

CONFESSING CHRIST:

A MANUAL FOR INQUIRERS IN RELIGION.

BY

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TO
THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, AT NATCHEZ; MISS.,
NOW LIVING;
AND TO THEIR DESCENDANTS AND SUCCESSORS WHO MAY READ THESE
LINES, WHEN THE WRITER'S MINISTRY IS CLOSED;
THIS SIMPLE EXPOSITION OF THE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL
Is affectionately Dedicated,
IN THE EARNEST HOPE THAT, THROUGH GOD'S BLESSING, IT MAY
LEAD SOME SOUL TO THE KNOWLEDGE AND
EXPERIENCE OF THE
GREAT SALVATION.

PREFACE.

THIS little manual has been prepared more in reference to the congregation of which the author is pastor, and to the community in the region where he resides, than to the public at large. He has intended it to meet a want which the living voice is not adequate to supply; and he hopes by means of it to speak where the living voice cannot go, and to continue speaking when the living voice shall speak no more. Other works in the same department no doubt possess far greater merit than this; but the fact is obvious that they cannot be made to circulate in proportion to the need of them. And, constituted as the minds of men are, one witness will be listened to with attention while another is disregarded; and testi-

mony from one source will exercise an influence while that from another will produce no impression. Some whom the writer wishes to serve will read this treatise because the writer wrote it, and this, perhaps, is a sufficient apology for publishing it.

The aim in composing it has been to adhere strictly to the teachings of the Bible, and to depict religion as it lies as a fact in human experience and practice, in precisely the form in which it is portrayed in the pattern given by God in his Word. Fidelity here, it is hoped, may gain for it such a blessing from the Holy Spirit as may make it the means of guiding some perplexed inquirer into the way of life.

NATCHEZ PARSONAGE,
September 1, 1880.

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CONFESSING CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

REASONS FOR CONFESSING CHRIST.

INTERPRETING the phrase "Confessing Christ," as signifying the adopting and practicing of the true religion, my object in the remarks which immediately follow, will be to persuade men to become religious, by confessing Christ. Where the idea of religion presented in the Bible is taken as the proper and authentic index of it (as is the case generally, where the Bible is known), there will be found a large proportion of persons who in their honest moments will confess, "we are not religious." By this confession it is admitted, first, that there is such an interest or object as religion proposed to the consideration and acceptance of men; and secondly, that these persons, for some reason,

have failed to consider and accept it. This failure—this lack of a personal concern in religion I wish to show—is both an error to be corrected and a fault to be abandoned. To each one of these individuals joining in the confession, “we are not religious,” I wish to address the injunction, “*you* ought to be religious.” No matter what the obligations of others of your species may or may not be, I make the affirmation to you particularly—the solitary reader whose eye is now upon these words—“*you* ought to be religious.” And for these reasons :—

I.

You are precisely the party upon whom religion lays its claim, and the whole weight of its claim. Whatever religion means or includes attaches to you, as directly and completely as though you were the only being in the universe besides God. And this is so, simply because the nature of the relation in which you stand to God makes it so. God is a unit, existing and acting wholly—that is, with all the authority and all the force which belong to him

as God—in reference to every other being for whom he exists, and upon whom he acts. Every such being can say, “He is *my* God; he is all that the term God means to *me*.” And on the other hand, each man is a unit, a several and independent being. He would be himself wholly, if he were alone in the world. At his coming into the world he is distinguishable from all beings who have existed in the past, or who now exist. All that can be predicated of man can be predicated of him. All the obligations which belong to man belong to him. No association with his species, no merging of himself in the mass of his kind, can divest him of the wholeness of his being, or of the wholeness of his responsibility. When death comes it is the unit who dies. There can be no companionship, no diffusion of self, in that solemn procedure. The isolation in which man goes out of the world is felt by every spectator; the wholeness with which he dies is understood by the bereaved hearts of surviving friends. Now, between these units there lies a relation which brings God, in his completeness, into contact with man, in his complete-

ness. The requisitions which God, under this relation, imposes upon man, rest, in all their entireness, upon you, the individual. The obligations that man is under to God, by reason of this relation, attach in all their extent to you, the individual. Religion is merely the due recognition by you of these requisitions and obligations. You cannot say it does not concern you, for you are the very being to whom it addresses itself. You cannot say it concerns you only remotely, or partially, for upon you solely, as if you were the centre, it rests the whole circle of its claims. The relation between you and God places you and him together in an association as close, and in a solitude as awful, as that in which Moses stood when God met him amidst the rocks of Horeb, and covers you with a duty as direct as that with which he was charged. To be religious is to fulfill this duty ; and the burden of it will rest upon you as long as you and God continue to be what you are. There is no evading it while two such units are standing in such a relation to each other. It began with your being ; it has run parallel with your life ; it

will attend you in death ; it will go with you into eternity. Surely it is worth while for you to be assured that this relation is a propitious one ! Surely it becomes you to consider the question, What is it to be religious ?

II.

The relation between you and God being of this direct and absolute sort it is evident that the not acknowledging of it by you must be a positive wrong to God. In other words, the absence of religion is positive irreligion. This alternative you adopt, as long as you decline or delay to adopt religion. For the absence of religion is practically a disowning by you of all the obligations which are involved in the relation in which you stand to God. It is saying to him, "Thou art not *my* God." This is clearly irreligion. It is something more than "being nothing," or occupying a position of indifference. You refuse to render to God what is required of you by the very relation under which you exist. This cannot be right ; and what is not right is wrong. There is no

middle ground between these points. You cannot escape the charge of being positively irreligious by appealing to the respectful phrases in which you are accustomed to speak of God and religion; nor by making promises to yourself or others that at some future day you will acknowledge God and embrace religion. These phrases and promises do not alter the fact, that what God requires you do not render; and that thus far in your career you have been leading a positively irreligious life; and that under cover of these phrases and promises you are now resolving to persist in leading such a life. This conclusion is one which you cannot contemplate with satisfaction. You are startled by the enunciation of it. You had persuaded yourself that though you were not religious you were still not irreligious. But it is apparent that you have been deluding yourself. While you have been crying "peace, peace," to yourself, you find that your actual position has been one of "enmity with God." It is a guilty position, and you need to abandon it; and to do this you must become religious.

III.

The motive to this is heightened by the reflection that the position you occupy is one in which you are exposed to the displeasure, or to what the Bible calls "the wrath," of God. By that very relation under which you are placed to God, and which you have heretofore disowned, he is required, unless he would disown it too (which would be to violate truth), to notice and mark your defection as a wrong. He must discriminate between the man who acknowledges his obligations to him and the man who does not. He must distinguish, both in his judgment and in his conduct, the man who does right from the man who does wrong. If one is an object of his favor the other must be an object of his displeasure. The decisions in the mind of God, as to the moral character of human acts, must contain in them an element of approbation or disapprobation; and these must express themselves by a corresponding method of dealing with these acts. To be living in irreligion, therefore, is to be living under the frown, the condemnation, of

God. Painful as this doctrine is, it must be a truth if the doctrine of God's existence is a truth. Is this a condition with which you ought to be content? Is there not something infinitely alarming in the thought that you are standing in immediate contact—and all alone too in your responsibility—with that God who is “angry with the wicked every day”? Does not common sense—instinct, even—say that you ought to fly from such a position? You can do this only by becoming religious.

IV.

Your need of religion, and the fault you are committing in neglecting it, have probably often been brought to your notice by the experiences through which you have passed in life. Critical periods have occurred in which you have been forced to carry your thoughts outside of the present world, and to seek some thing in the way of aid, protection, or satisfaction which the present world could not furnish you. Under an overpowering sense of impotency you have involuntarily lifted the cry, “Lord, save; I

perish!" "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me!" At the threshold of some momentous enterprise you have been arrested by the reflection, "the conditions of success here spread out far beyond my capacity to comprehend or control them. My resources cannot guarantee the end I seek. There is a place here for the favor, the guidance, the blessing of God." Religious faith and hope fit into such exigencies, just as trust in the God of Israel was needed to supplement the weakness of David in his contest with Goliath. It is a serious moment, for instance, when the young man quits the parents' roof to embark single-handed in the struggle of life. The burden which drives sleep from his pillow, on the night before his departure from his home, is something which only the invisible hand of God can lift from his heart. You have, at times when life seemed peculiarly attractive and the future was arrayed in the most enchanting hues, been suddenly brought by sickness to the verge of death; or you have seen death overtake some one in your circumstances. Such an anomaly has made life fade into an illusion. The ground

which seemed so firm has opened under your feet. "Something more than this I need," has been your solemn thought. "Something which shall make life independent of death—something which shall protect these aspirings within me from this cruel extinction." That something is religion. You have committed errors in judgment and in practice. You have had occasion often to charge yourself with folly ; and worse than this, with sin. The reviews which conscience has obliged you to make of passages in your life, have filled you with compunction and remorse. The fruits of transgression have been found to be bitter ; and under the revulsion produced by their bitterness, you have turned with loathing from your vicious indulgences, and have been able, only by a sort of violence imposed upon your mind, to resort to them again. Now in all these phenomena, with some or all of which you are familiar, you have the protests which your nature is always uttering against a life of irreligion. They show that the policy which reveals, at every summing up of its results, so large a column of pains and losses, must be radically

wrong. They are the monitors that God has stationed in the soul, to remind you of your fatal dereliction in forsaking him. They are the voices with which heavenly wisdom pursues her erring child, crying in his ears at every step, "All they that hate me love death!"

V.

To neglect or abjure religion is to set yourself in opposition to all that is distinctive of true manhood. Manhood is a term which we use with an excessive complacency, to distinguish the species to which we belong from brutehood. Manhood arrayed against religion is simply self-degradation, or rather self-annihilation. For religion is the very inspiration out of which manhood is born. It keeps guard over the elements which compose it; it protects them and cherishes them as the priest does the holy fire. To banish from the mind and the life the idea of God—for instance—to extinguish all recognition of him, and of the relations under which you are placed towards him—to divorce yourself entirely from the influences which a faith in him must exercise

over a rational nature, is to recede, by a fearful lapse, from manhood to brutehood. It is, in effect, to put yourself upon a level with the beasts which perish. To depreciate religion is, in some respects, the basest and the unmanliest act of which a man can be guilty. It is to be disloyal to that which puts the crown upon his nature. It is to resist the attraction which draws him upward to his true proportions; and it is to yield to a gravitation which tends downward to the grossness of an indefinite sensuality. It is the precise function of religion to make man godly, or, in his measure, godlike; and when possessed in a genuine form, it achieves illustriously this result. Humanity is indebted to it for the proper conception of goodness and nobleness; and there is not a good or noble feature in humanity which it does not encourage and cultivate. You cannot maintain the attitude of an irreligious man, therefore, without laying yourself open to the charge of being a traitor to the manhood of your species, and of defaming the honor of a benefactor whose good name deserves to be held more sacred than that of a parent.

VI.

It is religion alone which gives to the present life the properties which make it a substantial and valid thing. Without this, it is an aimless dream ; it is a perpetual revolution in a circle, reaching no definite end. You enter the world a naked infant ; and you go out of it as naked as you entered it. Has what lies between these points amounted to what can be pronounced, in any fair judgment, a consummation or success ? In ordinary cases, at least, we must surely answer, no. It is the plainest of all truths that a man's life, so far as this world is concerned, is never *done*. Whatever he has wrought it into or wrought out of it, there is something always to be added to his work. If he gains wealth, he has acquired also an appetite for gaining it, which will force him to keep on gaining it. Or, if he escapes contracting the covetous habit, and, as he calls it, retires for the enjoyment of his gains, he must stand guard over his treasures with a vigilance which allows him no rest. And at last he must pass them over to other hands at death, with no

assurance that all he gained will not be squandered, and all that he achieved undone, by those who come after him. Whatever is made by man can be unmade; and requires to be perpetually made over again, as it were, or it will become, by the mere force of decay, unmade. Never till life has been linked to an object outside of it and above it; never, till by religion it has been taught to terminate upon God, and become a co-living and a co-working with him, can it promise to itself any issue which may be said to give it completeness. This endless circling around a beaten path, like the caged animal, without a real finality in life, can be avoided only by attaching life to God as its supreme end. This is done by making it the business of life to please him; and by giving the precedence in the whole scheme of life to the relations which bind the individual to him. When you have identified yourself with God, you are independent of the conditions in which you may find yourself in the present world. Be they what they may, if through them you are securing to yourself the favor of God, accomplishing his will, maintaining fellowship

with him, your life can never be an abortion. It must be an ever-advancing success—a “light shining more and more unto the perfect day.” For if God is yours, it is certain “all things are yours.”

VII.

The apparent extinction of being which occurs at death, leaves the question open as to whether that extinction is limited to the life of the body or whether it is absolute, involving a literal and total end of being. The impossibility of making an affirmative answer to that question must always be an element of disquietude in the breast of an irreligious man. He may *say* “there is no hereafter, no judgment, no retribution,” but he never can be entirely at ease under this assumption, for he knows it is only an assumption. The mere *saying* of a thing does not prove it. At death, you reach the end of a pathway which, to an extent, has been familiar to you. You have walked hitherto in a certain measure of light. The light leaves you here, and your next step is a leap in the dark. This is what a wise man will, if

possible, avoid. If he can get a light from any quarter to guide him in that leap he will do it. Without it he must regard death with serious apprehension. Hence the fear of it is natural to man, and has the effect to keep him "all his life-time in bondage." Religion professes to be able to give him the light he needs in this critical juncture. Multitudes who have accepted its ministry attest that it does give it; that it gives it, first, in the clear testimony it bears to the fact of a continued existence beyond death; second, in the definite intelligence it conveys of a possible state of immortal blessedness, of which that existence may be constituted; and third, in the explicit announcement it makes of the terms upon which this possible state may be made actual. The evidence upon which this light has been commended to the faith of men has been sufficient to satisfy innumerable departing souls that it is a true light and not an illusion. Trusting to it they have passed tranquilly, even triumphantly, into the dark abyss. Death has been robbed by it of its sting, and the grave of its victory. Surely, the grounds upon which such

a confidence rests are worth considering! Surely, the conclusion to which they conduct us, if they can be rationally accepted, is such a sublime mastery over man's last and greatest enemy, that every poor trembling bondsman to the fear of death may well covet the comfort of it.

VIII.

Religion solves the question what is happiness, and guides the mind in the pursuit of it. It offers happiness under the genuine form of it—that of peace. It makes it reside in certain permanent elements, and not in frames of occasional excitement. It represents it as rest, not the exhilaration or intoxication of pleasure. It lays a good foundation for this state, and then maintains it by constant and adequate supports. It establishes peace within the soul by introducing concord among its affections and passions, through the regulating power of one imperial sentiment, love to God; by adjusting it to the relations in which the individual is placed to God, to his fellow man, and to the facts of providence; by allaying its cravings;

by offering it all wholesome gratifications in the present world; by mingling with these a sense of God's approbation and good will (without which there can be no true peace); and by planting within it the hope of eternal glory as a counterpoise to all the natural disturbances and disappointments to which it may be subjected. You can test this matter by an appeal to the experience of all really religious men. In no case, they will tell you, have they sacrificed any legitimate worldly good by their religion; they have enjoyed forms of good unknown to a worldly life; and in the end they have died, rejoicing in the grace of God, which made them and has kept them religious men. One thing they will emphatically declare, that whatever cost in the way of self-denial there has been in a religious life, it has been infinitely less than the cost which the sinner pays for the privilege of leading an irreligious life.

