formerly ran. The stream must have its pathway; but that pathway it makes for itself. So when a volcano throws out its fiery burden, the force within determines the shape of the crater, and the height to which the mass shall be sent, and the duration of the burning; and the thunder and the spouting fire, and the red rain of cinders, are nothing more than the inward, finding its way into the outward. More quietly does the life of a flower come forth to observation. At the first, the green top that peers above the ground, so far as human eye can tell, might be a rose, might be an ivy-vine, might be a cedar: its form is indistinct, because its life is feeble. But in a little time, the life has taken to itself a shape; and its shape is essentially the same with that into which a similar seed or slip always puts itself forth. Now in all these cases, the outward is simply the manifestation of the inward. So in every true reform, the measure, or the revolution, or the doctrine, which stands most prominently identified with such reform, will correspond to the feeling out of which the reform arose. It will not be a monument made of such material, and carved into such a shape, as may please the fancy, and designed only to remind of that which is in reality no vital part of it. It will be the very incarnation of the feeling which dictated the reform. The statute, the treaty, the new maxim, or whatever else stands as the sign of the reform, will be nothing less than the general sentiment taking that shape, in which

it can work with greater freedom. As a practical proof of these general principles, observe how, when unprincipled men desire the favor of the people, they either consider the principal grievance under which they lie, or, if they find it more available for their end, invent one, which they persuade them to believe; and then for the sake of keeping up the deception, and extending through a larger space their own enjoyment of its advantages, invent some measure, or some popular cry, which they assure them is precisely adapted to the evil under which they groan. Or if such men have a favorite point to carry, aside from the general desire for the popular favor, see how the same means will sometimes be employed to awaken the popular mind, and then the desired measure be brought forward, for the meeting of that artificial necessity. Such movements of course do not fall in with our definition of reform, and yet the fact that shrewd men ground all their pretensions to the name of social or political reformers, upon an alleged want of humanity, is one of the best evidences of the truth of these principles, which the case admits. Reform is never that which simply gratifies an individual desire: it is that which satisfies a public need. It is the vitality of the mass, putting itself forth into some healthier shape: it is the great social current, broadening out into lakes, or tumbling with noise and foam over surface obstructions, but ever going, under storm or sunshine, through wastes or gardens, to join itself to the sea.

Having said that reform is that which meets the necessities of men, and having observed also that these necessities arise directly or remotely from a single

source, viz : the disorder of men's faculties, it follows that the remedy for human necessities, or in other words, the true principle of reform, is that which will re-establish the harmony of these disordered faculties. It is a sound principle in science, that the remedy for mechanical irregularity, or functional derangement, must be brought to act, not so much upon parts which the disorder has incidentally affected, as upon the point in which it took its commencement. The mechanic will tell us that when an arch is to be enlarged or diminished, the only possible way is to tear it down, and commence again. For in a curve, every point depends for its place upon the point directly behind it; and therefore a change even in the position of the very key-stone, would demand a corresponding change at every point throughout the span. Again, in the treatment of those diseases which arise from general depression of the system, the part specially affected receives but secondary attention, and the remedial treatment is chiefly directed toward the general invigoration. Now precisely on the principles brought to view in these cases, do we say that the ills which afflict human nature, and embarrass the workings of human society, are to be remedied, not by applications made at the particular points where the evil takes its most palpable developments; but, inasmuch as these disorders all spring, as we have seen, from one central weakness, the emphasis of the remedy, must fall upon this central point. It is evident, therefore, that no plan for the reorganization of society, no adoption of a new body of political doctrines, no erection of a more recondite, or a more simple philosophy, no better

methods of instruction, no wider diffusion of the great social advantages, no immediate abolition of all the outward evils that now exist, will constitute the true and deep reformatory movement. These are instrumentalities through which the spirit of reform will work. These are shapes into which reform will go forth, to revolutionize and bless the world. Applications at the surface may cause the disorder for a time to disappear; but it will be only because they drive it within, where it may fix with fatal hold upon some vital part. Evil, whether physical or moral, is not always most dangerous when most apparent: it is the malady that crouches away within, hiding from the most patient search, and yet sending out from its secret source, the influences of prostration and decay, on which the physician and the statesman alike have reason to look with chief alarm. It is this shapeless and phantasmal danger, that at one time wakes up fears, the more dreadful because they cannot see their object, and anon, cheats the helpless understanding with prophecies of returning strength, of which the only fulfilment that will ever come, is the footfall of Death, and the long silence of the grave.

And now if the great, central source of human ills be that derangement among the powers, of which the disordered and imperfect relations of human society are the embodiment, and if therefore the remedy must be in its substance one, and must be applied directly to this source of individual and social ill, what shall that remedy be? Has the world yet found any? If it have not, is there reason to hope that it ever will? If it have, can such remedy be stated in any intelli-

ble way? Can it be shown by fair and manly reasoning to be a remedy? Can its points of superiority be shown over all the appliances hitherto offered for the amelioration of our human state? And stated thus in its theory, is it possible to show that it has a definite point of contact with human life? Can it be shown to have that kindly agreement with the spirits of men, that will cause it to incorporate itself with thought and feeling, as sunshine mingles with the waters, so that with thought and feeling it shall stream out freely into all imaginable forms of beauty and of power? We believe there is such a remedy. We believe its name is Christianity. We hold that all its theoretical excellence can be shown to be a practical power. And to this work some early opportunity will be given.

## XIX.

### ON REFORM.

2 CHRON. xxviii: 23.—“ And he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice unto them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.

This passage suggests the importance of sound reasoning, in the matter of religion. Ahaz, being a bad man, and unable therefore to see the hand of God in anything, perceiving that he was likely to be overpowered by his adversaries, and hastily concluding that their success was owing to the help of their deities, sought for himself the countenance and aid of these idol-gods, and so doing brought upon himself and his people, the judgments of that God who will not give His glory to another. Men always repeat both the folly and the sin of Ahaz, when they make wisdom, or riches, or any of the powers of this world, their trust, and turn away from Him “in whose hands their breath is, and whose are all their ways.”

In the discourse delivered a week ago, reform was defined as the introduction of an improved order of things. We also endeavored to show that the various necessities of men, all arise from a single central necessity, namely, that disorder in the mind, of which all the outward evils, are only the embodiment. From this it was inferred that, while particular remedies

may have a partial and temporary efficacy, the only agent that could effect any thorough and lasting improvement, would be that which, without neglecting the details of social ill, should exert its main activity upon the centre, in which these evils find their life.

We now proceed to say that such a remedial agent as we have described, is found only in Christianity. This position we shall seek to establish by two considerations, and of these the first will be,—

*The relations of Christianity to history.* It is not improbable that the glaring misrepresentations of infidelity in reference to the birth and the early history of the Christian religion, are largely owing to the injudicious and extravagant terms, in which it has sometimes been defended. For, however such a representation may be disclaimed, the friends of Christianity have too often *seemed* to aver, that until the Christian era, the world was in a condition of total darkness,—that men were little better than brutes, or lunatics, and that Christianity introduced at once a reign of absolute light and order. So much, however, as this we believe can be shown, that Christianity, considered as a purely supernatural power in the world, introduced an improvement in human affairs, the greatest of which human nature is susceptible, and one which human nature, in the simple use of its own resources, never would have realized.

Thus it appears from the annals of former times, that the different nations of the earth had each its own peculiar type of genuine greatness. The Roman embodied the most absolute command and dignity, and exhibited the most prodigious enterprise, that

have ever appeared in human history. The Greek carried poetry and the arts to a higher eminence, than any obtained before or since. The Egyptian developed the mechanical forces in a manner that not only mocks all the efforts of a later age, but leaves the Sphinx and the Pyramid for realities of human energy, that oppress the very imagination with their vastness. And it is not exaggeration to say that the ancient systems of philosophy and of ethics displayed, in many instances, a profundity of insight, and an acuteness of moral sensibility, that challenge the admiration both of the scholar and the Christian, of these latter days. At the same time, the reforms of Pagan days were not permanent. In general, the theories upon which they were founded, had reference to a class, rather than to humanity at large. Many times, they consisted but in the carrying out of some favorite idea, invented in seclusion, and wholly unfitted to the uses of life. The development of any given project showed its defective adaptation, by interfering, sooner or later, with interests which had been overlooked, in its construction. Reform was either a volcanic outburst, in which popular feeling found temporary relief, or a device by which rulers sought to divert their subjects from meditated outrage, or the resort of shrewd ambition, or the mechanical contrivance of an honest, but mistaken wisdom. They had no central thought by which all other thoughts might be estimated; but shaping reform by the outward phases of the evil which it was designed to meet, they were hurried from project to project, through a circle of constantly recurring ideas;—in the dreary round of

social experiment, passing from the oligarchy to the republic, and from the republic to anarchy, and from anarchy to a despotism possibly yet more binding and oppressive than the first. Austerity of manners was taken for the corrective of a ruinous luxury; and the pressure of a rule too little pliant, either to the uses or the dignity of human nature, induced a violent recoil;—and whether in the government, or the narrower circle of society, that which corrected one evil, brought in a worse; and that inoculation in which the system found a temporary advantage, became itself the basis of an independent disorder.

