

CHURCH PORTALS.

BY

JAMES I. VANCE, D. D.,

AUTHOR OF 'THE YOUNG MAN FOURSQUARE,' AND PASTOR OF
THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NASHVILLE, TENN.

"The church which the Lord Jesus Christ has erected in this world
for the gathering and perfecting of the saints is his visible kingdom of
grace, and is one and the same in all ages."

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DEDICATED

TO

THE OLD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

AT BRISTOL, TENNESSEE,

**NOW BUT A MEMORY, ITS PLAIN WALLS HAVING GIVEN PLACE
TO A MORE PRETENTIOUS STRUCTURE, BUT UNDER WHOSE
ROOF I FIRST CONFESSED THE SAVIOUR, AT WHOSE
ALTAR I TOOK MY FIRST COMMUNION, AND
UNDER THE SACRED INFLUENCE OF
WHOSE SIMPLE SCRIPTURAL FAITH
AND WORSHIP I LEARNED TO
LOVE THE CHURCH.**

INTRODUCTORY.

THIS book is the product of experience. It is the result of efforts to meet the practical difficulties of real people. The questions discussed are those of continual recurrence in church life. They meet every pastor; they suggest themselves to all who seriously contemplate church membership; they are of vital interest to all earnest churchmen.

How far may saving faith tolerate honest doubt? What is the cure for doubt? What must one accept before he may unite with the church? What is the churchman to do? What and how is the churchman to be? How may faith certify its saving vitality? What purpose do church sacraments serve? What is the scriptural attitude of churches to each other?

These are the themes treated in the pages that follow, and, as the discussion advances, the individual passes along the path of a common experience from the point where he was kept from uniting with the church because of

honest doubts, to the point where, as a member of some great Christian denomination, he considers his relation to the corporate life of the church catholic.

The church is a boon. It was divinely instituted "to give light and to save life." It need not be disputed, that one can be saved outside church lines; but he can certainly be saved more potentially, more completely, more gloriously, within the church.

The mission of the chapters that follow is to give lucid and simple treatment of certain questions that suggest themselves in church life, to the end that those who are without the church because of mental difficulties may see the way clear to enter, and that those within the church may reach a higher degree of church usefulness and Christian character.

The mission of the church is to christianize men and women, and send them down into the world as living incarnations of what the church proclaims. The product of the church is churchmen. The highest churchman is the most Christ-like Christian; the highest Christian is he who is the church.

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CHURCH PORTALS.

CHAPTER I. Honest Doubts.

TEST!

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.”—Rom. xiv. 1.

IT is one thing to remain outside the church because your creed is unsound, it is a very different thing to remain outside the church because your life is impure. The cure for the first is a deeper Christian experience; the cure for the second is a new heart. It follows, therefore, that one may be saved and yet be unorthodox, that is, have doubts as to some things which Christians usually accept. What bearing should this have on one's attitude to the church? Is church membership an affair of the head, or of the heart, or of both? As a matter of fact, many are without the doors of the church because they cannot conscientiously subscribe to all that the church holds.

Honest doubts! What shall the church say to the man who holds them? What do the

doubts themselves do for the man who holds them? What shall a man do with his honest doubts? How shall a man get rid of his honest doubts? These are some of the questions which naturally suggest themselves in connection with this subject, and in the course of the discussion all these points will be touched upon. Before doing so a few preliminary statements are needed.

The "honest doubter" is a real existence, although exceedingly rare. The "dishonest doubter" is of much more frequent occurrence. Many feign skepticism. They think it is an evidence of intellectual brilliance. Since it is a cheap accomplishment, costs no effort, and requires no great mental furniture to doubt, it is not an uncommon thing to find a certain class of people reaching for smartness and originality by calling in question the old-fashioned faiths of their fathers and of the Bible.

Very often skepticism is made a cloak for secret sins, and when one says, "I have honest doubts," he really means, "I have secret sins." He is leading a life that goes squarely in the face of the teachings of the Bible, a mean, selfish, niggardly, vicious, ungodly life; but he is unwilling to make the shameful confession that these abominable and depraved practices are

the bar to his becoming a disciple of Christ. Hence he covers all up with the specious phrase, "I have doubts; I have intellectual difficulties." He throws the thin gauze of a feigned skepticism over the yawning hell of a corrupt heart and a vicious life. It is not this class to whom this chapter is addressed. Such "doubts" do not give any trouble to their owner. They comfort. They are the scape-goat on which a bad man unloads his sins, and to reason with him would be like firing cannon-balls into sand-banks. Men that make skepticism a cloak for sin need to hear only the clear voice of the divine law, saying, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."¹ Still, there are people with honest doubts, who want to know the truth, who are perplexed by genuine intellectual difficulties, men and women, who, for the most part, lead fairly moral lives, but whose honest doubts keep them out of the church and deprive them of the consolations of the Christian religion. This is the class to whom I write, and it is a class not inconsiderable, especially among thoughtful men.

Let it be borne in mind that there is a kind of doubt perfectly defensible. You have no right to believe anything for which there is neither reason nor proof. God has endowed

¹ Ezek. xviii. 4.

the human mind with powers of investigation, reflection, and reason, that we may intelligently examine into and weigh evidence, and thus find the truth. He appeals to our thought. He bids us know, and be always ready with a reason for the faith that is in us. Christian belief is not credulity. God wants no blind faith, and he has provided amply for the satisfaction of every honest mental inquiry on the subject of religion. Since God has given the Bible to reveal his truth to all men, we may rest assured that its proofs, like the signature and seal of some royal proclamation, are level to the understanding of the common average man. The trouble with the honest doubter is not that the remedy for his doubts does not exist, but that he has never come into contact with that remedy. In nine cases out of ten this is his own fault. He has either never carefully studied the evidences, or, which is more likely, he has never thoroughly studied the Bible.

Be that as it may, the man has honest doubts, and we must take him as we find him. There he stands with his honest difficulties. What has the Bible to say about such an individual? It says this: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations"; or, as the margin translates it, "not to judge his doubtful thoughts."

"Him that is weak in the faith." What does that mean? Dr. Hodge says that faith here means "persuasion of the truth." And a man who was weak in the faith was one who was weak in his persuasion of the truth of certain Christian doctrines. "Some of the early Christians were, no doubt, fully convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and yet felt great doubts whether the distinction between clean and unclean meats was entirely done away. This was certainly a great defect of Christian character, and arose from the want of an intelligent and firm conviction of the gratuitous nature of justification and of the spirituality of the gospel. Since, however, this weakness was not inconsistent with religion, such persons were to be received."¹ The man weak in the faith, then, was he with "honest doubts." He was to be received, but not to doubtful disputations, not for the purpose of judging his opinions. The meaning, then, is about this: Whoever has honest doubts let the church receive, but not for the purpose of arguing with him about his opinions and sitting in judgment on his doubts.

I.

The first great lesson brought to us in this is: One may have a very strong persuasion as

¹ Hodge *in loco*.

to certain truths, and a very weak one as to others. He may be persuaded that Christ is the Messiah, and yet have doubts as to some of his miracles. He may be convinced of the existence and goodness of God, and yet have doubts as to many of the rulings of providence. He may be thoroughly persuaded of the truths taught in the "Sermon on the Mount," and yet have doubts as to the genuineness of certain passages of the Pentateuch. In other words, one may exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ as his Redeemer, and at the same time have honest doubts existing side by side with his saving faith. Some one says that state of mind is illogical. Of course it is, but it is the rarest thing for the human mind to be infallibly and remorselessly logical out to the uttermost consequences in an investigation.

You say a man with such commingled faith and doubt would be guilty of mental contradiction. Of course he would, but saving faith is an act of the heart, and not of the head: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness."¹ Certainly he would be guilty of mental obliquity, but every one is guilty of that more or less. Human reason makes a great many mistakes and does much that is foolish. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, there are instances on re-

¹ Rom. x. 10.

cord in the Bible where saving faith and honest doubts, where heart belief and intellectual difficulties, have stood thus side by side in the self-same soul.

One day a poor, needy woman, her tired heart distracted with "many a conflict, many a doubt," pushed her way through the crowd to Jesus' side, and bending at his feet, tremblingly touched the hem of his garment. Her faith was weak, her doubts were many. She knew little about Jesus and less about the Christ. She was illogical, and mentally foolish and self-contradictory, but Jesus looked down into that woman's soul, through all the mists of mental doubt and distrust, and saw a little gem of faith sparkling in her heart. That was enough. Christ saved her.

Recall the man that waited with his epileptic child, at the foot of the mount of transfiguration, for the coming of Jesus. In answer to his prayer for help, Jesus said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."¹ The man said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." There was faith and honest doubt, belief and honest unbelief, trust and distrust; but the boy was healed.

Yes, faith can exist in almost any atmosphere. It may not grow; its usefulness, its joy,

¹ Mark ix. 14-29.

may be diminished; but faith itself will not utterly perish, once it has been kindled in the human soul by the Spirit of God. Will you get a clear, firm grasp of the distinction here made? God's word recognizes the fact that a man may have saving faith with honest doubts. That is no excuse for doubting, understand you; but doubts do not destroy the possibility of salvation. They play a totally different part. They *limit usefulness*; they quench joy; they imperil peace. A soul's salvation does not depend upon its mental state, but on Jesus' blood; not on conviction, but on Christ. God does not damn a man for his bad logic any more than he does for his ignorance.

Well, what shall be done with the man who has honest doubts, but who looks to Jesus Christ and trusts him for salvation? "Receive him," but not to judge his doubtful thoughts. "Receive him." Let him come into the church. Let him partake of the sacraments, and be brought into vital contact with all the outward means of grace. Perhaps that shocks some over-orthodox soul. You say, "The church will become corrupt, defiled, unsound. Let the man wait outside the church door until all his doubts are settled." But God says, "Receive him," "Take him into your fellowship," "Let him join the church."

When shall we get rid of the heresy that one must be absolutely perfect, morally, mentally, in conduct and experience, before he is a fit subject to be admitted to church membership? Church membership is confession of Christ, and Christ is the very starting-point. If one can be all that is needed before coming into the church, let him stay outside. He does not need the church. Christ placed his church in the world to help souls struggling toward the light, and whenever there comes one looking through a beclouded mental sky for the Saviour whom he loves and trusts, receive him, help him, pray for him; but, in God's name, don't damn him for his doubts.

"Receive him, but not to doubtful disputations." There is divine wisdom in that line. Do not argue with a doubter about his doubts. Do not pit small minds against each other, both may fall into the ditch. Do not try to convince him that he is a fool for doubting as he does. Do not force him to defend his doubts. It may only confirm him in his delusions. Send him to God's word, and leave him to the enlightening influences of a growing Christian experience.

II.

Thus far we have been concerned with what the church shall do with the honest doubter.

There is another question of equal importance: *What do honest doubts bring to the man who holds them?* From what has been said, you may conclude that they are comparatively harmless; that you may doubt or not, just as you please, and go into eternity without any great loss to your spiritual interests. If you think so, you are tremendously mistaken. The world, instead of being ashamed of its doubts, is reaching the point where it actually boasts of them. Some one has said: "The first families in the world of intellect have adopted a new coat-of-arms; their escutcheon is a shield bearing an interrogation point. Faith is confounded with credulity. The simple confidence of a child-like believer, who takes the Bible as the word of God, is met by the learned and cultured with a complacent, if not compassionate, smile; and the gospel is treated by some with even a lofty contempt, as though it would do for women and children and small men, but not for great minds and highly-cultured people."

Now, it is well to understand that a doubt, instead of being something to boast of, is something to be ashamed of and to deplore. Doubts are spiritual and mental diseases. They do not destroy the ability of Jesus to save you. You can be, and possibly you are,

saved in spite of your doubts. Here is what your honest doubts do for you: *They sap your spiritual strength; they circumscribe your usefulness; they destroy your Christian happiness.* Doubts make people miserable. The soul dwells under a perpetually leaden sky. It never gets flooded with the glorious light from a clear-shining and unobscured faith.

David Hume, out of the misery of his sceptical heart, exclaimed: "There are moments when, amidst all of the pleasures of philosophical discovery and the pride of literary fame, I could wish that I had never doubted." A Christian with honest doubts is a Samson shorn of his locks. He has lost his strength. Doubt paralyzes. It creates weaklings. The reason why great numbers of professing Christians are so lukewarm in sending the gospel to the heathen is because they have doubts about the condition of the heathen. The world and the church wait for men of strong conviction, who can say, "I *know*." The doubters have not moved this world much. It has been men like Paul, with his "I know whom I have believed"; like Luther, with his impregnable convictions that upheaved a continent and transformed a century. Simon Peter could walk the sea until he began to doubt, and then he sank. There is the reason why many are not

worth more to the kingdom of Christ. Their honest doubts have given them spiritual paralysis.

III.

What shall a man do with his honest doubts?

First, Keep them to himself. Do not publish them. Do not defile some other's faith. The world has all the doubts it needs. Humanity can get along without the publication of yours. It was Emerson who said: "We need positive men, not negative men; affirmations, positions, not denials, negations." Goethe, with a despair born of habitual doubt, cries: "Give us your convictions! as for doubts, we have quite enough of our own." And it was the sainted Spurgeon who, in his quaint way, added, "It may be a great thing to doubt, but it's a greater thing to hold your tongue till you get rid of your doubts." Shame for those rabid skeptics and promulgators of a reckless infidelity, who have nothing to lose themselves, and who go up and down the land unsettling the faith of others. Keep your doubts to yourself. God knows they have a wide enough circulation in your own breast.

Then, *doubt your doubts.* Why not? Why not doubt your doubts instead of doubting your beliefs? Here is a belief, well supported, and yonder is a doubt, with scarcely any sup-

port at all. That doubt assails this belief, and you suffer your belief to fall and your doubt to stand. That is not sensible. Dr. Charles F. Deems has given to young men this excellent maxim: "Believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts. Never make the mistake of doubting your beliefs and believing your doubts." Some one else has admirably added: "Faith and unfaith are both susceptible of nurture, of culture. He who presumes that what he has been taught to believe is, for that reason, to be questioned; and that what he has been led to question is, therefore, unworthy of unquestioning confidence; and that his doubts are more trustworthy than his faiths, will find himself drifting away from all the moorings of truth and duty—on an open sea, where clouds hide the stars, and fogs obscure all headlands; and where, without compass, chart, or rudder, he is driving on blindly toward the utter wreck and ruin of all religious faith." What are you to do with your honest doubts? Keep them buried in your own breast, and doubt them with all the might God gives you.

IV.

One more question: *How shall a man get rid of his honest doubts?* Ah! that is the most important part of it all. For who wants

to harbor these foes of his peace, this poison to his soul? Doubts are not treasures; they are disabilities. Can we get rid of them? Blessed be God, yes! He does not leave his child to wander hopeless and helpless in the darkness. While we may not know all in perfection now, we *may* know much that now hangs in doubt, and for the rest, we may reach that point of perfect assurance which serenely waits for God's day of full disclosures. God has a way, a plan, for exterminating doubt. If you will follow his plan you will get rid of your honest doubts. This is the plan of God: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine."¹ Obedience is the door to knowledge, and experience is the ground of certainty.