IX.

Religion is commended to all right-minded persons by the fact that it converts that influ-

ence with which every man is charged, into a beneficent power in the world. You are leaving the impression of yourself, whether you mean it or not, upon some other being or beings; and that impression will come more from what you *are* than from what you *say*. This is eminently true of persons associated under the domestic relations. So naturally are children expected to resemble their parents in character that, where there is any marked departure from this law, we say of the exceptional party, he cannot be the child of such parents. A consistent religious life cannot fail to exert an influence. It is a light in the house, it is leaven in the community; and this influence will be on the side of all that is good. You are bestowing almost all possible benefits in one when you succeed by your influence in inducing a neighbor to adopt religion. And equally comprehensive on the side of evil is the influence of an irreligious life. Somebody, by your malign attraction, will be drawn away into courses of error and sin; perhaps into extremes of depravity from which you yourself turn with disgust. You gave the erring

soul its original direction; and under the propulsion of your influence it has gone down to its depths of corruption. The remembrances of a useless life furnish a painful retrospect; but those of a life spent in diffusing a positively pernicious influence may fill your dying hour with remorse, and will follow you with their torments to eternity.

X.

The facilities for becoming religious have probably been so numerous and so accessible in your case that nothing but a criminal and violent perverseness can account for your lack of religion. Nothing less can be said of you, under the circumstances, than that you belong to that class of persons who have refused to come to the light because they love the darkness rather than the light. Conceive of the difference, in point of religious advantages, between you and the heathen man; and yet, so far as the symptoms of spiritual life are concerned, you are no better than he. He is more gross than you, of course, in his manner of life,

or in the way in which he carries out his principles; but those principles are not essentially different from yours. As God does not determine for either of you the kind of life you lead, you each determine this for yourselves. His way leads to a savage self-indulgence; yours to a civilized, perhaps a refined, one. There is an excuse for him, as he has had no higher law than that of nature. You have had the testimony of revealed truth to enlighten and instruct you; you have had the history of the people whom God chose to be his witnesses, in the Old Testament, and the history of Jesus Christ, "who was the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person," in the New Testament. You have had the institutions of the church, with its ordinances, and the examples of godly men as "living epistles," to teach you the way of duty and of salvation. In the Law and in the Gospel God has been perpetually addressing to you his commands and his persuasions; so that in the day of judgment there will be the same startling contrast between your case and that of the heathen man as the Saviour declares there

will be between that of Tyre and that of Capernaum. To remain irreligious, in your circumstances, is deliberately to choose death instead of life.

XI.

These reasons, while serving to show the obligation which rests upon you to embrace religion, go further, and require you to embrace it without delay. Their force does not depend in any degree upon the conditions of any particular period of life: they cover in their scope all periods of life. The aged sinner, whose day of grace is visibly nearing its end, may be urged to seize, with a special earnestness, his short opportunity to embrace it; but he ought none the less to have embraced it before. The obligation attaches to you as a rational being—a man. It is an incident of your nature, not of your circumstances. Your neglect of it thus far has been a loss which you never can repair. To defer it further is only further to trifle with conscience, presume upon God, and imperil your soul. All irreligious living is a perversion of the gift of

life, and should never have been indulged for a moment. By all the responsibility which is involved in the possession of such a gift, you are enjoined to begin at once a religious life.

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.” Isa. 55 : 6.

“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” Isa. 55 : 2.

“The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Rev. 22 : 17.

“How far may we go on in sin?
How long will God forbear?
Where does hope end, and where begin
The confines of despair?
An answer from the skies is sent:
Ye that from God depart,
While it is called To-day repent,
And harden not your heart.”

CHAPTER II.

NECESSITY OF EFFORT IN RELIGION.

THE levity with which the confession, "I am not religious," is too often made, gives way, sometimes, to the sobriety which admits, "I ought to be religious." For reasons such as I have stated in the previous chapter, or on other grounds more special and personal, the ordinary insensibility of men to the subject of religion is sufficiently disturbed to make them uneasy in their conscious lack of it, and to awaken in their hearts, at least, a vague desire to possess it. This latter state of mind, if properly entertained, makes the subject of it an inquirer. His position is like that of a person making a journey, who has suffered himself to be so beguiled by the attractions of the country through which he has been passing as to have lost sight of his object, and to have wandered indefinitely from the right way. He is reminded of his fault by noticing the deepening

shadows of the declining day, and by the dreariness which gathers over the scene in which he finds himself. He is bewildered; he is alarmed. The point to which he was destined, and where his interests lie, must be reached, and reached without delay. But where is it? In what direction? What path will surely conduct him to it? Serious, anxious questions like these must occupy his mind. His effort to retrace his steps must begin in a process of inquiry. Could the reader whom I am addressing realize that in rejecting religion hitherto, he has been thus—and more fearfully—going astray, he would, with equal earnestness, pause, cast his eyes around the horizon, and ask the questions, What is this religion which I have so recklessly overlooked? In what quarter, by what means, shall I find it? Admitting candidly that he is not a religious man, and yet convinced that he ought to be one, the only consistent course for him to pursue is to do, in the case of religion, what he would do in the case of any other object which he did not possess, but believed that he ought to possess, viz., *try to acquire it*. And his try-

ing will commence when he begins honestly to *inquire*.

I.

You must *try*, therefore—I would impress the thought upon the mind of my reader—you must literally *try* to become religious, or you can never expect to possess religion. Your position will not be changed a particle by the mere confession of your want of it, and by the mere acknowledgment of the obligation you are under to seek it. If you stand still, simply revolving these truths, the night will go on darkening around you, and your error will become a fixed and a fatal one. You must *resolve* to *try* to gain religion. The repetition of your sense of a need of it, without such a resolution, will accomplish nothing. A positive effort of some kind must be made. The form in which the desire to become religious is expressed in Scripture (Acts 16 : 30) is, “What must I *do* to be saved?” The necessity of *doing* something, here, is just as apparent as it is in the case of the man who has discovered that he has lost his way, and who knows that he

must recover it, or perish; and the doing required is partly done, at least, when you are prepared to make the inquiry, "What *must* I do in order that I may be saved?" When you begin in good faith to try to answer this question, you are really beginning to do the thing which, in the question, you ask to be instructed to do. To become religious without this sort of doing, would be to be made religious without intelligence or will on your part. It would be to become religious as blindly and as mechanically as ice is dissolved into water by heat. There is no doctrine of the Bible which forbids to a man the *trying* to become religious, or denies to him ability in this respect. He can inquire how he is to become so, just as he can inquire how he is to find his way back to the road which leads to his home, when he has wandered from it. Rather, it may be said, every doctrine of the Bible assumes that a man will employ the powers which he possesses, as a rational being, in determining what it is to be religious, and what he must do in order to become so, precisely as he would in solving any other question of

interest or duty which might be proposed to him.

II.

It may seem like uttering a superfluous proposition to affirm a thing so simple as this, that if a man would possess religion he must *try* to acquire it. And yet, a great many considerations go to show that difficulties of some kind, of a serious character, must encompass this process of trying. Certain it is that vast numbers of persons who are convinced that they are without religion, and that they need to have it, do not try to gain it, even in the form of inquiring seriously what it is and how it may be acquired. Between these convictions and the practical effort to become religious, there is something which interposes itself as an obstacle so effectively that the transition from the one to the other is never made. It is the commonest thing in the world to find men who have lived to old age with the acknowledgments, "We are not religious," "We ought to be religious," on their lips, who still, with the natural limit of life almost in

sight, fail to give the slightest indication of a disposition to try actually to become religious. Surely the frequency of these cases of failure shows that this trying is not merely an indispensable step, but a critical one—one calling for attention, circumspection, and resoluteness of purpose. Your convictions on the subject of religion, however sound, will avail you nothing unless they issue in a positive and honest determination to enter practically upon the work of seeking religion. And as we have seen, from the very common experience of men, they do not easily pass over into such a determination. The difficulties which beset this movement are like those which environ the man who, in attempting to cross a swollen stream, has incautiously stepped into the quicksand. The conviction that he is in danger, and that he ought to escape from it, if not accompanied by a prompt and vigorous struggle, an actual trying to escape, will leave him to become more and more enveloped by the treacherous element, until escape becomes an impossibility. These difficulties deserve to be carefully looked at, and weighed, in order that

the urgency of the necessity for forming an immediate resolution in the matter of religion may be appreciated. They are such as these :

III.

First, this trying to be religious involves in it a turning of what may be called the drift of your internal life from one channel into another. It is a changing of the contents of the mind ; or a taking into the mind of a new set of thoughts, motives, and affections. It is the unsettling of a settled order of things. And such a process requires an effort which is generally inconvenient, and sometimes annoying. It is not easy to abandon the established and familiar ways in which you have been accustomed to walk, and take up a new path, and follow a new guide. It is not easy to become a different kind of man from what you have previously been. There seems to be a natural repugnance in the soul to the giving up of the tastes, the inclinations, the judgments, under which it has been wont to act. The conviction, "I ought to be something which I am

not," may urge you to alter these, but the force of habit, and a feeling of adjustment between yourself and them, will urge you to cling to them; and nothing but a strong and decided resolution can enable you to break loose from them. You must sever, by a violent wrench, the cord that binds you to your present self, if you would become the self you ought to be. Then,

Second, this change in your internal life must be followed by a corresponding change in your external life. The resolution to become a religious man is a resolution to act as a religious man. This will require in many respects, probably, a reorganization of your plan of acting. Some things which you have done must be left undone. Some things which you have not done must be done. Duty to God, which you have little regarded heretofore, must become a supreme factor in your schemes of conduct. Your relations to the world, to society, to business and pleasure, will be modified by it in various ways. A new class of occupations and studies, which may have been wholly neglected before—such as searching

the Scriptures, worship, attending upon the preaching of the gospel, associating and conferring with Christian friends, and secret prayer—will demand your attention, as a part of that doing or trying which is needed in order to the gaining of religion. Now, in putting yourself on to this new plane of action there will be no little difficulty. It certainly cannot be done without a distinct determination and an energetic effort. To one who has been a stranger to it, there will be, to say the least, an awkwardness about adopting it which will amount to a serious objection.

Third. In the next place, these changes can hardly escape the notice of the public, and particularly of the parties with whom you are identified in social intimacy. And this notice will not always be kindly. It may be so unsympathetic as to construe your assumption of your new character as a proof of weakness on your part, and as an offence to those from whom you differ. It may charge you with being a traitor to your old associations. Now, it is not an easy thing to take thus a position of singularity in a circle with which you have

previously been in entire harmony; to have the eyes which have always met yours with a cordial response look at you with an alienated gaze, or perhaps with a half-concealed pity or derision; to become a stranger in a scene where you have always been at home. You may not be literally ashamed of religion, but this rupture of old attachments and alliances, which the adoption of a religious life will require you to make, has a painfulness in it which is often extreme. And the prospect of the trial involved in it has stifled in many a man the sense of need and of duty, which were urging him to become religious. The effect of it will be the same in your case, unless you are prepared by a positive determination to go forward in the face of this general protest, and at the cost of this personal sacrifice, and make the effort to be religious.

Fourth. The claims of the interests of the present life will prove another formidable difficulty in the way of attending to those of religion. They are so near, so real, so pressing, that when thrown into the scale against your convictions in regard to these latter ones they

will be very apt to neutralize their weight. The thing seen has, in many respects, the advantage over the thing not seen, in addressing the mind. Nothing is more exacting than that hundred-handed despot called business. Nothing is more absorbing than the strife of competition, and the struggle for worldly wealth. The party involved in their complications is subject to a force like that of a rushing torrent. He knows no pause; he has no liberty. The farm, the merchandise, and the avocations of the household, plead so loudly for the precedence, that the rights of God, the wants of the soul, and the concerns of eternity, are perpetually thrown by them into the background. It seems almost like an impertinence to ask the panting, sweating laborer, gathering in the harvests which are to furnish himself and family with bread, to stop in the midst of his toil and consider the demands of religion. With something of indignation in his reply, he might say to you, "Not now, not now! Do you not see that I am preoccupied? Wait for a more convenient season." Certainly there is an entanglement here from which no man can

hope to extricate himself without an exercise of resolution which is almost desperate.

Fifth. Once more, it must not be overlooked that the proposition to assume a religious life is never made to the mind, probably, without a remonstrance springing up in certain quarters of that mind. The fact that a man has heretofore led an irreligious life is not due merely to circumstances. It is not a casual but a voluntary result. There have been affections, appetites, likings, which have determined his course in that direction. And these things are in him—parts of his nature—and are not to be eradicated in a moment, or by a word. They are certain depraved tastes, and vicious propensities, which are imbedded like the roots of a cancer in the soul; and which, however harmless and specious may be their form, have yet shown their malignant character by always keeping the soul from relishing and choosing a religious life. They are “the strong man” in actual possession of the house, and they will always protest against the adoption of any regimen in the house by which they are to be proscribed. It is, perhaps, never granted to

men, in this world, to say that their influence is entirely extinct. You may fancy they are suppressed or dislodged, but you will find them persistently reappearing and reasserting their power. Any purpose on your part, looking to a mode of life in which they are not to be indulged, in order to be successful must be strong enough to withstand their opposition. It must be the invader, stronger than "the strong man," capable of binding him and spoiling his goods. It must be a resolution so firm and uncompromising that the subject of it shall be prepared not only to "deny himself," but to "hate his own life" also, in his determination to follow Christ.

IV.

It will be evident, from these considerations, that an important work is to be done in connection with the admitted facts that you are not religious, and that you ought to be religious. You must, with all the energy you can throw into the effort, try to be religious. You must hesitate and temporize in the matter

no longer. You must cease to go around the subject of your duty in this respect, in these fruitless lucubrations. You must come to the point of a decision, and resolve, earnestly, solemnly, "By God's help I will, from this time onward, TRY to be religious." And one evidence of the sincerity with which this resolution is framed will be found in the readiness with which you enter upon the inquiry, What is it to be a religious man?

"For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Matt. 7 : 8.

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Luke 13 : 24.

"And ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."
Jer. 29 : 13.

CHAPTER III.

SOURCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF RELIGION.

IN saying of the lost traveller that he needs to regain the road that leads to his destination, we mean, of course, that he needs to find the right road. His inquiry, in its first stage, will concern itself with this question. A wrong road will only conduct him from one error into another. The true thing which the word religion expresses is what the inquirer in religion wants to secure; and the way which certainly leads to the acquisition of it is that which he wants to follow. He wants to take every step in the confidence that he is progressing in the right direction, and that, when the end is attained, it will perfectly meet all his needs and fulfill all his expectations. He wants to be assured that, as his life has been a mistake heretofore, it will be a mistake no longer. It will be my object in the present chapter to

offer such instruction to my reader on these points as may in some degree satisfy his wants.

I.

The term religion obviously denotes a definite form of life—definite in the sense that it can be distinguished from other forms of life by elements which it possesses which they do not, or by elements which they possess which it does not. The primary feature of this form of life is that it aims, in all the particulars of character and conduct into which it develops, TO PLEASE GOD. This definition of religion is as simple as language can make it, and yet is exact and complete. It will be a sufficient vindication of it to say that our Lord Jesus Christ, who certainly is a perfect exemplification of religion, affirms of himself and his form of life (John 8 : 29), “I do always those things that please him”—that is, God. Assuredly any other person who could truthfully say the same of himself and his form of life would be a perfectly religious person. And it is just because some men cannot say this of

themselves that they are called sinners; and because they know that they cannot say this of themselves that they are conscious that they are sinners.