Now, on the other hand, since the revelation of Christianity, it is admitted that there have been mistakes in every field of thought and enterprise. Men have been guided oftentimes by half sights, and have brought upon themselves the charge of being mock reformers. The relations of men among themselves, and their relation as a mass to those who teach, and those who rule them, are not yet brought out fully into the light. Political economics is almost constantly casting away, or reconstructing, some axiom of other days. Legislation does not always understand what the people need, nor, in many instances, even where it does, can it fix upon the wisest methods of adjusting the principle to the circumstances. And if one should regard the picture exclusively from a single stand-point, he might say with some show of reason, that the world is moving forward so slowly, as to induce a rational doubt whether it moves at all. For Christianity is not a constant procedure of miracle, superseding the natural powers, but a healthful

influence acting through them. But what is claimed is this, that Christianity has brought men truer ideas and purer impulses than they had before, or any just principles of human calculation ever would have attained without it,—and that these new thoughts and tendencies have worked themselves out into social changes, better in kind,—more diffusive and more lasting, than could ever have arisen out of the ordinary workings of human wisdom. Since the coming in of the Christian era, there has been far less of the fitful and temporary, more of steady, intelligent aim,—not so much of guess and experiment,—more of plan, of judgment, and of sober hope. Whereas antiquity, going from theory to theory, and experiment to experiment, offered but a meagre and narrow variety, and constantly returned upon itself; modern reforms (save in those cases which involve the open recognition of paganism,) have started from one single and simple idea, and yet displayed a diversity of feature, as wide as the varieties in the human mind or the human condition. In those quarters where the Christian religion has gained an ascendancy in the popular faith, the endeavor has been made with a constantly increasing measure of success, to place all men on a common level. The different orders are more truly represented in the councils by which they are ruled. Reforms have a more general reference to comprehensive principles, and involve almost infinitely more of that acknowledgment of lofty ideas, and stern obligation, which, even when but imperfectly understood, give some measure of dignity and stability to earthly enterprise. These reforms bear the stamp of hope, and moral dar-

ing; and even when, through the misrepresentations of human wisdom, they fall somewhat short of their aim, the ideas they embody, do not die out of human confidence and regard, but live on,—as the soul at the dissolution of the body,—and reappear as the life of other and better instrumentalities.

In the great, half barbarous world, that embraces Tartary and Japan, and the islands of the Indian ocean, until lately, when the rising light of Christianity has streamed athwart its ancient and gloomy towers, all has for ages lain under a spell of superstition and stagnation. Changes there have been; but changes like those in the Greek and Roman annals, from one shape of temporary and doubtful remedy to another; and not advances from one stage to another, of perception, strength, and enterprise,—changes like the convulsions of nature; not growth, but sudden revelations of an inward and terrible force, too long repressed. Reform, as we understand it, a thoughtful and voluntary abandonment of existing forms, for the carrying into expression of some purer principle, they have ever deemed, and do for the most part still regard, as a folly and a danger. Coming this way, to the West of the Ural mountains, a great shadowy power looks down upon the thrones of Europe; as brave as any other nation of the earth, and fourfold more cunning, running back in its history to the very borders of human annals, well nigh inexhaustible in resources, and gathering wisdom from every mistake, and growing strong by every disaster. Brooded over by a gloomy, half-pagan religion,—we find as its highest thought of freedom, the absolute supremacy

of a single man; and for its cardinal maxim of foreign policy, hatred to all distribution of power and privilege; and behold the melancholy struggle between the desire for those reforms by which other nations have been dignified and blessed, and the settled enmity to those broad humanitarian principles, by which alone such reformatations can be wrought. At the extreme West of the Mediterranean, where the Pyrenees look down on the Atlantic side, behold a people in some sort noble by birth and by early history, but ignoble by reason of a narrow and belittling faith; shorn of their olden pride, broken down in finances; in education, backward almost beyond the possibility of belief; in public policy, whether domestic or foreign, narrow, doubtful, and inefficient. In France, notice how the restlessness of the popular mind, and the hunger for change and motion, combining with a reckless and frightful infidelity, brought on the most bloody revolutions known to history; and yet how the free intercourse with Christian people, and the qualified welcome given to Protestant missionary effort, have been followed, step by step, by a healthier type of political speculation, and social experiment; and in the department of education, have given rise to a system to which the world can show nothing superior. See how in the middle range of States, from Norway to Italy, the progress of Christianity is daily passing more and more into a synonym for progress in thought, progress in liberty, progress in all the ideas that concern individual or social well-being. And turning to that noble nation of the North Atlantic, and then coming across the

waters to the spires and the fields, and the quiet homes of New England, we need only say, with all the melancholy marks that we behold even here, of the ignorance and the depravity of men, witness, so far as history can go toward demonstration, a proof that Christianity in the world, is its "*hope of glory*." When we find that changes of this description have invariably followed Christianity, and have never been seen except in connection with Christianity, is there not a logical fitness in referring these changes directly to the power of this new system of truth?

Nor let it be imagined by any that, because we have allowed so much to the heathen wisdom and morality, and have granted, on the other hand, that even Christianity is marked by evidences of human ignorance and frailty, that therefore the difference between the former and the latter days, is nothing but a difference in degree, and that what we have called the revelation of the wisdom of God, is only a natural development of the wisdom of man. Let none suppose that human speculation absolutely forced its unassisted way into the field of religious truth.

Many of you are doubtless aware that it is one of the favorite points with modern infidelity, that men are able by their own wisdom to frame their own institutions, and maintain the vigor and beauty of social life,—that the various reformatory movements, at present going forward in the world, have been originated and are now kept up, by the invention and energy of unassisted human nature. And when Christianity is held up as the root of all true progress, and

this Christianity is affirmed to be a supernatural system of belief, given by God in His great mercy to a blind and helpless world, in addition to the misconstructions they put upon Christianity itself, they insist that its origin was entirely human,—that it grew up out of the natural progress of human thought and experiment, in the same way with Mohamedanism, or any of the different systems of Pagan philosophy or mythology. Now it will be seen without difficulty, that while there can be no sin and no danger, in crediting human wisdom with as much as it has really shown itself able to do, there must be sin and danger both, in claiming for it that to which it is utterly unequal. For, in the first place, it is a dishonor done to the Almighty; and in the second, it encourages men to think themselves independent of the Almighty. There can be no advantage in timidly denying the inherent power and resources of human nature, and superstition may be as hurtful as infidelity, or even atheism. But if men, on the contrary, imagine themselves equal to that which in truth they never will be able to accomplish, and spend their days in a proud and self-reliant search for that which none but God can show them, every one can see how their creed must finally appear to be folly, and all their ingenious and splendid schemes for the renovation of the world, as empty and vanishing as the dreams of the night. It is on these grounds that we insist upon the Divine origin of the Christian system. When infidelity coolly classifies the Christian faith among the various systems of human invention, and as such, uses it so far as it is esteemed to be good, and rejects it in many par-

particulars in which it is imagined to be weak and profitless; we reply that it bears characteristics of a purely supernatural and Divine origin, which it is utterly unphilosophical to reject, and characteristics which do not stand connected with any other system of philosophy or religion. If we regard Judaism as the beginning of Christianity, in the sense of being its forerunner, and preparing its way, we have the most reliable historic testimony to a constant succession of miraculous manifestations of the power of the Deity. Nature stood then as now, an ample and splendid revelation of the unseen godhead. And if the Chaldean or the Canaanite, roaming over the Armenian hills, or feeding their flocks in the valley of the Jordan, had actually found in the daily and common aspects of the natural world all that their necessities required, the argument for Christianity would be at an end. But while we read of the nations, Persian, Hindoo, Arab, Greek, and Moslem, that they tried for themselves the long experiment of mining for light and peace in their own dark and troubled souls, and trying to make a Creator out of a creation, it is recorded of the Hebrew that he was called at the first from the midst of Pagans, to go and be the apostle of a pure faith, in a strange land,—that he was brought under a peculiar administration, by a law given directly from God,—that wherever he went, he was taught the character and the will of the Almighty, by tokens, which, so far from having their explanation in the common course of nature, were direct and palpable interruptions of the course of nature,—that from Abraham to Moses, and from Moses to David, and all down through the

days of the prophets, the most decided and striking evidences of the Divine presence and working, were repeatedly given to this one people. And then, if we go a little farther, until the last prophet had lain asleep some four hundred years, and the good time of a wise Providence had come, behold a miracle surpassing all that had gone before,—the birth, in a way contrary to nature and experience, of the Lord Jesus Christ;—then, the wonderful teachings that came from His lips, and the miracles that everywhere spoke for His divinity,—then the marvellous rising from the sealed and guarded sepulchre,—the appearance before His disciples, and the ascension into Heaven,—and afterwards the miracle of the cloven tongues, the sudden out-pouring of spiritual influence, and the wonders of healing, everywhere performed by the early teachers of the new religion. If these things do not show for Christianity an origin strictly supernatural and Divine, can any man tell what evidence would be enough to sustain such a truth?