First, Obedience. "If any man will do my will." You must follow God's plan unquestioningly, and you must take the steps as God directs. Start with Christ. Do not start with morality. First accept Christ as your personal Saviour, then confess him, then begin to serve him and keep his commandments. You have little faith and many doubts at first. Act up to the light you have, send your doubts to the devil, and, God's word for it, you will get more light further on and higher up. Then, as

¹ John vii. 17.

you endeavor, day after day, to do God's will, you will find that your obedience is bringing you a Christian experience, and this experience becomes the ground of an assurance before which no doubt can stand. When we smite honest doubts with actual experience, the doubts must go. "We have seen, therefore we know."¹ No metaphysics can break down that bulwark. Obedience leads to experience, and experience is the ground of assurance. "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life,"² and "this is life eternal, that they might know."³ Obeying God we get an experience, and this experience demolishes doubts. To get this experience, we must do God's will. You cannot get an experience of New York city by living in the Rocky Mountains. You cannot get an experience of continental Europe by living in the heart of Africa. You cannot get an experience of the kingdom of God by living in the world. To understand the gospel, you must come on the inside. Some one once asked Coleridge if he could vindicate the claims of Christianity to a divine origin with a single argument. "Yes," the poet replied, "try it."

Such is God's plan to banish doubt and strengthen faith, and it will work if you will

¹John iii. 11; 1 John i. 1. ²John vi. 47. ³John xvii. 3.

only put it to the test. You will find yourself all the while emerging into a clearer Christian knowledge, where the sky above you is bluer, and the horizon wider and brighter, until at last your Lord will let you go into that land which doubts never invade, where the full vision is granted, and where we KNOW EVEN AS WE ARE KNOWN.

CHAPTER II.

The Doors of the Church.

COME!

"Thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the 'Gentiles.'"—ISAIAH lx. 11.

IN common parlance the "doors of the church" stand for the terms of church membership. With the scriptural doctrine as to honest doubt, the way is open for the honest doubter to knock at the doors of the church. What makes a church member? Whatever the sentence quoted above from Isaiah may or may not mean, it certainly does mean that God intended it should not be hard to gain entrance into the Christian church during the gospel age.

Every now and then God raises up for a nation or an age some great, splendid, sun-crowned soul, who is the embodiment of the best in the past and the prophet of the best in the future. Such a man was Isaiah to his generation. It was an age of exclusiveness, of narrowness, of bigotry and intense religious intolerance. Admission to the sealing ordinances

of the church could be had only by the select few, and at the price of conforming to the most elaborate ceremonialism. This old Jewish seer lifted his face toward the morning, and, catching on his eager, waiting soul the lambent flame of a brighter era, said to his brothers and sisters and to the men of his time: "It will be better by and by. The way will be plainer, the truth will be clearer, worship will be simpler, the church will be ampler. Ecclesiastical exclusiveness and religious intolerance will have God's frown. The doors of the temple will no longer open only to the sesame of Levitical ritualism; the dowry of heavenly grace will no longer be conferred only at certain great festivals and feast days, but faith will be the magic touch before which all barriers shall go down; and as for the gates that open into the worship chamber of our God, they shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that all men may lay the homage of their love and praise upon the altar there."

It is our good fortune to live in the day which Isaiah saw, and to be blessed with the ministry of that church whose doors are "who-soevers," opening inward to the kingdom of heaven, and swinging free and large to the prayers of all men. Nevertheless, it is doubt-

ful if men understand the message clearly even now in the noontide of the era which the old Jewish prophet foresaw.

How large is God's church? Who are its members? What are its terms of membership? How much of form and symbol, of faith and doctrine, of vows and creeds, of confessions and experiences, must one possess before his credentials will be deemed strong enough to get him within the pale of the Christian church? What is the key to the door of the church? Just what must I subscribe to before I may get for myself the name of "churchman"? There is not a little confusion with regard to this.

It is rather strange that after the church has been in the world so long we should still find people discussing the subject of churchship, and asking, What is the church, and what is membership in the church? The doors of the church, What do they stand for, and how are they entered? These are the questions before us in the present chapter.

I.

First, What do the doors of the church stand for? What is on the inside?

A great congregation of denominations. Yes, they are there, of every shade and class and

form imaginable. The sects are behind the church doors, arranged in little groups, according to their special predilections and characteristic tenets, but the differences between them are not so great as at first appear. Gather a score of American citizens together from any city in the land and no two of them will be exactly alike. They will differ in appearance, in culture, in temperament, in station. The brow of one will be large and ample, the eye of his companion dull and lusterless, but they will all be men swearing allegiance to the same flag and sharing in a thousand ways the kindred experiences of a common destiny.

The differences between the sects, the denominations of Christendom, are not greater. Each has its peculiarities. The Methodists are the church of the fiery zeal; the Baptists are the church of the great confession; the Episcopalians are the church of the beautiful ritual; the Presbyterians are the church of the historic creed; but these are only minor points. All are Christian; all swear allegiance to the same flag, and share in a thousand ways the kindred experiences of a common destiny. Narrow views are the result of narrow conceptions of the church itself.

When God gave the church to the world, what did he give? Was he bestowing on man-

kind an ecclesiastical polity? More than that. The human race is not hungering and thirsting after an ecclesiastical polity. Well, then, if the church is not a form of government, you can have a church, whether it is governed by presbyters, or bishops, or popes, or deacons, or stewards, or what not. It may not be the most scriptural form of church, but it will be church. The government of the church is not the church. Are sacraments the church? Are divine services the church? Are creeds and confessionals the church? No; the church is something larger, grander, stronger. The church is the "kingdom of Christ." This is what God wanted to give the world, a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The visible church is composed of all those alive in the earth to-day who give allegiance to Christ. The invisible church consists of all those on earth and in heaven who give allegiance to Christ.

Now to say that, is to admit at once that the Presbyterian denomination is not the church, it is but a part of the great host. The Methodist denomination is not the church, it is only a section. The Episcopal denomination is not the church, it is only a single regiment. The Baptist denomination is not the church, it is only one of the divisions. This is the most

that can be claimed by any Christian. God's host is bigger than any sect. We are divided on very small lines, on questions of expediency, on forms of government, on significance of sacraments, but it takes something bigger than these things to make the church; and you can never trim Christ's spiritual kingdom down to such lilliputian dimensions. It does not read: "Be governed by elders and be saved; be governed by bishops and be saved; govern yourself and be saved; confess to a priest and be saved; take the sacraments on your knees and be saved; get yourself confirmed and be saved; be a Presbyterian and be saved; be a Methodist or an Episcopalian or a Lutheran and be saved." Larger, higher, ampler rise the gates, glorious and golden with that light that shines from out the heavenly world. Here is what it says: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved." God's church is as large as that, and over its portals that great word is written. Men imagine they have destroyed the church when they have swept away some theory or practice which the church held. You have seen men attack Arminianism or Calvinism and imagine that they were dealing staggering blows to the gospel of Jesus Christ. You have seen men fracture a creed, expose the shortcomings of a priesthood, proclaim the absurdities of a

ritual, and then strut away from the fight as though they had killed God and swept his kingdom from the face of the earth. They will never exterminate the church until they have quenched the last, lingering spark of faith from the breast of man.

Some one has finely said: "The spirit of Christ can no more be shut in by sectarian walls than the boundless atmosphere can be confined in a child's balloon. The Master, who said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me,' welcomes to his heart all child-like souls. He who said, 'He who is not against me is with me'; he who selected a Roman tax-gatherer for his apostle, who gave his divinest truth to the woman of Samaria, who went with publicans and sinners, his spirit cannot be bound by any narrow limitations. It belongs to all human minds and hearts. Philosophers like Pascal, Erigena, Anselm, can find nothing deeper than the words of its gospel, which also brought his only comfort to the slave on the plantation and to the poor working woman in her lonely room. Christianity soars upwards in majestic beauty in the great cathedrals of Europe; sings divine hymns to the music of great composers; calls on the highest touch of art in the divine child of the Dresden Madonna and the awful forms of the Sistine chapel. It hallows all life,

the marriage feast of Cana, the sad mourning at the tomb of Lazarus. It touches the infant's brow with its baptismal water, sanctifies the joy of the bridal hour, comforts the sick, the lonely, the dying, and speaks words of immortal hope over the grave where we lay our precious dead."¹ And yet the kingdom of Christ is greater than all it ever does, and stronger and ampler than all it ever helps or blesses.

The church is greater than its forms. It is something besides its vestments. Religion is not the creature of ritualism,² but ritualism of religion; and when we get behind our forms and deep down beneath our symbols, we are coming, at last, into contact with that warmth which is the very life of the church, and which is the basis of its organic unity. When one gets a vision of the church as large as that, it will be impossible for him to commit the infinite folly of attempting to dwarf the kingdom of Christ down to the dimensions of a single denomination.

I do not speak for other churches; but one of the characteristics which commends Presbyterianism to my heartiest acceptance is, that it has risen to a conception of the church as gen-

¹ Dr. James F. Clarke in sermon on Ephesians iii. 18.

² "Ritual does not produce religion, but religion produces ritual."—Dr. James F. Clarke.

erous and catholic as this just presented. Here are the exact words of the Presbyterian Church on this subject: "The church which the Lord Jesus Christ has erected in this world for the gathering and perfecting of the saints is his visible kingdom of grace, and is one and the same in all ages. The members of this visible church catholic are all those persons in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of the holy religion of Christ and of submission to his laws."¹ Perhaps the generosity and largeness of that statement may surprise some, coming, as it does, from the faith of a church which they have been led to regard as austere and unyielding in its doctrinal deliverances.

What is on the inside of the doors of the church? The whole family of God. Not merely our rules and creeds, not merely our forms and dogmas, but the entire kingdom of Christ. It matters not what may be their denominational stripe. It is not essential whence they hail. Men from the Congo and the Volga, children from the land of the midnight sun, Scythians, Teutons, Celts and Slavs, conformists, dissenters, old school and new school, protestants and papists—if only they have received into their hearts the life of Christ—they

¹ *Book of Church Order*, Chap. I., Sections 2 and 3.

are there within the shelter of the great church doors, stained on lintel and door-posts with the sacrificial blood shed on Calvary, and they are safe in that blessed keep of God forever and forever.

II.

How may we get on the inside? We are better prepared now for a simple, lucid answer to that question. What are the terms of church membership? What attitude must I take before the doors will open to me? What subscription must I make? What ecclesiastical trappings must I assume before I can get in? There is much misunderstanding here, and there has always been.

There was a time when the so-called "Blue Laws"¹ of New Haven were regarded by some as thoroughly orthodox and representative of the proper ecclesiastical attitude. It was in that epoch that human logic could go so far as to make "the willingness to be damned a test

¹ There was no such code as the "Blue Laws" ever enacted. There is, however, a "parchment-covered book of demi-royal paper," which Judge Smith, in his *History of New York*, says was handed to him in New Haven when he asked for the "Blue Laws." On examination, he found the book to be only "the records of convictions consonant, in the judgment of magistrates, to the word of God and the dictates of reason." To this extent are they evidence of what could then be regarded as "orthodox."

of conversion." But the blessed light from Christ's face has fallen on the page and made the message plainer, and yet there are people in the world who affect to believe that the church still demands subscriptions, kindred in spirit to this, of those who seek church membership.

Suppose you wanted to pass through the doors of the church into church membership, and take your place in the Presbyterian group, what would be necessary? "Well," you say, "I suppose it would be necessary for me to come with the *Westminster Confession* in one hand and the *Shorter Catechism* in the other, with election on my head and the songs of predestination on my tongue. That might admit me; possibly it would make me a member in 'good and regular standing'; but if, in addition to this, I could have reasonable doubts as to infant salvation, and could heartily endorse all of the deeds and deliverances of John Calvin, the doors would swing wide open, and I should be greeted as one of the very elect."

Does that seem to you an exaggeration? The writer has found people well informed in other respects, who believe that the Presbyterian Church demands a subscription equivalent to that of all those admitted to its membership—at least they affirm such belief, and appear

honest in their conviction. It is quite a common thing to meet those who are under the impression that they must surrender, not only their sins, but their independence of thought and liberty of conscience, before they can become church members. They must come before a human tribunal, they suppose, composed of fallible men, sometimes men of blameworthy lives, and there confess their sins, and be adjudged as to whether they are fit for church membership. Do these lines fall under the eyes of any who are outside of the church to-day because of any such views? You cannot subscribe to all of the creeds. You cannot endorse all that the elders and deacons and bishops have done. Let us see just what you must endorse, and let us settle the matter, first, out of God's word, and not from the practice of the churches.

Since the church is identical with the kingdom of Christ, whatever makes one a Christian should also make him a member of the church. Whatever admits me into fellowship with Jesus Christ should also admit me into fellowship with Christ's brethren. The door of the church ought to be as wide, as gracious, as responsive to the touch, as the door of the gospel. Surely it ought not to be harder to get into the Presbyterian Church than it is to get

into heaven. If one has a title to glory, it ought to be worth its face-value at the door of any church in the land.

What is it, then, that makes a Christian? Is it the *Westminster Confession*? Is it the Methodist discipline? Is it the Episcopal confirmation? Is it the Baptist immersion? Is it the understanding of the Trinity? Is it the ability to reconcile predestination and free agency? Is it the achievement of a high degree of sanctification? It is not so stated in the Bible. There it is said that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ makes a Christian. There is but one condition: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."¹ That lets one into heaven. That is all the credential which one needs when he stands at the bar of God. It should be worth as much at the bar of any ecclesiastical tribunal.

Faith in Christ is the only condition to salvation, and *a profession of that faith is the only scriptural condition to church membership*. It only needs that one come, saying: "I believe in Jesus Christ; I trust him for my salvation; I am determined to live for his glory"; and the creed is long enough and sound enough. Whether the profession is sincere or hypocritical, God must judge. Sometimes it is a tare

¹ Acts xvi. 31.

that grows up beside the wheat, but we leave it alone until the harvest; then God plucks it out and burns it. Faith in Christ lets us into the invisible church, and the profession of that faith lets us into the visible church. That is all.

Does this seem to you too liberal? It is the position of God's word on the subject. One day Christ asked Simon Peter, "Whom say ye that I am?"¹ The disciple answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus said, "I will build my church on that, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." What was it upon which Christ built his church? That profession of Peter's, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." So that, in all the centuries that were to follow, whenever one came knocking at the doors of the church, if he could say as much as that, they were to let him in. All must pass in that same way. It was the only door. The pope of Rome, or the humblest child in the land, must make the same confession before he can cross the threshold of the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, I am aware that some of our sister denominations have additional tests of membership, but even with them profession of faith in

¹ Matthew xvi. 15-18.

Christ is central and dominant. But the Presbyterian Church, in its test for membership, has risen to a largeness of view kindred to its constitutional definition of the church itself. For those who would avail themselves of its communion, and would stand in its ranks, and would march under its bonnie blue flag, it does not ask: "Are you a predestinationist? Do you accept the *Confession of Faith*? Do you believe in the *jure divino* origin of Presbyterianism?" Much less does it ask you to pin yourself down to conformity to certain rules and practices which may commend themselves as eminently Christian. Here are the constitutional questions which the Presbyterian Church propounds as the test:

"1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope, save in his sovereign mercy?"¹ That is, do you feel your need of a Saviour?

"2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel?" That is, do you trust Christ for your salvation?

"3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy

¹ *Directory for Worship*, Chap. X., Sec. 5, Par. 3.

Spirit, that you will endeavor to walk as becometh the followers of Christ, forsaking all sin, and conforming your life to his teaching and example?" That is, are you determined to live for his glory?

"4. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?" That is, will you behave yourself and endeavor not to stir up strife and produce schism?

Condense it all, reduce it to a single question, and it amounts to this: "Do you sincerely trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation and want to serve him?" That comprehends all. Can you stand with Peter and avow, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"? Then open swing the gates, and out goes the loving hand of church fellowship.