II.

Now it is evident that a form of life which demonstrates itself by a result so special as this cannot be a thing so loose and vague as to be capable of being fitted in to every imaginable pattern. It cannot include any and every theory and notion which men may choose to invent, and to which they may give the name religion. It is not enough, as is often assumed, to entitle a man to the character of a religious man to say that he holds, and even honestly holds, a certain set of opinions on the subject of religion. Before this conclusion can be accepted, it must be shown that these opinions correspond with something which we call Truth. It is a great and may prove a fatal fallacy for a man to conclude that his mere belief of a thing makes that thing true; for then—every one can see—nothing would be true. The distinction between the true and the

false would be broken down entirely. For what would be true to one person would not be true to another who held a different belief; and what would be true to the same person at one time would not be true at another, when his opinions had undergone a change. Truth, let it be remembered, does not thus change shape with men's changing beliefs and opinions. It is not *made* by men's beliefs and opinions; it is something apart from and independent of them. The important question with every man, on all subjects, is, Are his beliefs and opinions in accordance with the truth? Religion, if it be anything worth considering by a rational mind, must have in it a body and a form of truth. Your notion or theory in regard to it may or may not be in accordance with this truth. The mere fact that you believe so and so signifies nothing, proves nothing. When some adequate authority tells you that your belief is in agreement with the truth, you may repose upon it as safe and valid. A fundamental lesson, therefore, for the inquirer to learn is that he is not himself authorized to decide what that true thing which he is seek-

ing under the name of religion is. He needs a guide, an arbiter, in this momentous problem—an oracle that cannot err—to assure him that he is right when he commits his interests for time and eternity to his beliefs and opinions.

III.

This guide or arbiter is not to be found in any fellow man. He can but give you his beliefs and opinions, and these are no more authoritative than your own. He may be wiser than you are; his reasonings and speculations may be entitled to more credit than yours; but they are not infallible—they do not make truth—they cannot with absolute certainty decide for you what religion is.

The same objection lies against the judgments of men in their associated capacities. Public opinion, the sentiment of an age, current beliefs and notions, cannot be taken as indices of what is the truth of religion; for communities are but multiplications of individual men, and their theories and systems are but the aggregate of those of individual men.

What everybody does is not thereby proved to be right, nor is what everybody says or thinks thereby proved to be true. Infallibility can no more be predicated of everybody than of anybody; and the voice of the people may as easily lead you astray as the utterances of your own or your neighbor's mind.

IV.

Nor is it enough to say that what we call nature throws all the light which is needed on this supreme problem of religion; for, in the first place, you have no assurance in nature, nor from any other quarter, that in the revelations of truth which are contained in nature you are provided with *all* that is needed in order to put you in possession of the true religion. Certain it is that those portions of the race who have been left exclusively to the teachings of nature have uniformly failed to attain to such a conception of religion as would satisfy a truly rational mind, and in their practice have failed still more signally to exemplify a form of life which, in all its particulars, could

be said to please God. What intelligent inquirer could be content to accept the so-called religious beliefs and customs which have prevailed among the purest of the heathen populations as the true religion?

Then, in the next place, it must be remembered that nature, whatever its contents may be, is a volume which can only speak *as man interprets it*. It is dumb or vocal as he makes it; and, speaking through the human medium, must it not share in the objections which lie against that medium? If he is untrustworthy, must not the reports he brings us of nature's oracles be received with suspicion? Man, we know, may be a partial, an interested, a prejudiced witness as to what nature teaches; he may fail to notice important portions of its testimony, and he may even pervert that which is given him to communicate. Obviously, while man is thus to be the judge of the kind of religion which nature reveals, nothing more authoritative than the inferences and speculations of man can be gained from those revelations.

These considerations prepare us for the con-

clusion that, if the right conception of religion is that of a form of life which aims, in all its particulars of character and conduct, to please God, then God is the only person who knows adequately how he is to be pleased, and who can tell us infallibly how we are to please him. In other words, we need a revelation from God himself to teach us what religion is, and to acquaint us with the methods and terms by which it is to be possessed.

V.

Such a revelation the Bible professes to give us; that is, it professes to be the word of God, and its contents bear precisely upon these points—the things in man with which God is pleased, and the manner in which these things are to be rendered and performed by man. Nobody can study the Bible with an ingenuous mind without finding every question he needs to ask on these points answered; that is, he will find what he needs to know in order to be religious. The fact that the Bible does teach religion is demonstrated by another familiar

fact—that the men who possess the Bible, and make a fair use of it, *do* invariably learn religion. The tree is known by its fruits. Beyond all contradiction, the nations which have applied to the Bible for their religious notions and customs have, as a matter of history, exhibited a form of life in which the conception of God is more rational, the idea of morality is purer, and the type of civilization is more advanced, than has ever been the case with nations who have not had access to the Bible. Amongst individuals, the man who completely exemplifies the form of life which the Bible enjoins—who shows us, in fact, the kind of person which it portrays in its ideal of man—will infallibly be a religious man,—and a religious man in a truer sense and a higher degree than is witnessed in the case of the followers of any other teacher or the votaries of any other system of religion. Now the guide who invariably conducts those who commit themselves to his charge to the point they desire to reach is trustworthy, not merely in his capacity as guide, but *generally*. Certainly it would be right to receive from him testimony

as to the source from which he had derived the knowledge which he possesses. And if this knowledge is seen to be of a kind which transcends what natural genius and research have ever been able to discover (as is the case with the religion taught by the Bible), there is nothing unreasonable in the testimony of such a guide if he should affirm that he had obtained his knowledge from a supernatural source. Somehow—it is conceded by all unprejudiced judges—religion has been deposited in the Bible. I say religion, because the moment the idea of religion contained in the Bible is presented, all other ideas bearing that name are seen to be so inferior to it that they are rejected by any sane mind as fancies and errors. Now, how did this knowledge get into the Bible? or, in other words, where did the Bible come from? Its own testimony is that it came from God, “who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,” and “hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb. 1 : 1, 2). Does not this explanation correspond, with singular aptitude, with the

phenomenon? The fact that there is such a book in the world as the Bible is, of course, quite beyond the field of controversy. It is here in the world, as the sun is yonder in the heavens. The only point involved in controversy is, what is the Bible? It claims to be a revelation of the true religion; and as far as men allow themselves to come under its authority and sway, there is seen to be developed in them a form of life which must be pronounced—if there be such a thing—a truly religious one. And doing thus—what no product of the merely natural intellect of man has ever done—shall the Bible be discredited when it professes to be a supernatural product—the word of God, given through men to men, for the purpose of teaching men religion?

VI.

From this source and from this alone, therefore, the inquirer needs to obtain his beliefs and his modes of practice in his endeavor to possess himself of the true religion. In making use of it he will naturally draw from each

part of it the truth which that part reveals. And the contents of one part will be employed to explain the contents of another part; for the voices of the Bible are many, though the mind they report is always one and the same—the mind of God. . As voice follows voice, each adding something to what had been revealed before, the series will be found to be a progress; the field of light will become wider and wider, and the body of truth take on more and more of definiteness and fullness. And when, at the close of the series of voices, the speaker becomes the Son of God, the series evidently can rise no higher; and the testimony of this divine voice must be the light in which the contents of the whole Bible are to be surveyed and interpreted. To the truth contained in the revelation of Christ, and of those whom Christ has commissioned and qualified to be his reporters, all other and previous parts of revelation must point, and in this, as their climax and consummation, they must terminate. The religion taught in the Gospel, therefore, is the last and complete edition of the religion taught in the Bible; and the arbiter and guide

to whom the inquirer is obliged to go in order to be assured of the truth is the Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Revealer,—giving us in his person, his teachings, and his works, the final form of the religion which God requires and with which he promises to be pleased.

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world : he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” John 8 : 12.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Cor. 4 : 6.

“No man knoweth who the Son is but the Father ; and who the Father is but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.” Luke 10 : 22.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONNECTION OF CHRIST WITH RELIGION.

You cannot proceed far in the study of religion, as the Gospel presents it, without discovering that the form in which it is enjoined upon the acceptance of men is, from some cause, and in some way, connected with the person and work of Christ. In becoming religious you are required, not to subscribe to a formal system of doctrine, nor comply with a ritual of devotion, nor practice a schedule of moral duties, but to place yourself in a direct relation to Christ. The apostles, in preaching the gospel, always preach Christ. Believers, in receiving the gospel, are always said to receive Christ—to know Christ. We find the Lord habitually using such expressions as these: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.” John 6 : 51. “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

John 14 : 6. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11 : 28. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine ; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without me ye can do nothing." John 15 : 4, 5. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." John 6 : 29.

Now, such language is very remarkable. It is peculiar to the Gospel. The founders of other schools of theology, or philosophy, do not use it. They do not so identify their systems with themselves, or so make the vitality of their systems to hinge upon themselves. There is no parallel to the position which Christ occupies in the scheme of religion propounded in the Gospel. He is the centre, he is the soul of that scheme ; and to be in the scheme a man must be able to say he is *in Christ*. The aspect which such a fact puts upon the question, What is religion ? must be important, and deserves the inquirer's serious consideration.

I.

If it be the fact, as the Gospel undeniably teaches, that religion in man has its foundation and source in a relation to Christ, then it is clear, first, that man cannot, naturally, or in himself, apart from Christ, possess religion. Religion cannot be an original endowment or attribute of man. And secondly, it is equally clear that it cannot be acquired by his own independent agency. When you admit, "I am religious only in virtue of the fact that Christ has made me so," you affirm that, as nature made you, you are not religious; and that there is no ability in yourself to make you religious. What Christ gives, the recipient certainly could not have possessed before. Otherwise, the gift would be a mere superfluity. What Christ gives, with effort and cost on his part, certainly could not have been acquired by the recipient, by the easier and simpler method of using his own faculties. Otherwise, the interposition of Christ would be a needless, not to say an awkward, procedure. The whole office assigned to Christ in the Gospel, the whole

work ascribed to him there, imply these two facts: first, that men are not originally—that is, as nature made them—endowed with the attribute of religion; and second, that they cannot, by any ability of their own, endow themselves with it. If these facts are denied his mission becomes an enigma. He must have regarded men as the subjects of a need and a disability, such as are involved in these facts, or his language is stripped of all meaning, and his ministry of all value or aim. This is what he affirmed, and could not have affirmed more emphatically, when he declares (Luke 19 : 10), “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” For some reason, there must have lain in man’s condition a defect and an impotence, in regard to religion, which, without the intervention of Christ, would have been irremediable.

II.

The defect and the impotence here implied have their realization, according to the Bible, in the fact of SIN. This is the ground of that

need and that distress which Christ proposes to relieve. In offering his services to men, he addresses them specifically in the character of sinners. "I came," he says (Luke 5 : 32), "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." This call is repeated in all the expositions of the Gospel given in the writings of the apostles. Men are addressed universally, in the New Testament, as sinners. Christ, and those who reported his testimony after him, found no class of persons who could be exempted from the charge of sin, and from the call to repentance. Of course, when a man admits that the term sinner describes his character, he admits that he is not religious. For sin, as the Bible regards it, is such a contrariety in man to God as makes it impossible for the form of life in which it resides to be pleasing to God. Hence, such a form of life cannot be religious. It is something to be repented of, to be condemned and deplored. The connection of Christ with religion appears, therefore, first in this, that he teaches men that they are destitute of religion. But sin, really, is an element in the sinner himself. It is a depraved

disposition or habitude, an evil germ or principle lodged in his nature. It is the corrupt tree, out of which the corrupt fruit—the act of transgression—issues. Sin, says the Bible, is the offspring of “lust” (Jas. 1 : 15), and lust is a part of the man himself. Hence, the sinner is not only unrighteous, but he is without capacity to make himself righteous. He must be made righteous by an agent, different from and stronger than himself. He must be saved *from himself*, and therefore not *by himself*. Hence, the connection of Christ with religion appears, secondly, in this, that he teaches men that they cannot make themselves religious.

Now, for this condition of want and inability, involved in the fact of any man’s being a sinner, Christ somehow undertakes to make provision. What the sinner needs to be, and what he cannot make himself, Christ, in some way, proposes to make him. And he does this so directly and thoroughly that the distinctive title given to him in the Bible is, the Saviour of men. His special function, as announced in Matt. 1 : 21, is, “to save his people from their sins.” This goes immeasurably beyond that of

a counsellor or monitor, urging men to throw off their apathy, and by an exertion of their own powers make themselves pleasing to God. It teaches that without an exertion of the power of Christ on their behalf they cannot be saved from sin, or made religious; and that if they ever become religious the result will be due to the agency of Christ, and if they do not avail themselves of this agency they never will become religious. The connection of Christ with religion is therefore a vital one.

III.

This agency of Christ in the matter of religion is fitly likened by himself to that which the physician exercises in behalf of his patient. "They that be whole," he says (Matt. 9 : 12), "need not a physician, but they that are sick." Neither, it may be added, do the sick *who can heal themselves* need a physician. The man who is spiritually whole—that is, truly religious—has no need of such services as Christ renders. Nor has the man who, being spiritually disordered or chargeable with sin, can, by

his own skill, purge away his disorder, and restore himself to wholeness. If Christ's services are indispensable, therefore, as he represents them, in order to the making of any man truly religious, it must be because men naturally and universally are without religion, and are unable, by the exercise of their own power, to gain it.

This doctrine of the necessity of a resort to, and a dependence upon the services of, Christ, in the endeavor to become religious, is one which is strangely overlooked—even by readers of the Bible. It is necessary therefore that I should notice it thus particularly, and enforce it upon the consideration of my reader. Religion, in your case, is misapprehended so long as you think of it as a “becoming good,” or a “changing your ways,” or a “making a new departure” in your manner of life. You are leaving no place for Christ in the procedure. You are the sick man undertaking to heal himself, and who needs no physician. The first step to be taken by the inquirer—let me emphasize the declaration—towards the attainment of religion is to apprehend his need of

Christ, as the medium through whom he is to be made religious. This implies an apprehension of the facts that he is a sinner—made such, both by the “enmity of his mind” toward God, and by the outworking of that enmity in practical wrong-doing; and that he is unable to make himself righteous. He is the patient needing the physician; not the whole man, nor the sick man capable of making himself whole. Paradoxical as it may sound, religion, in the case of a race of sinners, has its beginning in the conviction and sense of a *lack of religion*. In other words, the initial stage of it consists in such a discovery of a diseased condition of the soul as leads the subject of it to depend upon and to seek the services of Christ, as the only physician adequate to save him. Christ is the connecting medium between the diseased soul and health—between the sinner and religion. In response to the appeal of the honest patient, it is his prerogative to bestow all the gifts and establish all the conditions which are necessary in order to deliver the sinner from condemnation, to reconcile him to God, and to confer

upon him a new nature, by virtue of which he shall be able, in his form of life, to please God or be truly religious.

“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1 : 12, 13.

CHAPTER V.

REPENTANCE AS CONNECTED WITH RELIGION.