Are we reminded that some things often quoted from the sayings of our Saviour were said long before His time, by persons claiming to be no more than men? But observe these important historical facts: *first*, many of these sayings had a very different meaning with the persons who first uttered them from that which they bore in the mouth of our Saviour, so that in truth, they were not the same thing: *secondly*, none of the wise men of former times gave forth their wisdom in such a connection with miraculous proofs of a Divine origin, as did Jesus Christ, after all their painful conjectures as to what truth might be,—con-

jectures coming sometimes near the truth—Christ came, rejecting a part of their wisdom, giving to a portion of it an entirely new application, and affixing the seal of positive truth to some things which had heretofore been matter of doubt and question, and therefore had no practical use. Even the best things of Plato and Confucius (let it always be remembered) were expressed only as opinions, so that men could not know whether to receive them or not; whereas Christ was such in His person, the manner of His teaching, and His miraculous power over nature, that men were constrained to believe Him a messenger from Heaven. When the soldiers came to take Him, they were terrified and fell back: Pilate was full of distress and evil forebodings, at being involved in the murder of this extraordinary character: the centurion openly avowed his belief in Him, as the Son of God; and in the moment of His death, the temple vail was suddenly rent, the sun was darkened, and many of the dead came forth to open view. If this Being were not a messenger from the Most High, worthy of implicit confidence, the question arises whether it would be possible for the Almighty to give to any messenger He might send, a proof of His divine commission. *Thirdly*, our Saviour taught, as an entirely new doctrine, which there is no historical reason to believe that the world ever have guessed, that men are “dead in trespasses and sins,”—that nothing but an atonement could redeem them,—and that through such atonement every man might, if he would, secure the favor of God, and be raised to everlasting life.

No philosopher ever went so far as this: When the infidel, therefore, affirms a likeness between any of the wise among men, and Jesus Christ, "the wisdom of God," we say that, taking character, and life, and teaching, the idea of any other than the merest surface resemblance is contradicted by plain facts of history. The manner then in which Christianity was introduced, the state of human society previous to its introduction, and its palpably altered condition immediately afterward, constitute one branch of our argument for the proposition that Christianity lies at the basis of all genuine reform.

2. We have spoken of what Christianity has done. Let us see now, in the next place, whether an equally conclusive argument may not be drawn from the nature of Christianity. We affirmed at first that, as matter of history, Christianity, considered as a supernatural power in the world, had done for men that which they never could have done for themselves. We now say that Christianity, regarded by itself, as a system of truth, is fitted as no other system ever has been, to the necessities of the human race. Christianity is a plan arranged by the Creator, expressly for the purpose of bringing men out of a state in all respects unnatural, and setting them in those relations toward Himself, in which alone they can be wise and happy.

The religion of nature certainly makes known a God. For Daniel charged the Chaldean king with a perversion of these teachings, when he said to him, "Thou hast worshiped the gods of gold and silver, of iron, brass, wood and stone, and the God in whose

hands thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." And the same testimony comes from the lips of Paul, when he says of the heathen world, "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God." And the reason that men are ever heathen, is not that God has refused to adapt Himself to the weakness of the human mind, but that men have so departed from God, that teachings which would otherwise have been ample, are found insufficient. With all the noble and excellent ideas to be found in the writings of many of the ancients, they yet had no ideas broad enough and stable enough, to build upon. And it is a remarkable fact, that one of the most eminent teachers of antiquity spoke doubtingly upon points the most important, and confessed that before the world should be stirred by any true and permanent impulse, some great teacher must appear from the unseen world, who, by his wisdom and his authority should command the attention, and convince the reason, and stir up the torpid affections of the race. And, indeed, so in the nature of the case it must be. The *machinery* that has become disordered, needs for restoration to its original uses, the mind that made it, and understands its complicated organism.

If a planet should wander away from its appointed course, it would need to be brought again within the circle of the solar influence. And if the spirit be disordered, the understanding, even in its best state, darkened and turned away, the affections cleaving either to sensuality, or to some of the subtler forms of selfishness, or pride, so that there is no real peace within; and to the unsettled reason, all the foundations

of the earth seem "out of course," and the multitude are wild with gross delight, and the wise are saddened by their fruitless searchings after a key to the world's great mysteries, what then does the spirit need, but a reunion to the Father of all spirits? For He who made them, and "fashioned their hearts alike," in all their wanderings, knows the devious paths they take, and beholds how they are overpowered by appetite, or bewildered by speculation; knows what they are, and what they need, and is able to lead them safely through the wilderness to the fields of promise.

And now, this great restorer that we call Christianity, is not wholly discovered in the particular form of truth brought in by Christ. By Him, it was more distinctly enunciated; and in Him, men saw it taking a more palpable and a more winning shape. But its great idea was the re-union of man to his God,—the law kept sacred, and the happiness of man nevertheless made sure. This idea was partly made known in Eden, to the founders of the race. Even after the thought had lost its distinctness, and so far its power to impress, it yet remained an imperishable thing in human belief. And even when it had ceased to be an understood truth, it remained as a conceived possibility. This tie yet left, slight though it was, by which the soul was kept from shooting off to a returnless distance from the Divinity, will explain some of the broken, and incomplete, yet wise and noble thoughts that appear at intervals along the line of heathen speculation; and these manifestly, in turn, explain the melancholy half-successes they sometimes

achieved, in their movements toward a better form of things.

Man was made by a wise, and just, and benevolent Being. Therefore he must have been created happy. From this it follows that he would be defended from all evil, save that which he might bring upon himself. It is plain that whatever might have been his capacities, so long as he was not free, he would have been only a higher type of brute, and his powers but splendid and helpless instincts. If he were not free, he could not disobey; but neither could he obey; he could not hate the Being who made him; but neither could he feel for Him the first sentiment of love and adoration. For love, and obedience, and purity of heart, are things voluntary; and voluntary they cannot be, if the nature be immovably fixed in one position. But thus made, and thus situated, man freely departed from God. And not only is this true of the first man, but the record reads, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But this it was impossible that God should approve. And further, it was necessary that His displeasure should be made known, not only as a matter of justice to His own pure and excellent character, but as a means of keeping alive in the minds of men, that impression of the evil of sin, without which it would be impossible they should be instructed and saved. Hence the blessing there was in the curse upon the ground, and the ills that were suffered to spring up in connection with every form of human industry, and every one of the relations by which men are bound to men, throughout the social circle.

And now, as men separate, and go toward the four winds, peopling the earth, behold them carrying with them that fear of the Deity, not unmingled with vague and occasional hope, that dimness of spiritual insight, that defect of spiritual vigor, which must stand connected with estrangement from God. Abel, and Seth, and Enoch, are men of faith and pure lives. Cain is quick and violent, yet the Lord shows him some favor. Noah stands forth, a preacher of "righteousness" in the gloom of Paganism. God left not Himself without witness on the plain of Shinar. Among the Chaldeans, Abraham is found, a man of piety; how many more there may have been among them, we do not know. Then by the shores of the Mediterranean, Abram must have made known somewhat of the true faith to Abimelech, and the sons of Heth. Isaac, in Canaan, finds his wife in the distant region of the Euphrates. The Midianitish merchants brought truth and godliness into their company, when they purchased Joseph from his brethren. And the sensual Egyptians entertained the people of God, as long as the family of Jacob dwelt by the mouth of the Nile. After this, we find the Hebrews held as slaves in Babylon. Even the great Nebuchadnezzar confesses with fear and trembling, Daniel's God, and the Jewish maiden is not silent in the house of Syrian Naaman. Continually the people of God were so mingled with the heathen, that the truth could not be hidden; and with these means of enlightenment, and the dim traditions handed down in each nation, in a manner yet more direct; then, with the preaching of our Saviour and His first disciples, the immense gathering from many nations,

at Pentecost, and the astonishing travels and labors of Paul, it is not strange that, at this day, we find men everywhere with some fragments of truth, that look like broken recollections of a former time, and with some capabilities for religious thought and religious worship.