A simple-minded but devout old woman was before a certain church session for examination. They asked her about the atonement, election, the Trinity. She became confused, she lost her head, and could answer nothing. At last they said to her: "We are afraid you do not understand the step you seek to take, and think you had better wait outside the church a while longer." She arose and started towards the door, but just as she reached it turned, and with a tremor in her voice said:

"I can't answer your questions, but I do trust my Saviour, and I know that he will not let me be lost." The pastor said: "Come back, my good woman, come back, for, after all, that is as far as any of us can go, and that is all the Bible requires."

"Does the precept run: 'Believe in God,
In justice, truth, now understood
For the first time'? or, 'Believe in me,
Who lived and died, yet essentially
Am Lord of life'?"¹

The creed of the "daft catechumen" may not have gone very far before some church courts, but it was a confession after God's heart.

"He wore the cowl, he kissed the cross,
He handled book and beads;
The friars plied his stupid head
With litanies and creeds.
'Twas vain. Though lines on lines they taught,
He could learn only three:
'I love the Lord, I trust the Lord,
I hope the Lord to see.'"

Is it as well as that with your soul? Can you go that far? Then come into the church. "If that be all," you say, "what becomes of the nine and thirty articles of the Westminster standards and of all the great creeds of Christendom?" They stand as the formulated state-

¹ Browning.

ment of the interpretations which the various bodies of Christians put upon the Bible. They were never intended to be tests for church membership, but tests for ordination. They are subscribed to by those who become the authorized and official representatives of the church in doctrine and government, but as acceptance of them is not essential to entrance into heaven, neither is it into the church.

The key which Christ put into the hands of his disciples was Simon Peter's great confession. We can use the key, but we cannot change it. We dare not change it, for none other will fit the lock and thrust back the bolt and open the way to God's heaven.

What is on the inside of the doors of the church? God's family. Christ's kingdom. Who may enter? All who render allegiance to Christ. What opens the door and lets us in? Faith in Christ. To all such the gates open continually here. "They are not shut day nor night."

Up yonder the entrance will not be harder. John, in his Patmos vision, saw not the doors of the church militant which Isaiah saw, but the doors of the church triumphant. He caught one swift, glad, fleeting vision of where they go into the heavenly land, and the ecstatic cry of his soul sounds so like the shout of Isaiah that

we fancy it might almost be the echo of the old prophet's voice bounding back from the throne of God. Listen! "The nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there."¹

The disembodied spirit of God's child travels from the gates of the grave to the gates of heaven. He is travelling from gruesome shadows and a great darkness into supernal light and glory. And when at last he reaches the threshold of that celestial city, the vision that enraptured John shines forth, and the anxious soul discovers that a touch as gentle as opened church doors down here opens gates of pearl up there. The doctrine has not changed; the confession is the same, for there, over the archway of the church invisible, in apocalypse of gold, the same simple, sweet, seraphic word endures, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

¹ Rev. xxi. 24, 25.

CHAPTER III.

The Doors for the Church.

GO!

"Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."—Rev. iii. 8.

AFTER joining the church—what? After one has entered the church, what is he *to do*? First, the doors *of* the church, then the doors *for* the church.

In the last chapter we were concerned with the scriptural conditions to church membership, discovering that there was but one such condition, viz.: a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That takes us through the doors of the church. That is all the credential any one needs; and as here and there, from all classes and conditions of humanity, souls come, having accepted Christ as their Saviour and professing to trust and serve him, the church arises in the earth, and endures as a distinct and definite organization—for what? Standing within church doors, a question propounds itself to all those who are members of this great, glorious brotherhood, the bond of whose

fellowship is a common faith in a common Lord; and who together constitute not a sect battling for an ism, but the great blood-bought church of Christ, the sacramental host of the Almighty.

What is it all for? that is the question. What is the mission of the church? What does God want with it? Precisely what is the purpose for which it was created? Surely it has been dowered with some definite aim. Its existence is not accidental. It cost too much to be used merely for purposes of ornamentation. It cost the life of the Son of God to make it possible for the church to stand beneath the skies. If the church is merely a luxury in which God wanted to indulge, it is a tremendously expensive one. What is the church for? What is any church for? What is any churchman for? The bell rings, the doors open, the people assemble, regular services are held. What is it all for?

Not what does the church do, but what is the church for? Possibly it may not be fulfilling the end of its creation. You have seen men reel and stagger in drunken debauchment, and fill the atmosphere with blasphemy. God did not create them for that. He meant them to glorify him. It is possible for a church to fall into a kindred degradation, and while created

for a destiny beyond the stars, to be grovelling in the dust and grime of self-indulgence and sensual ease. Therefore, the great question is not, "What is the church doing?" but, "What did God mean it to do?" We have various views and sundry answers to this question.

I.

There are those who tell us that the church is the champion of orthodoxy. God raised it up to keep pure "the faith once delivered to the saints." According to this view the ideal churchman is a heresy hunter, never serving his God quite so well as when running down a heretic; a sort of "grand inquisitor," like Lachlan Campbell in the *Bonnie Brier Bush*, whose life-business was theology, "from supralapsarianism in election to the marks of faith in a believer's heart," and whose library consisted of some fifty volumes of ancient divinity, over which he pored and dozed beside the fire during the long winter nights.

It is very fine to champion orthodoxy and keep the doctrine sound, but the church must degenerate into a sect before it can come to regard this as its chief mission in the world. The church at Ephesus had an ambition to play the role of grand inquisitor. It could not endure heresy. It tried those who said they were

apostles, and found them liars. "Nevertheless," says God to this church, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." "You have done very well for orthodoxy," he seems to say to the Ephesian Christians. "You have kept heresy out of the church. That is good as far as it goes; but let me tell you there is something larger for the church to do. It has not fulfilled its whole mission when it has championed orthodoxy."

There are very many good people who seem to think that the main mission of the church is to frown on worldliness. We are living in a day of great laxity, and one is never so good a churchman as when setting his face like a flint against frivolity, luxurious living, and giddy worldliness. If you want to be a good Christian, be a Puritan, and go around with a long face of awful solemnity and speak in tones hollow and funereal. The little church at Pergamos seems to have thought this was the great thing, and we find them in sharp conflict with the worldly encroachments in which they lived. Yet the Lord said he had "a few things against them."

All honor to the God-fearing men and women of our day who are taunted with being "Puritanical," and who, for conscience' sake and the honor of Christ's cause, steadfastly re-

fuse to step down to the low level of worldly life and trail the garments of their Christian discipleship in that dust. They are the choice, the heroic, spirits of the age, and they carry the betterment of human society on their hearts. They will not fail you. They can be counted on when the fight waxes hot, and yet the church is still far from having fulfilled its mission when it has frowned down worldliness.

What is the church for? There are those who regard it as a charity organization, and who opine that the church is never doing its work so well as when clothing the naked and feeding the hungry. He is most a churchman who is a philanthropist. Yes, that is part of it, but not all of it. If it had been all, Christ needed not to die. It was a crime for him to die, for it put an end to his personal work in helping the poor and the needy. The church of Thyatira thought this was its mission. "I know thy works, and charity, and services," says God. "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee."

Caring for the bodies of men is good as far as it goes. The religion that neglects this is sham and snivelling cant; but the church is vastly more than a charity organization. You may abolish poverty, if you please, but that will not heal the world's sin. Sin causes pov-

erty, not poverty sin. You have not made a man a saint when you have made him a millionaire. Money is not the cure for crime, and Christ had vastly more than the temporal welfare of the world on his heart when he died on the cross. There are some Christians who seem to think that the church is intended to be a kind of mutual admiration society, into which all of the good, decent people are gathered, and where each may felicitate his companion upon being in such good company. Whether it does or not, the church ought to stand for the choicest spirits, the holiest lives, the kindest hearts, the world over. Within church doors there should be found the most genial and blessed fellowship earth affords. The command is, "Love one another." "Let each esteem the other better than themselves."¹ Church members ought to think much of one another; but if that is all there is in it, if we are merely to sit down and smile good-naturedly, and say pleasant things about our neighbors, God did nothing great when he made the church.

Neither is the church merely a sort of religious nursery in which to foster the infant spiritual life. It is to do that, certainly, but something more. We are not to be coddled

¹ Phil. ii. 3.

forever. God expects the Christian some time to get out of his spiritual babyhood and do something. The church has a higher mission than to make people feel happy. To reach a holy and hilarious mood, where one can shout, "Glory to God," may be a consummation, but it may be seriously doubted whether God thinks very much of that sort of piety. When Christ sent out his disciples he did not say, "Go, shouting, 'Glory to God.'" There are some saints who are better talkers than workers, better at feeling than serving, like that old New England deacon described by the local rhymester :

"Here's Uncle Ase, so full of grace,
Sometimes his cup runs over ;
He'll lie and sleep, and let his sheep
Eat up his neighbor's clover."

What is the church for? There is a conviction in your heart that the main thing has not been reached yet. Nevertheless, it has not been time wasted to dwell a moment on these minor things, for, as a matter of fact, there are scores of Christians who, in reality, make some one of these minor things the main thing in the life of the church. Suppose the question were answered out of your life, what would it be? You are a part of the church. Suppose all the church were like you, what would the church

be for? Would it be a grand inquisitor for the maintenance of orthodoxy? Would it be a society for the suppression of worldliness, or an organization for the relief of poverty? Would it be a *coterie* of the most decent people in the community, or a nursery for spiritual infants, or a machine to make people feel good?

II.

The mission of the church is far higher. It is in the world to achieve all of these minor blessings, but to do so indirectly and by means of something far greater. The church is to give to the world that which carries with it every other blessing worth naming, to make proclamation of the momentous fact that has the weal of the race in its keep.

There are two great words sounding in the church. One is uttered at the doors of the church, the other on the inside. One word is "Come," the other is "Go." They are directed to entirely different classes. At the door of the church it is "Come." On the inside of the church it is "Go." To all those outside the great church doors the gospel invitation is ever ringing: "Come, come." "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out."¹ Then when once we stand within and are num-

¹John vi. 37.

bered with God's family, and belong to Christ's kingdom, the self-same voice that yonder said to us, "Come," now says to us, "Go, go!" "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."¹ The Christian is not to sit down by the church stairs and swoon away in bliss, nor sing his soul into sentimental raptures. He is to go. He is to do just what his Lord did. He is to go out into the world's darkness and hardship, out into the night of sin, and wave the torch. There are two great processions: one coming into the "doors *of* the church," the other going into the "doors *for* the church"; one marching to the great invitation, "Come," the other marching to the great commission, "Go." Sometimes we get the orders mixed, and when Christ says, "Come," the Christian answers. There are Christians ever running back to the hour of their spiritual birth, and who look up into the Saviour's face whenever he calls, "Come," and say: "Here we are, Lord." To all such the Lord's word is: "I did not call you. Your word is 'Go.' You have already come, and it needs not that you be everlastingly repeating what needs to be done but once."

Sometimes Christ must resort to persecution

¹ Mark xvi. 15.

to scatter us abroad and send us on our errands. It was so repeatedly during the first three centuries of the Christian church, and the need still abides. A church may be beautiful, wealthy, influential, but if it lacks the missionary spirit, if it is all stay and no go, if it is all for self and naught for others, it has dwindled away from the apostolic constitution and fails of the very thing for which it was created.

“Go ye.” Where? “Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” Let us take a look outside of the church. We have heard what God says in his word about it. Let us see what he is doing in his works. Current events are the commentary which God himself is writing, and their suggestions may be relied on.

III.

There was a time when it was impossible for the Christian missionary to enter heathen lands. He might have gone the rounds of China, Japan, India, Burmah, Persia, Africa, the South Seas, knocking, and everywhere he would have found only barred gates and closed doors. As a matter of fact, no missionary made the effort, and the church was torpid and indifferent to the great mission of the world's evangelization.

To-day the conditions are completely altered. The bars are down, the locks are broken, the closed doors stand wide open, and there is not a nation under heaven to which the Christian church, with its blessed story of a Saviour's love, may not have free access if it so desires.

The opening of these doors has been little short of the miraculous. Sometimes the providential tokens have been so signally striking that the only possible explanation has been, "God did it." A score of illustrations could be given. Let one suffice. During the year 1857 a great tidal wave of revival swept over Christendom, one characteristic of which was a new spirit of prayer for missions. Note the sequence of history, and call it chance or God, as you may please. On August 26th of the next year, England and Japan concluded the treaty which demolished the barriers of centuries, and opened the doors of the Sunrise Kingdom to the foremost Protestant nations of Europe. The day previous a cablegram announced to the world that the treaty of Tientsin, signed June 26th, opened all interior China to the Christian missionaries. The same year and the same month, the power of the iniquitous East India Company, which said it would rather see devils than missionaries coming to India, was broken, and all its territories vested

in the British Queen. It is hard to estimate the transcendent changes which these events brought about. It meant the opening of doors for the church. Access to 40,000,000 in Japan, 400,000,000 in China, 300,000,000 in India, and the doors turning simultaneously on their hinges in that same year of grace. But that is not all. The same year Livingstone sailed a second time to Africa to pioneer the way for missionary effort into the heart of the "Dark Continent." The same year the Mexican revolution opened the path for the gospel into Central America. The same year changes in papal Europe opened the door for Protestant missions in what was soon to be free Italy.¹ There is one page from God's commentary of current events. Is it not as though this verse of the Apocalypse were sounding out: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it"? The powers of darkness have tried to keep the doors locked, but God's hand has been on the knob, omnipotence has touched the bolt, and the barriers have fallen away. All the world lies open to missionary effort.

That does not mean that we have only to enter the doors and the heathen world will em-

¹For a more minute account of this wonderful year in the history of Christian missions, see Pierson's *Divine Enterprise of Missions*, p. 292 ff.

brace Christianity. Far from it. There are gigantic difficulties inside, but you meet them wherever the gospel confronts sinful human nature. It is as common to America as to China. We are not to expect that as soon as the missionary learns the language and tells the story of the cross for the first time, the heathen will fall on their faces and cry, "Holy! holy! holy! Lord God Almighty!" The missionary's business is not to convert the heathen, but to proclaim the Saviour. It does not say, "Go, convert," but, "Go, preach." The Christian church is under obligation to place every man, woman, and child on this planet in a position of privilege as good as that which the vilest sinner in Christian America enjoys; that is, to give to all such the knowledge of Christ as a Saviour, and the opportunity to embrace him. Why? Because Christ commands it. Why? Because it is only through Christ that God, the great Father of us all, can bestow his choicest blessings on any poor child the wide earth over. He cannot do it through Buddha; he cannot do it through Confucius; he cannot do it through fetichism; he cannot do it through idolatry; he can do it only through Christ. "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."¹

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

Now, will you place the teaching and the providence side by side? Here is the church and yonder is the heathen world. Here is the force and yonder is the field. Here is the ability and yonder is the need. Here the command is sounding, and yonder stands the open door. Here God's word says, "Go," yonder God's providence says, "The way is clear." Do you think the Lord would have said, "Go," if he had intended the church to stay at home? Do you think the Lord would have opened these doors for the church, unless he had intended the church to enter them?

And now will the church dare, will any church dare, to sit down before these open doors of missionary opportunity and say: "No, I will not go; I will enjoy my Saviour myself. I will take the sacraments, and sing the Psalms, and say my prayers and feel good, but I will not go. I believe in a Christianity that costs nothing. I will give nothing to the support of missions. If God wants the heathen converted, let him give them another chance in the next world. He cannot make me responsible for what I did not create. No; we will ring our church bell, and pay our church preacher, and attend our church services, and give the people at home, who do not want it, a chance to hear the gospel preached, but we will not disturb the repose of China and Africa."