CONSISTENTLY with his doctrine that all men are sinners, we find that Christ, in revealing the true religion, begins his work by addressing to men, without distinction, a call to repentance. You cannot, in fact, make, in sincerity, the two confessions, "I am not religious," "I ought to be religious," without laying a ground for an obligation to repent; for you admit that your present position is one to be condemned, and one which ought to be reversed, which is equivalent to saying it is one which calls for repentance. The connection of repentance with religion is shown clearly in the two forms of religion presented to our notice in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18 : 9). The Pharisee does not in his address to God say one word that expresses repentance. He did not know that he had anything to repent of. He sup-

posed he was in the most thorough sense a religious man. His thinking so, however, did not make him so. The Publican, who entered the temple at the same time, evinces a very different estimate of himself. His words, his attitude, his demeanor, indicate nothing but repentance; and, strange to say—that is, strange from such a point of view as the Pharisee occupied—“this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” The religion so complacently assumed by the Pharisee was not accepted of God. The humility, the self-depreciation and contrition of the Publican were accepted of him, as the first breathing, the first pulsation, of a religious soul. His repentance, his cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” was the confession that hitherto his form of life had not been such as to please God, and that, as such, it no longer pleased himself; in other words, it had been pervaded by a sinful disposition or spirit, to which it had been giving expression in its whole development. Of this sin the Publican repented, and on account of this he made his appeal to God for mercy. Now in the discovery, the

sense, and the confession of this fact religion has its starting-point, according to the Gospel. That connection with Christ which is indispensable to religion commences here. The sick not only need a physician, but *feel* that they do. Men must awake to a conviction that they are not religious—that their form of life has not pleased God, and that they are therefore sinners—before they can admit any need of a physician, a Christ. A profound change of mind must take place in this respect; and this change of mind is the scriptural repentance. The question before us in this chapter is, What does it include?

I.

It is an affirming by a man to himself that he is a sinner. What the Publican affirmed to God in his prayer he had first *affirmed to himself*. What a man affirms to himself he declares to be true. He no longer denies it; he no longer conceals or suppresses it; he no longer shuts his eyes to it. He says plainly and distinctly, “this thing is so.” There is

more than words in his utterance. It is an easy and a common thing for men to *say*. "We are sinners." They can say this—and often do say it, even when they are making their so-called confessions in public worship—so as *only to say* it. The true penitent not only says it, but says it as a truth—understands and means what he says. The heart, the mind, the conscience, all express themselves in his confession. There is no formality, no levity, in his utterance; no equivocation, no duplicity, no disposition to excuse or palliate, in the charge which he brings against himself. In perfect sincerity and in good faith he affirms to himself and of himself, "I am a sinner."

II.

It is an affirmation made with a clear and serious impression of its tremendous import. To be a sinner means more than to have committed an occasional sinful act; it is to have pursued a form of life which as a whole—as the sum of all its particulars of character and conduct—has not pleased God. Here is an

awful revelation made to the mind. It implies of the party concerned, first that his form of life is in itself wrong, since it is at variance with the highest model of rectitude; and second, that it is the object of the disapprobation of the highest of all beings. The sinner, as such, is radically diverse from God, and is necessarily under the judicial condemnation of God. Such a condition, when intelligently looked at, is terrible. The soul is so constituted that it feels that it can always, when under trial, make its last appeal to God; and it is its privilege, as often as it finds itself arraigned before other tribunals, to make this appeal. And in the exercise of this privilege a man conscious of innocence can suffer, if need be, with the heroism of martyrdom. But when this privilege is lost; when it is God himself who proves you wrong and proclaims you wrong; when the Being to whom you ought to be able to appeal when the charge of wrong-being and wrong-doing is brought against you fails you and turns against you, both as witness and judge,—then the forlornness, the bankruptcy of the soul becomes com-

plete. The penitent mind discerns this fearful predicament, and feels itself to be as truly without support or resource as Peter did when he found himself sinking in the waters of the Sea of Galilee. The word "lost" is the familiar one employed in the Scriptures to depict this state of the sinful soul; and the soul sometimes, under a sense of sin, realizes all the fitness and force of the term. To be a sinner is to have "lost" God, to have forfeited his favor, to have fallen under his disapprobation, and to lie exposed to all the expressions of his disapprobation which he in his justice may feel constrained to inflict; and this is the sense in which the Bible pronounces the sinner to be a "lost" man. No wonder the vision of his lost estate has in some instances driven the subject of the conviction to paroxysms of distress which have seemed to have in them the very tortures of the damned. Such extremities of anguish, in God's mercy, are not suffered, in ordinary experience, to overtake the convicted sinner. Nature, perhaps, could not sustain them; and therefore it is not right to teach that there can be no genuine re-

pentance without them. But it is still true that where genuine repentance exists there will be in the mind of the penitent, along with the conviction of the fact of sin, a solemn apprehension of the import of that fact, as something involving the loss of God, and, as a consequence, the loss of the soul itself.

III.

Repentance, again, is such a change of mind in regard to sin as disposes the mind to take sides with God against it, and to condemn it as it once approved and loved it. It adjudges it to be as wrong as God says it is. It weighs it, so to speak, in his scales. It is possible for you to make the confession, "I am a sinner," only out of a regard to the law, which annexes, authoritatively, the quality of sinfulness to certain of your acts, or courses of acts. But this is really only acknowledging a logical conclusion. You are affirming no change of mind in yourself in regard to sin. You do not condemn sin, you only admit that you have *broken the law*, in so far as you have

indulged in it. You show clearly that were there no law to prohibit it you would be as ready to indulge in sin as ever. And so the person who along with the confession, "I am a sinner," brings forward habitually some excuse or palliation, with which to ward off the force of the confession, is proving that it is the *form*, not the *substance*, of sin he is confessing. He is not condemning sin, but trying, by special pleading, to show that what is supposed to be sin is not sin. Sin in such cases is not seen to be a thing which forces the subject of it to call for mercy at the hands of God, as the Publican saw it to be. Such a call can come only from a mind which condemns sin in the sense in which God condemns it. When, back of the letter of the law, your mind has so entered into the mind of God that it has adjudged sin to be wrong in itself, and when, aside from all apologetic and mollifying considerations, it has recognized sin in its absolute deformity and ill-desert, you are prepared—you will be forced—to make your resort to mercy. If there is no mercy for you, your case is remediless. Repentance, therefore, is such a

consciousness of sin as a fact, and such a judgment of it as a fact, which is in its nature wrong and ill-deserving, as constrains a man to feel that his only resource, in the unhappy condition in which he is involved by it, is in the mercy of God.

IV.

Very evidently, then, in the next place, repentance must have in it something which can be called a sorrow for sin. The mind which has undergone such changes in regard to sin, as we have already noted, cannot stop with these. It must experience another change: which is one from indifference, insensibility, or complacency, to disquietude, distress, and grief. Sorrow is the pain which we feel over something which we wish had not happened or had not been done. When sin is seen to be such a thing sorrow will follow naturally. And the sorrow felt in such a case, if it be a part of genuine repentance, will be what the Bible says it ought to be: a sorrow *towards God* (2 Cor. 7 : 10). In this respect it is distinguished from that feeling of shame which

follows upon an act by which we find ourselves lowered in our own estimation, or in that of our neighbors; or from that remorse by which we are visited when we have by unkindness or injustice inflicted injury upon a human friend. Such sorrow is not sorrow for sin; for it is not a sense of sin which has produced it. The Bible calls it the "sorrow of the world." It is merely natural; growing out of our worldly relations, and bearing only upon our worldly condition; and has in it nothing of the quality of religion. Sorrow for sin is necessarily a sorrow towards God; for sin is wrong-doing towards God. It terminates upon him. No matter what intermediate objects it may touch and wound, its ultimate mark is God; and he is the party ultimately and chiefly aggrieved by it. The sense of it is simply the reflection, and the painfulness of the reflection, that, in his form of life, the man has been displeasing or offending God. This sorrow would be as positive and as sincere, if it could be shown that no being in the world had been injured by the sin he deplores. So David sorrowed when he said (Ps. 51 : 4),

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight;” meaning not that others had not been wronged by his evil-doing, but that, great as his wickedness in regard to them had been, in its bearing upon God it had been so immeasurably greater that this view of it overshadowed and obliterated, as it were, all its other aspects. The fact that sin consists very largely in that disposition of the soul by which it consents and chooses to adopt a form of life which is displeasing to God requires obviously that the sorrow with which it is contemplated should have respect mainly to God. For this disposition is a secret in the soul—a disaffection determining the relation of the soul to God—which may be known only to the soul and God. It may express itself in no wrongful acts towards the world. It may, indeed, be consistent with entire courtesy and fair-dealing towards society. And yet, it is sin: the leaven of corruption, which makes the whole form of life displeasing to God, and which is developing itself visibly in all acts of overt transgression. Repentance takes cognizance of this sin, and sorrows over

it; and sorrows over it, directly and necessarily, to God.

It may be well to add, concerning this feature of repentance, that while it is sorrow, genuine and unfeigned,—while it is represented in Scripture by the figure of a “broken and contrite heart,”—it is not necessarily such a sorrow as expresses itself by violent outward demonstrations. It is not boisterous nor ostentatious. It does not indulge in frantic outcries, nor array itself in sackcloth, nor publish itself by undergoing forms of penance or seasons of fasting and mortification. It is too deep, too serious, to expend itself in emotional effervescence. It is too closely concerned with God to wish to report itself to man. It is a sorrow of the heart, and of the closet. It may tell itself to some sympathetic Christian ear; but, in the nature of it, it is a matter between the soul and God; and it shrinks from an exhibition on a platform, or a proclamation on the streets.

And still farther, on this point, it ought to be noticed that the sorrow for sin which is included in repentance is in no way coupled with

complaints against God. In its impenitent days, the soul may often have thought of God as a hard master. Its sorrow, if any it felt, was at the rigor of his commands—at the sharpness with which his will crossed its will. There is nothing of this impatience, this exasperation, now. The sorrow is not that God's law has been so strict, but that it has been so constantly violated; not that obedience to it has been made so irksome, but that obedience to it has been so uniformly withheld. God is vindicated—if I may use such an expression—by this sorrow, as when David says (Ps. 51 : 4), “that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” Hence there is a tenderness, a softness, in it. It shows a change of mind in the sense of a turning of the disposition of the heart to God. This is an awakening of the filial spirit in the soul; the first quickening of a new nature; the first yielding of a rebellious will to the attraction of God. There is pain in such a sorrow; but it is a pain which forebodes healing and life—not death.

V.

It is a mark of true repentance that it brings forth, practically, fruit which is meet for it, or which is congruous to the convictions included in it. Such views of sin as have already been indicated must be followed by an abandonment of it. The change of mind, designated by the term repentance, appears in the new vigilance and activity imparted to the conscience. The sin once tolerated and caressed will be tolerated and caressed no more. Hard as the struggle may be, the familiar ways of iniquity will be given up. What was pleasure once is seen to be sin now, and can be pleasure no longer. The associations of friendship which are found to be lures into transgression will be broken asunder. Rebuke and ridicule will be endured rather than consent to touch, or taste, or handle "the unclean thing." Sincerity attests itself by its willingness to count and bear the cost of consistency. There is no repentance without sincerity; and sincerity in repentance means the cutting off the right hand, and the plucking out the right eye, where these cause us to offend.

It is not meant that this amendment will or can be made completely at once. The power of habit cannot be extinguished at a blow. The fascination of long-cherished but illicit things will hang around those things, and will appeal to the heart once enslaved by them, as the tones and looks of an old friend do. But the sin to which these things point will reveal itself beyond them to the enlightened conscience, and strip them of their mask, and rouse the determination to resist them. With more or less success actually, and with the persistent effort at entire success, the penitent man will be found verifying the prophet's injunction (Isa. 55 : 7), "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

VI.

Repentance, it may be remarked once more, implies such a dissatisfaction with the state in which the subject finds himself as creates a desire for a change in that state. "Reconcil-

iation with God" is the form under which the Bible presents the object of this desire. This reconciliation, it is obvious, cannot be effected by any change or reversal of the fact of the sinner's sinfulness. That fact belongs to the immutable past. It belongs to the existence of the author of it, is a part of his life, and can cease to be only when he ceases to be. The confession, "I have sinned," therefore, is a confession of impotency, so far as the power of the person making it, to undo the fact which he confesses, is concerned. St. Paul's exclamation (Rom. 7 : 24), "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" expresses this impotency in his own case. The sinner, with a life, a history, dead to God hanging to him, is tied, according to the apostle's terrible figure, to a corpse; from which he can no more extricate himself than he can separate his being from itself. Nor does the change of mind, in regard to the fact of his sinfulness, entertained by him at the present produce any change in that fact. *Repentance does not unmake sin.* The penitent feeling of to-day only makes the history, the

life, of to-day ; and however right it may be, it cannot go back of the period which it covers, and make the wrong of yesterday right. Nor can the desire on the part of the sinner to have his sin extinguished, put God under an obligation to extinguish it ; for this would be putting law, and the administration of it, into the sinner's hands instead of God's. What force would there be in the commands of God, if the power to convert disobedience into obedience, —in other words, to make sin to cease to be sin,—were lodged with the sinner, and his mere *desire* to be delivered from it could oblige God to grant him this deliverance ? If St. Paul's cry could thus coerce God to relieve him of the burden with which he was oppressed, what propriety would there be in his exclamation, "O wretched man that I am" ? Clearly, then, the desire for a change of condition which belongs to repentance must recognize and address itself in the profoundest spirit of humility to the free and sovereign mercy of God. But one person can answer this desire, and that is God. The mere desire can lay him under no obligation to answer it. The prodigal (Luke

15 : 17) can find relief nowhere except in the Father's house ; but goes there, with the admission, "I am not worthy to be called thy son," upon his lips from the start ; and in this humble, self-depreciating frame, casts his hope entirely upon the mercy which he may find in the Father's breast. Hence it is of the essence of repentance to make its resort, directly and simply, to the mercy of God.

VII.

The necessity which requires the soul to do this does not act, however, as mere compulsion, driving its victim onward without giving it an intimation of the result. For the encouragement of the returning sinner the Bible has made repeated and emphatic revelations of the fact that there is mercy with God. Not in hopelessness, therefore, though in the utter renunciation of all personal claims, the penitent carries his desire for relief to the mercy of God. And does so, as a consequence, in that spirit of pure dependence and ingenuous trust which makes no terms on his part, but leaves him

ready and thankful to accept any terms which God may choose to annex to the bestowal of his mercy. Like the Publican, his appeal terminates with the entreaty, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and surrenders to God, implicitly, the right to prescribe the method and form in which his mercy shall be granted.

VIII.

One subject more deserves notice in this connection—the relation of prayer to repentance. We have seen (1) that religion, according to the Bible, which is our only infallible guide in the matter, begins with a conviction and acknowledgment that the inquirer is without religion. (2) That this conviction and acknowledgment simply mean that the inquirer is a sinner,—one whose form of life has not been pleasing to God. (3) That a state of sinfulness is one which involves the loss of God, and consequently the loss of the soul. (4) That repentance consists in an apprehension of sin, and of what it involves, with the emotions, judgments, and desires which natur-

ally flow therefrom. (5) That among these incidents of repentance are the changes of mind which appear in the condemnation of sin; in sorrow on account of it; in the revolt and struggle of the will against it; in the desire for deliverance from the condition in which it has placed the subject of it; and in the resort to the mercy of God, as the only source of deliverance from it. Now, although prayer is not essentially a part of repentance, it is plain that the use of prayer is implied in all that has been represented as belonging to it. The man who seriously is asking the question, What is it to be religious? has already recognized in God such a being as can be and must be *prayed to*. Men who deny the propriety or utility of prayer have no conception of religion, and no desire to be religious. The inquirer who has learned that he is a sinner, and as such without religion, will find himself in a position which makes prayer a necessity. His wish, "O that I were religious!" will take the form of prayer. His view of his lack of religion will drive him to God as the only source of relief; and his sense of his guilt, unworthi-

ness, and helplessness, will extort from him the cry, "Be merciful to me, O God!" Religion and prayer are, therefore, inseparable things—as much so as life and respiration. If religion begins with repentance, repentance begins, continues, and ends with prayer. It needs to be impressed upon the mind of the inquirer in religion, therefore, as an indispensable condition of success in his great effort, that from the outset all that he needs to know, to feel, and to become, he should ask for from God, in prayer.