Nor is it strange that infidelity, from facts like these, has taken up the hasty inference that men are religious by nature, and that there is no occasion to divert their thoughts from the gospel written on their fields and mountains, to the message of God's Word, and the one only Saviour, Christ. But the vague recollection of something lost, is by no means the same thing with its restoration: the evidences by which God *might* be known, and *ought* to be known, are not the same thing with such knowledge itself, and the greater the capacity for love and worship, and the deeper the longing after truth, and the felt necessity for life with God, the more flagrant the sin of refusing to worship, the deeper the misery of a life devoted to self. The world could not be made pure, until it had first been convinced of sin, and of moral impotence. It could not be instructed, until it should first have that experience of its own wisdom, that should make it willing to accept the wisdom of God.

Sin and error within must grow and put themselves forth into sin and error without. The powers were not made to work in a condition of estrangement from God; and no device of human ingenuity could make them work. "The whole head was sick,—the whole heart faint." There was a necessity then, if men were to be redeemed, that God should send down a guide

and a helper. If one could come among them, who by evident tokens, should show himself a teacher come from God,—who should distinguish himself from all their wise men, and even from all their gods, by his power over the forces of nature, and by the unexampled purity of his life,—and who, although their Redeemer, and a herald come from Heaven, should yet fix the thoughts of men upon himself, only for the evident purpose of drawing them eventually to God,—if one should arise upon whom men could look, in the very depths of conscious impotence and guilt, and say, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world!” then we can see how the soul of humanity should beat with a healthier pulsation, and all the enterprises and aims of life be nobler, by so much as the thoughts of God, and dying and the life to come, were more stable and more cheering. For then, every part of the nature would be adjusted with reference to its central source of life;—every power would be put in that position, and assisted in that activity, which agree with the design of the Maker. It is this that the great Teacher and Redeemer meant, when He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” It was this that Paul intended, when he affirmed that the preaching of “Christ, and Him crucified,” perfectly met the condition both of Jew and Greek, notwithstanding the one demanded a sign that should make religion a matter of sense, instead of faith, and the other believed that speculation could find “the unknown God.”

Reform demands a perception of the evil, an ability to determine what remedy will meet the evil, an ability to find and apply the remedy. Now we say that Christianity is the only true agent of reform, because it is the only religion that has ever made men understand themselves, their relations one to another, and their relations to God, and along with such comprehensive knowledge, has given an impulse sufficient to carry men in its direction. It is the only religion that has been neither too deep for the ignorant, nor too shallow to satisfy the wisest. It is not universally received, because it is not universally understood. And it is not universally understood, for the reason that many are determined to judge it from the outside, whereas, since it bears substantial evidence of having come from God, it ought to be received with humility and with love, *because* it is from God; and in its deeper things can be understood more and more, as the increase of spiritual life imparts an increase of spiritual discernment.

## XX.

### ON REFORM.

2 CHRON. xxviii: 23.—“And he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice unto them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.”

Let us, in the next place, take a very summary view of the reforms of the day, in the light of the foregoing principles.

It must be remembered that every age contains both truth and error, and that truth is often impaired by too exclusive a dwelling upon some single aspect of a period. Those, for example, who are meditative, are in danger of passing an extravagant condemnation upon such an age as the present, as being shallow; and those who are eager, and active, are likely to extol it unduly, as the most wonderful of all ages, merely because it has so much of change and motion. Those, in like manner, who hold it for a settled principle, that the world is growing worse, will see only evil in almost every endeavor toward good: they will be fearful, conservative, difficult to move. And, on the other hand, those who hold to a vague theory of progress, will think everything a true reform, and with their quick, mobile natures, will be too ready to lend their aid to any enterprise that has life in it, without a due consideration of its character. In order

to see the world as it is, we must abandon all principles of judgment for which we can give no better reason than instinct or temperament. We must observe; and we must do so at once kindly, and seriously; at once with hopefulness, and with caution. We must not persuade ourselves that things are not good, merely because we do not like to think of the evil; nor must we pronounce them evil, merely because they lie under the shadow of some evil association. We should strenuously resist the disposition to explain and classify, by our preconceived ideas, and give ourselves to the work of ascertaining how things actually are. In accordance with these views, the leading characteristics of modern reform may perhaps be included under three divisions. And of these the first that we shall name is,—

1. *Individualism.* By this is meant that sentiment which attaches a peculiar importance to each man as an individual; having a distinct dignity, and personal rights, in distinction from the multitude, which, although made up of individuals, often interferes in its collective activity, with private and personal happiness. Those who have the most of knowledge, and of practical wisdom, and of wealth, will, in general, rise to social ascendancy. And consequently in early days, when wealth and knowledge and the means of liberal culture, were but narrowly diffused, there were but few who held influence; and the mass of men had but little of freedom and personality. The laws that were set over them, they had neither the wisdom to improve, nor the power to cast off. Their

superior numbers were overborne by the superior wisdom and address of those who governed them. Personality was well-nigh destroyed: the multitude was large; and individuals were few.

But the progress of time has brought a change. The means of influence are widely extended: no man and no body of men, can long remain in the ascendant, unless the mass desire it. For experience has taught men the bitterness of arbitrary rules: and the Scriptures have come in also to assert the separate personality, worth, and accountability of each man; and thus what was once an instinct, groping toward the light, is now an intelligent idea, moving freely and with power, through all the fields of social enterprise. Men do indeed move in masses, and they always will; for both the social instinct, and the ends of society demand organization. But these masses are not like herds of animals, which can be numbered, and counted upon, and kept together, and urged in this direction or that, at the will of a master. They easily dissolve, and recombine with other elements. For the individual of the number who may have a certain depth of thought, or a certain momentum of character, will start out from the multitude, and offer his remonstrance, or propound his new theory; and straightway he becomes the leader of a multitude, each of whom in turn will be listened to, on account of his personal right, and if he have the personal force and tact, will for the time, be followed. Once, the social elements were tightly bound together; and an impulse being received at any given point, the entire mass was moved helplessly in the direction of the blow, like

a stone: now, a similar impulse will carry the multitude in its direction, only when they are of one mind, and choose to go: otherwise, like a pile of sand whose particles separate, and fly in all directions on being disturbed, a portion may be moved, but others will either resist, or fall to one side, so that the influence really affects but a small number. Not that men are more independent than they once were. There are in truth few men of as marked and noble an independence, as some of the great names passed away; yet the spirit of independence is more generally diffused, and, as it is with knowledge, each man has a certain measure, and in each man this independence is in some degree acknowledged by all the rest. But we name in the second place, as a characteristic of modern reform,—

2. *The development of a practical benevolence.* We have just said that the general attention has been drawn in a peculiar manner to personal rights. It has been an inevitable consequence, that the right of each to a share in the general happiness has been brought more fully into view. It has been seen that a few of those who make up society, have no more right to absorb all the means of safety and enjoyment, than they would have, were the thing possible, to monopolize the sunshine. Wherever there is suffering, the question is asked by somebody,—who has caused this suffering? Who has interfered with this man's right to the blessings of life? Who shall forbid this man to rise, and assert his claims to the things given by God to all alike? Perhaps the benevolence

of the day is referable to this feeling in a larger measure than is commonly supposed. And while there can be no doubt that Howard, who stands as the representative of the modern philanthropic movement, was a man of unusual benevolence, he would be yet more fully characterized as a man whose stern sense of justice led him to inquire into the evils that beset the human family, partly that he might restore to suffering its proper privilege, and partly that he might rebuke the oppression which had taken it away.

But however this may be, there seems to be a more direct and obvious reason for this development. For the extensive intercourse among men, which forms one of the features of the age, has brought different classes into more intimate contact than ever before; and men know one another. The changes in society seem to be more rapid and more marked, than they have been: the rich become suddenly poor, and the poor rich: those who have been widely influential are thrown aside; and those who have been strangers to place and fame come into sudden inheritances in both. These changes give to all men wider and more varied experiences, and quicken their sympathies, by enlarging that acquaintance with suffering, out of which sympathy arises. Men realize more and more that because they belong to the same race, each has a claim upon the whole, and that the world is always responsible for suffering which it is able to relieve.