All the while God's providence stands yonder holding the door open for the church to pass through, and God's voice is ringing out through all the churches: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Do you mean to say that a Christian can be loyal to Christ and deliberately turn his back on all that? Do you mean to say that the church can please God when it fails to do the very thing for which he created it? Never! The message is plain, the duty is imperative, the need urgent, and evasion impossible.

The case is stronger still. For nearly half a century the church has had the vision of these open doors. It has prayed for laborers, and the prayers have been answered. To-day, in addition to those who have already gone out, a host of six thousand young men and women in our colleges and universities have offered themselves for the work. They are saying to the church: "Send us through the open doors yonder with the message of salvation." And yet, they tarry. Why? Because the Christian people of America and Europe have failed to contribute the means to send them. That is where the burden rests now. Humiliating as it may seem, it looks as if the only thing standing in the way of the speedy evangelization of the world is the lack of money. The church has the money, if only it were consecrated.

There was a day when the doors were closed against the church. That day is behind us. There was a day when none offered to go. That day is behind us. There was a day when the church failed to provide money ample for the needs of the work. That day abides with us still. What part do you propose to take in making that day a back number?

God is standing over against each one of us with a challenge as bold as that which he gave the little Philadelphian church so long ago: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." God keeps the door open. He is waiting on us. My soul, what sayest thou? May God help us to rise to the demands of the hour and meet emergent duty!

"God is marching on,
He is sounding out a trumpet that will never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment
seat,
Be swift, my soul, to answer; be jubilant, my feet,
OUR GOD IS MARCHING ON!"

CHAPTER IV.

Within Church Doors.

LOVE!

"If ye love me, keep my commandments."—JOHN xiv. 15.

AFTER joining the church—what? After one has entered the church, what is he *to be*? First, the doors *of* the church, then the doors *for* the church, then *within* church doors.

Church life means character as well as duty. The two are intimately associated, so much so that what one does determines largely what one shall be; and what one is determines largely what one shall do. Character is the measure of influence, and service is the measure of greatness. How shall the churchman *be*? A great ideal is set before the Christian. He is to grow up toward Christ.

This story is told of Rubinstein: When he was on a visit to America in 1872, he was spending Sunday evening with a friend in New York city. The friend invited him to go to church. They went, and listened to a mild sermon on the æsthetics of religion. The next

Sunday evening the friend repeated the invitation. The great pianist replied: "Very well, but on one condition. You must take me to hear a preacher who will tempt me to the impossible." Rubinstein was right. That is precisely what the gospel does for men. It tempts us to the impossible: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."¹ The Christian is to grow like God through all eternity, and yet he will never be God.

He is to grow. . How? Within himself how is he to be and do what God requires? How is he to live the Christ-life? John solves the problem of Christian character and personal piety in the line quoted at the opening of this chapter: "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

The verse contains two clauses, and teaches two distinct truths, as each clause is emphasized. Lay stress upon the first, and the teaching is in the nature of a *cause* or *motive*. Lay stress upon the second, and the teaching is in the nature of a *result* or *proof*. Principle and conduct; motive and action; desire and deed; that which prompts the deed, and the doing of that which is prompted.

Here, then, we have two great facts: First,

¹ Matt. v. 48.

the *power*, and second, the *proof*, of a Christian life.

"If ye *love* me;" there is "*love*," and that love is the *power*. "Keep my commandments;" there is "*law*," and keeping that law is the *proof*.

Love and law, the power and proof of a truly regenerated life.

I.

Jesus said: "If ye *love* me, keep my commandments." He wants our obedience, but we always obey better the cause and the people we love, and so Jesus wants, first of all, our love. Jesus would have us serve him, not from fear, but from affection. He would have us call him "Master," because, first, we have called him "Brother."

One of the hottest battles ever fought by French troops was the celebrated battle of Marignan, which lasted two days. The French troops were led by a daring boy, Francis I., not yet twenty years of age. In that fight his soldiers performed prodigies of valor, and triumphed over tremendous odds, so enthusiastically did they rally around their young prince, who had hazarded the engagement against the advice of his sagest generals. As Francis stood at the front of his army to lead

on his troops, he shouted, "Let him that loves me, follow," and that was the secret of the splendid soldiery devotion and enthusiastic valor on the field of Marignan. They loved that daring lad at the front.

As the Lord Jesus summons his followers it is a call like that which sounds out, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." There the great Teacher has revealed the mainspring of Christian life. Love! love! The more you love Christ, the more Christ-like you become. The thing which Jesus longs for above all else is our love. He is our Master undoubtedly, but mastership implies superiority. He has taught us that we are to have fellowship with him, but fellowship implies equality. How are we to reconcile the two things? Love does it. In order to gain our love as well as our obedience the Master has become our Elder Brother. "I call you not servants, but I have called you friends."¹ He was "made like unto his brethren."²

Christ wants our love. It was so when he was on earth. He was happy whenever he was in the company of his friends. He was grateful to that woman who broke the box of precious ointment on his head. He would have three of his friends with him on the Mount

¹ John xiv. 15. ² Hebrews ii. 17.

of Transfiguration; and again in the dark hour of Gethsemane's sorrow. How happy he seemed to be whenever he could get back to that little, quiet, peaceful home, and to the dear friends at Bethany! So it was not, "If ye fear me," nor, "If ye believe me," nor yet, "If ye admire and reverence me," but, "If ye *love* me, keep my commandments."

There may be a sort of obedience that springs from lower motives. One may do right because he is afraid to do wrong. He may restrain the blasphemy in his heart because he knows it is vulgar and low-bred to be profane. He may close his saloon on the Sabbath because there is a good judge on the bench, and he is afraid of the penalty. He may abstain from theft for fear of the penitentiary, or from murder for fear of the gallows. But Jesus teaches the great lesson that such obedience is worth very little in God's sight. A man is no better than his motive: "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he."¹ If his heart is full of crime, and his meanness is only kept back by the strong restraints which human law throws in the way of transgressors, he is a villian in God's sight, and as bad as his heart's desires are bad.

Since this is true, and since those who wor-

¹ Prov. xxiii. 7.

ship God must worship him "in spirit and in truth," that is, in heart, it follows that saints are not made by force. If people refuse to do right because they love the Lord, their obedience from respect to sundry church rules is worth very little. The Lord stands ahead of all ecclesiastical regulations. The great need is to get the heart so full of love to Jesus that this love will become the dominant power of the life. When that is the case, one can go into the hottest centre of fiery temptation and maintain his integrity. He will be like the Hebrew children in the dreadful furnace, untouched of the flame, for the form of a fourth will be there, whose vision is like unto the Son of God. His love for Jesus will make Jesus ever present in his life, and that divine presence makes with every temptation a way of escape.

Love transforms law. We talk much about consecration. It is a duty. We belong to him who has bought us, and it is our duty, if needs be, like Paul, "to hazard life for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

How is consecration achieved? Through love. Love transforms law. Love in the heart makes rainbows in the eyes, that transform every frowning sky into wondrous beauty and unapproachable splendor. Under the gentle

light of love, Mount Sinai, thundering forth its "Thou shalt not," becomes Mount Calvary, speaking sweetly, softly, its divine "*Thou shalt.*" The stern command melts into a blessed promise. The mountain that did quake and tremble becomes the cross that prefigures immortal hope; and the heartless stone, written with inflexible law by the finger of Almighty God, becomes the breathing, suffering, loving Christ, who fulfils the law's demands.

Thus love transforms law. When Christ puts love before law, and tells us to keep law because we love him, he has transfigured the tables of stone. They cease to terrify us. "Perfect love casteth out fear." Through his work of love for us, the law has ceased to be the ground of our justification, and has become the rule of our conduct.

Love helps us to understand law. When we bring Christ's commandments under the spell of love for him, they seem to be but the embodiment of the Lord himself. He is "the way, the truth, and the life."¹ "He is the end of the law for righteousness."² He came not "to destroy the law, but to fulfil."³ Back of the law stands the Lord.

In the early dawn of that fateful morning, after the disciples had toiled all night long and

¹ John xiv. 6.² Rom. x. 4.³ Matt. v. 17.

caught nothing, they looked across the barren sea to the distant shore and saw, in the uncertain light, a mysterious stranger standing on the pebbly beach. Who was he? They strained their eyes to discover, but the vision of the beloved disciple was clearer than all the rest, and gentle St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, turning to Simon, exclaimed, "Peter, it is the Lord."

Is it not always so with the vision of love? When other eyes look from weary toil over barren seas to duties calling from the shore, and see only a mysterious stranger, the vision of those who love "him" is clearer, and they see that it is the Lord. Inside the law itself we distinguish the matchless person of that Lord who fulfilled the law. Within every duty, behind every call, faith sees the wondrous person of the Saviour, and because we love him we keep his commandments. Thus love helps us to understand the law. What a blunderer is he who goes through this hard world trying to do right and be right without the infinite charm of this supreme motive of love. Duty is harsh and terrible until touched by the sunshine of love to the Saviour.

The only way to know God is through love. It is the greatest interpreter in the world. No one understands a child as his mother does,

because no one loves him as his mother does. Love reads volumes where fear is blind. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God."¹ It matters not how brilliant one may be in intellectual gifts and culture, he can never argue his way into a knowledge of God. To know Christ, we must love him.

What a blessed thing it is that this is the way! It is so broad that all can travel in it. If he had said knowledge, or power, or wealth, or lineage, many could never have known God. But let every heart take cheer, for it says: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."² But every one, from the highest to the lowest, from the richest to the poorest, who loves the Lord, is called; for "whosoever loveth is born of God."³ Look, love, and live! There is hope for the worst of us, then; for it matters not how far gone in haggard, wretched prodigality we wander, we never utterly lose the power to love, nor the hungering for love.

Love equips for service. It is very significant that the verse which immediately follows this statement about love for Christ is a promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit: "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another

¹ 1 John iv. 8. ² 1 Cor. i. 26. ³ 1 John iv. 7.

Comforter, that he may abide with you forever."¹ The Holy Spirit gives us power for service, and dwells within those who love the Lord. No man is ready to do God's work in rescuing the lost until he has gotten a baptism of love. The question that preceded the command to service, "Feed my sheep,"² was not a question about intellectual training, or personal magnetism, or individual fitness and experience. It was simply this: "Simon, son of Jonas, LOVEST thou me?" That is the supreme question. Love wins where everything else fails. If you have not gotten the love of the Master in your soul, tarry a while longer at Jerusalem.

One day a man went into the room of a sick boy, and, laying his hand on the lad's forehead, he said: "My boy, God loves you; God loves you." The heart of the child leaped up in a transport of joy, crying, "God loves me." That thought had let heaven down into the lad's heart.

A poor drunkard had an only daughter, whom he had terribly abused, but she clung to him with undying affection. One day when he awoke from a drunken debauch, and found her preparing supper for him, and singing a childish song, he asked, with a tone that was almost tender: "Millie, what makes you stay

¹ John xiv. 16.

² John xxi. 15-17.

with me?" "Because you are my father, and I love you." "You love me?" repeated the wretched man, "*you love me?*" He looked at his soiled and ragged clothes and his bloated limbs, and then he said: "Millie, what makes you love me? I am a poor drunkard. Everybody else despises me. Why don't you?"

Still murmuring that holy word "love," he went out into the night, but not to renew debauchment. He went out, as Simon did on the night that he denied his Master, to penitence, and to prayer for a better life.

Love is the great missionary for this lost world. God is love. If you are failing in Christian service, it is because you are out of harmony with God. Love to Jesus transforms the meanest life, and transfigures the most insignificant service.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."¹

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 1-3.

These are some of the reasons why Jesus puts love before law, and says: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Love leads to obedience. Love transforms law. Love interprets law. Love acquaints with God. Love fits for service, until we can exclaim with Paul, the apostle of law, "Whosoever loveth hath fulfilled the law";¹ or with Jesus, the apostle of love, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."²

II.

By emphasizing the last clause of the verse another truth is taught. "If ye love me, *keep* my commandments;" or, as the Revision has it, "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments." Obedience is the proof of love, just as love is the power or motive to obedience. Says Jesus, "If a man love me, he will keep my words." Law and love are inseparable. Obedience is love, but love is also obedience. If you love Christ, you are going to keep his commandments. Shakspeare never wrote a truer line than when he said:

"They do not love that do not show their love."

¹ Rom. xiii. 8

² Matt. xxii. 37-40.

There is a sort of gospel sometimes preached which divorces the two things that Christ here unites. Love, instead of leading up to law, annihilates it. Instead of spurring on to the most faithful discharge of duty, it excuses. It is said that it makes little difference what one does provided he loves, and this love is not much more than mild unconcern or stolid indifference.

This prostitution of love is the hybrid offspring of Unitarianism and Universalism. It leads to Antinomianism. Universalism says everybody will be saved, so it makes little difference how you live. Unitarianism denies Christ's divinity, and declares that his commandments are no more binding than the words of any other good man. The result in either case is to trample law under foot and open the way for licentious living. Piety of this type may go about performing diminutive charities in Christ's name, but it believes as it pleases about Christ, reads duty from human reason and desire rather than from the Bible, and does not hesitate to affirm that Paul and the other sacred writers were mistaken whenever the Scriptures run counter to its "leadings."

Thus love becomes license, the Bible is thrown into the background, and the moral law is superannuated.

The gospel sounds a sharp rebuke to all such

nonsense. Christ has a law. Christ is the embodiment of that law. When you set the law aside, you set the Lord aside. Christ has spoken his will. It is clear. It cannot be misunderstood. He declares, with emphasis that is unmistakable, "If ye love me, *keep* my commandments." If we refuse to keep his commandments, there is but one inference; it is, that we do not love him. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."¹ Thus obedience is the unmistakable evidence of love to Christ, and, as some one has said: "A man sincerely obedient will not pick and choose what commands to obey and what to reject. He will lay such a charge upon his whole man as Mary, the mother of Christ, did at the feast, 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.'"

This is the great essence of piety, and no one has a right to claim to love the Lord unless he loves to do the Lord's will. If it be true that law without love is dead, it is also true that love without law is imbecile.

A man that has true love is electrified of God. He can no more be indifferent and irresponsible to the influences of the spiritual world than the aspen leaf can be still in a gale or the sea-spray in a tempest.

¹ John xiv. 21.

Thus love is "the greatest thing in the world." Faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love. Love is to transform the world. What it can and does do for a single human life it is to do for society. It is to regenerate the old earth, and make it new in Christ Jesus. Then there will be a millennium.

It is not simply a pity, a commiseration, for the world itself that is needed. It is a love that first goes up to Christ and there gets purified and clothed with omnipotence, and then comes down to work and save. That philanthropy which is not the offspring of love to Christ counts for little. It is evanescent. It lacks strength. It is not conviction, but sentiment and enthusiasm. It is all froth and bubble and foam, and will die when the tempest that lashed it into being has lulled.

If we would do the world any real and lasting good; if our ministry is to be permanent; if we ourselves are to persevere in goodness, we must get into the current of the mighty stream of divine love, whose fountain, deep down in God's heart, is never failing.

Not, "If ye are sorry for the poor," not, "If you pity the wayward," not, "If you love the wretched," but, says the Master, "If ye love ME." There is the proof. The whole matter centres there. Love Christ, and everything will

be right. How? How? A practical word, in conclusion, in answer to that question.

How am I to love Christ? I cannot love simply as a matter of duty. We cannot love because we ought to. That is true. Law is not the creator but the creature of love. It follows, instead of going before. Some try to reverse the natural order, and putting law before love, try to love the Lord because they are commanded to do so. They must fail. They must learn to love first. How?