"To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Isa. 66 : 2.

"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth." Ps. 145 : 18.

CHAPTER VI.

FAITH IN CHRIST AS CONNECTED WITH RELIGION.

ASSUMING that men are, what the Bible says they are, sinners, it is evident, as has been already stated : (1) that an indispensable step in the way of their acquiring religion is to learn their lack of it ; and (2) that an apprehension and sense of this lack will manifest itself by that state of mind which we call repentance. A genuine desire to be religious will express itself by repentance, as regularly as the desire of a starving man for life and health would express itself by a cry for food. And repentance, we have seen, in its last development, leads the sinner to apply for relief from his condition to the simple mercy of God, without presuming to question or object to any terms which God may choose to annex to the bestowal of his mercy.

Now the terms upon which, according to the Bible, God has been pleased to offer his mercy

to sinful men, are comprised in the fact alluded to in a previous chapter, that the bestowal of this mercy is connected with, or made to depend upon, Christ. Throughout the Gospel Christ is represented as standing between the sinner and God, to whom the sinner needs to be (and if penitent desires to be) reconciled. And it is through him that that reconciliation is said to be effected. Through Christ, or on account of Christ, or for the sake of Christ, mercy is said, over and over again in the Scriptures, to be bestowed by God upon the sinner. If, therefore, in repentance the object regarded and sought by the soul is mercy, the soul is taught that along with its repentance it must associate a dependence upon or trust in Christ as the medium through which mercy must be derived. It is upon these terms—of coupling the hope of reconciliation to God with Christ; of finding the ground for an expectation of God's mercy in Christ; of acknowledging Christ in his office of Saviour, Redeemer, Peace-maker between God and man; and of exercising simple confidence in, and reliance upon, the efficacy of this office of Christ—that

God is pleased to offer to sinners the grace or favor which delivers them from their condition of sinfulness, and confers upon them the blessings of forgiveness and salvation. The act of complying with these terms is called, in the Bible, Faith or believing. Repentance, as we have seen, leads up to it, or comprehends it as its issue. And faith presupposes repentance, as repentance brings into existence the desire or sense of need to which faith presents its appropriate object. The soul, under the promptings of repentance, cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner." God in the Gospel presents Christ to the soul, and says in response to its cry, "Here is the depository of my mercy! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16 : 31). Religion, then, which commences in that change of mind which consists in a turning away from sin to God, and an application to God for his mercy, is further developed in that determination of the mind to Christ which receives him as the ground upon which, and the channel through which, that mercy is bestowed. The religious man, therefore, is not only a penitent but a

believer in Christ. The nature of that faith, which constitutes the second stage of that form of life which the Bible denominates religion, will now occupy our attention.

I.

Obviously, the object of this faith is Christ. It is distinguished by its object more than by anything specially characterizing it as a mental exercise. Faith, in order to be a part of religion, must be a faith which gives credit and reality to Christ. No matter what a man believes, or depends upon under the name of belief, unless he believes in Christ his faith has no relation whatever to religion. And Christ is a person, an agent, an efficacious factor, doing something, and an indispensable something, for men, in the great matter of their reconciliation to God. He is, therefore, in the aspect under which faith regards him, something very different from a mere historical character. To say simply, "I believe that Jesus Christ lived," means nothing, so far as religion is concerned. To give this profession

a religious character you must say, "I believe that Jesus Christ lived, and still lives, for the purpose of reconciling sinful men to God; and as such an agent, I rely upon his agency as the means by which my reconciliation to God is to be effected." Every careful reader of the New Testament must have noticed that the prominent figure in it is Christ, and that the religion which it teaches attaches itself to and centres upon his person. What the disciple of Plato believes and confides in is the system of doctrine taught by Plato. The system could be embraced and the benefit of it enjoyed without a knowledge even of the name of the author. He is not personally an element in it, and in no sense is its efficiency due to him personally. Faith in the man Plato is not necessary to make a Platonist. How different is the position in which Christ stands to his disciples! The sum of his doctrines—the focus upon which they all converge—is himself. Do you ask, "What is the way by which I may be led to the Father? What is the truth by which I can be made to know the Father? What is the life by which I may be introduced into a

oneness of nature with the Father?" The reply comes from Christ himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." St. Paul identifies all the elements of religion with the mere profession of Christ, when he says (1 Cor. 1 : 30) he "is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" and the religion of the gospel, as he was accustomed to preach it, was contained in the one theme of "Christ crucified." It is in harmony with this peculiarity of the Bible that the faith which it requires is a faith which rests upon Christ, and that the religion which it teaches is the effect not of the didactic force of a body of doctrine, but of a potency which is derived directly from Christ. To the inquirer's question, "Upon what am I to depend in order to be reconciled to God?" the Bible answers, "only Christ."

II.

The faith which has Christ for its object of course must contemplate him in a definite character; and that character must furnish an ad-

equate ground for the confidence reposed in him. The point proposed in this great problem of religion, let it be remembered, is to secure such an interest in the mercy of God as shall deliver the soul from a condition of sinfulness, and bring it into a state of favor with God. It belongs to God, as we have seen, to propound the terms upon which his mercy shall be bestowed. These terms are comprehended in the Bible, in the one requirement—"Believe in Christ." He who does this, the promise says, "shall be saved." Christ then must bear a character which furnishes an adequate ground for this supreme act of confidence. Faith apprehends in him this character, and sees in it this ground. In doing this :

(1) It receives Christ as one who *comes from God* ; or, as that phrase means, as one who comes with the authority, under the appointment, and by the mission of God. Thus Christ always speaks of himself as one who had been "sent." In his last prayer, speaking of his disciples, he says (John 17 : 7), "They have known surely that *I came out from thee* ; and they have believed that *thou didst send me*."

Similarly, to the people in Capernaum, he says (John 6 : 38), "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him *that sent me.*"

(2) In this "sending," Christ is to be regarded as co-operating himself. Hence, he speaks of his "coming" as familiarly as of his being "sent." His office was, therefore, not imposed upon him, but voluntarily assumed. He willed himself to do the work which the Father had given him to do. This fact marks a distinction between him and the prophets, who were "sent" from time to time by God to deliver his messages to his people. No prophet could have said of himself, "I came," in the sense in which Christ was accustomed to make that assertion. It would have invalidated his right to act as a prophet if he had claimed to act in such a voluntary capacity. Christ "came," therefore, by his own consent; came to do the will of God, but, as the Psalmist declares (Ps. 40 : 3), came with the words, "I delight to do thy will, O my God," upon his lips.

(3) Faith discerns in Christ, therefore, one

who *lived* before he was "sent,"—before his work on earth was assumed. He "came" into the world *from the Father*, that, as his agent, he might fulfill the conditions upon which mercy might be offered to sinful men. Now, such unity of mind, of will, of purpose and act, between Christ and God, requires us to admit the testimony of the Bible, that the pre-existence of Christ was an eternal and a divine existence; that he was essentially the Son of God; and that, as such, he could say even on earth and in human tones, "I and my Father are one" (John 10 : 30). The fitness of such an agent, and the completeness of his endowments for the work assigned to him, will be recognized by the faith which truly believes in Christ.

(4) This Faith will admit further, that what Christ "came" to do, and what he was "sent" to do, he was actually engaged in doing in all his life-work on earth. The character which he bore personally, as a Saviour of men, impressed itself upon everything which he did. His business in the world was the saving of the world. His aim throughout his ministry was to bring men to God, or to reconcile them

to God by bringing them under the operation of his mercy and into the enjoyment of his favor. Hence, his teachings, his reproofs, his appeals, his warnings, his miracles, his precepts, and his ordinances, all bear upon this result. All are adapted to expose sin in men, to convince them of sin, to produce in them repentance for sin, and to excite such a sense of guilt and misery on account of sin, in their hearts, as may dispose them to seek from God the mercy which may deliver them.

(5) But what is to be believed concerning the life of Christ must be believed equally concerning his death, for it is clear that his dying is as much included in his mediatorial work as his living. His own testimony repeatedly affirms this. "The Son of man came" he says (Matt. 20 : 28), "not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to *give his life a ransom for many.*" And in John 10 : 15 he says, "I lay down my life for the sheep;" and to show that this sacrifice was free and voluntary, he adds, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself;" and still farther to show that it was included in the purpose of

the Father in sending him, he affirms emphatically, "Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." It is impossible, therefore, to evade the conclusion that the character which belongs to Christ, as the procurer of mercy for sinful men, must be, somehow, expressed and verified in the remarkable event of his death.

(6) The Scriptures accordingly affirm this, and explain the fact by such statements as these :—"Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15 : 3) ; "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3 : 18) ; "Now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2 : 13) ; and "Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9 : 26). It would seem that there could be but one interpretation put upon statements as plain as these ; but recognizing the possibility of an error, and in order, as it were, to prevent it, the Scriptures have supplied us with the key by which they are to be interpreted. They not only affirm that Christ's death was

endured for man's salvation, but teach us in what sense it was endured for this purpose. Thus St. John (1 John 4 : 10), speaking of it, calls it "a *propitiation* for our sins." "Herein is love," he says, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Now a propitiation is that which procures favor; and, generally, favor after it has been forfeited. A propitiation for sins must of course be designed to procure the favor of God for the sinner. Ordinarily, too, the word propitiation in the Bible involves the idea of a sacrifice of the thing which propitiates: as of the animals slain as sin offerings under the law of Moses. Christ's death propitiates because it was designed as a sacrifice to effect the reconciliation of the sinner to God. St. Paul, in Rom. 3 : 25, employs the same term in reference to the death of Christ—"whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." His idea clearly is that the blood or death of Christ procures the favor of God for all who, by faith, accept and rely upon it for that purpose. In the immediate context, v. 24, the

same apostle uses another significant term to define the sense in which Christ's death effects the sinner's salvation,—“Being justified freely,” he writes, “by his grace, through the *redemption* which is in Christ Jesus.” The proper meaning of “redemption” is deliverance procured by the payment of a ransom. The word is a common one in the New Testament, and is commonly used in this sense. St. Peter puts the meaning of it beyond all dispute when he says (1 Peter 1 : 18), “ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” To be redeemed to God is to be restored to his favor; and this is effected, according to the Bible, through the payment of “the precious blood of Christ,” as a “lamb” offered in sacrifice. Certainly then we may conclude that the character under which Christ is to be regarded by a believing and trusting soul must be prominently that of a Propitiation and a Redeemer.

(7) Faith, looking upon it in this light, finds in the death of Christ a special ground of con-

fidence. For the mercy of God towards the sinner is seen thus :—to be, not an effusion of weak tenderness, not a capricious exercise of clemency, and not a blind and reckless indulgence of benevolence at the expense of law and moral order (acts which would be fatal to the claim which God makes to an infinite respect and confidence on the part of the subjects of his government), but a deliberate, intelligent and consistent expression of his compassion and love. In entire harmony with the great principles of justice by which the sinner is condemned, and not by the reversal and destruction of them, he is thus seen to be justified by God.

The death of Christ has therefore a most important bearing upon the question, What is religion? and must determine largely the manner in which it is to be acquired. If it be Christ who is to reconcile you to God, it must be borne in mind that he does this, not merely by living for you, but by dying for you. And your faith, in recognizing him as a Saviour, must recognize this character as pre-eminently verified in the fact of his death.

III.

This doctrine of a connection between the death of Christ and his character and office as the Saviour of men is, however, sometimes controverted, and even denounced, as irrational. It may be well, therefore, to direct the inquirer to the Scripture view of the necessity of Christ's death, and of its relation to the salvation of a sinner.

As a sinner, as we have seen, you are thrown absolutely upon the mercy of God for deliverance from your condition. You are wrong; you wish to be made right. You are lost; you wish to be saved. You can only do what the Publican in the parable did in the same situation: cry "God be merciful to me a sinner." The meaning of this cry really is, "mercifully regard and treat me as no longer a sinner." What you desire is that God in his mercy will discharge you from (1) the *quality*, and (2) the *liability*, which attach to you as a sinner. And when your desire is granted, this precise thing is done. You are "justified," as the Publican was. Your sin is forgiven. The quality and

the liability which had attached to you as a sinner are expunged. You are accepted of God as one occupying the place of a righteous man, or of one who pleases God. All these results are said, in the Bible, to follow upon faith in Christ; and these are what you are asking from the mercy of God. You would not ask them if you were personally a righteous, *i. e.*, a religious, man. The Pharisee, supposing himself to be such a man, did not ask them. He felt that he had no occasion to ask such favors from God. But you are standing in the Publican's position—confessing that you are not religious, and desiring to become so. You therefore make your application to the mercy of God. Now how shall this mercy make response to your application, supposing that God is graciously willing to entertain it? We can conceive, as one method, that God might simply, in an arbitrary way, decree to grant it. He might determine to count your sin for nothing—to ignore it altogether as a thing without significance or value. But you can see that in doing this he would be obliterating all distinction between sin and righteous-

ness, and would be admitting to his favor the sinner indiscriminately with the righteous man. This method you cannot for a moment suppose that God would adopt, for it is to make him deny himself; it is to make him say that what is displeasing to him is pleasing, and that to be religious and to be not religious are, in his estimation, the same thing. The Scriptures, therefore, uniformly discard this method of delivering men from a condition of sin. They represent God as so essentially holy that he "cannot behold evil, nor look on iniquity"—that is, with favor (Hab. 1 : 13). "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness," says David (Ps. 5 : 4) : "neither shall evil dwell with thee." To Moses the Lord proclaimed himself (Ex. 34 : 6, 7) "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will *by no means clear the guilty*." Certainly, after having affirmed so emphatically in his word such a difference between the righteous man and the sinner, he will not say, in his practice, that

there is no difference between them. But as another method by which mercy may conceivably reach its object in the deliverance of a sinner, God may decree to allow some other party to stand in the place of the sinner, and to assume the obligations contracted by the latter to himself through his sin. In this way certainly sin will receive the credit and the notice due to it—as a fact. Full and honest effect will be given to it, both in its quality as a thing displeasing to God, and as involving in it a liability to such expressions of God's displeasure as justice might ordain. Every one is familiar with the process in civil life by which the debt of one man is cancelled by the payment of it by another. Obligation here is not repudiated—it is only transferred. The debtor is discharged, not arbitrarily and without reason, but on a ground residing in the act of his surety or friend. Sinfulness in man, although distinguishable in many respects from a pecuniary debt, is still so analogous to such a debt that it is often designated in the Scriptures by that name. It puts the subject of it under an obligation to account to God for his

wrong-doing. And here, as in the case of pecuniary indebtedness, it may occur that a discharge from this obligation may be based upon a ground residing in the act of another. Thus, the Bible represents God, in repeated cases, as showing favor to their descendants, for Abraham's sake, and for David's sake. Thus Job's friends were exonerated from the censure of God by reason of his intercession for them : "My servant Job shall pray for you," said God ; "for him will I accept." A remarkable instance of the substitution of one person for another, in the matter of a crime, is found in 1 Sam. 25 : 24 ; where Abigail, the wife of Nabal, interposes to turn away the wrath of David from her husband. Falling at the feet of the enraged chieftain she says, "Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be." "I pray thee forgive *the trespass of thine handmaid.*" And David's reply was, "Go up in peace to thine house. See, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have *accepted thy person.*" The ground upon which the obligation of the offender was remitted here was found in the act of his substitute. Now the deliverance of a