3. Once more, the reformatory movements of the day, are marked by *the familiar reference to great and elevating ideas*. The names of liberty, patriotism,

self-sacrifice, heroism, have always been known in the world. And there have always been living illustrations of their nobleness. But once, they were things too high for the popular apprehension; much more, too subtle for the popular experience. They were admired at a distance; and those who from time to time appeared as their representatives, were the wonder of a dumb and uncultured multitude, who had not the remotest thought that those whom they revered as demi-gods, were made of the same dust and spirit with themselves, and that even they, in their low and hampered estate, were capable of rising to the dignity of men. But now, there is hardly a movement bearing upon the local, or the public interest,—not a political harangue,—not a literary address,—not a lesson on the social activities,—not a leading article in the village newspaper, but makes such reference to these better and grander conceptions of the human mind, as presupposes at the least, some general and surface familiarity with the things to which they relate. No man looks up for instruction in these things to any other. Every one is more or less under a stimulus to effort, to which the multitudes of other days were strangers, arising from the familiarity with great thoughts and aims, which he feels able, if he would, to turn into the realities of a noble and commanding life. There is a larger number than ever before, of persons who feel free, strong, dignified, wise, and capable. There are the widest diversities of feeling, and of actual experience. But the general level of sentiment has been raised; and all men feel the nobleness and beauty of life, to come

more nearly within their reach. Virtue, at least as a sentiment, is more admired and honored. Venality is more quickly reprobated. Liberty is growing dearer, as it becomes better understood. Sects are less honored. Corporations are held to a stricter accountability. Law is more noble. Oppression is more hated. Commerce has passed from an experiment into a system. Diplomacy has a higher code. Peace is more coveted, and war more abhorred. And while in everything the difference is most apparent and most sad, between the refinement of men's instincts, and the real elevation of their souls, the world is yet nearer than ever before to those grand realities, which in other days all men longed for, which the poet painted, and the sage foretold.

Now if we look, for a moment, at the defects of the current reforms, we shall find them of two sorts.

1. The defects of *mere excess*. The characteristics, good in themselves, which have just been named, are in many quarters unhealthily developed. Thus the principle of individualism, has in many instances separated too widely between men. Organizations of any kind are less reliable than they would otherwise be, from the fact that they are so easily resolved into their elements. The systematic arrangement, and the simultaneous motion of an army, give it a very large part of its efficiency. But in the modern multitude, the energy of the whole is impaired by that sort of licensed insubordination in individuals, which arises from a keen impression of personal importance, and personal right. Each one is quick, even to the point of a mor-

bid sensibility, to perceive any invasion of his proper personality; and the instant result is, a withdrawal of himself from the general movement, and the assertion of an individuality, with which no organization has a right to interfere. Not uncommon is it, also, for the superficial and the restless, without any such reason, to move away from the general line of social operations, barely because of the salutary restraints, which the very nature of society supposes, and the end of society demands. We have said that the time was, when the mass overbore and injured the individual. But such is the constitution of human society, that the individual may interfere with the liberty of the mass. And just this evil exhibits itself at present, in many of the fields of social enterprise. Public kings, with crown and prerogative, are going down in the general esteem. But each man desires, himself, to be a ruler and a head. Individualism, instead of being an instrumentality for working out the ends of society, has run up into a rank and evertopping luxuriance, in which it is conspicuous, at the expense of strength. As if the passengers in a ship, conceiving a sudden idea of their individual rights and dignity, should insist upon taking successive turns at the helm, without any reference to their capacity for steering, and indeed without any particular care as to the result of their experiments, but only for the sake of asserting their right to guide, or misguide, the vessel in which they sailed; so in society, each man would teach, govern, offer his views, lead his faction, not particularly because he is aware of any fitness for the work, or because he is greatly solicitous that the work should

be wisely done, but primarily at least, for the sake of exercising the undoubted prerogative of one of God's free creatures. It is not necessary to speak of the disorder which must result from so great an error as to the nature of personality, and the object of the social compact.

In like manner, the instinct of benevolence has, in some directions, carried men to great extremes. In some of its forms, it has fostered that most pernicious state of feeling, in which the beauty of an idea is more highly admired, than the thing itself is loved and practically maintained; and a class of persons have arisen, who display that wretched effeminacy of benevolence, which canonizes John Howard and extols Caroline Fry, and sitting by a comfortable hearth, and never lifting a hand for its fellow men, mourns mawkishly over the ills that afflict humanity. In another direction, this sentiment of sympathy is more practical, but perhaps even more dangerous. For it has led to a serious confusion of moral principles. Acting in connection with this instinct of individual right and dignity, of which we have spoken, it looks upon the criminal, and disregarding the fact that he is a criminal, it considers only his wretchedness, and referring that wretchedness to the law which condemns him to lose his life, instead of attributing it to his own wild and ungoverned passion, it denounces the law as cruel; and surrounds a character, branded with guilt, with such a light as painters throw about the brows of martyrdom. The sentiment of justice is withdrawn from society, and placed upon the individual. The law which, in general at least, represents the deliber-

ate opinions of men, is held to be unjust, because it inflicts a greater amount of evil than the sympathies of these men can endure to behold, while it is forgotten that an excessive lenity to the individual has always issued in practical injustice to the mass. And, whatever may be the opinion in regard to the particular question of capital punishment, it is at least to be allowed that the public sympathies have overborne the public judgment, and that the equilibrium can be restored only by that deep sense of right, which, while it delights to call the good, good, will not shrink from calling the evil, evil; and dealing with it in a manner answerable to its nature.

And once more, the currency of great ideas of which we have spoken, has shown too often, how easily a thought may be mistaken for a thing; and the most noble realities lose much of their nobleness, by the touch of ignoble minds. It is one of the glories of humanity, that its real dignity lies in that which it is possible for every man to attain. Wealth, all cannot find,—position, all cannot reach: all cannot be emperors, or nobles, nor all hold sway over other minds by reason of an eloquent tongue, or a faculty for counsel or command. But every man may fill out the capacity his Maker has given him. Every one may stand firmly in his place, and do the work that belongs to his place,—suffer his sufferings, and enjoy his good, and walk in all things by the measure of light that has been granted him. And precisely in this lies virtue, heroism, or whatever else we please to call, that which most ennobles man. Hence when we speak of the contact of great ideas with rude minds, we are far

enough from meaning that one must be cultivated before he can understand these ideas. On the other hand, it too often happens that the polished and sensitive have little in them of the nobility of human nature; and sometimes this nobility is found growing in rough, uncultivated beauty in the lanes and by-places of the world. But this we mean, that cultivated, or uncultivated, with learning, or without it, that man is always personally beneath the grandeur of a great idea, when he suffers himself to talk about it, without acting upon it;—to admire, without obeying. For it shows that he is purer in intellect and taste, than he is in feeling,—that his disposition falls behind his knowledge,—that the reason is willing, but the will is weak. And this, as it is a *sin* viewed in reference to the higher relations of men, is a degradation and a shame, in any view whatever. Now this is the abuse which has been suffered in a peculiar manner by great ideas, in their connection with modern reforms. Once, men did not often name these excellent things. They were too high for them. And when they did, they spoke vaguely and uncertainly, as of things that were not often seen among men, and except with the wisest and most powerful, were not well understood. And this, because it was not seen that the beauty of human nature belongs to all who will earnestly seek it; and that every man in his place may be a hero. But now, these sacred words are passed from mouth to mouth, as the common-places of conversation, and form the staple of all public discourse. And if an inhabitant of some other world could hear what is thus said, without knowing the

every day characters of those who use the words, he would surely infer that the age was full of pure men, and the world was entering with swift and triumphant footsteps, into a millennium of golden days. But too often, and this not merely in the empty prattle of the magazines, but in the language of men in station, and charged with great interests, it is seen that the idea is only something which they know by sight, but never had by their tables, or their hearth-stones. They praise the lofty and unselfish, and know in their hearts that it is by such the world is preserved. But for themselves, they are content with cheaper virtues. They extol patriotism, but are not willing to be patriots. Philanthropy they worship; and yet they do not deal gently with the poor, the troubled, and the weak. They are eloquent against all manner of oppression, and prophesy in sounding words the day when slavery, priestcraft and misrule will be no more; and yet beyond the words they utter, they are as emotionless and empty as wax figures in a show. For their lives give forth no pleasant sound: their daily deeds are not beautiful: there is nothing in what they do that is like their words: they only talk,—they do not live. And because the world hears so often these great words, and so rarely sees the great things to which they point, the confidence of the world in the very existence of these things is shaken. Men hear of heroism, and see it not: they inquire for it, and no one can tell them where it may be found. They associate great thoughts with great failures, possibly with great hypocrisy: they learn to think of eloquence as a dexterous arrangement of words: they lose confi-

dence in the reality of that, of which the reality is so little manifest; and with the hollow praises of these noble things still sounding in their ears, sink back into the life of impulse and self-love.