It is not hard after we have caught the heavenly secret. We only need to understand the Lord, to know what he has done for us, to get a true conception of his character. Christ is greatly misunderstood and misrepresented. Men read their hate and bigotry and envy into Christ, and then tell the world *that* is the Saviour it must believe. No wonder the world refuses. Get your ideas of Christ from the fountain source. Go to the Bible and read of him there.

It is not an accident that the New Testament opens with a fourfold life of Christ. Before the Acts, before the Epistles, come the Gospels. It is as if God would say, "Before you take up church history, before you take up church doctrine, sit down before Christ. Study him, know him, receive him, love him; then all the rest will be easy."

As we go through this fourfold life of Christ, as we look upon this fourfold portraiture of the Saviour, he becomes our familiar friend. We know him, and what he is and does for us; and without effort, as naturally as light falls from the face of the sun, does our love go out to Christ.

"We love him because he first loved us."¹ There is the great secret. Love must first descend before it can ascend. It must first come down into our lives before it can go out from our lives into the world.

You have noticed that the man who travels with his face northward has it grey and cold, but he who turns toward the genial south, the home of the midday sun, has his countenance to glow with the brightness he beholds. Let us turn our lives to the blessed sun; let us travel toward the Christ until we shall catch upon our souls the beauty of his love, and have its warmth sink down into our hearts. Then it will not be hard to keep his commandments, for we shall love him. Then it will not be hard to bring the world to his feet, for we shall be like him.

There is an old legend handed down among the traditions of the Indians who had their tribal home in the White Mountains. They

¹ 1 John iv. 19.

say that once the Great Spirit visited his people, and before he went away promised to return again. In order that they might recognize him on his return, he left his likeness on the stone face of the mountain. One old Indian gazed with rapt vision upon the stone image of the Great Spirit by day, dreamed of it by night, and anxiously peered into the faces of his brothers and sisters to see if he could discern its lineaments there. Years went by. At last, when the tribe had ceased all strife and settled into peace, they looked into this old seer's face and saw that all unconsciously it had been transformed into the likeness of the Great Spirit, who had come back and become incarnate in this his faithful disciple.

It is only the stumbling story of a credulous race, but it enshrines a great truth, and suggests the splendid possibilities for us in Jesus Christ.

God's church is in the world to make Christ-like men and women, and even unto that may each one of us attain, if we will but dwell with loving devotion in the presence of him who is the "express image" of the great Father of us all, and gaze upon his blessed person until we be what we see, and until, drawing nearer and nearer the unsurpassable and unapproachable glory of the Lord, we shall have his radiance

flood our lives, and shall be transformed into the same likeness, as the sunbeams that touch dark folds of cloud along the sunset sky shoot them through with the sun's own glory, and transfigure them into the same radiant gold.

CHAPTER V.

The Great Proof.

WORK!

"Faith without works is dead."—JAMES II. 26.

IT is one thing for the name to be in the communicants' roll of a church in earth; it is another thing for the name to be on the "Lamb's book of life," from which there are no erasures.

How may one assure himself, and certify to the world, that he is a member of the invisible as well as of the visible church? By his works. "*Faith without works is dead.*"

That is a plain statement. We do not need the microscope of textual criticism, nor the telescope of theological investigation, nor the field-glass of biblical exegesis, to show us the inside of that line of Scripture. We may dispense with the commentaries and the commentators here, for the meaning is as clear as the shining of the noontide sun in a cloudless sky. Sometimes we come upon a statement in the Bible that is obscure and perplexing, but by straining it through the expositor's sieve we

may get it weak enough and thin enough to give the conscience no uneasiness. The line just quoted will not submit to such treatment: "Faith without works is dead." You can look it clean through from end to end, and it means but one thing, and all the wriggling and double turning and twisting can make it mean nothing else. It means precisely what it says. There is no kaleidoscopic manipulation by which one may get the "various views" out of this text. "Faith without works is dead." It is the epitaph over the tomb of a defunct faith. The faith never did anything, and it died. It is dead because it never was alive.

We like a blow that hits the nail squarely on the head. We like a verse of Scripture that speaks straight to the heart, and takes us with such a mighty grip that we cannot get away from its meaning. That is the Bible's way whenever it comes to fundamentals. There are some obscure passages, on which the mind may get a little befuddled. Perhaps this is a blessing. We need difficult passages to keep us humble, and to teach us the metes and bounds of human thought. However, these obscure statements are not often concerned with the cardinal truths of Christianity, around which the soul's salvation revolves. When it comes to them, the way is so plain that a

wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

The previous chapters have treated of themes more or less closely connected, and all bearing on the fundamentals of salvation. Let us rehearse them briefly, that their connection with the present subject may be more apparent.

The first chapter was on "Honest Doubts." What about the mental hindrances to church membership? The answer was, that one may exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour, and at the same time may have honest doubts as to certain dogmas; and the verse of Scripture containing the key to the whole situation was stated to be: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."

The second chapter was on "The Doors of the Church." What is the condition to church membership? The answer was, that the profession of whatever makes one a Christian is the only scriptural condition to membership in the church; and the verse of Scripture containing the key to the whole situation was stated to be: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

The third chapter was on "The Doors for the Church." After one gets inside of the

church, what then? What is the church for? The answer was, that the mission of the church is to give to a lost world the knowledge of Jesus Christ as a Saviour from sin; and the verse of Scripture containing the key to the whole situation was stated to be: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

The fourth chapter was on "Within Church Doors." Christian life means Christ-likeness of character. How is that secured? The answer was, that love, not fear, for a personal Saviour was the divine method for the impartation of all Christ-like traits to our character; and the verse of Scripture containing the key to the whole situation was stated to be: "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

First, What brings me to the door of Christ's church?

Second, What makes me a member of Christ's church?

Third, What am I to do as a member of Christ's church?

Fourth, What am I to be as a member of Christ's church?

Faith in a personal Saviour brings me to the door; the profession of that faith makes me a member; my whole mission is to go; my whole duty is to love.

I.

What now? We come to the sad part of it. As a matter of fact, there are many within the church who neither do nor are what church membership imposes. They have professed faith in Christ, but they have no part in the great mission of publishing Christ to the world; and in their personal characters they are not different from those outside of the church. What about them? They are inside. They are just inside the doors of the church, they have dropped down there, nor have they budged from the moment of their first repose. Is it possible that one can go comfortably on his way to heaven while failing utterly, both in his service and character, of all that the church and Christianity stand for?

There is a gigantic blunder somewhere, and in the present chapter we come to consider "The Great Proof," the absence of which is God's explanation of the strange phenomenon just mentioned; and the verse of Scripture which contains the key to the whole situation is this: "Faith without works is dead." You went into the church on a profession of your faith in Christ, but if you stopped there, if you have never done anything for Christ, if you have never made any effort to keep his commandments, you went in on a corpse, a dead

faith. Your faith was not faith at all, but the mere semblance of it—a sham, a fiction, a cold, clammy, coffined, featureless, powerless, lifeless mental assent. A dead faith never brings more than its face-value anywhere—burial!

Will you put together these lines of Scripture which voice these great gospel truths, and consider if there is anything mysterious in their meaning?

First, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.”

Second, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

Third, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Fourth, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Any child can understand these Scriptures. They are great, simple, majestic words of God, that speak straight to our hearts and grip us, until it is impossible for us to wrench ourselves away from their meaning. The fifth is like unto them: “Faith without works is dead.”

“Yes,” you say, “the English of that statement is very simple, but the theology of it is very abstruse. That is what James says, but Paul teaches a different doctrine. Paul says: “A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” Now,

while each statement by itself seems simple enough, when we bring the two together and compare the Pauline view with that of James, serious theological problems confront us, which must be settled ere we can go further." That is, we will deliberately thrust our heads into an exegetical fog-bank of our own manufacture, and so long as its grateful drapery of mists will hang about us, we will go on living as we please.

After Paul and James have settled their differences about faith and works in the Bible, it will be time enough for us to adjust them in our lives. It need not take very long to make the adjustment if we are in dead earnest, for the truth is, there is not the shadow of a difference between Paul and James on this subject.

They are looking at the Christian from different sides; Paul from God's side, James from man's side. Paul sets himself to answer the question: How may we justify ourselves in God's sight? James sets himself to answer the question: How may we justify ourselves in the sight of our fellow-men? Paul's answer is "Faith." James' answer is "Works." Faith in Christ is the only condition to salvation: "We are saved by faith." All the good works in the world cannot atone for sins. We are saved by faith. But there is a question back of that, deep down behind it, vital, fundamental: What

is faith? James says it is the sort of thing that manifests itself in works. If it does not, it is not faith at all. It is dead. That is, saving faith, the faith that unites one to the Lord Jesus Christ and makes him an heir of glory, is something beyond mere mental assent or historical belief.

One may, and possibly does, in a cold, intellectual way, assent to the teachings of Christ without their having the slightest influence over his conduct. He may say: "I believe Jesus lived and spake and did all that the Scriptures affirm," yet if he goes on living and speaking in positive antagonism to all that Jesus ever did and said, by what kind of pious jugglery can he transmit that sort of historical belief into saving faith? It has not saved him—not from an oath, not from an unholy desire, not from a solitary evil practice. It is dead faith.

Notice that it does not say, "Believe Christ," but, "Believe on him." One may be off of him and yet believe him. Yonder two planks span a chasm. One is self, the other is Christ. One is rotten, the other is sound and strong. You stand out there on the rotten plank of self, spanning the awful chasm of hell, and as it sways and cracks beneath your tottering weight, you look at the other plank, and you

say you believe it is strong, sound, and that it will bear your weight. -That sort of faith will do you no good. You must go further than that. You must venture. You must step off of the rotten plank of self on to the plank that bears ; you must not only believe about Christ, but you must believe *on* him ; then you are safe. There are many prating about the mental excellencies and moral beauties in the life of Jesus Christ, but admiration for Christ's life will never save them. You may stand off there and shout panegyrics on Christian philanthropy and civilization until you die, but if you do not step out on Christ as your personal Saviour it will profit you nothing.

How may one know that he has taken this step, and that his belief in Christ has passed from mere mental assent into saving faith ?

By his works. That is the only evidence. Works do not save, but they are the positive evidence as to whether one has been saved. They are an infallible spiritual thermometer, registering the moral state of the soul. Without works faith is dead. It is a corpse. There is no breath in it, no color, no action, no grasp. It can feel nothing, receive nothing, achieve nothing—a dull, dismal, sapless, disintegrating sham.

¹ Phil. ii. 13.

² Phil. ii. 12.

In one place it says, "It is God that worketh in you,"¹ and in another place it says, "Work out your own salvation."² That is, God works salvation in us, and we are to work it out. God works honesty and sobriety and brotherly love and liberality into us, and we are to work them out until our fellow-men shall behold these fruits of the Spirit in our characters.

Here is a man who says God has worked salvation in him. He has faith in Christ; he has professed; he is a church member. God has worked salvation into him, but he is working something else out. He is working out self-indulgence, niggardliness, profanity, licentiousness, gambling, lying, embezzlement. What has become of all that God worked into him? What has he done with all of that reverence, honor, honesty, generosity, liberality, which he claims God worked into him? It has never appeared on the surface of his life. What has he done with it? Does he mean to say that he has it all carefully stored away deep down in the hidden recesses of his soul? What does he want to keep it there for? Why doesn't he let it out?

We had best not hoodwink ourselves on this subject. Faith without works is *dead*, and if we are not working salvation out, we have grave reasons to fear that God has never worked salvation in. We may lay it down as an axiomatic

principle, that if our faith is genuine, vital, it will make a difference in our lives. We shall not leap up into angelic saints all at once, but we shall be better—better neighbors, better husbands and fathers, better wives and mothers, better citizens.

“Faith without works.” It does not say, “Faith without professions”; it does not say, “Faith without creeds and catechisms”; it does not say, “Faith without feelings and experiences and testimonies.” It says, “Faith without works”; without solid, old-fashioned honesty and integrity; without plain, practical, matter-of-fact charity; without patient, plodding loyalty and service. “Faith without works is dead.”

Faith unites to Christ. Christ is the vine, Christians are the branches. Christ's life flows out into the lives of his followers as the sap from the vine flows out into the branches. This is our hope of a heaven hereafter. It is not merely that the barriers between this and that goodly land have been removed; it is not merely that salvation has given us an insurance policy against fire in the world to come. It means a transfusion of spirit. Christ's life flows out into us. Can that be true, and we go on living the same old way? Do I dare flatter myself that I have faith in Jesus Christ when I

outclass the unbeliever in all of his characteristics?

These are plain words, but it would be an unspeakable disaster for us to go through this world clinching a counterfeit coin in our hand, never finding until heaven's gate is reached that it will not pass.

"He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also."¹ There is the guide. It is not necessary to draw up a discipline, specify what one must wear and eat and drink, how he may cross his feet and move his hands, what he may touch, where he may go. Things like these are too pusillanimously small. Salvation emancipates us from the bondage of ordinances. It deals in principles, not rules. The law of life is greater than the law of arrangement. There is something higher for our model than tables of stone—a *life*! There shines Christ's life, there stand Christ's works. Here speak Christ's words: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also."

Test your faith by that. Are you living the way Christ lived; are you doing the works Christ did? If you are not, you may pray and shout and rush around in meetings and work yourself into religious frenzies and swear by all the creeds and manipulate yourself through

¹ John xiv. 12.

all the rituals, but if that is all, if your conduct is unchanged, you have not taken the first step toward the kingdom of heaven. Your heart is only a gloomy tomb, where lies interred a dead, mummified faith: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."¹

II.

Let us have "*The Great Proof*." It is the only kind of religion that satisfies the world. The world is sick of shams and pretenses, of people who profess one thing and practice another. One may boast of his religion till the stars die out of the sky, but if he fails to live it, the conviction of the world is, that he has been bragging about a liability and not an asset.

The best apologetics for the divinity of Jesus Christ and his gospel is not books and fine churches and great sermons, but good deeds in the lives of his followers. Where one man reads the Bible, twenty read the Christian. The cross cannot preach itself. Christ is learned from his disciples: "Ye are my witnesses." Suppose we go on the witness-stand, and our daily deeds become our testimony: what would the world's verdict be, not about us—that is a comparatively small matter—but about our Saviour?

¹ James ii. 26.

The world has lost none of its respect for a clean, pure, loyal, godly life. It will always bow in profound homage before the splendid majesty of such a presence, and the religion which fails to measure up to the kingly standard of a life of good works, however much of other things it may have in its favor, will never satisfy the world.

The only religion that will satisfy ourselves is the life in which faith has had set to it the royal attestation of good works. If we are disappointed in religion it is because we are trying to satisfy ourselves with something smaller. We are trying barely to creep inside the gate.

There is a story of an Indian who had heard that feathers make a soft bed. Gathering a handful, he laid them on a hard plank, and lying down thereon tried to sleep through the night. The next morning, stretching his aching limbs, and looking contemptuously at his improvised resting-place, he soliloquized thus: "White man say feathers make soft bed. White man great fool."

There are some who make a similar trial of religion. They have heard that it brings peace to the heart, that it enriches life with joy and gladness, and they barely touch it. They lie down upon its ordinances, and find, instead of rest, torture, discomfort, weariness. No won-

der! Religion will never satisfy you until it saturates you. It will be only a pestiferous vexation until, like old Caleb, "you go in"¹ with all your might for God, and not only profess his name but perform his will.

There is something higher still. The religion that attests the vitality of faith by a life of good works is the only kind that will satisfy the world. It is the only kind that will satisfy ourselves. But beyond all that, and infinitely more important, is this further fact. It is the only kind that will satisfy God. God loves a true man, an honest, sincere, consistent woman. He loves them here; he will love them none the less up there. Indeed, this is our hope: that what God values in a life down here, will bring as much before the great judgment bar on high, until our profound conviction finds a tongue for itself in Browning's awkward verse:

"It's wiser being good than bad;
It's safer being meek than fierce;
It's fitter being sane than mad.
My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That, after last, returns the first,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
That what began best can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst."

¹ Josh. xiv. 11. The word in the original is pictorial. The reference is to a ship going under a full head of sail. Thus Joshua "went in" for God.

Over in the Apocalypse there is a beautiful promise that has lifted the pall at many a funeral, and sounded the last triumphant note in the harmony of many a saintly life: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them,"¹ or, "their works do come on after them."

The meaning is not simply that a good man lives on after death in a saintly influence over those who knew him, but that as he goes up to God, his works follow on after him, gather around him and form the company in the midst of which he appears before God. We take our works up there with us. That does not mean that heaven is to be won by works, but it does mean that our works are to speak in God's presence; they are to give in their testimony there, and the works which come on after us will largely determine *the measure of* our reward.

Our works! our works! not our profession, not our resolutions, not our expectations, but our works will come on after us. A good deed has a voice that all the demons of the pit cannot drown. Perhaps God does not care so much about our views and decrees, about our dogmatic statements and theological deliver-

¹ Revelation xiv. 13.

ances; but he is wonderfully careful to mark our works. Whatever name one may bear down here, whatever he may profess, if deep down in his heart he have the Christ-spirit, and in his daily deeds he live up to God's mark for a good life, he need have no fears for the hereafter. His works will come on after him, and "The Great Proof" that was his vindication before men will utter a testimony as potent and satisfactory before God and angels.

"Do the duty nearest,
Cling to truth the clearest,
Face the ill thou fearest,
Hold thine honor dearest,
Knowing God is good."¹

¹ Helen Rich.

CHAPTER VI.

The Sacrament of Birth.

CLEANSE!

"And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed¹ after thee; Every male child among you shall be circumcised. . . . And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you."—GENESIS xvii. 9, 10, 12.

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children."—ACTS ii. 39.

"The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy."—1 CORINTHIANS vii. 14.

"And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."—ACTS xvi. 33.

WITHIN church doors there are two great sacraments, and only two—baptism and the Lord's supper. Baptism is to be administered but once, the Lord's supper repeatedly. Baptism is the symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity; the

¹ Abraham's *seed* are not those of the same blood merely, but those of the same *faith*. Cf. Romans iv. 11-13.

Lord's supper is the symbol of the work of Christ, the second person of the Trinity. Since the Holy Spirit is the agent of the new birth, we may call baptism "the sacrament of birth"; since the Christian grows as his faith appropriates and assimilates the finished work of Christ on the cross, we may call the Lord's supper "the sacrament of growth." Inasmuch as these are the sacraments, and the only sacraments, that have divine authority within church portals, it is important that the church member have a clear understanding of their scriptural meaning.

Baptism, "The Sacrament of Birth," is before us in this chapter.

It is the rite of entrance into the visible church; and, since "the members of this visible church catholic are all those persons in every nation, *together with their children*, who make profession of the holy religion of Christ, and of submission to his laws,"¹ baptism is primarily and fundamentally the church rite for infants, and for adults only because they have failed to receive the rite in their infancy.

Hence our discussion must be mainly that of *infant baptism*. Indeed, it is here that the real issue centers, for the *mode* of baptism must, in the nature of the case, be secondary

¹ *Book of Church Order*, Chapter I., Section 3.

to the *subjects* of baptism. What does the mode amount to without the subject? Once the proper subjects to receive the rite have been determined, it will have no small bearing in determining the mode.

People on the outside sometimes wonder why it is that Presbyterians, compared with certain other denominations, preach so little about baptism. It is intimated that we are conscious of the inherent weakness of our position on this subject, and prefer darkness to light. Nothing could be further from the truth. The general who is conscious of the impregnability of his position will not be everlastingly detailing regiments to patch the mortar in the walls. He will send his men to the guns and to the field.

The Presbyterian Church, catholic in spirit, thorough in scholarship, loyal to God's word, as she has ever been, has no doubt whatever as to the scriptural impregnability of her views on baptism. She believes that the scriptural mode of baptism is by sprinkling or pouring, and that the scriptural subjects for baptism are all those who profess faith in Christ, together with their children. In this she is in accord with nearly all Christendom.

There are 408,500,000 real or nominal adherents of Christianity in the world. Of these

more than 375,000,000 practice infant baptism, and hold to sprinkling or pouring as the scriptural mode. The Presbyterian Church, however, believes that the truths of religion are more important than its rites; that faith in Christ and a life of good works outrank baptism; and that, unless the Holy Ghost regenerates the heart, all the water in the world cannot make a sinner holy. This is the reason why we do not hear frequent deliverances from Presbyterian pulpits on the subject of water baptism.

Nevertheless, this does not minimize the importance of the rite as a rite, nor make the performance of it any less binding on the conscience.

There are parents who look upon infant baptism as a beautiful ceremony, but possessing no special spiritual significance, and in no sense essential or obligatory. It is a sort of "christening," a naming of the baby, but that is all. That is the smallest part of it. It is a sealing ordinance of the church, of divine appointment, and parents who neglect it cannot expect the full blessing of God upon them in their efforts to train up their children in the fear, nurture, and admonition of God.

Let us have before us the very words of the

church standards on this subject as found in the *Confession of Faith* and Catechisms:

"Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's."¹

"Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, until they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him; but infants descending from parents, either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ and obedience to him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and are to be baptized."²

"Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated."³

Such is the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church, and to this every minister, ruling elder, and deacon makes solemn subscription at his

¹ *Shorter Catechism*, Quest. 94.

² *Larger Catechism*, Quest. 166.

³ *Confession of Faith*, Chap. XXVIII., Sec. 5.

ordination, not only to practice in his own household, but to maintain as a part of the faith once delivered to the saints.

A great many will say: "We are not concerned with what the Presbyterian Church teaches on this subject; we want to know what the Bible has to say about it." Has it ever occurred to you that the Presbyterian Church believes what it does believe only because, probably, the ablest body of biblical students in the world believe this is precisely what the Bible does have to say about it. The doctrines of our church are not the opinions of men; they have no foundation outside of Scripture; and all of this blatherskite declamation about going behind the church doctrines to the Bible, as though the two were in conflict, is as undiscerning as it is vapid. There would be no church and no church doctrine but for the Bible; and to array the two against each other may be pleasing enough to the hobbyist and exegetical crank, but finds no foundation in fact. Nevertheless, we shall not stop with the doctrinal statement of the Presbyterian Church about infant baptism, but go straight to the word of God and examine "the sacrament of birth" in the light of the plain statements of sacred Scripture.

I.

First, The infants of believing parents were solemnly consecrated to God by a church law and according to a church rite under the Old Testament dispensation. Probably no one will question that proposition. If he does, let him attend to this: "God said unto Abraham, And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every male among you shall be circumcised. . . . And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you."¹

There stands the law on the pages of the only Bible that Paul had, or Timothy, or John the Baptist. Who enacted the law? God Almighty. Who selected the rite? God Almighty. Who decreed that infants at the tender age of eight days should receive the rite and thus be solemnly consecrated? God Almighty. It will not do to inveigh against it, to call it foolish, senseless, unnecessary, farcical, for that is only to challenge the wisdom of God. There stands the fact firm and fast, imbedded in the very foundation of church life under the old dispensation—a law binding believing parents to consecrate their children to

¹ Genesis xvii. 9, 10, 12.

God, and a rite by which this act of consecration was sealed. We also find that whenever a Gentile adult became a convert and joined the Jewish church he submitted to the same rite.

What did the rite of circumcision signify? Three things: First, church membership; second, purity of heart; third, a seal of the covenant of grace. That it signified church membership is certain from the fact just stated, viz., that when Gentiles became Jews they received the rite. That it signified purity of heart is certain from many Scriptures. Moses said: "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live:"¹ Paul adds: "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God."² That the rite is a seal of the covenant of grace is also certain: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, being uncircumcised."³

The Jewish economy was that of a church state. There are those who will admit all thus

¹ Deut. xxx. 6.

² Rom. ii. 28, 29.

³ Rom. iv. 11.

far, but who claim that circumcision had special reference to the state, and its sole intention was to make one a Jewish citizen; that is, it was a seal of membership in Jewish state, but not in Jewish church. Paul declares that Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of "the righteousness of the faith" which he had. How could faith have any righteousness? Only through the covenant of grace which God entered into with those Old Testament saints, and which he enters into none the less with New Testament saints, that upon the exercise of faith righteousness will be imputed. Hence circumcision was not a seal of Jewish citizenship at all, but of the covenant of grace which God made with Abraham for himself and for his seed forever.

What is the teaching, then, as we find it in the Old Testament? This: We find that the infants of believing parents were solemnly consecrated to God according to a church law and by a church rite, and that this church rite was charged with a threefold significance: First, it stood for church membership; second, it stood for purity of heart; third, it stood as a seal to the covenant of grace. Furthermore, that whenever an adult Gentile was converted and joined the Jewish church he received the same rite as infants.

II.

What next? This fact, of tremendous importance: *that church law has never been revoked.* There cannot be found a solitary line of Scripture to show that it has. If not, then it still stands, and is binding on the conscience and practice of the church.

A law, unless self-limited, is in force from the time of its enactment until repealed. There are some self-limited laws in the Old Testament. They are ceremonial, typical, foreshadowing Christ. This is the case with the Levitical laws as to sacrifice, and with the ritualism of the temple. All these pointed to Christ, and when Christ came they were fulfilled, and, being fulfilled, ceased. The law with regard to infant membership in the church was in no sense typical of Christ, and therefore Christ did not abrogate it by fulfilment. "But," some one says, "Christ put an end to the old dispensation, for it says, 'Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'¹ That puts the Jewish dispensation out of date; that does away with what we find in the Old Testament."

Does it? Does it do away with the ten commandments? Does it do away with the Psalms? Does it do away with the promises? What

¹ 2 Cor. v. 17.

does Christ say? He saw that our dull minds might blunder into this stupid and fatal mistake, and one of the earliest utterances of his public ministry is to guard against it. Sitting there on the mount, preaching the most memorable sermon ever voiced in human speech, he says to the Jewish multitudes gathered around him: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."¹

The point which is before us now, viz., that the law of infant membership, which we find in the old dispensation, continues over into and is operative in the new dispensation, becomes stronger still when we consider the fact that the church is one and indissolubly the same in both dispensations. The dispensations differ. In the old it is type; in the new it is anti-type; in the old it is shadow; in the new it is substance; in the old it is twilight; in the new it is noontide. The dispensations differ, but the dispensations of the church are not the church.

What is it that makes the church? Is it not a Saviour, a plan of salvation and a gospel?

¹ Matt. v. 17, 18.

Take these away, and all the rituals and altars and priests in the world could not make the church. Now, these great vital, fundamental characteristics are the same in both dispensations.

The Saviour of the Old Testament is the same as the Saviour of the New. "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and was glad."¹

The plan of salvation in the Old Testament is the same as the plan of salvation in the New. The sole condition is faith: "For the promise that he should be heir of the world was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."²

The gospel of the Old Testament is the same as the gospel of the New. "But," some one says, "I didn't know the Old Testament saints had any gospel. I thought it was all law with them." The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, writing to the Christians of the new dispensation and comparing their lot with that of the Jews under the old dispensation, says: "For unto us was the gospel preached *as well* as unto them."³ Paul, writing to Timothy, says: "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."⁴

¹ John viii. 56. ² Romans iv. 13. ³ Hebrews iv. 12.

⁴ 2 Timothy iii. 15.

What Scriptures did the boy Timothy have which were able to make him "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"? The Old Testament, certainly, for the New Testament was not in existence during Timothy's childhood.

No, God has never had but one church in the earth. It has always been the same Saviour, the same plan of salvation, the same blessed gospel for Jew, for Gentile; for Old Testament, for New Testament; for old dispensation, for new dispensation. There is no more common, no more fatal, blunder made by the superficial student of sacred Scripture than to suppose that because we have two distinct dispensations of the church, therefore we have two distinct churches. Paul compares the church to an olive tree with two kinds of branches, the natural branches, the Jews, the engrafted branches, the Gentile Christians; but it is one tree, all olive, and the same life-sap pulsating through every fibre and twig.

Notice the effect of this upon the subject before us. Away back there in the dawn of the history of Christ's church God put a law upon its statute books, that the infants of believers should be consecrated to him through a church rite. That law has never been fulfilled; it has never been repealed; the change of dispensa-

tions did not abrogate it; *it is binding still*. Therefore, as Peter stands up before a great concourse of Jews upon the day of Pentecost to announce the characteristics of the new dispensation then inaugurating, he assures his hearers that the covenant of grace will not be abridged, for he spans the chasm between the old and the new dispensations in the career of the self-same church by announcing: "The promise is unto you, and *to your children*."¹

III.

Just here it is objected that, as a matter of fact, circumcision ceased with the opening of the Christian dispensation. Is that not sufficient proof that infant church membership was to cease? Yes, circumcision has ceased. Why? The opponents of infant baptism have no scriptural answer to that question. There is not a line commanding the cessation of the rite; but granted the doctrine of infant baptism, and the question is easily answered: circumcision ceased because another rite took its place. It is one thing for a rite to cease by annulment, and a very different thing for it to cease by substitution. The Old Testament doctrine consisted of two things: First, a law that children should be consecrated to God;

¹ Acts ii. 39.

and second, a rite by which this consecration should take place. The law has never been repealed; the rite has been changed by substituting baptism for circumcision. A change of the rite can no more annul the law than a change of the Sabbath from the last to the first day of the week can annul the fourth commandment.

"Well," some one says, "show me out of the Bible that baptism has taken the place of circumcision, and I will grant the scriptural soundness of your position."

That baptism has succeeded circumcision in the case of adults seeking membership in Christ's church no one will question. If in the case of adults, why not in the case of infants? Both received the same rite under the old dispensation, why not under the new?

In addition to this, we find baptism, in the New Testament, charged with precisely the same significance as circumcision in the Old. That significance we saw to be threefold: First, entrance into the church; second, purity of heart; third, a seal of the covenant of grace. Now, if the church be the same in both dispensations, and we find that an Old Testament rite has ceased without explicit command, and that a New Testament rite has been created, which fulfils the same functions and stands for the same truths, and is charged with the same significance,

is not the conclusion inevitable that the one does take the place of the other? Furthermore, since there is no controversy that baptism does take the place of circumcision in the case of adults seeking church membership, is not the conviction inevitable that it must take the place in the case of all those who were the proper subjects to receive the Old Testament rite?

Let us sum up the steps thus far taken :

First, We find in the church, under the old dispensation, a law and a rite by which the children of believing parents were to be consecrated to God.

Second, That law has never been repealed ; it has never been fulfilled ; and since the church is one in both dispensations, the law still stands.

Third, The Old Testament rite has ceased, but ceased by substitution ; and, just as the Lord's supper, a more accurate portraiture of the doctrine of the *atonement*, as set forth in Christ's work on the cross, has taken the place of the passover, so baptism, a more accurate portraiture of the doctrine of *purification*, as set forth in the work of the Holy Spirit and his descent on the day of Pentecost, has taken the place of circumcision.

Such is the Bible's teaching for infant baptism. We have not gone outside of the word for a single position ; and the man who says

there is nothing in Scripture supporting infant baptism is like the man who goes out under the heavens on a clear summer night, and, shutting his eyes, vows there are no stars in the sky.

IV.

In closing, let us notice a few objections to infant baptism that are extra-Biblical, and that, perhaps, have more weight with certain classes than all that the Scriptures may have to say on this subject.

It is said that "baptism cannot do babies any good." Whenever I attempt to answer that objection I feel like the man who said it gave him such an awful wrench to kick at nothing. "Baptizing babies cannot do them any good"! What good can be accomplished by baptizing anybody? What good does the mere act of baptism do an adult? Water cannot wash away sin; water cannot regenerate the heart. God does not enforce the rite because there is any spiritual efficacy in the external application of water accompanied by a religious formula. If any one rejects infant baptism because it cannot do babies any good, he must strike adult baptism from his creed also.

Another objection is, that we are commanded to believe and be baptized, but inasmuch as infants cannot believe, they are not to be bap-

tized. Yes, we are commanded to believe and be baptized: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."¹

"Infants cannot believe, therefore they are not to be baptized."

"Infants cannot believe, therefore they are to be damned."

That is the logic of the objection. If a man is ready to take the position that infants are shut out of heaven and sent to hell because they cannot believe, then he may consistently hold that infants are shut out of the covenant of grace and deprived of its baptismal seal because they cannot believe.

Yes, there must be faith preceding the consecration of our children to God, but whose faith? Whose faith was it that stood when Isaac was consecrated to God in the rite of circumcision? It was his father's; it was Abraham's. Whose faith is it that is to stand when our children are consecrated to God in the rite of baptism? It is their parents'; it is ours. The covenant is not between God and the babe, but between God and the parents for the babe. Hence it must be parental faith that enters into the solemn compact with a covenant God. That is what it means in Corinthians when it

¹ Mark xvi. 16.

says: "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children unclean; but now are they holy."¹ At least one of the parents must be a believer; and that is why the Presbyterian Church refuses to baptize a child neither of whose parents is a believer in Christ. It would be the mockery of a sacred rite; a hollow, empty, meaningless form.

It is objected, again, that while all this may be true, there are no instances of infant baptism in the Bible. Would that nullify an explicit ordinance and abrogate an explicit command? Hardly. However, let us see whether there are any instances on record. Suppose a man or his wife or both were to profess faith in Christ, and on their profession they were to receive baptism, and also their children, what sort of a record would be made? Would it not run something like this: "Blank was baptized and his children," or "his family," or "his household"? Let us see whether there are any records of that kind in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians i. 16 Paul says: "I baptized also the household of Stephanas." In Acts xvi. 15 it says, Lydia "was baptized, and her household." In the 33rd verse of the same chapter, speaking of the Philippian jailer, it says: "He

¹ 1 Corinthians vii. 14.

took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."

All down the years through the history of the church the same record has been writing itself. The ordinance comes to us from the father-heart of God, hallowed with the most sacred associations, and precious with covenant mercies for us and for our children. If there are parents who neglect this ordinance and fail to present their children for baptism, they are not only derelict in duty themselves, but unwittingly they are depriving their child of one of the sweetest and holiest influences of God's church. The baptismal seal is an epoch in the child's life. It identifies him with the faith of his fathers, and by a positive act places him in God's care.

There are few things more sacred to me than the thought that when I was a little babe I was carried in the arms of parental love before the altar of holy church, and that there parental faith covenanted with God over my infant life, and the baptismal seal was affixed, in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Thus we enter into the precious heritage of faith and claim the promises. This God was our fathers' God; and "this God is our God: he will be our guide even unto death."¹

¹ Psalm xlviii. 14.

CHAPTER VII.

The Sacrament of Growth.

REMEMBER!

"This do in remembrance of me."—LUKE xxii. 19.

WHEN one joins the church, he receives baptism. As long as he is a member of the church, he is to be a partaker of the Lord's supper. When he becomes a churchman, he receives the "sacrament of birth." While he develops as a Christian, he receives the "sacrament of growth."

The Lord's supper is a simple memorial feast, instituted by Christ to keep vividly before the mind of the church in all ages his atoning work.

"This do in remembrance of me." One dark, fateful night, a long time ago, a poor, hunted, persecuted man said that to a little group of friends gathered around a supper-table. He was an obscure Jewish artisan, unknown, until three years before, beyond the narrow boundaries of the provincial village where he had spent his childhood and youth; and now, after the most remarkable career that

any man had ever followed, he is not too well known in a little country not much larger than Rhode Island.

There were no newspapers to report what he said that night, no lines of electric wire to flash it from continent to continent, no elaborate propaganda to give it publicity and promulgation. The audience itself was neither large nor distinguished; but, as they sat there in the waning hours of the Passover-eve, Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of me"; and all the ages placed their hands attentive to their ears, and hearkened.

The world has moved on its way many a league since then; tremendous problems have been discussed and settled; wars have upheaved continents; races have come and gone; nations have been created and destroyed; but somehow that word of a humble Jewish peasant, spoken on Passover-eve to his twelve peasant friends, has endured—through storm and tempest, through blood and fire, through martyrdom and victory, through shift of centuries and national contentions—until now, on every Sabbath, thousands gather in the sanctuaries of this new world, which was not even discovered then, and, reverently taking the same blessed words of the Master on their lips, bow in adoration before him, and try to obey his command.

The world's finest art has glorified itself in trying to reproduce that quiet scene in an obscure room in Jerusalem so long ago. Not the least notable among the great paintings of the world are those whose inspiration came from this eventful hour. But man has never painted the picture so well as has God's servant in the few graphic lines that describe it.

We see the plain table in the dim light, and the rugged men gathered around it, half reclining, after the custom of the East. That nervous, impulsive man near the centre we recognize at once as Simon Peter; and the quiet, earnest face near by is that of Andrew, his brother. Down at one end of the table four men are quietly listening. They are Philip and Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus. Near by, one whose thoughtful face betokens calm judgment is engaged in earnest conversation with a disciple whose half-questioning attitude indicates that he is by nature more disposed to doubt than to faith. They are James and Thomas. Beside Thomas is Simon the Canaanite; and, hiding somewhere in the little company, his scowling face bent low, and ever and anon stealing swift, furtive glances at those around him, is Judas Iscariot, "who betrayed him." Then there is Matthew the publican; and the rapt, youthful face of him who leans

on the Master's bosom we recognize at once as that of John, the beloved disciple. Next to him, and in the centre of the little group, is that celestial face, radiant with the light that never shone on land or sky. As they sat thus, talking over the events of the day, or indulging in reminiscences of other Passover feasts, Jesus took the Passover loaf, and, breaking it, gave unto his disciples, saying: "This is my body, which is broken for you." Then, taking the cup, he gave unto them, saying: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." After they had finished, he added: "This do in remembrance of me."

This was all. As we look at the picture, how does it impress us?

I.

Does it not seem to you that Jesus was doing a very strange thing? He was actually holding his own memorial service before his death. The suggestion of the shadow of the cross had not yet come to the disciples, and a perplexed look comes into their faces as they eat and drink the sacramental bread and wine.

Jesus was unfettered then. There was not a man in all Jerusalem freer than he that night; and yet he is forecasting his own funeral, and providing a simple feast to keep fresh and

sweet in the disciples' hearts the memory of him after he shall be taken from them. Why? Because he knew that his enemies must at last get the better of him in the contest now raging? No; but because he knew that the time had come for him to offer himself for the sins of the world. It was no defeat which Christ announced, but the certain fulfilment of a divinely predetermined purpose. Hence, if we listen well, we shall catch the distant chimes of Easter bells and the glad notes of Easter triumph, even amid the gathering shadows of crucifixion-eve. Back there before betrayal, before arrest, surrounded by his disciples, and in the full enjoyment of his personal freedom, Jesus himself sounds the first note in the dark tragedy that was to follow, and by doing so gives premonition of the fact, that while he will go down into the grave, it will be no defeat. To the silence and gloom of death will succeed the seraphic joy and quenchless beauty of the resurrection.

Let us look at our picture once more. What an humble scene it is! Those men represented nothing great in a worldly way. Their combined fortunes would not equal the possessions of many a "poor man" in this land. Yet out of a scene so very humble as that comes the command which our faith reverently obeys in the holy sacrament.

Why is it that Jesus selected that scene as the one to keep fresh and vivid in the heart of his church forever? Why is it that every time we observe communion our Lord has determined that we must go back and look upon those twelve Jewish peasants gathered around a plain table in an "upper room"? Is it not as if he would say: "Come, look upon the cradle of the church. See where it was rocked in its infancy. See how poor it was, how plain, how utterly bare of all that appeals to the worldly heart. And as you look, learn something of the power that you still need to save the world from its sin."

The church, made of fallible men and women, is ever prone to pin its faith to worldly pomp and circumstance, and to glory in mere ecclesiastical importance. They had not one iota of it back there in that little low-roofed upper chamber. They had plenty of it where the Sanhedrim was meeting. They were well furnished with wealth and love, with churchly pomp and worldly power in the temple, where priest and Levite, where Pharisee and ritualist were gathered; but these had nothing for the world's salvation, nothing with which to ease an aching heart or heal the open sore of the world's sin.

Is it not true that we ever need to learn the lesson, "God hath chosen the foolish things of

the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence"?¹

It is not a question of how respectable a constituency the church may have, nor a question of how many millions we may count up in the list of pew-renters, nor a question of our culture and good breeding. We may have all this, and still have nothing with which to heal the sorrow of a sin-sick soul. Let us go back to Passover-eve, and taking our places at the plain table, count it no humiliation to have Galilean fishermen as our brethren.

Look at the picture once more. How simple it is! How free from all form! There was nothing elaborate there. Place it beside some of the observances of the "supper" since then, and see how it shrivels into inconsequence.

Yet there is something in it akin to all that Jesus did. He hated form and icy ceremonials. The most gorgeous and elaborate pageants seem like tawdry tinsel beside the majestic simplicity of Christ's way. What a strange thing it is, that around this simple

¹1 Corinthians i. 27-29.

memorial of the Lord's supper, coming out of a scene so absolutely unadorned, there should gather the most profound mysticism, the most elaborate ritualism, the most presumptuous church-craft, that has ever cursed the Redeemer's cause.

Away with it all! Let us rub our eyes and get a clear vision; get back to the blessed hour when the Lord sat there in the midst of his disciples, and, without ostentation or mysticism, passed them the bread and wine, and said, "Do it in remembrance of me."

That is what we want to reproduce. God save the church from ritualism, and formalism, and mysticism! God save the church from the tomb!

"*This* do in remembrance." What do? "*This!* The very thing that I am doing now. Reproduce this. After I am taken away, sometimes when you are gathered together as you are now, give the bread and the wine to each other and think of me. That's all."

Do the mists sometimes gather before our faith? Are we confused as to what the sacrament of the Lord's supper stands for? Does it seem to us that, by some unmeaning blunder, we may commit heinous sin in the very act of receiving the sacred emblems?

Let us go back to Passover-eve and look

upon the simple scene again. "This do."
"This!" Then confusion will depart, and the
mists will lift, and our faith will lose its per-
plexity.

II.

"This do." Why? "In remembrance." It
is a memorial. It is to carry the story down
the ages, and keep green in the heart of the
church the love of her Lord.

Out yonder on the hilltop stands a marble
shaft. It commemorates a heroic deed of more
than a century ago. We did not witness the
deed, but we look upon the marble shaft and
our hearts beat quicker.

Here is a simple memorial. It commemo-
rates the most heroic deed that ever glorified
the earth. We did not witness it ourselves,
but we look upon the sacrament and partake of
the symbols of his body and his blood, and our
hearts beat quicker. Coming to us as it does,
this simple feast unites the present to the past,
and links faith to reality. It is like a scarlet
thread which God has woven into the centu-
ries. The eucharist has been kept through all
the years. One generation has handed it down
to another, until at last it has reached us.
Standing here, we begin to thread our way back
through the years, with this sacrament as our
pilot. Whither does it carry us? Oh, what a

strange, strange pilgrimage on which it takes us! There is scarcely a sacred spot on earth where it does not bid us linger for a moment in rapt devotion. Into great cathedrals and splendid churches, and humble chapels and lowly cottages, it carries us. On bleak mountain sides and in shadowed valleys, in the cloistered cell and in the caves of the earth, by Greenland's frigid shore and Ceylon's amber sea, it leads our wandering way, for there adoring souls have kept the eucharist and dwelt upon the old, old story. It leads us into kings' chambers and by the dying-couch of the pauper. It carries us into the rugged fastnesses of the Italian mountains, where Waldensian saints "lie slaughtered on the Alpine summits cold."

It bids us wait in Scotland, on holy ground, where many a martyred hero sealed his testimony in fire and blood. It carries us to the dank, stern islet of Iona, shrouded in Hebridean mists, and lashed by the waters of the Irish Sea, where Columba, the apostle of Teutonic Christianity, and himself a Protestant, "a thousand years before the Reformation," canonized his little sea-girt kingdom by guarding there the purity of a primitive faith.

Back further and still further our guide leads the way, through Bohemia, through Rome and its catacombs, through Alexandria, ever draw-

ing nearer to that fateful night, until at last the picture fades away, and the great reality comes to take its place. Our guide has brought us into the very presence of the peasant Saviour and his peasant disciples, and to the very hour, where, for the first time in the world's history, the sacrament of the Lord's supper was observed.

Are you a skeptic? Do you want some proof of the genuineness of that which Christian faith accepts? I shall not take you to the Bible this time. I shall not ask you to listen to the testimony of fulfilled prophecies, nor to the evidence from certified miracles, nor even ask you to judge the Christian's faith by what it has done for fallen human nature through these weary years. Something far simpler will suffice. Take for your guide this simple sacrament, that has survived persecution, triumphed over the fierce hate of maddened foes, kept a quenchless life through martyrs' fires, defied bonds and bars, summoned succeeding generations around the Christian household's hearthstone, and still lifting its testimony fresh and unsullied before us, says: "I have come to you from Christ. I started from his very side. I was with him on the dark night of the betrayal. I saw him crucified. I saw him rise from the dead. I have come down the pilgrim way,

sharing all the trials and triumphs of the church since then, and now I declare unto you the reality, the certainty, of the blessed story of a Saviour's sufferings and death. Touch me and know. You may not, like Thomas, put your fingers into the very nail-prints, but here are the symbols of it all. This bread is his body given for you. This cup is the new testament in his blood. Put forth your hands and touch me, and be not faithless, but believing."

Blessed be God for such a witness! Not one whit less trustworthy is its testimony than that of the marble shaft out yonder to the heroic deed of a century ago. As the Christian partakes of the sacramental bread and wine he is coming into fellowship and brotherhood with the saints of all the ages; better still, into fellowship with Christ himself.

"This do in remembrance of *me*." There lies the virtue of the sacrament. A bronze tablet is placed in the great church wall as a memorial of the heroic endurance and saintly consecration of David Livingstone. Now, then, it would be a dull mind that would attribute to the memorial slab the virtues it commemorates. It is not the bronze tablet, but Livingstone himself who incarnated virtues worthy of remembrance by future generations.

A simple feast is placed in the great church

life as a memorial of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, and what a poor, stupid blunder we make when we attribute to the sacrament the virtues which it commemorates. It is not the Lord's supper, but the Lord that possesses an infinite merit and has endured a passion worthy of remembrance by all generations. You must get your eyes off of the feast—that is only a symbol, a rite, a mere thing, that has no virtue in itself—and fasten them on Jesus. What a stupid, fatal blunder we make when, exalting a dead form into undue importance, we clothe it with powers which only Christ possesses, and imagine that by the merely perfunctory celebration of the thing we are getting grace unto our souls.

“Do this in remembrance of *me*,” and unless one gets back through bread and wine, through form and symbol, to the living Christ, it will all be but the grinning, hideous skeleton of lifeless formalism.

Get back to Christ. Let me remember him, let me see my Saviour on the cross, suffering, bleeding, dying in my stead; let this bread be to me a reminder of his body which hung there; let this wine but suggest to me his all-atoning blood, and let me by faith rely on that; then, and not till then, does the sacrament of the Lord's supper become the *Sacrament of Growth*.

CHAPTER VIII.

Under the Church Dome.

CO-OPERATE!

“How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight?”—DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 30.

AS individuals profess faith in Christ, churches are organized. What is to regulate their activities and determine their attitude to one another?

Under the *Church Dome*—what?

The verse cited above works out a sum in church arithmetic, and declares the Bible answer to the question before us to be, not uniformity but unity, not sameness but harmony, not stagnation but co-operation.

One of God's men can chase a thousand; but put two of God's men together, let them co-operate, let them work to mutual advantage, and notice the tremendous gain. Instead of chasing two thousand, according to ordinary arithmetic, they put ten thousand to flight. That is, the application of the co-operative principle to Christian activity multiplies usefulness not in arithmetic, but in geometric, ratio.

Precisely the same truth is stated in another verse of Scripture, where it is said: "Five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight."¹

In the natural world there are two great antipodal forces,¹ the centrifugal and the centripetal, moving in opposite directions, but so nicely balanced that the world is held in perfect equipoise. Give to either the advantage, and chaos would result.

The same tendencies are found in the individual; the one centered in self, the other centered in others; and a perfect life is the equipoise of prudence and philanthropy, of egoism and altruism, of moral centripetality and moral centrifugality, in the same character.

The analogy may be carried further, from the life of the individual up into the larger life and more manifold activities of the church itself. We shall discover that these two great forces, the centripetal and the centrifugal, the self-centered and the self-repellant, reproduce themselves in church life.

There are churches that live for themselves, and there are churches that live for mankind. There are denominations whose horizon is bounded by the low rim of their own narrow sectarian sky; and there are denominations

¹ Leviticus xxvi. 8.

whose sympathies are world-wide and whose vision is as broad as the earth. What is the divine law for churches in their relation to one another? What is the great principle which is to serve as a mighty balance-wheel to regulate all ecclesiastical activities?

Some say *competition* is the true principle. What is competition? It is the outcome of emphasizing our own things, and always exists whenever the centripetal or self-centered force in a man or a corporation or a church becomes dominant. Competition means pitting the churches against each other. It is every one for himself and only for himself. It is allowing the law of supply and demand to determine the survival of the fittest. Denominations have been raised up, we are told, by the providence of God, to act as safeguards against each other. The Presbyterians keep the Methodists from becoming unsound, and the Methodists keep the Presbyterians from becoming formal. The Congregationalists keep the Episcopalians from becoming autocratic, and the Episcopalians keep the sister denominations from becoming puritanical. Competition is the great principle that regulates all business life, they say. It fixes the price of labor, it determines the rewards of capital, it regulates commerce, it must be recognized in religion.

Again, there are others who say that *communism* or uniformity is the true principle. What is communism? It is the resultant of emphasizing the things of others, and always exists whenever the centrifugal or self-neglecting force in a man or a corporation or a church is dominant.

Communism is wiping out all distinctions and eliminating all differences. It is the throttling of independent thought in the effort to reach sameness. It is the emasculating of all doctrinal statements in creeds for the sake of union. It is the dream of socialism and the ardent desire of emotional Christianity. There are not a few in these last days who tell us that the church must come to this. "If it is ever one church," they say, "it must be through the operation of the communistic principle, and no sacrifice, however great, must be deemed too big a price for the boon of church uniformity. Down with the denominations, out with all sectarian landmarks, and up with one great corporate church that shall have a polity lax enough to be irksome to none, and a creed brief enough to provoke no controversy." So say the advocates of church communism.

Between these two, there is a third great principle—*co-operation*. What is co-operation? It is the balancing of two antipodal traits

against each other until we have perfect equipoise. It is care for self and care for others. It recognizes the law of supply and demand, and recognizes none the less the rights of others. Co-operation is the churches working together instead of apart, working for instead of against each other, maintaining convictions instead of throttling them, breathing comity instead of hate, helping instead of hindering. It is practical without being emotional; it is prudent without being avaricious; it is generous without being improvident; it is fair without being severe; it is gentle without being weak; it is aggressive without being extreme; it is assertive without being overbearing; it is sound without being bigoted; it is pure without being puritanical; it is economical without being niggardly; it is unselfish without being socialistic.

Co-operation! It is the equipoise of the Christian centripetal and centrifugal, until the blood-bought church moves on its divine mission without jar or hindrance; and not competition nor communism, but co-operation, is the true principle for the regulation of all church activities.

Under the Church Dome—Harmony!

I.

Let us hope that competitive Christianity is out of date. Even in the secular world the

principle is a back number, and there is no respectable political economist living but teaches that a new principle in the business world has come to the throne. In the future all progress between labor and capital must be had under the sceptre of this new king—*co-operation*. Capitalists are finding that the best way to deal with labor is not to squeeze it down to the lowest wage by the hydraulic pressure of competition, but offering it a certain per centum of the profits to spur it on to the most efficient service by co-operation.

The following statement was made by a writer in the *Independent*: "At the recent annual meeting of the American Association for the Promotion of Profit-sharing, the reports of the peace and prosperity of such companies as were governed by this spirit were most hopeful. One company, whose plan is to give capital six per cent. as legal interest, to allow a certain sum for a reserve and provident fund, and then to divide the surplus earnings, giving two per cent. on wages and one per cent. on capital, proposed last year during the depressed times to pay the men three-fourths of a day's wages for a full day's work, on the understanding that as soon as possible wages should be restored to the former amount. The proposition was received by the men with cheers, and in October

the wages were restored to the former rate." There is the key to the problem between labor and capital. There is the cure for strikes.

If the business world is turning with aversion from the old barbaric school of competition, where might was right, and greed preyed upon necessity, surely it is high time for the church of God to arise to something higher. The day is far past for denominational rivalries, and for the struggle of sect against sect for supremacy, where the common enemy, sin, was lost sight of, and Satan needed only to complete an article of the creed on eternal punishment.

A competitive Christianity is an anachronism in these times. Thank God that it is so. Can as much be said for a communistic Christianity? In our aversion to narrowness and bigotry, we are in danger of swinging past the truth. There are many clamoring for the consolidation of all denominations into one. The church, in some quarters, has caught the socialistic infection. It is said that, if the denominations differ on questions of doctrine, drop the doctrines, and come together; forgetting that a church without doctrines is like a human body without bones. It is claimed that the various Christian denominations are a standing scandal in the eyes of the world, in-

dicating to the inquiring minds of unbelievers that Christianity itself has been cut up into so many religions. "Come together," it is said. "Let all Christendom come together, and have all things in common." Are they right? Is this desirable?

The world has already had one colossal illustration of this sort of uniformity, the Church of Rome, with its vast hierarchy and its masterly organization. What has been the result? An estoppel of all progress. Independent thinking is at an end, and the individual tamely submits to the unalterable dictum of the church. That sort of uniformity is the mighty grasp of a force that changes life-energy into machine-power. It may perpetuate, but it cannot originate; and nothing is more certain than that the progress of the future must be in the hands of those whose thought is untrammelled and whose activities are unfettered.

Not a competitive, nor yet a communistic, but a co-operative Christianity, is to bring the lost world at last to the feet of its Redeemer.

II.

That this is the teaching of God's word may easily be shown. Paul has given us a beautiful illustration of the church. He has com-

pared it to the human body,¹ and has declared that it is not one member, but many. What is the principle upon which the human body does its work? It is not on the principle of competition. The feet and the hands are not pitted against each other. The five senses are not at strife. The brain and the nervous system are not in antagonism. The heart and the lungs do not fight each other. The body does not say, "Every member for himself."

On the other hand, it is not communism that we find in the human body. The hand does not become an eye. The mouth does not become the brain. The blood does not become the muscles. Every bone, and muscle, and vein, and corpuscle, and cell, retains its individuality. Nevertheless, the entire body is bound together until it is absolutely one body, bound with living ligaments, hinged on ball-and-socket joints, united into such interdependency that, while each member maintains its individuality and performs its special function, it helps every other member, and contributes to the entire marvellous combination its special quatum of efficiency. The thumb performs the functions of a thumb, but it also makes the fingers tenfold more efficient. The feet remain feet, but they multiply the body

¹Cf. 1 Cor. xii.

indefinitely by making it movable instead of stationary. The eye does not cease to be an eye, but it increases immeasurably the usefulness of the hand. We need not develop the portrait further. The truth is evident. The human body is the most magnificent illustration of the principle of co-operation in existence.

Behold the church! What we want is, not the rivalry which pits the churches against each other, nor yet that sentimentalism which would blur all differences. The need is, for the denominations of Christendom to work together with absolute harmony and for mutual help, as do the members of the human body.

Under the Church Dome—Unity!

Christian co-operation means the utter suppression of sectarian controversy; but that is the merest beginning. If carried out it would lead to friendly conferences between denominations with a view to reducing these differences to a minimum. It would mean a broad view of the work itself and the planning of the same, so as to avoid the clashing of interests and the waste of resources. It would bring about concerted action on the foreign mission field, so that the denominational rivalries at home would not repeat their disgraceful competitions in the eyes of the heathen. It would completely revolutionize Christian work in small villages

and country places, and would plant churches with a view to supplying spiritual destitutions rather than to building up denominationalism. It would unite the Christian host against social evils, and transform both the civil and social life of many a municipality. It would do these and do more efficiently innumerable other things that the church of the Lord Jesus has been sent to do. Its advantages are pre-eminent, and it appeals to us strongly from every noble view in which we may regard the ministry of the church.

It falls into harmony with the spirit of the gospel. That is enough in its favor. Whether it be expedient or not, it is right. A self-centered church is just as much self-doomed as a self-centered man. A selfish church is warped, out of plumb, cursed at home. If the Golden Rule is a good rule for one Christian why not for a hundred Christians or five hundred Christians where they organize themselves into a church? It is right for the church to care for itself, to hold tenaciously to its own convictions; but if it is true to the spirit of the gospel, and to that power of grace which has brought it into existence, it will be none the less careful for the welfare of sister churches that are endeavoring to proclaim the same gospel and bring perishing sinners to the same blessed

Saviour. This is the spirit of the Master. This is the Bible teaching, and so, whether it is expedient or not, whether it pays or not, whether the church builds up or goes to pieces under it, every church in its activities ought to be an exponent, not of competition, not of uniformity, but of intelligent co-operation. But we need fear no disastrous results. God's plan succeeds.

III.

There are other distinct advantages which co-operation insures:

1. It permits honest differences on points of Bible interpretation while securing concerted action for the world's evangelization. If I am to do my best work for God, I must be allowed to remain a Presbyterian, because I conscientiously believe that the doctrines of this church are those taught in the Bible. As much must be granted a Methodist, a Baptist, or an Episcopalian. You have not made any man mightier for God by causing him to surrender any righteous conviction that incites to effort for the salvation of souls. We want no system of ecclesiastical bondage that will put manacles on the private conscience, or fetter free thought. We do want a system that will bring men and women harmoniously together in Christian work so that in all their efforts they shall help

and not hinder one another. Co-operation insures this. It permits honest differences while securing concerted action.

2. Economy is another precious result secured. It is enough to make the heart ache to contemplate some church blunders. Scores and scores of small villages throughout our land have three times too many churches and three times too many preachers. The various denominations are there, each with a small following, competing for the supremacy. Their work is not supplemental, but too often contradictory. Let the principle of co-operation be applied, and there would be an immense saving, both of men and means. The same principle would bring about a much-needed reform as to the location of churches.

In the summer of 1894 the writer stood on a street corner in one of our Southern cities with a population of 40,000, and counted, within two squares, eight magnificent church buildings. All the leading churches of the city were bunched together. What brought them so close to each other—competition or co-operation? They were after an eligible location, and they had all pounced upon the same spot. If God had designated the location of those churches, would not he have scattered them? When men want to light a city with electricity

they do not bunch all the arc-lights around the courthouse square. What is the main object in the location of a church—to get among the best class of people and build up a flourishing congregation, or to strike a light in the night's darkness and carry the gospel of life to perishing souls?

3. Again, co-operation makes the church more efficient in its work. It decreases friction, and, to that extent, increases efficiency. One by himself can chase only a thousand, but when two come together and co-operate they put ten thousand to flight. The practical application of this principle would centre the attention of the church on the vital things in religion. Competition always ranges around non-essentials. When two churches begin to compete, what is it that they usually emphasize? Music, architecture, rhetorical preaching. Did God ever intend his church to be driven to such a plight in order to hold a congregation? These things are not wrong in themselves. They are good, if we make them stay down there in their proper places. Nevertheless, something is wrong whenever a church turns to these things as stepping-stones on which to climb to prosperity.

Co-operation would save the church from the temptation to make such a fatal mistake. It

would fill its hands with the work of holding up Christ to a lost world, until it would have neither the time nor the necessity to turn to aught else to draw a congregation.

4. Co-operation would also give us a stronger and more robust type of piety. The things just mentioned engender the partisan spirit; petty rivalries and jealousies spring up between the members of different churches, and directly it is "*our church*," instead of "*Christ's church*." Christians become devoted to a particular organization, to the detriment of any interest in the Lord's work at large. This is always an infirm piety. We need the broader view. Christ's work is one everywhere. A soul saved to him in Saint Peter's is not less precious than a soul saved within Westminster Abbey.

As our sympathies enlarge, the Christian pulse beats stronger. As ignorance decreases we learn something of what God is doing in other places through other instrumentalities, and we are saved from the ridiculous parsimony of that insufferable conceit which would dignify any small section of the Lord's host as "*the church*," to the exclusion of all others.

5. The tremendous advantage which co-operation would give the church in combatting organized evils is apparent. The trouble in many places is not that the Christian sentiment

is weak, but unorganized or divided. It hates vice, but when it comes to the demolition of vice, good people fall out among themselves as to how it is to be done. Then the devil sits back and laughs in great glee at the way we have brought our own counsel to naught. We get together on Sunday and lustily sing in rapturous song :

" We are not divided,
All one body we."

Then we go out into the world and split up into a dozen cliques, and the music of our great song dies before it gets to God. The saloon power is organized, the gambling power is organized, vice is united ; and if ever these abominations are cast out, good men must co-operate, and God's church must present an unbroken front.

These are but a few of the many advantages of co-operation. They are enough to make every earnest lover of Christ's kingdom pray for it and strive to realize it.

It is the point to which the church must come. It is right, and whatever hinders it is wrong. We must throttle our prejudices. We must not, and ought not to, surrender our convictions, but we must give up our prejudices. We must be ready for conference ; we must welcome all friendly comparisons that will tend

to dissipate mutual misunderstandings. We must hail whatever brings us closer to each other as a token that we are closer to the Christ himself.

The church will come to this sooner or later. It must, and as it does it will be coming to its ideal estate of glorious prime and saintliest vigor.

Then the man of God will no longer have need to ask, "How shall one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight?" for the rapturous answer will be pouring tumultuously in upon him from every chapel and church and consecrated heart the wide earth over :

"Like a mighty army
Moves the church of God ;
Brothers, we are treading
Where the saints have trod ;
We are not divided,
All one body we ;
One in hope and doctrine,
One in charity."