sinner, on a ground lying in another party assuming his obligations, is in accordance with these instances, and is a process therefore which has its parallel in the familiar usages of men. By this method sin is duly accredited (as it ought to be) as a fact; but is assumed and borne away from the sinner by another. And mercy, without suspicion of complicity with his sinfulness, can exercise its office in the forgiveness of the sinner. This is the way in which, typically, under the Mosaic dispensation, sinfulness or guilt was transferred to the animal devoted to sacrifice; and forgiveness and acceptance were accorded to the party offering it. By this way, according to the Gospel, God has actually decreed to extend mercy unto salvation to sinful men. The passages which affirm this are almost innumerable. The leading doctrine of the New Testament—a doctrine written so plainly upon almost every page that it would seem to be impossible to misunderstand it—is that Christ in assuming human nature took the place of the sinner, and, by his mediatorial life and death, relieved him from the quality and

the liability of sinfulness, and opened the way for a gracious exercise of mercy towards him. Thus, at the outset of his ministry, Christ was introduced by John the Baptist as the true sin-bearer of men when he was proclaimed "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." And, in the same way, St. Paul sets him before us, when he says, in 2 Cor. 5 : 21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" and again, in Gal. 2 : 20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Now is it not clear that this latter way of delivering the sinner from his condition, through an exercise of mercy based upon a full satisfaction of law by a surety, commends itself to faith as a more rational and a more reliable ground of confidence than the other, or indeed any other which may be suggested? And does not the faith which embraces it

deserve to be called the “justifying” agent which St. Paul so emphatically affirms it to be? (Rom. 5 : 1.) For first, it exhibits God as “justified” or proved to be consistent and right in bestowing mercy upon the sinner. Secondly, it “justifies” or confirms by an adequate warrant the hope of the sinner, and enables him to rejoice in the assured possession of this mercy. And then, thirdly, it establishes such a connection between Christ’s life and death, and the sinner, as “justifies” the latter, or makes him righteous before the law of God, through the righteousness of the former, accredited and imputed to him. For, the unrighteousness which had provoked the condemnation of the law has been taken away by Christ from the sinner, and the righteousness of Christ, which perfectly satisfies the law, has been communicated to him in the act of believing; so that, as the apostle argues (Rom. 8 : 1), “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

And hence it is that in the death of Christ as a propitiation for sin faith finds its full and final ground of confidence. It is in this pro-

cedure that it sees most illustriously demonstrated his character of the Saviour of the world.

IV.

Faith, in the form in which the Bible sets it forth, is an actual making use of Christ and his work, by the sinner, as a personal act and for his personal benefit. You are seeking an interest in the mercy of God, in order to be delivered from your condition of sinfulness. You are told in the Gospel that this deliverance is to be secured through the mediation of Christ. You turn to Christ, therefore, for the purpose of securing this deliverance; and you must turn with a trust and an expectation as definite as is your purpose. Your view of Christ, your way of looking at him, must make him as real an object as your sin and your need of deliverance from it are known to be real objects. Faith is a transaction lying between an individual and an individual: an individual who on the one hand cries, "What must I do to be saved?" and an individual who on the other responds, "Look unto me and be

thou saved." It is the act of giving credit by the former to the latter, and of trusting in and depending upon him for the purpose of being saved. The general proposition, "Christ died for sinners," must be made specific and particular. It must be put in the form "Christ died for me, a sinner." And then to the fact so affirmed the literal effect or force of a fact must be given. You must believe that the benefit of Christ's mission is as applicable to you, and as available for you, as though it had been undertaken solely for yourself. Faith thus makes the Saviour of the world the Saviour of the particular sinner. It is an act of appropriation—a making Christ one's own by a personal resort to him, and a personal embracing and resting upon him in distinction from everything else, for one's salvation. A moment's reflection will show you that the soul in its application for the mercy of God must depend upon something. That something may be some supposed merit to which it lays claim, or it may be some work of penance to which it submits, or it may be some magical power which it ascribes to a ceremony or

a sacrament, or it may be some conception of God, as blindly and unconditionally good. And such dependence in every case will be faith. The doctrine of the Gospel requiring men to exercise faith in Christ has nothing peculiar in it except the object which it proposes to faith. The man who sneers at this doctrine, and who professes to found his hope of salvation upon his works, still is expecting to be saved by faith in his works. Now faith in Christ only puts Christ in the place of these works, and looks to Christ to do for the subject of it what this man expects his works to do for him. Faith in the thing upon which we are depending for salvation occurs, therefore, in the case of any method of salvation which we may propose to ourselves. The man who adopts the Gospel method, through faith in Christ, is simply doing in reference to Christ what others who say they want no Saviour external to themselves are doing in reference to themselves. That is, he puts faith in Christ, or gives credit to him as a Saviour, and sees in the phenomena of his life and death the ground and the proof of his ability to fulfill this character.

To the question "Upon what do *you* depend for the mercy of God which you hope for?" the answer must be given, "Upon Christ, and what he has done and suffered for me," as definitely as the man who relies for justification upon his own righteousness would answer, "Upon myself, and the good deeds I have done." Such a faith establishes a vital connection between the believer and Christ, such as may be compared to that between the branch and the vine (John 15 : 5), and as such it must actually save, because in uniting the sinner to Christ it actually introduces him to the embodied and manifested mercy of God.

V.

But in order that the soul may enter into the full apprehension of this fact, faith has another office to perform. It must give credit to the promises which are made by God, in the Bible, to those who believe in Christ. The terms upon which mercy is offered to sinful men, as has been stated, are fulfilled in the mediatorial work of Christ. Those terms are

adopted by the individual when he believes in Christ. Now to those who thus adopt them the promise of God is given in almost innumerable cases and forms, that they shall be delivered from condemnation, pardoned, justified, and saved. Faith brings the soul under the cover of this promise, and the soul, in the exercise of faith, sees itself covered by this promise. It not only believes that the promise has been made, but gives effect to the promise, extracts from it the blessings which it contains, and ventures (with a boldness which is so child-like and natural that it feels that not to venture so would be an act of still greater boldness) to say to itself, "God's promise means what it says, and I am forgiven, accepted, and saved!" To the question "Upon what do you depend for salvation?" the sinner, taught by the Bible, answers, "Solely upon Christ." To the question "Why do you expect salvation from depending upon Christ?" the sinner, taught by the Bible, answers, "Because God has pledged it to me by his promise." Faith is the giving intelligently and honestly both these answers to both these

questions ; and if the Bible be not false, such a faith must save the subject of it.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3 : 16.

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Rom. 10 : 4.

CHAPTER VII.

REGENERATION AS CONNECTED WITH RELIGION.

IN what I have thus far said, it may seem that I have made religion consist merely of certain mental changes and exercises. And you may ask, How do these verify the definition of religion given at the outset of this treatise, as a form of life which, in all its particulars of character and conduct, is pleasing to God? That the view of religion which I have been presenting does accord with this definition of it I will now proceed to show; and the point of harmony will be found in the scriptural doctrine of Regeneration. It is evident that when religion is defined as a special *form* of life, it is implied that the subject of it is possessed of a life *which is capable of taking on this special form*. "For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes." Luke 6 : 44. The presence of life

is known only by the symptoms and processes through which it expresses itself. When certain symptoms and processes are observed you say there is life, and life of a kind adapted to produce these phenomena. If religion be a form of life, therefore, it will reveal itself through symptoms and processes which demonstrate in the subject of it the presence of a religious life. Now, the Bible teaches that every truly religious man is so because he is the recipient of a new *life*. "Except a man be born again," said Christ (John 3 : 3), "he cannot see the kingdom of God;" that is, he cannot be truly religious. This being "born again" is the regeneration of which I am speaking. And it is further said by Christ to be wrought by the Holy Spirit (John 3 : 5). Hence, it must be the result of a supernatural operation; and as such it is called (John 1 : 13) a being "born of God." A birth issuing from a divine source must communicate the kind of life which will, in all its manifestations of character and conduct, be pleasing to God. But the Bible also teaches that these mental changes and exercises, which I have been

explaining under the names of repentance and faith in Christ, are symptoms and processes which belong to this life, and prove the presence of it in the person of him who exhibits them. The man who truly repents of his sins, and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, is shown by these acts to have been the subject of this new birth. He has received a kind of life whose special property or law it is to please God. To the objection which may be raised, that repentance and believing, by themselves, do not constitute religion, I reply that they do something more. They prove that the man practicing them is the possessor of a new life, which must issue in that special form in which he will appear as one who, in all the particulars of his character and conduct, will be pleasing to God. He repents and believes because he is already "born again;" and if born in this way, the form of his life will be in all respects religious. The tree having been made good the fruit will be good. The religious man is so because he is a regenerate man; and the evidence that he is a regenerate man appears in the repentance and faith which are the first

developments of the new birth which he has received. This subject of regeneration, therefore, has an intimate connection with religion, and deserves a serious consideration at the hands of the inquirer.

I.

The fact that any man is regenerated is due, according to the express testimony of our Saviour, to a power exercised upon him by the Holy Spirit. The same doctrine is taught or assumed all through the New Testament. The proof that this fact has occurred in any particular case is found, as I have said, in its first stage, in those symptoms and processes which we call repentance and faith. Repentance and faith, therefore, are due to an influence exercised upon the soul by the Holy Spirit. But nothing is clearer than that repentance and faith are, and must be, personal states of mind; that is, they appertain to the individual who entertains and exhibits them. When you repent and believe in Christ it is *you* who do these things, not the Holy Spirit or any other being doing them for you. Until

- it can be said of you, "he repents," "he believes," there can be no repentance or faith in your case. These things must be your own acts as much as your sins have been your own acts. Now, there is no conflict between this statement and the one which preceded it. Both are true, and both are necessary to be known. There is no inconsistency in saying that an individual is brought into a penitent and believing state of mind, or is disposed and enabled to entertain and express such a state of mind, by an agency outside of himself, such as that of the Holy Spirit. For there is no fact in our experience more familiar than this, that our conditions of mind, and the tempers, feelings, and purposes included in them, are
- wrought within us by an influence foreign to ourselves. The leaf on the bough of a tree is not more played upon by the shifting breeze than the soul is by influence. The clay is not more literally moulded by the hand of the potter than the human heart is by influence. The power of it every one knows, for he feels it, and he uses it. Education, in one very important part of it, is but the application of this

power. The gospel, in "persuading" men to be reconciled to God, is only availing itself of this power. That a man should have become what he is, or should have been made to undergo a change from one condition of mind to another, through the agency of an influence exerted upon him by another party, is not at all an unreasonable proposition, and does not at all disturb or destroy his own personal concern in the procedure. And that the Holy Spirit should be such an agent, where the design of the procedure is to influence a soul towards such a change of mind as is exemplified in a sinner's repenting and resorting to Christ as the medium of God's mercy, will not be deemed unreasonable or improbable by one who believes that God takes cognizance of the fact of sin in the individual, and has so far interposed to deliver that individual from his condition, as a sinner, as to provide a way for his deliverance, through the life and death of his eternal Son. If the gospel be a revelation of a definite scheme of grace, devised by God for the saving of sinful men, we may be sure that among its provisions there will be found

one which guarantees to the sinner the aid of such a power as that of the Holy Spirit, *if this be necessary to give effect to that scheme*. Such a provision, on the ground of its being a necessary one, the Bible therefore has revealed to us in the doctrine of regeneration.

II.

The term implies, of course, a new birth—a being born over again. Such a term applied to a being already born can only mean the undergoing of a change which produces the same kind of effect that birth produces. Birth gives being; but more than this, it gives being *after a kind*, a species; it affixes a nature to being. I am born—a being, a living thing; but I am born, at the same time, a man—a being with a human nature, this nature determining my place and quality in the world of life. Regeneration does not literally give a new being to the subject of it, but it gives him a new nature; it makes him *a different kind of being* from what he was before. He was a sinner—a being whose law of life produced a form of life which

was not pleasing to God. He becomes a penitent man—one who condemns and deplors his former form of life; one who sees, confesses, and sorrows over his sinfulness; one who feels his need of the mercy of God in order to be delivered from his condition of sinfulness; one who is willing to submit to any change or sacrifice on his own part to obtain this mercy, and to accept it upon any terms which God may be pleased to annex to the bestowal of it; and one who therefore, in compliance with the requisitions of the gospel, recognizes in Christ the only medium through which it can be obtained, and thankfully reposes upon his mediation as the ground of his forgiveness and acceptance by God. Now let it be remembered that this change is not a momentary paroxysm; it is not a fit or spasm which may pass away and leave the party experiencing it the same kind of being that he was previously. Repentance and faith are permanent states of mind. When commenced in truth, they are like respiration—they last as long as life lasts. When, according to the Bible, does a religious man cease to repent and

believe in Christ? "My sin," said David (Ps. 51 : 3), "is *ever* before me." "I *live*," said St. Paul (Gal. 2 : 20), "by the faith of the Son of God." Repentance and faith, therefore, constitute a new *kind of being* in the man who really experiences them, and this means a new nature; and when this is given, there is, in effect, a new birth, a regeneration.

III.

The change described by such a term must be radical. It is more than outward reformation, more than an assumption of a new dialect or a new demeanor. It is called in the Scriptures a "quickening," or the introduction of a new principle of life into the subject of it. It is likened to the giving of sight to the blind, which is more than removing a flaw from a diseased eye: In it St. Paul declares (2 Cor. 5 : 17) "old things are passed away"—that is, have become extinct, or have perished; "behold, *all things* are become new." He affirms the same thing when he speaks of the "old man" being put off and the "new man" put

on. The true man, in every case, is the being who feels, chooses, purposes. He is constituted not by speech, manner, and deportment—for these may be a mere mask—but by the affections of the soul. When these are changed from old to new, the “old man” becomes the “new man.” Repentance and faith imply a change of this character; and two conclusions follow upon the occurrence of such a change.

The first is that the influence by which it is wrought must be more than human culture. It must be a power which can give life—or, what is the same thing, birth—and which therefore must proceed from the Author of life. It must be what the Bible says it is, the power of the Holy Spirit. So David confessed when he prayed (Ps. 51 : 10), “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

The second conclusion is that the new life imparted in regeneration must be the opposite of the old one, which has been extinguished. As that was a sinful life—one that did not please God—this must be a holy life—one

which aims, in all its developments and exercises, to please God. As the one was under the law of a sinful nature, and so was carnal, this, being the product of the Holy Spirit, must be spiritual. As the affections which controlled the one made self and the world the supreme objects of regard, the affections which give character to the other must be a supreme love to God, and delight in his service and favor.

Add now to these facts the further thought that a change so wrought, and of such a nature, cannot be a mere transient mood of mind, but must be an abiding principle and specific type of life, forming, indeed, the very nature of the man; and the conviction must come with the force of a demonstration, that in the result to which, through repentance and faith, by the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit the soul has been brought, we shall have the genuine and perfect realization of religion. For that result, being the communication of a new life by the Spirit of God, must demonstrate itself in the possessor by a new form of life, which in all its particulars of character and

conduct shall please God; and this will be religion.

IV.