2. But passing from the errors which lie plainly in the line of something good, there is one which stands out with greater prominence, as a positive and independent defect,—*an undue emphasis upon the human, and a shallow impression of the Divine*. It will be perceived that we are not speaking of what is distinctively termed religion, but only of that which must be deemed an excellence or a defect, by virtue of the relation it sustains to human necessity. It is therefore without at present any other reference to Christianity than such as a plain and honest view of human wants may force upon us, that we affirm a superficial impression of the Deity, to be the great, prominent defect in the modern reforms.

There is in man a susceptibility to the impression of things supernatural; and in every age, and in every part of the world, there has been in men a disposition to look away from the narrow sphere of their own faculties, and to regard with peculiar emotions of some kind, the great Power, let it be what it might, of which their first and clearest thought has always been, that it is a power. Therefore, when this susceptibility is not met, one of the wants—nay, the very deepest want of the human mind, goes uncared for. Now there is at the present day, an extravagant disposition to exalt the resources of human nature; and although there has perhaps been no period, when religion has

been more talked of, and more generally recognized as a sentiment which the world cannot well do without, yet it is religion as an idea, outside the mind, instead of an experience and a life within. The thought of dependence upon an all-wise, and kind, and powerful Deity, is one very generally received as a necessary element in all the higher departments of literature. For as an idea, it sustains innumerable connections with life, and with thought, and cannot be quite cast out. But there is reason to believe that the feeling of such dependence has little to do with a large portion of the recent reforms; and that, if suggested as a practical element, without which no system can long continue, the idea would be received with open ridicule by some, and by others either with decent indifference, or with that cool and courteous assent, which means denial.

In certain quarters, this error has its illustration in the gross and more intelligible forms of materialism; and men are taught that the highest wisdom lies in a knowledge of the forces of nature; and the truest dignity, in taking care of the health; that the Deity is a very simple subject, when rightly viewed, that belief is a matter of no consequence, that right and wrong are only other names for the shape of the brain, and the beat of the pulse, and that the millennium is nothing else than the final inauguration of chemistry, magnetism, self-culture and hygiene.

With a different class of minds, the error is more refined, and consists in referring all individual power and dignity, and the general progress of the race, to the force of thought and of will. The doctrine with

these is almost precisely identical with that of the ancient stoics, and is all expressed in the single word, self-reliance. It presents fewer absurdities than the one just named, not so much because it is really more consistent with itself, and with the facts of human nature, as because it moves in a region of thought where neither excellences nor defects are so generally perceived. Equally with the other, it disrelishes and practically at least, rejects, the thought of a Divine interference in the affairs of the world.

Regarding this tendency, as it appears in either of these shapes, and without separating between palpable infidelity, and that which only tends to it, we find it in *theology*, assuming to know more than may be known concerning the Deity, and the future life; and reducing the whole revelation of God, with its countless lines, running back into shadows and silence, to a few simple elements, which, because they fall entirely within the range of mortal comprehension, utterly fail to lead up the thoughts to God, and therefore, on the principle already laid down, fail to meet the necessities of men. In *science*, there is a morbid and dangerous tendency toward the worship of second causes, and a shrinking from the thought of a personal Deity, greater than nature. This is the very superstition of superstitions; for as ignorance was once afraid of ghosts and witches, so in these later days, science is afraid of God, and fortifies its courage by pretending to believe there is none.

Again, in the department of daily life, we hear endless repetitions of the doctrine that faith in one's own self, is the first element of individual strength and

success. Thus every man has certain powers,—he understands their use,—their use is the only human means of success,—therefore the very utmost that any man can do toward his own dignity and his own well-being, is to believe in himself. There is no Power above, upon which all human powers depend, for the realization of their true dignity, and their loftiest action,—no object about which all the capabilities of the soul revolve, and in the light of which they move and shine. If religion be acknowledged, it is only as a decoration, or at the most, as a sort of decent sanction, without which the very instincts of men teach them that anything is hollow and absurd.

Allied also to this, is that doctrine respecting the ills of life, which holds them as things to be borne, for the reason that they cannot be avoided. Suffering is not seen as the natural outgrowth of sin: therefore it does not remind men of their defection from God; and hence it either does not lead the thoughts to God at all, or else induces an impression of God, which makes impossible any solution of this melancholy order of things. It contents itself with meeting the sorrows and dangers of life, with that refinement of Paganism, which takes everything as it comes, and has not the faintest wish to rise through its sober teachings, into any dearer communion with the great, good Being, who is over all.

## XXI.

### ON REFORM.

ISAIAH LXV: 17—25.

Your attention is invited this evening, to the relations of the Church to the current enterprises of Reform, which form so prominent a feature of the age. In the treatment of this general subject of reform, we endeavored first of all, to fix upon a true definition of the term,—then to ascertain the necessary principle out of which alone a true reform can arise,—yet again, to show that Christianity, considered as a system of entirely supernatural truth, is this principle: we then presented some of the leading characteristics of modern reform, and the way in which the Church is to make good its claim to the title of the world's great spiritual regenerator. And here, as has been the case from the beginning, we shall be obliged to avoid all reference to details, and all unnecessary expansion of whatever kind, not to occupy you unduly with a single subject.

We have said already, that in the strictest sense of the words, Christianity is the root of true reform. Let it be remembered, however, that we have all along allowed large credit to the unassisted wisdom and efficiency of human nature, and claimed for Christian-

ity, only that it has gone beyond every human power, and started the world on a track of thought and of vital activity, which there is the plainest historical reason for affirming that, of itself, it never could have found. We grant a true dignity and power to the unaided wisdom of the world. But we say, that in a long and bitter experiment, it proved itself insufficient, and that Christianity was the life of a dying race. We allow that the native invention of men has devised and wrought into practical benefits many a wise and truthful scheme. But the one thing which human nature so sorely needed, that all things else without it, were hardly worth the labor which obtained them, human wisdom did not find. Hence, we say of that which man has been able to do, that it has many times temporarily relieved, but of that which God did, in Jesus Christ, that it alone could cure. And no matter in what terms of choice and glowing rhetoric we extol the independent march of human reason, if there be between it and Christianity a difference like this, our argument stands;—philosophy is weak,—the Bible is omnipotent: man is helpless, and God alone is great.

With this repetition of the thought we have been seeking to develop, we are prepared to observe that the Church sustains to the times two distinct relations, corresponding to two different phases, which the reformatory operations have assumed.

1. In the first place, certain endeavors at reform are going forward strictly in the line, and under the conditions of merely human wisdom. To say of a portion of these, that they fall short of the true idea

of reform, is to speak with a leniency and moderation that lie near to falsehood. They seem like folly and untruth, taking up an open trade of shame, and going forth with reckless impudence to insult the reason, and violate the moral sense of men. We need not dwell upon the crowd of noisy and ephemeral reformers, who, without insight or principle, ignorant of history, ignorant of the Bible, ignorant of men, on the one hand destitute of reverence for God, and all things that remind of God, and on the other incapable even of an intelligent atheism, assume to be the seers and leaders of a blinded age, and shrewdly make fanaticism pass for inspiration. It is one of those truths which it would seem that ignorance itself must perceive, that reformation never starts without a certain measure of information. But when this very important principle is totally overlooked,—where presumption undertakes the miracle of standing on empty air, where confusion of mind is hastily taken for a license to teach, where a restless temperament is mistaken for genius, and a diseased imagination, or a disordered condition of the nerves, is taken for an inward call to preach a new gospel, and start a fierce crusade against it knows not what, the mind is divided between pity and indignation; and the charity that weeps over human mistakes, struggles feebly against that other instinct, that rebukes sin; and destroys things rabid and dangerous. According to that brief, but searching Scripture, while these false apostles promise men liberty, “they themselves are the servants of corruption.” And while no man can know the long-suffering spirit of Christ, and yet call for the fire of Heaven

upon these deceived and deceiving men, both reason and religion stand in unchangeable relations of enmity to the falsehood and the blasphemy which they utter.

But there are works of *true reform*, which are carried forward under the teachings of a human wisdom. And these it is doubtless the duty of the Church to recognize for what they claim to be. It is none the less an error, because it arises out of a reverence for the Scriptures, to disallow and depreciate the ingenuity and common sense of the world, where they keep within their sphere, and make no dangerous claim to an equality with something more powerful and more sacred. It is part of the excellence of the Gospel, that it looks with friendly allowance upon that which is not in itself evil, even though it lack the stamp of religion, and want the inspiration of a true piety. It does not, indeed, speak in that loose and indeterminate way, that might lead to a confusion of the false and the true, and leave men to imagine that something less than personal consecration and holiness will meet the Divine requirement. But it takes everything, if not at its own exaggerated valuation, at least for what it really is; and finds a place for everything that has a value. When, therefore, we speak of certain enterprises which, as far as they go, are wise and useful, notwithstanding they are of human invention, and place even mortal wisdom in its fairest light, we do so, partly because the necessities of controversy can never justify the suppression of truth, and in part upon that principle, too little recognized in the polemics of the day, that if Christianity cannot be supported by fair and manly reasoning, it cannot be supported

at all. When the question concerns that, whether in the form of theory or practical appliance, which is true within the limits of its own sphere, instead of regarding it with suspicion, or possibly assailing it with direct censure, under the vague impression that Christianity requires for its defence an indiscriminate warfare against everything that does not bear the seal of Church authority, it is the part of the Church to show it a large indulgence,—to deny indeed that it is equal to religion, but yet to approve and encourage it for so much as it truly is, and for the salutary results which it is actually working out.

2. In the second place, there is a type of reform, in which the wisdom of men and the truths of the Bible are combined, and the result is held up in triumph, as an illustration of what unassisted human nature is able to do. Calling to mind the observation already made, that we have no controversy with human reason, except when it endangers faith, by claiming to do the work of faith, it will be plain that a mistake like this ought to be regarded with the most serious apprehension, and in every possible way shown to be irrational, and hostile to the interests of men. With a class, it is one of the open arguments of an avowed infidelity, and with others, it is the expression of a feeble and half-fledged doubt, while yet Christianity is on the whole accepted, that after all the boast which Christians make of their Bible, and notwithstanding all the massive enginery of the Church, as a matter of fact, the world does really move forward of its own self-originated force,—that there is as much

inspiration in the collective wisdom of successive ages, as there is in what Christians call, by way of distinction, the Word of God,—and that the world, so far from being indebted to the Church for its life, is absolutely displaying more strength than the Church itself, and carrying forward operations of reform, to which the Church as such is utterly unequal. Now if these things are true, the defence of Christianity is at an end. But what if a careful examination should cause it to appear that the very choicest elements in these boasted reforms have been unconsciously taken from the Bible itself; and that infidelity is thus on the largest scale bearing unintentional testimony to the excellence of the Scriptures, just as a strong man, boasting of health, is saying in other words, how largely he is indebted to the nourishing food and the bracing air, by which he has been made what he is. If we find, in going back through the history of the world, that men like Plató, whose words are even yet the Bible of philosophy, strove painfully and vainly after that hidden something that should meet the deep necessities of the race, and that all at once, on the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, the darkness began to be light,—every science received a new impulse, and every art took to itself higher forms, and adjusted itself to better uses,—if the world began to feel freer and more hopeful, and has been growing more and more so, until, at last, all the truest ideas and noblest aspirations have become household words,—and if now men are found to rise up and say, We are sufficient for our work: we need no Bible: we know all things: reason can find whatever reason

wants,—what is the just conclusion, but that as children forget the fears of the night in the cheerful light of the morning, so men, surrounded by a state of things which nothing but the Gospel could ever have produced, rejoice in the light, and imagine that they made it, and forget the melancholy night-time of the world? And as to the enterprises of reform which stand associated with this mistaken reasoning, what can be more obvious than the duty of separating with the utmost care between that which is of man, and that which is from God, and holding reason and revelation in a position of true adjustment? There will always be a class outside the Church, who, in addition to general breadth of view, have a true admiration for some of the great, leading ideas of the gospel. But while there are some of the truths of religion which any one may know through reading and reflection, that in it, which brings into union with God, and is therefore that for which all the rest exists, and without which it is useless, as regards any great purpose, is known only to those who have loved and embraced it. To the mere understanding it is as unintelligible as sunshine to the ear, or fragrance to the sight.

Now the better part of those who have styled themselves reformers, have received as much of Christianity as the understanding will take, and, without yielding to its claim upon the whole nature, they have carried out some of its beautiful sentiments, and some of its pure principles, and some of its comprehensive ideas, into embodiments that wear sometimes a most attractive aspect, and are readily mistaken for complete

systems of truth, containing all that is necessary for the world's restoration. It is related of one of the ancient painters, that the perfection of one of his fruit-pieces deceived the very birds. There must have been here an astonishing truth to nature; and yet nature itself was not there; and hence life and nutriment were not there. So in these reformatory systems there is sometimes a most remarkable likeness to the Christian faith, but the Christian faith is not there. And because that is wanting, the life-principle of true and permanent reform is wanting.

Far be it from any lover of God and man to decry the wisdom or the benevolence of the times, merely because it is not all that it might be; or because it cannot show that most equivocal recommendation, a certificate of Church-membership. But when it is set up as the very essence of religion, and in every vehicle of information, philosophy, review, novel, newspaper and popular address, urged upon men as that new way that is better than the Gospel, we say with all our heart, Anathema! Maranatha! Welcome to every good result, no matter when or by whom wrought out. Hail to the man who will rise up, and do strong work for a suffering world! For the work must be done. Never let the Christian be heard forbidding men to cast out devils in their own way. For it is well for the world that the devils be cast out. And we should beware of that reproach bestowed upon the disciples of old, by the man who took to our Savior his son, vexed with an evil spirit, "I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him." Never let the disciples call down fire upon those who are diligent,

temperate, kind and pure, even though their virtue have not the type of true religion. For there is not too much virtue in the world; and perhaps it is a questionable way of increasing it, to discourage and denounce what there already is. But when anything is announced as the last and perfect remedy for human ills, which leaves out of view the most important facts of human nature,—when anything is offered to men as the great restorer, which satisfies one want only to create another and more bitter one, which it never can satisfy;—when I am told that diet and exercise will deliver me from the burden of sin, and that a wise consideration of the shape of my cranium, and the peculiarities of my temperament, and a judicious accommodation of body and mind to what are strangely called the laws of nature,—will bring me into the state for which my Maker designed me, and that prayer, and a watch over my spirit, and meditation upon God's truth, are things for a bygone age, or for the simple-minded and ignorant, of this, then I am sure that the old spirit of heathenism has come back over the minds of my fellow-men, and that, as they of old, whose foolish heart was darkened, and whose profession of wisdom was a fatal indorsement of fanaticism, and who, promising to other men a wider liberty than that with which Christ makes free, were yet themselves the slaves of a corrupting faith, and needed with a deeper need than they could understand, the very Gospel they derided, so now, the world in its sad and sightless wisdom knows not God. In the world's old days of twilight, the heathen, teaching in the portico, or walking in the idol-grove, planned out such rude philoso-

phies as he might, by the suggestions of a magnificent world without, or the counsels of a half-ruined instinct within; and beautiful and stately do they stand, the parthenons and pyramids of thought, in an early and unenlightened time. But there was one thing their utmost could not do. And there is one thing which even the wisdom of these wiser times can never do.

It may seize upon some of the leading ideas of the Christian system, and make them subservient to many a wise and useful end. But it never can work out the social salvation of the world, except the *life* of that system work within, to guide its willing and its doing. Many are the works of benevolence and reform it may execute. But never is it entitled to call its action religious, when the very soul of religion is left out. It is as if the ripples and eddies near the shore, should be taken for the stream that starts among the distant mountain tops, and flows away downward to the sea. Alas! that this stream should hold so many impure and noxious elements,—that its waters instead of always gleaming in the light, and moving always with a swift, and strong, and steady flow, should go sometimes with a sluggish and doubtful motion,—that they should be brooded over by shadows,—that they should be tossed by storms! But it is the river of life, notwithstanding. It has given to a solitary and fruitless world, whatever of bloom and of promise it can show. It has borne on its breast the glory and the enterprise of human life, and many is the graceful and stately thing, that might have lived upon its margin, but perished by the side of other waters.

For those who think they see in the spirit of modern

reform something better than the Gospel, we say then, comprehensively, two things: First, in many points, we allow that human wisdom has already done, and that it will continue to do, that in which it receives no direct and specific aid from the Gospel. For the revelation from God does not so much give men a catalogue of things to be done, as teach them great principles by which their labor is to be guided, and inspire them with those inward dispositions, which agree with the position they hold toward their Creator, and thus cause the powers to work accurately, safely, and with effect. Secondly, a very large part of the vitality and hopefulness of the times is referable in a way yet even more direct, to the influence of the supernatural communications contained in the Scriptures. Men have been obliged to breathe the atmosphere of the Gospel, even when they would not so accept it, as to feel its life stirring within them. They have been converts to its good sense, its benevolence, its beauty, even when they have known nothing of that secret power, under whose influence men become new creatures.

There are individuals in the Church who look with interest upon all the enterprises which aim at the elevation of the race, whether distinctively Christian, or not, and wonder that they should have fallen to so large an extent under the control of free-thinking, and men of uncertain principles. Yet they love the Church, for its solemn and splendid history; and because they believe it to be in this age, as in all ages, the very "pillar and ground of the truth," they will cleave to it the more warmly, the more rudely it

is assailed. And they hardly know how far it may be safe to countenance that, which, although oftentimes excellent in its results, is yet so sadly identified with that lawlessness of thought, which never can long work well. On the other hand, there are men not of the Church, of clear heads, quick sympathies, and practical energy, constituting no mean item in the life and motion of the times; who regard the Church as little better than a huge incumbrance upon the surface of the social system; and even while, in many instances, they will not sneer at an organization in which so many of their fellow men, and some it may be of their dearest friends, have found the realization of their best hopes, and the solace of their deepest sorrows, regard it as strangely unfitted to the necessities of a striding civilization, and lament that so much of capacity and worth should be found clinging to a creed, and a polity, and a couple of sacraments. The former of these classes feel that the fire and energy of many who do not bear the Christian name, would greatly enhance the efficiency and the honor of the Church. And the others, on their part, while they hold development of the human mind through symbol and doctrine to be artificial, are yet conscious of wants, which symbol and doctrine would most genially meet; and perceive defects in their most cherished enterprises, which would be precisely supplied by elements to be found in the distinctive dogmas of the Christian faith.

The doubts of the former of these classes, and the more decided misapprehensions of the latter, and the want of a better understanding between the two, find

a large part of their explanation in the fact that the Church is at present in one of its transition periods; and is struggling to adjust both doctrine and practice to that advanced stage of thinking and experience attained by the present age. Truth does not change; but human apprehension of truth is subject to increase and progression. Truth does not change; but it has from age to age new bearings and applications: it is the same in itself; but it requires constant adjustment to new phases of thought, and new forms of social necessity. This law of change is not peculiar to that truth of which the Church is the depository. It obtains equally in every other department. The man of science, the civilian, the thinker, all recognize the necessity for fresh modes of statement and of appliance, in their several fields. The diamond must at intervals be reset, or it will no longer cut. And when the truth has served one set of uses, it must offer to the world a new face, in order to its true efficiency.

The Church has been much engaged, thus far, in settling the boundaries of that faith, by which the individual, and thus the world of individuals, is to be reformed. It has never taught, nor has it ever really believed, that doctrine is the whole of religion. It has always displayed somewhat of self-sacrifice, the fearless struggle with fraud and oppression, and the noble aggressions of benevolence. But its first age was chiefly an age of thought and introspection. Now it is passing forth into a period of more than usual activity. It is not long since Anastasius wept in his cell, and the noble Luther was a monk, and religion

was identified in the general mind with seclusion, austerity, silence, and monastic rites. The Church is composed of men. And men never learn the whole of anything at a single lesson. The contemplative and devotional aspect of religion has been well studied. We are passing now into an era of observation, endeavor, and external reform. Once, when religion was more quiet, it was not therefore a dead belief, but a living faith, only a faith living apart and silently. Now, because it is becoming more active and aggressive, it is not therefore less devout, but only, in establishing more healthy relations between itself and the busy world, it is blending meditation with industry, and trying the efficacy of prayer, with the tests of practical life. Once, the reflective part of the nature was more open to Divine influences than the active. Now, the executive and working faculties, are feeling in a larger measure than before, that agency which was always adapted to them, but which they slowly learned how to use. Life is life; but there is a time for it to be a sapling, and a time for it to be an oak, or a palm!

In addition to this change in the mere development of the Church life, we allow that there has been a serious defection from the faith and the power, which will be the invariable accompaniments of pure religion, in any age. We have no disposition to defend the errors of the Church; and we acknowledge, therefore, that the beauty of the Church is not unmarred, that its life is not everywhere hale and sound. But this we also affirm,—there is excellence enough to command the admiration of any who are as willing to

admire as they are to condemn. There is life enough to keep the world from perishing, through the force of its own unparalleled delusions, and the poison of its deceitful and desperate wickedness. If we observe also, that some, even of those who are sincere, do not fully understand the change that is passing upon the religious life of the Church; and are therefore fearful of too close a contact with the extraordinary activity of the times, we can see that the backwardness of the Church in reference to some of the reforms now in progress, is perfectly consistent with its claim to be the depository of religious truth, and thus the very armory of all reformatory warfare.

The Church has wrought a great work upon the general life of the world. It has stimulated thrift, awakened a feeling of personal independence, suggested to the general mind the possibility of great things, and fired it with admiration for lofty ideas; and even in quarters where it has done the least, it has acted as a stimulus to the general morality. These facts will account for no small portion of the reformatory energy of the times. But the great work of the Church is to bring men into that personal union of feeling and purpose with the Creator, in which alone human nature finds its proper life, and in which alone all deep and lasting social good must take its beginning. It is the peculiar business of the Church to persuade men that their souls can thrive only by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, just as their bodies live by the inspiration of all the natural influences. The thought, not often enough considered in reference to individual experience, and never even dreamed of by

the crowd of the world's reformers, that the believer is a "temple of the Holy Ghost," is yet to be inaugurated by the Church, as the great maxim of social polity, because it has been ordained by God, as the comprehensive law of religious life.

Now, by our reasoning thus far, the Church holds this great idea of reform. And the method of reform is always first to correct the inward idea by the true standard, and then to adjust the forms without, to the idea within. In other words, the Church must correct its own character and position by the Bible, and then engage in those forms of outward activity, which afford the fullest expression to this improved inward character. There must be a return to the plain and grand simplicity of the Scriptures. There must be a coming back to the old faith in prayer, and the old love for a devout and earnest walk with God. There must be a still and deep religious joy, a high and abiding enthusiasm, in the strength of which the men of the Church shall labor, whether in the low, or the conspicuous places of society, not for the praise of men, but for the love they have toward men, not for the sake of pushing their denomination, or their party, but for the truth's sake. The Christian must never stand aloof from any form of benevolent activity, fitted to do good, merely because he did not invent it, or because it was not baptized in his own Church, or because it was not recommended by his own newspaper. He must accept all the useful instrumentalities of the age he lives in. He must come in practical contact with the world of letters, of trade, of politics, and never come without bringing his religion

with him. The Church must be more than upright,—many are all of that, who yet are not Christians,—they must be spiritual, and spiritual in the very midst of this bustling and noisy world.

Christians must be cheerful, diligent, humble, manly, just and pure, in a sense above that in which the world understands these virtues. They must mix with the world, in all its right and useful enterprises, and yet maintain the character of a peculiar people. Now openly, and now silently, they must rebuke its evil: always they must love it,—always pray for it,—wherever they go making the place radiant, and the hour glad and yet holy, with the light of a godly manliness. They must show the world that this same Gospel which they either deride, or distrust, is just the most real thing upon which the sun shines. They are to show men how pure, and wise, and dignified, and lovely, human nature may become, under the operation of celestial influences. I speak not without consideration when I say, that they are to seize with strong hands upon the thoughts and enterprises of this busy world, and turn them to pure and lofty ends: they are to be the men of nerve and labor,—the men who are courageous when others are cast down,—the men to whom there is never “a lion in the way,”—the men who are not afraid to speak, lest some one should be offended, and not afraid to be silent, lest fanaticism should charge them with cowardice,—men “full of faith and the Holy Ghost,” whom a deep vital belief in God, and in Jesus Christ the Son of God, has made brave, determined, gentle, pure and true, and

who in the high, or the lowly places of life, shall be the prophets and apostles of this latter age.

And now, do you tell me, my Christian brethren, the old, melancholy tale of a holiness and nobleness that were proper to an age gone by, and may be expected again in some distant millennium, but from which we, in this particular time, have a merciful dispensation? I tell you that whether long ago, or now, "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." From the patriarchs to the prophets, and from the prophets to the apostles, the men whom God owned as His, were for their time, and their knowledge, good men. And I do not read anywhere that the commandments of God have been repealed, or that truth and holiness were buried in the graves of Palestine. I think rather, they will live on, through all the history of the world, until the world's uncounted sepulchres shall deliver up their dead to God. Oh! my brethren! remember that no generation can ever do the unfinished work of another, and that no generation can return from the fields of death, to live again its wasted days. The men of other years are done with life on earth, and their bodies sleep until the resurrection, by the Jordan, the Tigris, the Tiber and the Nile. We also shall soon go down to those still and unlighted chambers. Let us therefore do with our might what our hands find to do, for the night is coming on, and the morning after is the morning of the judgment.