The subject of this radical change will of course have the highest possible evidence that the form of life, which is the product of it, is the genuine thing called religion. Being “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1 : 13), he is a “son of God,” an object of his favor, and a partaker of his nature. The question “Upon what evidence can the experience of this change be predicated?” is, therefore, an all-important one; and a remark or two may be proper, in the way of an answer to it. First, let it be noticed that a distinction is to be made between a consciousness of the *fact* of regeneration and a conception of the *mode and process* of regeneration. In regard to natural life, every man is conscious of the fact that he is alive, but cannot tell what life is, nor how he was made alive. The Saviour said to Nicodemus, in reply to his query, “how can these things be?”—“The wind bloweth where

it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth." The rustling of a leaf assures us that there is such a thing as the wind, and that it is in operation; but who can explain its origin or its law of action? The evidence of regeneration is therefore to be looked for in phenomena to be found in the subject of it; not in any manifestation of the agency of the Holy Spirit, revealed to the senses or to the understanding. In other words, it is to be looked for in the effect, not in the cause, of the change. As has been remarked, regeneration is a personal matter. If it occurs at all, it occurs in the person of an individual. It appears in the making of a new man out of an old one. But the new man is the same person who was the old man, and must be conscious of the change he has undergone, and must be capable, to some degree at least, of affirming and defining the change. The blind man (John 9 : 25) could not tell how he was cured, nor wherein the power of Jesus to cure him lay, but he could say, "One thing I know,

that, whereas I was blind, now I see." The evidence which proved that he had been cured was that he was conscious of new sensations, new convictions, new affections, new capacities. He had entered into a new sphere of being, and had a new part to act in the world. The regenerated man reasons in the same way, and may be as well satisfied of the correctness of his conclusions as he was. Repentance and faith, when truly exercised, as has been said, indicate a change so radical and so extensive as to prove that a regeneration has occurred. The intelligent apprehension of sin, as a fact in one's personal character and history; the sense of the criminality of sin; the disapprobation of and sorrow for it; the turning away from it with the conscience and the heart; the desire for forgiveness and a recovery of the favor of God; the resort to his mercy as the source of these blessings; the recognition of the mediation of Christ as the ground upon which mercy is to be obtained; and an application to Christ, in faith and trust, for an interest in this mercy—all this, if really a matter of experience, demonstrates that transition from

the old man to the new man which constitutes regeneration. But with the Bible as our guide we may verify this fact by a variety of other marks ; as, for instance :

(1) A quickened moral sense, by which sin is detected in secret forms and under disguises ; especially in the region of the motives and dispositions ; and by which, when discovered, it produces, by a sort of spontaneous response, a feeling of pain and self-reprobation. It was the discovery of the force of the command “Thou shalt not covet,” St. Paul tells us (Rom. 7 : 7), that revealed to him the emptiness of his boasted righteousness, and destroyed his hope of justification on that ground.

(2) Akin to this is a power of spiritual discernment by which spiritual things are apprehended, relished, and applied ; by which the Word of God is opened to the understanding, and clothed with authority and majesty—and often with light and beauty ; by which the offices of Christ are made clear, and the relation between them and the individual is disclosed sensibly to the soul. Thus, says the Apostle (1 Cor. 2 : 14), “the natural man

receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

(3) A third mark of this change will be found in an altered manner of conceiving of and practicing prayer. It will be no longer a formal or mechanical exercise. It will be prompted by new views of God, and of the relation in which the party offering it stands to him ; and will be real and intelligent communion between the lowly human child and the infinite and infinitely gracious God—made his God and his Father in Jesus Christ.

(4) Fourthly, holiness, or purity of heart and life, will be coveted and sought after for its own sake, and apart from any collateral advantages to which it may lead. To be good and to do right will become pleasant in themselves ; requiring no end beyond them, unless it be that of pleasing God, to make them attractive.

(5) A habit in the soul of discriminating between God and the world, so that the will of the former shall take precedence over the

will of the latter as a guide; and the approval of the former, rather than that of the latter, shall be aimed at as the supreme end in the whole ordering of the individual's life.

(6) Love to Christ necessarily belongs to a regenerated nature. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ," says St. Paul (1 Cor. 16 : 22), "let him be Anathema, Maranatha." "If ye love me," is the familiar formula by which the Saviour assumes, in all his teachings, that his disciples will love him. The indications of this love are not to be confined to emotional frames and excited sensibilities. These are, in the nature of things, exceptional. They are to be looked for, rather, in such demonstrations as can be stable and permanent; as the keeping of the commandments of Christ, patient continuance in well-doing, complacency in and meditation upon Christ, gratitude to him, delight in his ordinances, zeal for his glory, and a readiness to submit to self-denial in order to please and serve him.

(7) "We know that we have passed from death unto life," says St. John (1 John 3 : 14), "because we love the brethren." The love of

those who belong to Christ follows naturally upon love to Christ, and is significant as a mark of a regenerate state. Men exhibit their kind of life by the kind of people with whom they sympathize and affiliate. Fellowship with unbelievers cannot be the element in which a believer will choose to subsist. Accord, kinship with the household of God, is the fraternal spirit in regard to man, and the filial spirit in regard to God.

(8) The last characteristic that need be noted here is a change in the use of life, or in the principle which determines the use of life. "Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price," is what the Scriptures say (1 Cor. 6 : 19) of the attitude and function of the regenerate man. Christ is Master and Lord to his disciples, and their one comprehensive rule is to "follow" him; to "occupy," in the employment of their talents, till he come. Self is crucified with Christ; and henceforth, to the believer, life is a consecrated trust and stewardship.

Such phenomena will infallibly attest the reality of such a change as is implied in regen-

eration. Those here indicated are types of a large class. All may not be recognized in a particular subject at the same time; but some of them will certainly appear, as expressions of the life of the new creature in Christ Jesus.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Rom. 8 : 14.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.” Rom. 8 : 16.

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” Ezek. 36 : 26, 27.

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Luke 11 : 13.

CHAPTER VIII.

PROFESSION AS CONNECTED WITH RELIGION.

THE view of religion which has been given in the previous chapters represents it as an internal work, manifesting itself by a special form of life in the subject of it. The term "confessing Christ," which is used in the Bible as the equivalent of an adoption of religion, necessarily includes the experience of this internal work. Without this, your "confessing Christ," in words or by symbols, would be a mere form or mockery. There must be religion in the sense of it which I have presented, before there can be a church or a church-member. An association of men, or an individual, destitute of religion, is no more entitled to be called a church, or a church-member, than a marble statue or a wooden automaton is to be called a human being. A formal avowal of religion, such as is made by a uniting with the visible church, is therefore not to

be confounded with religion. This mistake is sometimes made. The idea seems, at least, to be sometimes entertained that the way to become religious is to attach one's self to the church. Let it be remembered that religion is a transaction between the particular soul and God; a transaction in which the church can primarily or directly take no part. But when this transaction has been really concluded, and upon good grounds you can affirm of yourself that you are a religious man, it is your duty, where the thing is not impracticable, to avow your religion by uniting yourself to the visible church. "Confessing Christ" includes in it, also, this mode of asserting the repentance and faith by which, as an internal work, you have been demonstrated to be a regenerated person. The obligation to make a profession of your religion in this way is proved by such considerations as these :

I.

The institution by God of a visible church, consisting of religious people, is an intimation by him that all religious people should be at-

tached to that church. Now, under the Old Testament dispensation, a church appears, undoubtedly, under a visible and organized form. It was co-extensive with the circumcised descendants of Abraham, with whom and his seed God had entered into covenant. The facts of birth, and an external compliance with certain regulations and rites, made the Israelite, formally, a member of the church. All who were thus formally members, however, did not belong to the real body of God's children; for, as St. Paul declares (Rom. 9 : 6, 7), "they are not all Israel which are of Israel : neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children." That is, the mere fact of natural descent did not make the essentially religious man. But clearly, this fact that mere membership in the visible church did not necessarily constitute a person a religious man did not disturb the obligation of any really religious man to become a member of the visible church. In theory, all who were associated in this visible church ought to have been religious men. Pre-eminently, therefore, the man who was really religious would find his proper home

and habitation there. The "kingdom of God," so far as then developed, was realized in that visible church; and every genuine child of the kingdom was bound to place himself under the bounds and badges by which the kingdom was distinguished from the world.

II.

The New Testament proclaims and emphasizes the fact that this "kingdom of God" is continued without intermission in the world, and that it is advanced to its complete and final form. The outward peculiarities under which it appeared in the Jewish church, as a national and hereditary institution, were abolished by Christ, and the spiritual feature, the essential religiousness of the regenerate man, was made the condition of and the title to membership in it. Henceforth there was to be no difference between Jew and Gentile, between circumcision and uncircumcision; but all who were born of the Spirit, all who constituted the body of true believers in Christ, were to be accredited as members of the "kingdom of God." The church, modified in accord-

ance with this change, was continued in the world together with this kingdom. It was continued in a visible and organized form; for in this form Christ laid the foundation of it in the society of his apostles, and the superstructure of it was reared by their hands in the societies of believers whom they gathered together in their evangelistic missions. As the "kingdom of God" spread from land to land, and from city to city, the fact of its diffusion is made manifest by the appearance of such visible and organized communities as the "Church at Antioch," the "Church at Ephesus," the "Church at Corinth," and so on. In all such societies government was instituted by the ordination of presbyters or elders (Acts 14 : 23), and probably deacons (Phil. 1 : 1). In one of such societies or churches, wherever practicable, it is fair to conclude every particular believer was expected to be enrolled.

III.

The obligation to observe the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which certainly rests upon all believers, seems to carry

with it an obligation on the part of each believer to identify himself with the visible church. Obviously, the imposition of this observance by Christ upon his followers forbids any man to say, "Between myself and God—where the matter lies—I am satisfied that I am religious; therefore I have no need of such supplementary attestations of my religiousness as are to be found in the practice of baptism or the Lord's Supper." For if these sacraments have been ordained by Christ as things to be observed by his disciples, every disciple needs to observe them, just as he needs to obey any other command of his Lord. Now the evidence that these things have been enjoined upon his disciples is so clear and complete as to preclude all question. "Go ye and teach"—that is, make disciples of—"all nations," said Christ in his last commission to his apostles, "*baptizing* them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matt. 38:19, 20). As the apostles were commanded to administer baptism, surely, therefore, every dis-

ciple is commanded to receive baptism. And so, at the institution of the last Supper, the Lord says, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19)—a command which evidently implies that a doing of what Jesus was then doing would continue to be done, at least by these apostles, indefinitely in the future. That the command was understood to embrace all the succession of believers till the end of time is shown by the general references to the observance of this ordinance in the early churches to be found in the book of Acts; and especially by the account of the institution of it and the proper mode of observing it given by St. Paul to the Corinthian Church in 1 Cor. 11. It is here seen that an apostle who was not one of the original party to whom the command "this do," etc., was given, considers himself bound by it, and that, in teaching their duty to a body of Gentile Christians living at the distance of more than twenty-five years from the time of the issuance of the command, he considers them bound by it. The sense of the church in all ages that this command is universal and perpetual in its application can-

not be a misconception. But observe now that both of these ordinances include in their significance all that is signified by the act of uniting with the visible church; for by the one—baptism—the recipient formally and publicly takes a position in that special class of persons known as believers in Christ; and by the other—the Lord's Supper—the participant formally and publicly continues to maintain and assert his position as one of this special class of persons. An organized and a visible society, in which each particular believer can be accredited as a member, is presupposed in the fact that the Lord has imposed such ordinances upon his followers. These ordinances do not give the grace of regeneration, or make men religious, as is sometimes taught; but the observance of them clearly belongs to the modes by which men are required to express the fact that they are regenerate or religious. You cannot neglect or repudiate them without putting in question the genuineness of your claim to be a regenerate or religious man, as much as you would do by deliberately violating any other law of the kingdom of God.

IV.

The duties which belong to a religious life are, many of them, such as require that believers should be associated in the form of a visible and organized church, and that each individual believer should be incorporated with this church. For instance, that sort of testimony which the people of God are expected to offer to the notice of the world of the existence of a "kingdom of God" in it can hardly be efficiently rendered without some such sensible demonstration of the distinction between this "kingdom" and the world as is given in a visible and organized church. "Ye are the light of the world," said Jesus to his disciples (Matt. 5 : 14)—speaking of them, apparently, in their collective capacity ; but this character, in a collective capacity, could only be realized by the combination of the lights which separate believers had to bestow. Each believer must help to make this general light by throwing into it his particle of light, however minute. "Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth

light unto all that are in the house." A blaze of illumination is needed in order to make men know that the "kingdom of God" is among them; and this can never be produced by candles secreted under bushels, but only when these are placed in open and public position, as on candlesticks, and their rays concentrated in one common focal light.

In like manner, the duty of religious men to practice and maintain the worship of God as a positive institution in the world, which God clearly demands of them (John 4 : 23), requires a union of their efforts and services in this respect, which implies such an association of individuals and such an orderly economy as we find in the visible Church. As God was to be worshipped in the "great congregation" under the old dispensation, so, for the same purpose, under the new, believers are admonished "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is." Heb. 10 : 25.

So the special charge laid upon believers collectively, to preach the gospel to every creature, and to extend the "kingdom of God"

throughout the world, demands that unity of counsel and concert of action which are to be secured only through the medium of a visible and organized church. The nations of the earth are to be conquered to God through human agents; and this can never be done till all believers are joined together, with the compactness and unanimity of an army, in the work.

The facilities afforded by the organization of a church, to individual Christians, in those charitable and pious labors in which, like their Master, they are to engage, is another argument for the association of individuals in a church capacity. And further, the cultivation of brotherly love, and efforts for mutual encouragement and edification, which are enjoined upon all the children of God, point as a necessity to the sacred family-relationship and communion which are realized in the Church.

V.

To these considerations I would add one more of a peculiarly personal character. The

joy which the believer is authorized to expect from his religion depends very much upon that sensible assertion of his fellowship with Christ which he makes in a literal profession of his faith. If it were true, as is often affirmed, that a man can be as good a Christian out of the visible church as in it, it would still be true, I think from a long course of observation, that he cannot be as happy a Christian out of the visible church as in it. The reasons which are usually assigned for declining a church-connection are certainly not such as show in the persons offering them those motives and sentiments which are akin to religious peace and satisfaction. There is ordinarily a quarrel, at some point, which lies at the foundation of this exclusiveness; and a quarrel of any kind is unfriendly to enjoyment. A want of confidence, or an absence of sympathy, in any position, is inconsistent with true rest of soul. Besides, the out-speaking of love is the natural expression of it, and adds to the sense of it, and to the sense of the sweetness of it. Love to Christ, like the waters gushing from a fountain, will gladly pour itself out through every

channel; and will widen its volume as it multiplies its channels. The Ethiopian nobleman of whom we read (Acts 8 : 27) had believed in Christ on the preaching of Philip. But instead of being satisfied with the internal work which had been wrought in his heart, no sooner did the opportunity to profess his faith in a legitimate way present itself, than he cries with eager delight, "See, here is water! What doth hinder me to be baptized?" And when the solemn rite of profession was concluded, we have the significant record, "he went on his way *rejoicing*." He had joined no particular or local church, for none such was accessible to him; but by the prescribed form he had identified himself with the visible Church of Christ; he had palpably planted himself on Christian ground; he had put his secret convictions into an articulate utterance, and with his inward consciousness of a new life, confirmed by this outward attestation of it, he pursued his way with a new song on his lips and a new joy in his heart. The solitary pilgrim who will walk in a way of his own, and asks no comfort from Christian companionship, and no aid from the

signs and seals which God has affixed to his covenant with his people, I am sure, as a general thing, at least, carries no such spirit with him on his journey towards heaven.

Religion therefore, we may conclude, though carefully to be distinguished from mere membership in the church, beyond a doubt includes among the demonstrations of it, warranted by the Bible, a free and solemn confession of Christ, by a public connection of the individual believer with the visible church which Christ has instituted, which he calls his "body," and over which he presides as the glorified Head.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles; whether we be bond or free." 1 Cor. 12 : 13.

"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." 1 Peter 2 : 9.

"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." Isa. 35 : 10.

CHAPTER IX.

PRACTICAL COUNSELS AND CAUTIONS IN REFERENCE TO RELIGION.

THE person who has by an honest effort passed from the first point of spiritual experience indicated in the foregoing remarks to the result noticed in the last chapter may, in the Bible sense of the term, be called a religious man. The purpose which the author has had in view in the preparation of this treatise might therefore be said to have here reached its completion. But he is aware that in an inquiry so critical as that which concerns the nature of true religion and the method of acquiring it, many incidental questions may be started or difficulties suggested, which may embarrass a mind earnestly engaged in the inquiry, and may impede the way to a satisfactory conclusion. These questions and difficulties will take so many shapes, according to the different tempers and habits of individ-

uals, that many of them must be left to be dealt with by private counsels on the part of judicious and experienced friends; but some of them are sufficiently common to be anticipated, and a few remarks may therefore properly be added in the hope of offering some solution of them.

I.

The nature of religion, as I have been presenting it, involves, as we have seen, conspicuously the agency of certain supernatural elements. The religious man becomes so through something done for him by Christ his Divine Redeemer, and something done in him by the Holy Spirit his Divine Regenerator. Now this view of the matter may seem to you to have the effect of removing religion outside of the field of practical effort on your part. In other matters of study or achievement you may know what to do, and may be prompt to do it. But here you are bewildered, perhaps disheartened, by finding yourself acting upon such exceptional and mysterious ground. You may be tempted even to conclude that nothing

is to be done by you but wait till some extraordinary influence, in some inexplicable way, shall, by a happy violence, transport you out of your present position into that of a Christian.

Now it ought to be remembered that if there is a supernatural department in religion there is also, and must be, a natural one. What is done for you by Christ, and in you by the Holy Spirit, is still done for and in *you*, as you are naturally constituted and endowed. And such capacity for effort as belongs to you naturally is not superseded by the agency ascribed to Christ and the Holy Spirit in the matter of religion. The doctrine of such an agency rather is intended to guide and aid your personal effort. Your inability in regard to such processes as are wrought for and in you by Christ and the Holy Spirit—that is, deliverance from the guilt of sin and the communication of a new nature—is altogether consistent with an ability to employ the powers which you possess as a rational being. The Bible assigns to man in the matter of religion a part precisely analogous, as far as it goes, to that which he has to perform in other matters,

which appeal to him as a rational being. Thus he is required and expected to "consider his ways," to "search the Scriptures," to seek knowledge, to reflect, to appreciate facts and act in view of them, to choose, to will, to decide according to conviction, just as he does in other cases. When the question is asked you, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" it is implied that you can make an answer to it intelligently and with a becoming sense of the terms used in it. The proposition, "the wages of sin is death," is one which makes an appeal to your common sense, and which your common sense, if you will let it act, cannot help appreciating. Such statements call for the exercise of the same faculties which are resorted to and depended upon by you in the prosecution of any species of worldly business. The supernatural elements of Christianity do not place in abeyance your natural powers, nor absolve you from the obligation to use them, and will be found upon experiment to offer you only the assistance you need and at the time when you need it, in the important inquiry after religion. The command of the

gospel is uniformly "Come;" and "come" means "begin to move, and move now." The Saviour who during his earthly ministry was continually crying, "Come unto me," had no word of excuse to offer for those who remained aloof from him, on the ground of embarrassments created by his own work or that of the Holy Spirit, but says to them distinctly, "*Ye will not* come to me that ye might have life." The traveller who finds himself benighted in a wild desert, hungry and chilled, might as well refuse the invitation extended to him by some hospitable dweller in the region, who stands with his door open calling to him to come in and enjoy warmth and refreshment, because he cannot understand how a human habitation could have been erected in such a place or how fuel and provision could have been conveyed to it. The common sense which guides him in other cases, where his safety or interest is concerned, would bid him drop such speculations and hasten to the offered rest.

II.

Perplexity sometimes—very frequently, I have reason to suspect—grows out of miscon-

ceptions in regard to the nature of faith in Christ, or the way in which faith operates in embracing Christ. Figurative expressions are used in the Bible, and used, we may say, necessarily in a book addressed to men. These expressions are borrowed from the acts of the body; such as, "laying hold of" or "looking to" an object, "fleeing to" a refuge, "taking the water of life," and so on. Some special exercises of the soul, something anomalous in its procedure which may bear an analogy to these acts, is supposed to be necessary. Now, these terms all signify simply a hearty and intelligent dependence upon Christ for the mercy of God, which the sinner needs and desires. It is the same kind of dependence which he is practicing in other matters. It is evident that he must have something to depend upon, as a ground upon which to expect this mercy of God. That something may be one of various things. Whatever it is, the confidence reposed in it will be faith. The right thing to put in this place of dependence, the Bible says, is Christ. Let the troubled doubter ask himself, then, "What do I put in this place, or upon what do I depend for my acceptance with God?"

Is it my own righteousness? Is it the merit of my prayers or religious observances? Is it the credit of quitting some evil practice? Or is it the vows I have made as to future well-doing?" If he is in earnest in his pursuit of religion, he will say to these questions, promptly, "No." Then let him ask, "Is it Christ—Christ and nothing else?" If the answer to this question arises just as promptly, "Yes," he has the faith of the gospel, though it be in its character just as simple as any other act of faith. And if he will only follow up this faith with the further exercise of it, which gives credit to the promises of pardon and justification, made so frequently in the Bible to those who do thus depend upon Christ, he may, and will, receive into his soul the comforting assurance that he is a pardoned and justified man. He will have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and will need to trouble himself no more about the nature of the process.

III.

The pursuit of religion is sometimes embarrassed by the disposition to make the experi-

ence of other persons the guide and test of that required of the individual. The question, What are repentance and faith as actual exercises of the soul? is one which it is natural for the inquirer to ask. And the answer is perhaps quite as naturally sought for in the testimony of living Christian friends, or in that of the biographies of eminent departed saints. Coincidence with the phenomena detailed in these cases is assumed to be essential, and the want of it becomes a source of discouragement. This assumption is an error. With the variety which is known to exist in the temperaments and circumstances of different individuals, it would be unreasonable to expect that the effect of religious truth would be identical in all cases. The Bible, with that wisdom which characterizes all the terms and provisions which it has annexed to salvation, does not require this uniformity of experience. It prescribes no inflexible way by which the sinner is to pass into the characters of the penitent and the believer. One thing is proposed as fundamental, and that is—God's method of justification through his grace bestowed upon men, solely on the ground of the mediatorial work of Christ. This must

be accepted and relied upon by every one who receives the mercy of God. This is done whenever repentance and faith can be said to have been *intelligently* and *sincerely* practiced by the soul. The fervor of feeling which may accompany these exercises is incidental rather than essential. It may vary indefinitely, in entire consistency with genuineness in them. If they are based upon correct Scriptural views of sin and guilt, and of Christ and his work; and if they are expressions of an honest conviction, desire, and purpose, they have verified what is demanded by the Bible. And this is the authentic arbiter in the case. The manner in which one man is affected is no index of the manner in which another is to be affected. Repentance in one subject of it may be accompanied with an intense and protracted distress; and the discovery of the freeness and fullness of mercy offered in Christ, in faith, may flood the soul with a delight amounting to rapture. But such extremes of emotion are not, anywhere in the Bible, said to be indispensable to the reality of repentance and faith. Rather, the instances of them given in the Bible are marked by calmness and gravity. To a right

repentance and a true faith the promises of the gospel are addressed; and repentance will be right, and faith will be true, when they accord with the definitions of them given in the Bible, whether they agree or not with what others may have to relate, or what may have been recorded of them in books, concerning their own particular experience.

IV.

The simplicity with which religion should be sought by the inquirer is sometimes disturbed by a premature occupation of the mind with questions touching church membership and its obligations. As has been remarked in a previous chapter, religion is strictly a transaction between the individual soul and God. The need of religion, which lies in the soul, conducts it to God. The relief which meets that need comes directly to the soul from God. The only intermediate object which can be admitted to the thought is Christ, who is the channel through whom both the need must be presented and the relief communicated. To introduce the Church to the consideration of a

person engaged in the pursuit of religion is to embarrass him in that pursuit, if not to divert him from it. The Church does not properly come into view until after that pursuit has been successfully concluded. Of course the Church is not to be thought of as a necessary medium of access to God. That would be to put it in the place of Christ, and invest it with the office of a saviour. To entertain this idea is to turn away from the pursuit of religion altogether. Or, as often happens, to indulge the mind in forecasting the solemn responsibilities of church membership, and in conjuring up the perils which may possibly arise from your inability to meet those responsibilities, is to admit into the problem you are considering a factor which is entirely foreign to it, and to encumber the pursuit of religion with difficulties which are unreasonable and irrelevant. What you have to do now is to become a religious man—to obtain the forgiveness of sin, a regenerate heart, and reconciliation with God. The time to consider the duty of assuming church membership, with its responsibilities and perils, will come only when these results have been attained; and when that

time comes, the light which may be needed to determine the question of duty may be confidently expected. Your business as an inquirer is to see that your feet are planted certainly in the way of God, and that will lead you by an easy progress into the house of God. Reversing this order, and putting the house of God between you and the way of God, will only be throwing an impediment in your pursuit of religion. The thief on the cross had the promise from the highest authority of being admitted to Paradise in a few short hours. The thought of the Church, or of a formal connection with it, did not enter into his mind; nor was there any allusion to it in the Saviour's answer to his prayer. Religion with him in his extremity was a simple pursuit of mercy from God, through the mediation of Christ; and it was successful. Success in every case requires that there should be a pursuit of the same object, and the same simplicity in that pursuit.

V.

The seeker after religion is sometimes hindered in his effort by an undue devotion to

the study of abstruse doctrines, or by an excessive attention to the operations and frames of his own mind, or to what is called introspection. In preference to these methods of gaining light, the Bible recommends the use of prayer. "The things that are freely given to us of God," says St. Paul (1 Cor. 2 : 12), we are to know through the aid of "the Spirit which is of God." Now the aid of this "Spirit which is of God" is to be sought from God through prayer; and the necessity of prayer as a principal means of acquiring religion must be recognized by the inquirer. In the nature of the case the use of prayer is demanded of him. Religion, as we have seen, begins with a sense of the need of God's mercy and with a desire for it in the soul of a sinner. That desire would be a nominal, not a real, thing, if it did not report itself to God—its appropriate object. Spoken or unspoken, the so reporting of itself is prayer. But nature asks the aid of speech in reporting its desires; and the desire of the sinner needs this aid in expressing itself. Spoken prayer gives distinctness, and even force, to the desire which it reveals. It helps the party resorting to it to realize

better that he is carrying his desire to the Being to whom it must be presented in order to be relieved. It has special promises made to it, and is an instituted method of approaching God. And on these accounts it is to be commended to the inquirer as a way of gaining sensible and efficacious access to God, and to "the things that are freely given to us" of him—more direct than any which is afforded by the merely intellectual exercises of study, reflection, or speculation. Prayer, truly offered, implies the presence of God with the suppliant. The presence of God is the presence of the source from which mercy must come to the soul. In that presence, so near the fountain of salvation, it is to be expected the hand of faith will most easily and certainly find and grasp the blessing sought. The response, "Go in peace; thy sins be forgiven thee," comes perhaps most frequently as an answer to prayer.

VI.

The disposition to look for the promised aid of the Holy Spirit under extraordinary forms may conceal from the inquirer the actual forms

under which that aid has been given. The absence of such extraordinary forms may cause a disappointment which leads to discouragement; whereas the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's work, when properly understood and applied, is adapted to be an eminent source of encouragement to the seeker after religion,—for it assures him that in every good disposition, every right purpose, every spiritual apprehension, of which he is conscious, he is already experiencing the aid of this divine agent. The desire for grace, or the impulse which prompts him to seek grace, is a proof that grace has already been bestowed. While the prayer for the Holy Spirit's aid is going up, the Holy Spirit, with his gracious power, is already present, inspiring the prayer. And grace bestowed is an earnest and pledge of more grace ready to be bestowed, according to the recipient's need. Every struggling aspiration of the soul after Christ is a sign that Christ is already calling the soul to himself. The blind Bartimæus (Mark 10 : 46), while crying to Jesus, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me," finds himself already called of Jesus; and as his step drew nearer, and his

prayer became more earnest, he learns that all was preparatory to the final message of grace : "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole."

A solemn inference from this doctrine ought not to be overlooked. To stop short of this final grace; to relinquish, from any cause, the effort to obtain it; to "look back" after you have been led to "put your hand to the plough,"—is not only to prove yourself unfit for the kingdom of God, but it is to be guilty of discrediting the grace already vouchsafed to you, and of quenching the influences of the Holy Spirit.

VII.

One caution more needs to be given in regard to the cherishing of doubts as to his regeneration and acceptance with God by the inquirer. When, upon fair scriptural grounds, you can claim to have repented and believed in Christ, doubting is both an unreasonable and an excusable state of mind. It is the holding back of your assent from a conclusion which, God himself has declared, follows upon these acts. It is not a mark of humility, as it is often supposed to be. That would make you magnify

the grace of God, and readily accept of his mercy. It is rather a mark of a defective faith—a faith which still requires something in the man himself to supplement and complete the promise of God. It is a faith which fears to lean except upon a staff which it holds in its own hands. Such faith does not please God; it does not glorify him, because it cannot venture, with an entire confidence, upon his simple word. The faith of the gospel is trust—trust in Christ; and trust in Christ is a going out of self to Christ to do for you what you can no longer do for yourself. The effect which would follow if you had a power of your own to resort to must follow from your resort to a power which you put in the place of your own. Faith in Christ secures and makes certain salvation—just as your own agency would if you could employ it. The refusal to accept this conclusion, and to draw from the promise of salvation the salvation which it offers, is as inconsistent and as unjust as it would have been for the blind man to whom Jesus had said “Receive thy sight” to stand with his eyelids closed, groping in the dark and mourning over his wretchedness,

when he was all the while a healed man, and had only to say to himself, "I am what Jesus says he has made me," to realize the gracious miracle which had been wrought in his behalf, and to expatiate in the rapture of the new sense which had been given him. The sinner who has truly gone to Christ for life must throw aside the last vestige of unbelief, and with an humble courage affirm to himself at once, upon the authority of Christ's word, that he is the actual possessor of the life which Christ has to bestow. By such a confidence God is honored, while the doubter only impugns his veracity and limits his grace. And in the exercise of such a confidence the believer realizes that religion, as a present boon, is what the Bible declares it to be—a "receiving the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul."

In the attainment of this happy result may it be the lot of all the readers of this little volume to share, and, in the final and perfect consummation of it, to experience the blessedness of the Saviour's promise :

"WHOSOEVER SHALL CONFESS ME BEFORE MEN, HIM WILL I CONFESS ALSO BEFORE MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN."