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WITH AN INTRODUCTION

By REV. HENRY A. BOARDMAN, D.D.

LONDON:
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INTRODUCTION.

I HAVE had an opportunity of looking over the sheets of the following work in advance of its publication, and have been requested to say what I think of it. If I do this, I must say, first of all, that it is, in my opinion, a work which stands in no need of an endorsement from any quarter.

Without adverting to the lucid and vigorous style in which it is written, it is remarkable for several characteristics which cannot fail to arrest the attention of the thoughtful reader. Among these, not the least conspicuous is its *comprehensiveness*. I can recall no book of moderate size in which a greater number of important topics pertaining to personal religion are discussed. The wide range of subjects lying between such fundamental questions as these, "Is there a God?" "What am I?" "Why am I placed in this world?" and the sublime consummation of the Christian life, here pass in review before the reader. He will find in these pages just that kind of information respecting the BIBLE, the necessity of a reve-

lation, its evidences, the canon of Scripture and its paramount authority, which every reflecting person desires to have. The true ends of life, the nature of real religion, and the reasonableness of its claims, with the perplexities and dangers, the duties and privileges, of the believer, are considered in a way which cannot fail to impress the candid mind.

For this book is not more remarkable for the extent and variety of its topics, than for the ability with which they are discussed. In the first sentence of the first chapter we have a key to the peculiar style in which the author conducts his argument:—"It has been my privilege to be engaged for nearly fifty years in the religious instruction of young persons in Sunday schools, and for nearly three-fourths of that time to have charge of one or two weekly Bible-classes of young ladies." Precisely so. It required just such a training in order to write this Work. No vigour of intellect, no amount of learning, no ordinary pastoral experience even, could have qualified a man to write it. It could have come only from the pen of one who, endowed with ample intellectual and moral gifts, had spent a score or two of years in the faithful religious instruction of intelligent young persons, carefully observing their various tempers and temperaments, noting the effects of different modes of domestic training, watching the diversified impressions produced upon them by the imperative demands of Scripture, analysing their sceptical doubts, recording their cavils and their subterfuges, and employing the resources of a well-furnished mind in re-

moving their difficulties and pressing home the truth upon their consciences. Regarded in this view, I am quite sure that the book will be found a useful study, not merely to those for whom it was specially written, but to teachers and pastors also. It were well if we could all command the skill in casuistic morality which is displayed in these pages.

To describe this feature in a single sentence, I should say that it has a *reality* about it which constitutes its highest value. The late venerable Dr Archibald Alexander, of Princeton, was accustomed to say that he preferred "Jenks's Prayers" to any other collection of the kind, because they were evidently "*prayers which had been prayed.*" So with this book. The personages introduced are real. The conversations actually took place. The doubts and fears, the cavils and complaints, were all expressed. One of the most touching narratives presented here (pages 67-70) recalls to my recollection a young friend whose death was mourned with a true sorrow by many hearts. The author has said very little, where he might have said much, about her personal charms and her rare intellectual gifts. Nature and grace conspired to form her to a mould of singular excellence and loveliness. And during the long months of fluctuating health which preceded her summons home, she was manifestly ripening for her change. No one could doubt that she passed from her cross of suffering to her crown.

Perhaps too little notice is taken, in most sermons and religious books, of the sceptical misgivings and complaints

of earnest minds. There are many persons, many young persons even, whose bosoms are filled with murmurs,

“Unutter'd or express'd,”

against the Deity. They feel that their lot is a hard one; that the Creator ought not to have placed them in such a world with such a nature; and that if they perish, it will not be their fault. These persons have not been forgotten by the author. The candour and ability with which he has considered their difficulties will commend to them his wise and faithful counsels.

Again, young Christians are frequently perplexed with questions of duty respecting books, amusements, methods of doing good, and other practical matters. The author's knowledge of the world, and large experience, have made him a competent teacher on these points, and they will have reason to thank him for his suggestions.

But it is not necessary to extend this Introduction. If this book is read in the spirit in which it has been written, it cannot fail, by God's blessing, to lead many persons to “CHRIST THE ROCK;” and thus it will have accomplished its mission.

H. A. B.

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THE ROCK! THE ROCK!

WE have an authentic account of a person who was afflicted with a very singular calamity. In the midst of apparent health, activity, and cheerfulness, he would suddenly lose all consciousness, and fall like one dead. In the paroxysm which ensued, he would often reach out his arms convulsively, as if feeling for something which he could not see. As soon as the spasm had passed, his eyes were opened slowly, and fixed intently on the ceiling, as if he would pierce it and the sky beyond it. When consciousness was fully restored, he would always ask to have the sixty-first Psalm read to him :—

“Hear my cry, O God ; attend unto my prayer.
From the end of the earth I will cry unto thee,
When my heart is overwhelmed :
Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.”

“Stop there ! stop there !” he would exclaim, and then, clasping his hands, repeat, with solemn earnestness,—

“Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.”

“When a favourable opportunity occurred,” says an intimate friend, “I drew from him the following brief story :—

“It was his privilege to have the example and teachings of a godly mother, who used to make him read to her, every morning, from the Bible ; and she was accustomed to select, from the passage read, one verse to be his motto for the day. He was naturally very passionate, and one morning was be-

trayed into a violent fit of temper. His mother called him, and he very sullenly obeyed, when she took his two little hands in hers, and, with inexpressible tenderness and affection said,—

“ My dear son, this is your text for the day—“ Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.” You have been very wicked in the indulgence of such a temper. You have grieved me, and (what is much worse) you have sinned against God, who has kindly given you all you enjoy. You know you always feel sorry after these wicked fits of ill temper, and you have often promised to amend, but you have as often failed to do so. It is high time you were convinced that your unaided efforts will not avail, and you well know there is One who will give you all the help you need. JESUS, who was once a child like yourself, was tempted as you are ; but He did not sin, and He is able to succour all who are tempted. He is the Rock spoken of in your daily text. And now, whenever you feel these sinful tempers rising in your heart, let that short prayer fill your heart and go up from honest lips, “ Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.” Never rest till you feel yourself firmly fastened there.’

“ They then kneeled together, her arm clasping his waist, and with great fervour she commended him to God’s grace and protection. Her words, and even the tones of her voice, were indelibly impressed on his memory.

“ Not long afterwards his mother died ; and so strongly was his perverse will allied to a licentious world that he again indulged in folly and sin ; but when sober sense and reason were all but discarded, and the faithful voice of conscience all but silenced, these very words, ‘ Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I,’ rushed upon his memory, and revived a sense of his guilt and infatuation. At length they became as the handwriting upon the palace-wall ; and when temptation assailed him, the remembrance of them, instead of calming and soothing his perturbed and desponding spirit,

filled him with inexpressible terror and awe. The thought that he had hardened his heart against the tender remonstrances of his blessed mother, and refused to submit himself to the guidance of his heavenly Friend, overwhelmed him with pungent sorrow, which the Spirit of God ripened into true repentance. He consecrated himself to the service of his gracious Redeemer ; but his conflicts with the tempter were at times terrific, subjecting his bodily frame to a severe shock ; and when the fearful struggle came upon him, as it did at intervals in the way described, and completely prostrated his nervous system, he instinctively reached forth to lay hold of 'the higher Rock,' where, and where only, he found safety and peace."

It is the humble hope of persuading some vexed and troubled soul to feel for that Rock until it is found that prompts the preparation of this volume.

CHAPTER I.

What Christianity is—Relations of every human being to this world and the next—The Bible: whence is it, and what is its authority?—Epitome of its doctrines—As a rule of faith—Is it reliable?—General proofs—What ends it answers—Its peculiarities—Moral qualifications needful in judging of its claims to our faith.

It has been my privilege to be engaged for nearly fifty years in the religious instruction of young persons in Sunday-schools; and for nearly three-fourths of that time to have charge of one or two weekly Bible-classes of young ladies. These opportunities to become acquainted with the modes of thinking, or the reasons for not thinking, on religious subjects, which prevail in such circles, have been very favourable. The educated, refined, and intelligent, the daughters of luxury, affluence, and fashion, have been among my most interesting and (not unfrequently) my most tractable pupils. And, on the other hand, there are few, if any, more degraded and hopeless in moral or social condition than many hundreds of those to whom I have attempted to impart an elementary knowledge of revealed truth.

Between these extremes of external condition I have found, of course, a large variety of habits, capacities, dispositions, and susceptibilities; but in none of them have I discovered that settled repugnance to the whole subject of religion which I have often found in adult minds. So that in this attempt further to aid my young friends "to seek the Lord, if haply they may feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from every one of us," I persuade myself that I already have their sympathies; and with this confidence I connect the hope that I may be instrumental in making the path of duty and happiness plain before them.

It is pleasant to enter a cheerful, well-lighted apartment in the quiet hour of a Sunday evening and see a group of intelligent girls, full of life and hope, and not indisposed to listen to whatever may be appropriately and seasonably said to them. All the associations of the place and time invite to thoughtfulness. It is not merely as a *teacher* that I have been accustomed to mingle in such a group, but as a *friend* who feels with them that the world is very beautiful, and its promises very fair. I am a partaker of their joy, though I may not have the flush and buoyancy of earlier days. I can share in their bright visions of the future, though I know how many of them will prove delusive. I can anticipate their sad disappointments, while my predominant desire is that they may attain to the full measure of happiness of which their nature is susceptible. Nor have I any monkish, morbid views of life, its pleasures or pursuits. If Christianity—that is, the religion of Christ—does not cheer the spirits, sustain the hopes, give courage to the hearts, and vigour to the minds of men, its promise is not redeemed. Its professed office, in the striking language of Oriental imagery, is “to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to comfort all that mourn, to give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

That there should exist in any intelligent mind a positive aversion to the whole subject of religious faith and duty, which, in some form, interests every human being, can be explained only upon the hypothesis that the moral perception has been obscured or perverted, so that darkness is put for light and light for darkness. We say “every human being;” for, except in those who are destitute of the natural faculties of men, there must needs be a consciousness, more or less distinct, of an immaterial nature; and for the wants of that nature, a moment’s reflection must convince us something is required which the material world cannot supply.

That I am a living being is a matter of consciousness. I did not create myself. My life is a gift. I am allowed to live. Whether such a being should ever have a place here at all, no one could have told one hundred years ago, unless it were supernaturally revealed to him. The Creator must be greater and wiser than the creature. He that built the house hath more honour than the house. I was made for some end. The involuntary exercises of my mind, and the emotions of my heart; my passions of love and fear and joy and hope and anger, are part of myself. I can think with pain or pleasure upon what I heard or did or saw yesterday, last week, or years ago; and though I know not what shall be on the morrow, yet my plans are formed for days and weeks to come, and I anticipate with pain or pleasure what (if it occurs at all) may not occur for months or years.

What is my condition here? I am not an isolated creature. I am surrounded with beings like myself,—creatures of God, passing through life as across a stage, and disappearing by thousands upon thousands every day. Surely it cannot be

“all an empty show,
For man’s illusion given.”

I cannot be blind to the evidences of the power, wisdom, and love of God in my own frame and faculties, and the stupendous works of His hands which stand out above, beneath, and around me. In the right use of His gifts, I am capable of exquisite but not unmingled enjoyment; while the abuse of them brings with it intense and various pain. And, moreover, with all these tokens of Divine benevolence that meet my eye, there are evidences of a blight and a curse. Labour and toil, sickness, sorrow, and death, chagrin, disappointment, and despair, discontent and poverty, crime and wretchedness, are spread all over the earth. If I ask the cause of this, I am told it is SIN, and that I am infected with it, as are all my fellow-creatures. One trait can be stereotyped as part of the

biography of every child of Adam—He was a sinner.* A moment's reflection upon my own motives and conduct convinces me that it is so. The quick perception of right and wrong, of which I am conscious, presupposes a law which is given by my Creator to be a rule of my life; and sin is a transgression of this law.

What are the consequences of transgressing a Divine law? One consequence is present disquiet and fear; and this starts that gravest of all questions of universal interest and universal appropriateness, How shall man be just with God?

In our intercourse with our fellow-men, this question often occasions the deepest solicitude. He who has been betrayed into some violation of law, for which reparation must be made by fine or imprisonment, asks, with inexpressible emotion, How shall I meet the requirement?

The debtor is harassed by the constant thought of his creditor's power over him, and by continual anxiety lest his means of payment should prove inadequate.

What is before me? The only *certain* thing is death. If I live another hour or day, it must be by some power above and independent of myself. I can end my present life instantly, but I cannot prolong it a single moment. If I live, life must be a ceaseless conflict with the evil inclinations of my heart, and with the outward temptations of the world. Many joys may attend my path; but, like the impatient prophet's gourd, they may grow up and wither in the same night.

And is such a life a gift of love? Yes, of infinite love. But not if we leave out of view its relations to another and a better.

“Were it the whole of life to live,
Or all of death to die,”

human existence would be not only a mystery, but a mockery and a curse. What gives our present transient being its in-

* Dr Chalmers.

comprehensible value and interest is that, if wisely improved, it introduces us to our true life,—our immortality; and it is the anticipation of this true life that mitigates the sorrows, purifies the joys, and brightens the hopes of our brief pilgrimage here :

“ Beyond this vale of tears
 There is a life above,
 Unmeasured by the flight of years ;
 And all *that* life is love.”

What knowledge have we of such a life, and whence is it derived? Which is the way to it, and what do we need to prepare us for its enjoyment?

We have in our hands a familiar volume, which we call the Bible, and this is said to be a revelation from God, and to contain all that we need to know respecting His character, laws, and government, as well as concerning our own condition and destiny. We are, however, told of other sacred books and pretended revelations. There are the Shasters, or divine books of the Brahminical religion, whose disciples embrace more than an eighth part of the human family. These books reveal three times as many objects of worship as there are worshippers! There is Boodhism, the number of whose votaries far exceeds that of any other religious system on the globe, though it places its disciples in the marvellous position of worshipping an extinct being! There is the Koran, or the Bible of the Mohammedans, containing exactly three hundred and twenty-three thousand and fifteen letters, which is received as of Divine origin by about one-sixth of our fellow-men. Then there are the Jews, who hold to the Divine authority of the Old Testament, but reject the New; while the believers of the Greek and Papal churches, embracing more than another sixth part of the world, receive the Scriptures as of Divine origin and authority, but receive, as of equal authority, the interpretation which “the Church” (meaning their Church) puts upon them. Indeed, apart from such interpretation, they regard the sacred oracles as a source of error and confusion.

It is the popular impression that Protestants generally hold the Scriptures to be of themselves the only and the sufficient rule of faith and practice, so that "whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." It may be doubted, however, whether the faith of any person rests exclusively on his own original conceptions of what is taught in Holy Scripture. A religious doctrine is announced and advocated, and the attempt is made to shew its consonance with Divine revelation. The disciple is referred to that acknowledged standard of truth, and resorts to it to determine whether the new doctrine is "read therein, or may be proved thereby." He is supposed to accept or reject it according to the response of this sacred oracle. But how many influences, too subtle for analysis, may have perverted his apprehension, or warped his judgment! It may be that education, social relations, or fortuitous circumstances of residence and association may have given a strong bias to the mind before the appeal is made to the acknowledged standard.

It cannot be denied that those who are supposed to have formed their religious opinions under the teachings of Holy Scripture do greatly differ in what they believe and teach; and hence the almost endless diversity of creeds, denominations, sects, and schools. But a close examination will shew that in a very large majority of cases these differences relate to points not involving human salvation. We know of no Protestant communion that denies the possibility of salvation out of its pale; and ninety-hundredths of the real and nominal disciples of Christ would readily agree that what is familiarly known as the Apostles' Creed contains the essential doctrines of Christian faith. Beyond this they would not insist upon any belief as necessary or requisite to salvation. Less than this would not be consistent with submission to the Scriptures as a rule of faith.

Some are disposed to plead the diversities of sects as an excuse for keeping themselves aloof from a connexion with any of them ; and they even go so far as to call in question the genuineness of religion itself, because its disciples differ so widely in respect to its doctrines. But they forget that each of these systems of faith is nothing more than the expression of an opinion as to what the Scriptures teach, and upon us is laid the obligation to "search the Scriptures, to see if these things are so." In a free country like ours there are different political parties, and the views of public policy which distinguish them, one from the other, are investigated by intelligent citizens, and as their opinions coincide with or differ from this or that party or school, so they enroll themselves among its advocates or opponents.

But there are remarkable differences in the two cases. The instrument by which, under a government like ours, the right or wrong of public measures is determined, is of human origin, and, of course, imperfect. It was formed in ignorance of what time might effect in the condition and circumstances of the people. And, besides, the consequences of the most erroneous interpretation of its essential principles cannot reach beyond the bounds of time. It is therefore of little moment, comparatively, to what party one is attached, if he discharges the duties of a good citizen. And yet there are few persons who have not more sympathy with one party than with another.

In the religious world we claim to have an instrument of Divine origin by which to determine what is right and wrong in opinion and practice. It was formed with the most perfect knowledge of all possible contingencies and all possible conditions of those who should live under it. To misinterpret an essential principle of it involves fearful hazards for this world and the next ; and not to recognise it as a guide and rule of life is to prefer darkness to light. Instead, therefore, of rejecting the oracles of Divine truth because their responses are variously construed by those who profess to rely on them,

we should give the more earnest heed to them, in order that our own views may be governed by them. And when, with the best light we can obtain, these views are definitely settled, we should join ourselves to those whose conclusions correspond most nearly with our own.

As already intimated, there are some who maintain that, from ignorance or incompetency, people in general cannot be expected, of themselves, to form correct opinions of the teachings of the inspired volume ; and hence (says one) "the Church, in various ages, has given them an interpretation which is to be received as of binding authority." This claim may perhaps present a question of precedence. Much of what we receive as a Divine revelation relates to the foundation and progress of "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground [stay] of the truth," and to the means of extending the kingdom of its Founder and Supreme Head to the ends of the earth. We may not be able to fix the date or describe the constituents of the earliest community which could properly be called a church. But from the earliest existence of such an institution under the gospel dispensation there is a contemporaneous declaration of the Divine will, directing its offices and ordinances with minute particularity ; and a Divine authority, in the person of its Founder, to oversee and conduct its administration. His personal teaching and example were enjoyed by His immediate apostles ; and, after them, at no subsequent period could any judgment have been formed which should have any authority except that which a concurrence of opinion on a given question among a body of fallible men (large or small) is supposed to carry. Each of them has an individual judgment, founded on evidence presented to his own mind ; and their determination of any question, whether expressed in the form of a law, a decree, or a creed, is but an aggregate of private opinions. So that we are thrown back upon the right and duty of every human being who has the opportunity and means to examine the records of Divine truth, and draw

from them precepts, doctrines, and promises for the government of his own life and the foundation of his own hopes.

The possibility—nay, the probability—of a Divine revelation is one of the first and simplest instincts of reason. True philosophy inquires if there is any positive declaration of the will of the Almighty ; and, finding what claims to be such, it is received and obeyed, and leads the humble disciple up to its divine and incomprehensible Author. There are various systems of false philosophy, all resting on certain conceptions of the Supreme Being supposed to be consistent with reason ; and thence are inferred the attributes of a Divine character and a scheme of Divine government.

“ Has the Almighty given any messages to His creatures ? If so, how can we know them from all delusions and counterfeits ? Not by their agreement with perfect goodness and infinite wisdom ; for this is a standard beyond our reach. If we knew perfect goodness and infinite wisdom, a revelation would be superfluous. Is the message or messenger accompanied by such tokens of Divine wisdom, power, and goodness as could not be derived from mere natural means at the time, and could not proceed from an unseen power of evil ? ”

Perhaps you are surprised that I should raise any inquiry among persons educated, as you have been, under Christian influences, as to the credibility of Holy Scripture. But I fear it may be much more pertinent than you suppose. There are multitudes of persons in your position whose faith is purely negative. They do not deny the truth, nor do they embrace it. There is a superficial impression that to be a Christian is very right and proper, if persons are inclined that way. But no personal, inexorable obligation to submit to the claims of the gospel is recognised, or even considered.

“ What religion has to fear is not the most searching criticism of the contents of Scripture, not any fundamental inquiry into the laws of physical phenomena, not the fullest examination of every vestige upon the field of nature left by the footsteps of

time.”* The supposed discrepancies between the theories of philosophy and speculation and the Scripture account of the creation, of the unity of the race and of the diversity of tongues, have been found to have no real existence. Whenever science has vaunted itself upon some new discovery which seems to involve the credibility of sacred history, it has so turned out that another step in advance or in some other direction has furnished new evidence *from itself* to confirm or elucidate the inspired record. “Hence the true source of alarm is the danger to their faith which those persons must encounter who content themselves with superficial information or partial knowledge.”†

The other day, two young ladies were conversing about some work of Carlyle, which one of them was persuading the other to read. The admirer of this erratic speculator took occasion to utter some bitter maledictions upon one of his reviewers; whereupon her companion (who was a Roman Catholic) reproved her, at the same time quoting the passage, “Vengeance is mine,” &c. To the inquiry where that came from, it was answered, “From the Bible;” and she then very flippantly asked, “Do you believe the Bible? for I’m sure I don’t.” The Catholic lady replied, “Certainly I do. I believe it is inspired by God, and contains what can make us wise unto salvation.” Here was an educated Protestant unbeliever rebuked by a disciple of what we justly regard as one of the most corrupt forms of Christianity! And even where Holy Scripture is received as a Divine revelation, “truths of all others most awful and interesting are too often considered as so true that they lose all the power of truth, and lie, bed-ridden, in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors.”

We have before us, then, a collection of ancient writings claiming to be a revelation from God, and we are to ascertain,

* The Inspiration of Holy Scripture, its Nature and Proof. By William Lee, D.D.
 † Ibid.

so far as we can, on what this claim rests. That they are very ancient writings is unquestionable. They were the sacred books of the Jews from the earliest period of their history. The accounts they contain of men and events are corroborated by evidence which has never been successfully impeached. That evidence is written (says one) over the rocks and mountains, the deserts and plains, of Judea. The boldest sceptics charge upon believers in the Bible no degree of credulity so absurd as that of a man who could travel through the sacred land with the Bible as his guide-book, and believe that it is not a true record of men and things as they were.

The journeyings of the children of Israel are minutely described by the sacred historian,—the places where they halted, the wells and brooks they passed, and the plains and deserts which they traversed. Among the most memorable events in that journey of forty years was the encampment at Sinai, the geographical features of which are distinctly described by the inspired historian. And it is the express testimony of one of the most intelligent and discriminating of modern travellers, not only that there is no discrepancy between the incidents of the sacred narrative and the natural aspect of the spot where they occurred, but that in no other quarter of the peninsula is there a place corresponding in any degree so fully to the historical account and to the circumstances of the case. Here lay a plain broad enough to receive the mighty host of Israel, and here was a mountain from whence alone the lightnings and the thick cloud would be visible to such a multitude, and the thunders and the voice of a trumpet be heard by them, *when the Lord came down in the sight of all the people*, upon Mount Sinai.*

The writings to which successive generations of the Jews gave heed as of Divine authority were constantly read in their synagogue. It was the office of a particular class of men to study them and to preserve their integrity and purity. From

* Robinson's Researches.

the time of the dismemberment of the Jewish kingdom, which occurred early in the reign of Rehoboam, there have been extant two independent copies of the five books of Moses,—one in possession of the Jews, and the other in possession of the Samaritans; and, though critics differ as to the preference in point of antiquity, purity, &c., their co-existence in the hands of rival and hostile parties must be regarded as no ordinary security against corruption.

And so intimately is the subsequent history of the nation associated with institutions and ordinances, of the nature, origin, and design of which these books alone give any account, that they must stand or fall together. If there were such men as Abraham and Joseph, Moses and Aaron, there must also have been such men as David and Solomon, Isaiah and Daniel. If there were a temple, an altar, and a sacrifice, there were also an Aaron, an Eli, and a Samuel. If there were a captivity and a restoration of the Jews, there must have been a Josiah, an Ezra, and a Nehemiah. If the Pentateuch is rejected, no ancient writing can maintain its claims to credibility. If it is admitted as genuine, the other scriptures of the Old Testament must be allowed equal credit and currency.

The introduction of the Christian dispensation would not tend to relax the vigilance with which the Jews guarded their own Scriptures. The stated use of them in the synagogues, and the constant reference to them by the Founder and apostles of the new faith, as well as by the Jewish scribes and doctors of the law in justification of their unbelief, attest the authority in which they were held. To those who believe in the Divine mission of Christ, His repeated citation of these scriptures, as sacred and authoritative writings, would seem to end all controversy. When He was teaching in the temple, and replied to the chief priests and elders who were disposed to question His authority, "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?" He spoke of what was familiar to them,

and of unquestionable authority. At a public festival in Jerusalem, when the Jews were so incensed against Him as to seek His life, He directed them to "search the Scriptures; for," said He, "in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they testify of me." And in the same discourse He said, "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust; for had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me; but if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" There can be no doubt that "Scriptures" and "writings" in these passages referred to well-known and authentic documents.

On another occasion He appeals to His Jewish auditory, when greatly excited against Him, "Is it not written in your law?" &c. The book of Psalms is also repeatedly cited as a well-known section or collection of these sacred writings; and in the interview which our Saviour had with His disciples after His resurrection, He expressly recognises the division of them into the three departments of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms; and then "opened He their understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures."

When Paul was in Thessalonica he went into a synagogue of the Jews, and "reasoned with them out of the Scriptures." Apollos, who was himself "mighty in the Scriptures," convinced the Jews in Achaia, "publicly shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ;" and in the narrative of the interview between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, we have specific reference to a particular passage of the sacred writings, and "the place" or "passage" which he read is cited by the historian, and is found in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. So that it may be truly said, not only that the Pentateuch, as a whole, but the entire Old Testament, "was alive in the minds of the Jewish people when the new covenant was revealed."

Is there any room for doubt, then, that the truth and authority of so much of the book before us as we call the

Old Testament, received the fullest attestation from Christ and His apostles?

We now turn to the other portion, which we call the New Testament, and which is the foundation of the Christian faith. Is its sufficiency for such a reliance indisputable?

In the first place, if it is not reliable, the argument which we have derived from it in support of the Old Testament has, of course, no validity. Yet it must be admitted that as a supplement to the Jewish Scriptures, it is surprisingly natural and complete. The entire volume of these Scriptures had been in the hands of the Jews for nearly five hundred years when Christ appeared. The historical and prophetic records which they contain were the subject of earnest inquiry and diligent study. Everything in the civil and social condition of the nation concurred to excite expectations of some great event at or near the period of Christ's advent. The devout servants of God were waiting in faith for the "consolation of Israel," while the nation at large were looking for a prince who should deliver them from political subjection, and restore to them the power and grandeur of their golden age.

To human view, nothing could be more unsuited to such a state of the public mind than the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. If the object had been to excite the bitterest prejudices of the Jewish mind, and the most relentless hostility of the Jewish people towards the new dispensation, it would have been scarcely possible to do it more effectually than by giving such a nativity to the promised and expected Messiah. Instead of preparing them by some intermediate, semi-ritualistic ordinances to part with the temple, the altar, and the priesthood, and with them to yield their national distinction and glory, and accept in their place a purely spiritual dispensation, the benefits of which all the rest of the world would share as freely as themselves, the infant Jesus was presented to them as the incarnate Son of the eternal God; a babe in the manger at

Bethlehem was revealed as "the light that was to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people of Israel."

Contrary as all this was to their expectations and prejudices, no other manner of revelation would fulfil what was written in their Scriptures concerning Him. No sooner did He commence His public ministry, than His countrymen, with one consent, opposed Him. They denied His authority as a public teacher ; charged Him with being in league with the prince of devils ; heaped reproaches and insults upon Him for the space of three years, and then, with a malignant cruelty, aggravated by the form of arraignment and trial, they laid violent hands on Him and put Him to an ignominious death. All this was in literal accordance with the sure word of prophecy, and might have been found written, with almost historical accuracy, in their Scriptures many hundred years before the event.

If we should find an ingenious lock, with numerous complicated wards, in one place, and afterwards a key in another and distant place which exactly fitted it and would fit no other, we might reasonably conclude not only that the key was made for that lock, or for one exactly like it, but that, if both were not made by the same man, the latter could not have been made without a knowledge of the former. The Old Testament without the New would be a lock without a key, the one being a necessary complement to the other. Genesis is the legitimate preface to the law ; the law is the natural introduction to the succeeding books of the Old Testament ; and the whole is a proper and indispensable prelude to the gospel dispensation. What the four Gospels are to the New Testament, the five books of Moses are to the Old.

But we have other grounds on which to maintain our position.

Two or more of the writings which we call the Gospels were written within thirty years after the ascension of Christ. Thousands of people were living during that interval, and for

years afterwards, who were familiar with the persons, places, and incidents which they record. Has there been a tittle of reliable evidence from any source, or a single credible witness from any of the towns, cities, and villages in which the Redeemer lived, preached, and wrought His miracles of mercy, to invalidate their claim to implicit faith? Not one.

It is supposed that both Ignatius and Polycarp had personal acquaintance and intercourse with some of the apostles. The former of these holy martyrs, who suffered A.D. 107, refers to the Gospels in terms which imply not only their being published at that time, but their being regarded as a true record of the sayings and doings of Christ. "In order to understand the will of God," he says, "flee to the Gospels, which I believe not less than if Christ had been speaking to me." Before the middle of the second century, while the immediate descendants of the actors in these scenes and the authors of these writings were living, the books were collected into a volume, and were generally received as an infallible directory of faith and duty by the adherents of the new doctrine. And so controlling was their faith in them, that the most terrific forms of torture and death which the malice of their persecutors could invent, seemed only to give new emphasis and earnestness to their testimony.

During the eighteen intervening centuries the Jews as a people have rejected the claims of Jesus to be their Messiah, and of course they regard the gospel history as unworthy of credit. They have no knowledge of the counsels of God as they are revealed in the person and offices of Jesus Christ. They cling to a dispensation of types and shadows which was merely introductory to a better covenant established upon better promises. Like the fond child, who in the delirium of its grief throws itself on the cold and senseless body of its dead mother, they cleave to Moses and the prophets, and, with a judicial infatuation, deny Him "of whom Moses and the prophets did write." But never have they successfully impeached

the veracity of the New Testament history. Never have they impaired in the slightest degree their claim to be received as of Divine authority. And who could assail them with any hope of success if *they* could not? The other portion of the volume of evidence originally committed to their custody is still in their hands. The parties and incidents most prominent in the history are interwoven with the civil, social, and ecclesiastical annals of their nation. The scenes described take their character and hue from the mountains and vales and lakes with which they are most familiar. The witnesses, advocates, and propagators of the new faith were taken from among their own people,—and some of them of no mean condition and reputation: surely they have ample opportunity and means to detect and expose any surreptitious claims. But they are silent. As in many things during the incarnation of the Messiah they undesignedly and unconsciously fulfilled their own Scriptures, so in their pertinacious rejection of Him they only confirm and exemplify what their own prophets have declared concerning Him. And in the fulness of time their return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls will, in like manner, illustrate the truth and magnify the grace of the gospel.

It is not denied that for at least fifteen hundred years the New Testament in its present form has been received by Christians, and recognised as of Divine authority in public and private. It has been the umpire to which questions of faith and duty have been referred, and its decisions have been the end of all controversy. Whatever doubts may have existed at an earlier period in the minds of friends or foes respecting the claim of the collection, or any portion of it, to be a revelation from God, they must have been dissipated; for without question the collection, as a whole, rests on a far firmer historical foundation, and is more completely accredited and sustained by internal and external proofs, than other works of antiquity which all the world regards as genuine.

A recent examination of Persian, Syrian, Greek, and other monasteries, made* under authority of the imperial government of Russia, has brought to light several manuscripts of various dates from the fifth to the tenth century, containing indubitable evidence of the existence and authority of the sacred writings, and that they were then ancient records. Among these invaluable treasures is a Greek MS. of the Bible, discovered in a monastery at Mount Sinai, supposed to be the oldest in existence. The Old Testament is in the same text as that used by the apostles in their quotations, and the New Testament is complete. The date of the MS. is supposed to be at or near the commencement of the fourth century, probably in the time of Constantine the Great. "These writings," says one, "are drawn from the grave of ages as living witnesses to the present generation of the inspired authority of the apostolical Scriptures. Sacred treasures they are, which, in secure repose at the foot of the Mount of Moses, have survived, as by a miracle of Providence, through all the storms of the tumultuous centuries of the past."

It is not needful to inquire particularly into the claims of each book of the New Testament. Suffice it to say that the general evidence of the truth of the apostolic Acts and Epistles is of the same character and of equal force with that which is adduced in support of the gospel history.

Before we leave this topic, it may be well to reflect for a moment how much depends on the genuineness of the sacred writings. We can scarcely conceive of a condition more forlorn than that of a child who has fallen asleep in a boat, without oars or rudder, which by some oversight has become loose and drifted far out to sea. Awaking, the helpless little navigator finds his frail craft tossed hither and thither by the wild waves, and threatened with destruction. If a vessel were to heave in sight, he has no means of signaling her. If he knew which way to steer to reach some shore, he has nothing with

* By Prof. Tischendorf.

which to propel the boat or direct its course. He can only gaze vacantly and despairingly upon the boundless expanse and fathomless abyss of waters, and resign himself to a seemingly hopeless destiny.

But inconceivably more forlorn is the condition of a human being in the absence of a revelation of God's will. With overwhelming evidences of the existence of an infinite and intelligent Creator, he is conscious of desires and capacities that elevate him above all orders of creatures about him. Endowed with the faculty to discern between right and wrong, he cannot fail to connect with it the idea of a Lawgiver and a Judge. Not more eagerly does the hart pant for the water-brook than the human soul craves some portion suited to its superior nature; and such a portion it seeks in vain within itself or within the bounds of time and sense. Not a nation, people, or tribe has ever yet been found in whose rites and superstitions there was not some trace of faith in a life to come. It is as universally characteristic of man as an erect posture or the power of articulation. Systems of philosophy assert the desire, the hope, and even the probability of a future; but in what vain and vague speculations do they indulge till, by the light of a Divine revelation, something is learned of the nature and attributes of God; the principles of His moral government; the relations of the human family under it; the wonders of His providence and grace; and the retributions of the world to come!

If there is one particular in which the intelligence of the divine Author of all things is more conspicuous to human view than in any other, it is the perfect adaptation of the nature of each order of creatures to its condition and circumstances. The camel is found where he is wanted and where he can live. Birds of the air are not web-footed, nor do the fishes of the sea have wings and feathers. The powers and passions of the human soul are adapted to an immaterial, immortal existence; and it would be contrary to all the laws of analogy if it were

not so. And yet in what almost total darkness would this mysterious future of our being be wrapped were it not for the disclosures which this book makes. Life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel. The great problems of human apostasy and redemption are here solved. The only hope and help of a sinner are revealed in the doing and the dying of the Son of God ; death and the grave are divested of their terrific power ; the flaming sword is withdrawn from the entrance to paradise, and its gates are re-opened to every son and daughter of Adam who will penitently accept a gratuitous pardon. Let this light that shines in our darkness be extinguished ; let Holy Scriptures prove to be a cunningly-devised fable, and we should sink at once into the absurdities and cruelties of the grossest Pagan superstition.

Limited and imperfect as is the direct influence of the Bible in our world, it is, nevertheless, the essential element of all civilisation and progress. It has not caused wars and fightings wholly to cease, nor has it put a full end to selfishness, fraud, and oppression ; but, were its influence to be entirely withdrawn for a single generation, there is not a civil, social, or domestic relation that would escape the blight. The principles of our faith, derived from Holy Scripture, are interwoven with the very structure of society ; and even where they are weakened and corrupted by superstition and formalism, they serve to elevate public sentiment, to restrain outbreaking wickedness, and to keep the social fabric from falling into ruin.

These sacred pages explain some of the deepest mysteries in the history and condition of our race. They reveal the source of all the sorrow and suffering, the want and woe, the sickness and death, that fill the world. It is SIN. In the light they shed upon the works and ways of God, we see existence to be an inestimable blessing. The infinite justice and mercy of the Divine government are brought into perfect harmony. The incarnation and sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and the mission and offices of the Holy Spirit in restoring the image of God to

the soul, and fitting it for His blissful presence, are presented to our wondering view. The ways of Providence, however inscrutable, become luminous to the eye of faith. The present becomes the narrow, dark vestibule of our true life, opening into a temple of which the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the light, and into which "nothing can enter that defileth, or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie."

Were the Divine authority of the Bible set aside, and the hope of immortality which it brings to light proved to be baseless, we should have left the most extraordinary delusion of which there is any account. For what pretended revelation can shew such an array of unimpeached and unimpeachable testimony in favour of a primitive faith in its genuineness? What other picture of man was ever drawn which displayed a like knowledge of his moral and spiritual nature? From what other source have ever flowed such gentle, elevating, humanising influences as that living fountain supplies? What other rules of moral right and duty have been revealed which are so uniform, so well adapted to mankind in their present state, and so universally acknowledged as the basis of all enlightened legislation and government? What system of fabulous or spurious religion has ever done for any portion of the race what the Bible has done for woman alone? to say nothing of the general precepts and duties which it inculcates, and which, if properly regarded, would make a paradise of earth, and an angel of man.

No theory of inspiration, no obscurity in the doctrines or language of Holy Scripture, no mystery of Divine Providence, asks so much of our faith as he asks who requires us to believe that such a book has not a Divine origin and authority.

There are two or three incidental thoughts which I may be allowed to introduce in this connexion.

1. The Bible is marvellously fitted to the needs and capacities of the bulk of men. It is a repository of truth in which such minds as those of Lord Bacon, Sir Isaac Newton, Jeremy

Taylor, and Sir Matthew Hale,—monumental men, standing, it may be, centuries apart, and conspicuous among many millions,—have found inexhaustible treasures. But the common walks of life are thickly set with the weary and heavy-laden, the sick and suffering, the tempted and the fallen. To such this blessed volume opens a perennial fountain of hope, and joy, and peace. It supplies strength and courage for the conflicts of life. It points the tired pilgrim to his rest at home. It is emphatically the poor man's blessing.

It has been beautifully said, that the empire of religious faith is not in cities or courts, nor in the strife and bustle of worldly enterprise. "She passes by the gates of the proud, and enters, a gracious and welcome guest, into the dwellings of the humble and poor. She finds ready adherents among those whom we may suppose the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem to represent. Christ is the desire of the simple heart. His truth answers its mysterious questions, solves its perplexities, and gives meaning to its sublimest aspirations. It is recognised and embraced, because it meets the holiest desires of the soul. The angels' song is no longer heard, and the star which guided the wise men has faded from the sky. But the divinely-communicated instincts which led the shepherds and sages to give heed to heavenly manifestations still remain; and, instead of the vanished star in that far distance, through all the dark experiences of intervening ages shines the ever-increasing light of the gospel of Christ."

2. The Scriptures, even without any living preacher, are able to make men wise unto salvation. In a history of missionary work in Madagascar, we are informed that when the missionaries were all driven from the island the native converts were without any religious teacher, but relied for spiritual guidance on scraps of the Bible carried in their memories or about their persons. They dared not appear as Christians; but, by the silent power of the leaven of truth already diffused, their number was increased tenfold in a few

years. A still more striking illustration of the same principle is furnished in the history of the mutineers of the ship *Bounty*.

3. It is worthy of remark that the Bible is so portable a volume. Rich as it is in history, literature, geography, poetry, narrative, and theology, it is for a Sunday-school child to wrap up in his tidy handkerchief, or the labourer to take with him into the field or the workshop. The statutes of England are said to occupy sixty folio volumes, and the various decisions of courts upon them to ten or twenty times that number of volumes; but in this convenient pocket-manual we have a code of perfect laws applicable to every possible contingency of human relation and condition, and at the sametime there accompanies us an interpreter and judge, who, if its aid is honestly invoked, will unerringly decide every doubtful case.

4. Notwithstanding the variety of subjects of which the Bible treats, the different characters, conditions, and habits of the authors or compilers of its several books, and the ages which intervened between the dates of their composition or publication, there has never been detected any important deviation from one straight line of doctrinal and preceptive truth. All its parts are consistent, all its teachings uniform; its requirements neither relaxed nor modified. Can a volume be produced to match it in these respects, or in any one of them?

The storm which shakes the oak only loosens the earth around its roots, and its violence enables the tree to strike them deeper in the soil. So it is that Scripture has gloriously surmounted every trial. There gathers around it a dense "cloud of witnesses," from the ruins of Nineveh and the valleys of the Nile,—from the slabs and bas-reliefs of Sennacherib and the tombs and monuments of Pharaoh,—from rolls of Chaldee paraphrasts and Syrian versionists,—from the cells and libraries of monastic scribes, and the dry and dusty labours of scholars and antiquaries.

Our present Bibles are undiluted by the lapse of ages. These oracles, written amidst such strange diversity of time, place, and condition—among the sands and cliffs of Arabia, the fields and hills of Palestine, in the palaces of Babylon, and in the dungeons of Rome—have come down to us in such unimpaired fulness and accuracy that we are placed as advantageously towards them as the generation which hung on the lips of Jesus as He recited a parable on the shores of the Galilean lake, or those churches which received from Paul or Peter one of their epistles of warning exposition.

Yes! The river of life, which issues out from beneath the throne of God and of the Lamb, may, as it flows through so many countries, sometimes bear with it the earthly evidences of its checkered progress; but the great volume of its water has neither been dimmed in its transparency nor bereft of its healing virtue.

A perplexing question is sometimes raised, when the claims of the Christian religion are discussed, why so small a portion of mankind have embraced it. As an evidence of its truth, we refer to many wise and learned men in the successive ages of the world who have lived and died in the full belief of its doctrines. We ask, How could such men as Lord Bacon, Sir William Jones, and Chief-Justice Hale be imposed upon by a false religion? and how could such multitudes of intelligent men and women throughout Christendom fall into the same delusion? The reply is sometimes made with an air of triumph that other minds, equally enlightened and philosophic, have rejected Christianity, and that in point of numbers the Christian faith ranks among its disciples a very insignificant minority of the human race. However specious such a reply may be, it is very shallow. To determine its force, we must be satisfied, in regard to the first position, that the minds of those who reject the Christian system are in all respects equally competent to judge of its claims as the minds of those who believe it.

Two persons may look at the same object and form entirely different opinions of its size, colour, proportions, &c. ; but whether one opinion is as good as another depends upon the organ and medium of vision and the various circumstances that may prejudice or distort them. - One jury may reject evidence and acquit an offender, while another would receive and weigh the same evidence and convict him. It would not do to say that one verdict was as likely to be right as the other. We must have juries alike and evidence alike in order to have opposite verdicts balance each other. Sir Isaac Newton receives Christianity as a revelation from God. Voltaire rejects it. Shall we consider the question of its truth or falsehood, so far as these two minds are concerned, in equilibrium? Surely not. The comparative strength, clearness, and maturity of their minds respectively must be determined. What was the comparative value of their judgment on subjects purely philosophical and not connected with religious belief? What degree of confidence was felt in their reasonings and deductions in respect to matters of pure science? Which of them would command the greatest degree of confidence in their judgment on moral subjects apart from revelation? As the intellect and the moral feelings are intimately associated, we must ascertain their position in this respect. Will they be likely to look upon the evidence with equal candour, and to weigh it with equal caution? Or will one be prepared, by an obliquity of moral vision, to see only deformity and disproportion, where the other, with a rectitude of moral perception, will discern symmetry and grace? And, if so, shall their judgments be set over against each other as of equal value?

We do not say, in this connexion, that the reception or rejection of Christianity is an affair of the heart rather than of the intellect. The position is true, and is a sufficient answer to all the cavils of sceptics and infidels; but we take it simply in reply to the proposition that men of great minds have rejected it, and that this neutralises the force of the argument

that great minds have received it. We say it has no such neutralising effect till the receiving and rejecting minds are shewn to have some equality.

Voltaire and Newton are as wide apart in their capacity to weigh evidence on moral subjects as are either of the parties we have named; and, of course, it is no sufficient answer to the argument that mighty intellects have submitted to the gospel, to say that other mighty intellects have rejected it.

As to the second position—viz., that but a small proportion of the human race acknowledges the Christian system—the fact can be easily explained without any impeachment of its claims. Of the ten hundred millions composing the human family, seven-tenths, probably, have never seen or heard of the text-book of Christianity, or the first word in support of its Divine origin. And of the rest, the large majority have given it but a passing thought, dismissing it with a careless indifference as an unwelcome, if not an unworthy, subject of their attention. Even if it could be shewn that of a thousand individuals of equal intellectual competency to decide the point, nine hundred and ninety-nine had decided against it, it would not necessarily follow that the thousandth man was in error, for he may have examined the subject under advantages not enjoyed by the others.

But, above and beyond all this, the power to judge of the truth of a system which professes to have come from God, and to be concerned exclusively with the moral relations and responsibilities of man as a subject of God's moral government, must be essentially a moral power. A blind man cannot judge of colours, nor a deaf man of musical sounds; neither can one whose affections are alienated from God, and whose whole moral nature is corrupt and defiled by sin, judge justly of a dispensation which reveals to him his own character, fixes upon him the deepest guilt, and threatens him with deserved punishment. He must be endued with power to discern the beauty of holiness and the deformity and malignity of sin,

before he is competent to such a task ; and this power is the free and gracious gift of the Divine Being.

Those who have never carefully reflected on the subject are not aware, probably, of the extent to which the intellectual perceptions are clouded and perverted by the weakness or disorder of the moral faculties. As a farthing rushlight in a dark passage gives him who has it the advantage of another (and perhaps a wiser) man who gropes in darkness, so he who has but a glimpse of the simplest truth of revelation, occupies a position far in advance of a large proportion of the human family.

There is an argument for the being of a God happily adapted to very mean capacities and shallow reasoners. It is familiar to you. Anything made—a pin, a watch, or a world—must have had a maker. A very inferior mind may perceive something of the force of such an argument for the existence of God ; but we need not say what very low and gross conceptions even of His natural attributes might consist with such perceptions. What could such a one comprehend of the distances, motions, and changes of the heavenly bodies ?

Suppose we tell him that, by means of an instrument called a telescope, the caverns of the moon can be measured, and that so vast is the field of vision over which one of these instruments sweeps, that if the dog-star were to attempt to elude its grasp, and were to travel at the rate of twelve millions of miles in a minute, it would take him two thousand three hundred years to get beyond its reach ! What idea would he receive ? What idea can any one have of such time and distance ? And yet the glimpse which such a mind obtains (by the force of this elementary argument) of the mere POWER of God, elevates it far above a heathen in his native ignorance. For he plants a tree, and when it is grown he cuts it down, and with part of it he makes a fire and warms himself, with part he roasts his meat or bakes his bread, and of the rest he makes a god, even his graven image. He falls down and worships it, and has not

understanding enough to say, "I have burned part of it in the fire, I have baked bread upon the coals thereof, I have roasted flesh and eaten it; and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to worship that which comes of a tree?" This besotted condition of the understanding is one of the most formidable obstacles to the enlightenment of pagan nations on spiritual subjects.

The degraded condition of the heathen is ascribed by an inspired apostle to their "unwillingness to retain God in their knowledge;" and a little observation will satisfy any one that the state of the moral dispositions must of necessity be closely connected with the functions of the mind. There are doctrines of Divine revelation which are offensive to my pride. To receive them is to put myself on a level with the meanest and vilest of our apostate race. I am asked to take things upon faith which it is admitted I cannot understand; and what is this but to stultify myself and refuse to exercise the powers God has given me? This seems very plausible; but does not the mover of these objections allow himself to be brought into such a predicament on subjects which do not involve moral responsibility? He cannot comprehend how God's retributive justice, as expressed in the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked, can be reconciled with Divine benevolence, and therefore he rejects it. Does he comprehend how the acts of God's providential government can consist with infinite wisdom and love? And if not, does he reject the idea of such a government? He cannot comprehend the mystery of the incarnation; and therefore he rejects it. Does he comprehend other mysteries, such as that of human thought, or the connexion of the mind and body, or even the grosser phenomena of vital heat and the flow of the blood? And if not, does he deny their existence?

Rely upon it, that if our moral perceptions and dispositions were not sadly perverted, most of our intellectual perplexities respecting our relations to the spiritual world and its laws and

government would never have arisen. If the Bible were less stern and holy in its precepts and doctrines, its opposers would be few and far between.

5. It cannot be denied that there are persons of intelligence and integrity who do not receive the Bible as a book of Divine authority. How far its claims to such a character have been carefully and candidly investigated by such persons, with a desire (God being their judge) to know the truth, and to receive it in the love of it, if indeed the truth is there, is not for us to decide. If they find the deep cravings of their spiritual nature answered without such a revelation from God as this claims to be, or if they have clearer and more consistent views of the Divine Being and His attributes by the light which is shed upon them from some other source, the foregoing argument will be, to that extent, weakened. But it may be safely affirmed that in no event can the creature be safe or happy in a state of alienation from the Creator or of opposition to His laws,—that a proper regard to those laws, as affecting the condition of our moral being, is essential to the perfect use and development of our intellectual powers, and that in the midst of the dangers and tumults, the clouds and storms, of this transient life, the prayer should be ever on our lips,

“LEAD ME TO THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I.”

CHAPTER II

How the Bible is to be received—Misconceptions and conflicting interpretations—Difficulties, whence arising, and how overcome—General concurrence in the teachings of Scripture—Obstacles to a right understanding of what is revealed—The position of the believer.

THE Divine authority of the Holy Scriptures being ascertained, we may be reasonably expected to approach them with the deepest reverence and humility. When the meekest of men was called into immediate communion with God, the command was, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." To consult the sacred oracles is an act of scarcely less imposing solemnity.

It is to be regretted that the common use of the Bible in schools and families is by no means fitted to preserve even a traditional reverence for it; and yet it would be a subject of still deeper regret if its circulation were restricted by any human authority. The multiplication of copies, and their cheapness, have put them within the reach of all who are disposed to read them. And, while we should cultivate in ourselves and others devout reverence for their contents, we should steadfastly oppose any attempt to remedy the abuses to which their free distribution may expose them, either by limiting their circulation, or by requiring that an authorised interpretation should accompany them to prevent their perversion. The Holy Ghost, who moved holy men of old to utter what is therein recorded, is promised to guide the meek and teachable into all truth. Instead of looking to earthly sources for liberty to read or light to interpret the sacred oracles, let our prayer be to the Supreme One, "Lord, open

Thou our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law."

The Bible is a book of mysteries. It would be very strange if a revelation of the Creator to His creatures—of the Infinite to the finite—did not contain some things not to be understood by them. The self-existence of God is an unfathomable mystery. All His attributes are infinite, and, of course, incomprehensible by any finite mind. The less cannot contain the greater. But Holy Scripture does not furnish the only revelation we have of the character and will of the Supreme Being. His works of creation and providence exhibit them with an awful distinctness; and they too abound with inexplicable phenomena. Who knows the source or nature of the power that supplies warmth to the natural body, or propels the current of its life? Who can explain the connexion between the thought of the mind, or the decree of the will, and the motion of the muscles that follows it as invariably as the shadow follows the substance? The power and the impotency of man; his freedom and dependence; his courage to go forward, and his ignorance of what attends on his steps, are seeming incongruities in our nature, quite as inexplicable as anything in the duties, doctrines, or declarations which are drawn from the Bible. So that, whether we extend our inquiries upward into the moral and spiritual nature of man, or descend to an examination of the wonders in the material and external world, we shall come back to the Bible fully prepared to find it crowded with mysteries. The entrance of sin into our world by the transgression of our first parents; the effects of their apostasy upon the moral relations and prospects of all their posterity; the existence and influence of the tempter; the incarnation and death of the Son of God, followed by His resurrection and ascension; the agency of the Holy Spirit, and the work of converting and sanctifying the souls of men, are among those mysteries, and are to be received with submission and faith.

Happily for us, the precepts which are to govern our conduct, and the promises of grace and strength to enable us to repent, believe, and obey, are so exceedingly simple and plain, that the peasant, the patriarch, and the philosopher are alike able to receive them, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

We may be perplexed, oftentimes, by the conflict of opinion among those whom we cannot but regard as the true servants of God. Doctrines which seem to be irreconcilable are urged with an earnestness and pertinacity that betoken confidence in their truth and importance, and by those, too, for whose superior intelligence and eminent piety we cannot but feel unfeigned respect. How shall we determine their claims to our faith?

There is a promise from the lips of the Divine Teacher which comes most opportunely to our relief in this extremity—"If any man desires to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine," (John vii. 17;) that is, he shall know whether the doctrine proposed, in any case, is of God, and, therefore, to be received. The first requisite, then, to a right judgment in matters of faith, is a heart right in the sight of God. He who submits meekly to the requirements of the Divine law will not be left to grope in darkness. Hence it is that some of the most illustrious examples of godliness—of that godliness which has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come—are found among the ignorant and lowly. "They receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save their souls." This state of mind is favourable to an increase of light. The glory of the Divine character, the excellence of the Divine law, and the riches of Divine grace are seen by such persons with surprising distinctness. Contrary to our experience in the vision of material things, it would seem that the clearest medium for discovering the magnitude and relations of spiritual objects is in the valley of humiliation. The deep things of God are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes.

It has often been my painful task to dislodge the mind of a young friend from a refuge of lies, to which it had betaken itself when hard pressed by the power of saving truth. Instead of yielding to the simple and obvious requirement of our heavenly Father, "My son, give me thine heart," there is a disposition to magnify difficulties and obstacles, and to insist on reconciling the real or supposed teachings of inspiration with the demands or decisions of human reason. To take but a single illustration.

Some persons have perplexed themselves greatly about the Divine attribute of *omniscience*, and its compatibility with the freedom of human actions. They have asked me questions like these: "If God knows all things, He foreknows them, does He not? And if all things are foreknown, they must be fixed, must they not? Because whatever is foreknown must come to pass. And if whatsoever is to come to pass is fixed beforehand, it cannot be otherwise than it is, can it?" And they are often conducted by these reasonings to the conclusion that their own personal salvation or perdition is among the events unalterably fixed, and not to be affected by any possible act or effort on their part. Such persons are seldom aware to what extent these cavils result from pride and unbelief. And they are always surprised to find, when through grace they are adopted into God's family, how suddenly such clouds of doubt and idle speculation clear away, and a serene and pure light shines upon what were once the darkest mysteries.

I well remember a young friend in one of my Bible-classes whose pride of intellect was as obvious as any feature of her face, and who stubbornly insisted that it was no fault of hers that she was not a Christian. In the course of many protracted interviews with her, she took such positions as these:—

1. God might have prevented sin if He pleased; and that He did not, plainly shews that He prefers to have it in the

world. Hence, that I should be a sinner is His choice, not mine. If He desires to make me different from what I am, He can easily do it.

(Would it not be against your will?)

2. It is not my choice to live. I did not consent to existence. I am what I was made; and He who made me what I am, will do with me what He pleases.

(It is His pleasure that you should love and serve Him, and so be happy; but He leaves it to your choice.)

3. There are as good people out of the Church as in it. Many intelligent and benevolent persons reject what are called orthodox doctrines.

(We have a higher standard of duty than the example or opinion of others.)

4. I cannot believe that a benevolent Being would have brought me into the world with capacities for exquisite enjoyment or suffering, and after a few years would consign me to endless wretchedness.

(The Being who gives us existence has made all possible provision for our highest happiness.)

5. We are not the authors of our belief. Propositions are made to us, and our faith is solicited. Our minds are so constituted, that some evidence is needful to excite our faith, (unless the proposition is self-evident;) and as that evidence affects us, we believe or withhold our belief, and are no more responsible for our rejection or admission of it, than for believing that white is white, or for not believing that it is blue or red.

(Will such a plea be accepted from a child who does not believe it is his duty to obey his parents, or from a citizen who does not believe it is his duty to obey the magistrate? The *will* to believe is not less necessary than *evidence*.)

6. I cannot reconcile what the Bible tells me about God and His treatment of men—especially in the Old Testament history—with His supposed moral attributes.

(Do we know enough of God's plans to pass judgment on the consistency of what He permits?)

When the groundlessness of all these cavils had been clearly shewn, and the duty of an open confession of Christ as the only Saviour of sinners was urged, there was a new array of difficulties:—

1. A profession of religion is not necessary to being a Christian. I am willing to be a disciple of Christ; but I am restrained from an open profession of my faith; 1. Because it seems ostentatious to set myself up to be a Christian; 2. I may be self-deceived; 3. I may act inconsistently.

(The obligation to confess Christ before men is imperative.)

2. There are many conflicting opinions claiming a warrant from the Bible, and held by equally good people; and it is impossible to decide which is right.

(If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine.)

3. I am not good enough to come to the Lord's table. I am conscious that I do not love Him to the degree that such an act implies.

(Christ came to call not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.)

4. My brothers and sisters and associates are quite as good as I am,—perhaps even better; and a profession of religion on my part would be regarded as a tacit reproach to them, as though I were better or wiser than they.

(Perhaps they are restrained from the discharge of their duty by the influence of your example.)

The earnestness and pertinacity with which these views were urged, and the apparent self-satisfaction which they afforded, cannot be described. The inadequacy of human "might and power" to cope with the spirit that prompted them was painfully obvious. But in process of time, and by means which Infinite Wisdom chose, the scales fell from her eyes,—the hindrances to a simple, saving faith disappeared

like icicles before the rays of an April sun. She became, to human appearance, an humble, docile child of God, and before reaching womanhood, was called to her heavenly home.

We have found it useful, in meeting such speculative inquiries, to advert to the very limited knowledge we possess of the attributes of the Almighty. The highest degree of knowledge attainable by any human being chiefly serves to shew how great is his ignorance. The things with which we are most familiar,—facts obvious to the senses,—are often utterly incomprehensible as to their nature: the mutual relations of the material and immaterial part of man—the phenomena of sleep—the instinct of animals—death. How ignorant is the wisest of our race of himself,—of his origin, his destiny! Each of us carries in his own bosom a world in miniature. What conflicts are in progress there between passions and motives, inclinations and purposes, hopes and fears! and how imperfectly can we trace their origin, or indicate their tendency and end! Little as each man knows of the working of his own mind, how much less does he know of the exercises of his companion's mind? He meets perhaps thousands daily, each of whom shuts up, in inscrutable secrecy, his thoughts and emotions. And as to the next hour or moment, who knows what it will reveal? The curtain is lifted by imperceptible degrees, at each of which one and another of the vast purposes of the Infinite are, at the same moment, unfolded and executed. One is born, another dies. One is exalted, another is abased. One nation rises to view, another becomes extinct. War, pestilence, and famine sweep over the earth, to be followed by peace, health, and plenty. And who of the sons of men knoweth who shall come after him, or what shall be on the morrow?

But to the omniscient God there is neither past nor future. A thousand years are in His sight as one day, and one day is as a thousand years. He knoweth the end, not merely of a single purpose, act, or event, but of all things from the be-

ginning. What we call time is an infinitely minute section of eternity. We measure it by ages, years, and days. But yesterday and to-morrow have no meaning when applied to the being or knowledge of God. An event which happened a thousand years ago, and one which shall happen a thousand years hence, are both as present to Him as our consciousness of being is to us. The flood which destroyed the antediluvian world, and the fire that shall consume the world that now is, are alike present realities to Him.

And not only is there this all-comprehensive present view of all that ever has been or ever will or can be, but there are fixed, immutable laws by which the relations of cause and effect are so adjusted and controlled that all the wise and benevolent purposes of the Creator and Governor of the universe are sure of accomplishment. Of these purposes we can have no knowledge, except as they are revealed by the grace and providence of God. The Sacred Scriptures, which are the gift of His grace, make known to us, so far as we need knowledge, our origin and character, our relations and destiny. We are conscious of capacities and affections, of passions and emotions. We realise the successive stages of life as we pass from infancy to childhood, to youth, to manhood, and to old age. In this progress our capacities are enlarged; our affections seek and find sympathy; our passions and emotions are excited by the objects around us, and by the reflection of our own minds. We are moved to do or to abstain from doing, not by any irresistible power, but by the influence of motives presented to the mind, which we can obey or resist at our pleasure. It may be that these motives become so powerful in some minds as completely to control the will; but this strength they are allowed to acquire. However difficult it may be for the habitual drunkard to abstain from his cups after years of indulgence, he will not deny that the first, second, or third draught might have been refused. The passions of revenge, avarice, and ambition, which now reign

with such terrible despotism in the soul, were once subordinate. They were infant Samsons asleep, and could have been bound with a silken thread. It was a matter of choice with us, even in our childish pastimes, whether we would yield to a selfish temper, or whether it should become our highest enjoyment to contribute to the happiness of others. If we felt the weakness of our efforts to resist the promptings of an evil nature, we were not ignorant of the source of all needful strength, nor of the way of access to it: so that, upon a candid review of our own life, we shall find our sins lying at our own door, and all attempts to excuse or palliate them by reference to some unrevealed purpose of God are not only vain, but very sinful.

This course of reasoning usually satisfies the inquirer for the time being, and until the great tempter again succeeds in persuading him to charge God foolishly.

The first question we have to ask ourselves is, whether we have cheerfully and heartily submitted our will to the will of God? That such a state of submission is not natural to us, I need not stop to prove. When the first man was formed in the image of God, his will was perfectly coincident with the will of God. When he voluntarily disobeyed the Divine command, this coincidence ceased, and the image of God in which he was created was lost. The will of God being perfect and unchangeable, man must conform to it, or he can neither glorify God nor enjoy His favour. To reconcile us to God, to restore this lost image, to bring man's will once more into concurrence with God's will, was the grand purpose of the incarnation and death of His Son, our Saviour. As our substitute and surety, He rendered perfect obedience to the law; and by faith in Him we become partakers of His righteousness. For His sake our sins are pardoned. By His grace our souls are renewed. The spirit of adoption is given to us, and our first and earnest inquiry is, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," expresses the prevailing

temper of our minds. The subduing process is of heavenly origin. The grace which enables us to say, "Thy will be done!" is not of ourselves. It is the gift of God. But we shall have occasion to revert to this point hereafter, and have introduced it here only to shew what is indispensable to a right understanding of revealed truth.

The diversity of Christian doctrine, which is so perplexing to many persons, is, as I have before observed, much less than is generally supposed. If we leave out of view questions of mere form and ceremony, and such as involve the organisation and government of a body of disciples, we shall find that a vast majority of those who profess the Protestant faith agree substantially in the truths which are to be believed in order to salvation,—though we do not mean by this expression to affirm that none who do not receive them all can be saved,—and so far as a system of faith is deducible from Holy Scripture, it would comprehend the following particulars, viz : The supremacy of the inspired volume as a rule of faith and duty ; the lost state of man by nature, and his exposure to endless punishment in a future existence ; his recovery by the free, sovereign, and sustaining grace of God, through the atoning sacrifice and merits of a Divine Redeemer, and by the influence of the Holy Spirit ; the necessity of faith, repentance, and holy living, with an open confession of the Saviour before men ; and the duty of observing the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The same doctrines, in a somewhat amplified form, are set forth in the Apostles' Creed, which now stands in the Liturgy of a majority of churches in Christendom as it stood fifteen or sixteen hundred years ago, and has been used as a summary of the faith of the professed followers of Christ from that day to this. It may be well to bear in mind that those who receive in true faith the doctrines taught in either of the summaries to which we have referred, have in company with them seven-eighths of the religious professors in Christendom : so that an honest inquirer after truth may regard any apparent diversity

of doctrine among the avowed disciples of Christ as a matter of comparatively little consequence. Such diversity must be ascribed to the imperfection of human judgment rather than to any want of harmony or consistency in the teachings of Holy Scripture.

In the study of Scripture, people are very apt to hold to some opinions derived perhaps they know not whence ; and whatever they find in support of these they readily receive, while whatever is contrary to them they doubt or reject. In a free Christian country like ours, it is rare to find persons who have not some notion of religious truth : it is by no means rare, however, to find those who hold fast religious opinions which they have not only never examined by the light of Scripture, but for which they can give no better authority than that " some one told them so."

To have our views rooted and grounded, we need, in the first place, a supreme, unquestioning deference to Holy Scripture as a rule of faith ; and, secondly, a clear conviction that what we believe is read therein or may be proved thereby.

The first of these requisites is often wanting, even in those who profess to receive the Scriptures as of Divine authority. Instead of yielding faith promptly to all their teachings, they accept only so much as is consonant with their notions of what is proper and reasonable, and regard the rest as spurious, or interpolated, or mistranslated, or of local and temporary use, and now obsolete. Some portions are reckoned among the extravagances of oriental imagery ; some as applicable only to nations now extinct, and some as pure fiction : so that, after lopping off all these supposed excrescences, there is scarcely enough left of the form and life of the original to enable us to recognise it.

It is in no such spirit as this that the Divine oracles are to be consulted by those who would know the truth. That they will find doctrines there entirely beyond their comprehension, we admit. That they will find doctrines contrary to reason,

or inconsistent with what we can comprehend, we may safely deny.

Most of the erroneous views that prevail in the world result from a gross misuse of the sacred volume. Take, for example, the doctrine popularly known as Universalism. Its advocates present God to us as an infinitely merciful Being, and we rejoice to recognise Him under this attribute. They then ask triumphantly, if it is possible to suppose that He would form and endow a creature like man, give him a dwelling-place for a few brief years in this world, with a certainty that he would sin, and then, for this sin, consign him to eternal misery! The bare suggestion they pronounce a monstrous libel on the Divine government. To shew that it is anti-scriptural, they quote passages in which the benefits of Christ's redemption are represented as commensurate with the consequences of sin:—"As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall *all* be made alive;" "That He, (Christ,) by the grace of God, should taste death for *every* man;" He (the Lord) is not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance. When, in reply, passages are cited which describe the wicked as going away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal, they at once refer us to passages in which the hills and mountains are spoken of as everlasting, the word being used to express stability or continuance, not endless duration. And such expressions as "outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," and hell, "where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched," are regarded as nothing more than highly figurative expressions, to denote remorse and other sufferings which wicked men experience, but which terminate at the grave. It will be observed that this is the judgment which offenders pass upon the character and purposes of the government which they have abused, and of the justice and propriety of the law which condemns them. Their position is evidently not favourable to an impartial

decision, even if it were only human laws and magistrates with whom they had to do. But in the case before us the parties have but a very limited conception of the high matters about which they exercise themselves. The character of the law given is revealed to them but very partially, while of the nature of the law itself, and of the interests beyond our sphere of knowledge that are protected by it, our information is still more limited. What sin is in the sight of a holy Being, and what mischief the least sin works in the administration of the Divine government, who can tell? No philosopher would be bold enough to assert what would be the full effect of impairing in the slightest degree the exact order and relation of the elements which are combined in the various forms of the visible creation. And yet there are not a few who do not hesitate to sit in judgment on the Divine administration, and determine what befits infinite wisdom and benevolence in the conduct of its affairs.

If our legislature should make it a capital offence not to take the right hand in passing over a bridge, we might justly condemn it as an unreasonable and tyrannical law; for we know the full extent of the interests that require such a regulation, and of the evil which results from passing a bridge without regarding it. It is a subject wholly within our comprehension, and reason teaches us that the penalty is utterly disproportioned to the offence.

But suppose a Hottentot, fresh from the bush, should suddenly come upon a railroad, and without knowing at all the use of it, should be told that to lay a rail across it, or to put any obstruction in the way, was a capital offence: he would be very likely to regard it in the same light as we would a like penalty for violating the bridge-law. But let him see a locomotive, with its train of ten or twelve carriages freighted with many hundreds of men, women, and children, suddenly thrown from the track, and the dying and the dead, crushed human limbs, broken timbers and twisted iron all piled together in

horrible confusion and ruin, and his views would be materially modified. If he should stand by and see the bleeding, mutilated bodies drawn out one after another, and witness the anguish of attending relatives and friends, he would not wonder why the offence of obstructing a railway is punished with such severity.

The question, What is a just expression of Divine displeasure towards a transgression of the Divine law, cannot be determined without Divine knowledge and purity. And hence the conclusions of Universalists are not entitled to confidence. "Their rock is not as our ROCK, our enemies themselves being judges."

It is a favourite conception of many persons that God's paternal character forbids the thought that He should inflict legal or judicial punishment. The most we can anticipate, they say, is kind discipline.

Such views, proceeding from persons of intelligence, refinement, and influence, and urged in intimate association with humane and philanthropic sentiments—not unmixed, perhaps, with a spice of satire—have a marked effect on the popular mind.

It is, nevertheless, true that the denial of the doctrine in question is almost the uniform precursor of a state of general doubt and scepticism,—especially in respect to the nature and desert of sin, and the necessity of an atonement by sacrifice. "Such a denial involves the virtual rejection of the moral government of God and of the whole system of redemption."

The same may be said of the views which errorists of various classes take of God's method of dealing with His creatures. They start with the assumption that there is no such moral relation between the first man, Adam, and any of his posterity as involves them in his guilt or its consequences. Hence they discard the idea of the depravity or utter unholiness of our original nature. That men do not love and obey God, is because their natural affections are not properly cultivated.

They are neglected and uneducated, and, falling into the strong currents of temptation and evil association that surround them, they are carried hither and thither in courses of sin. But God is merciful. They are all His creatures. He knows and pities their weaknesses, and He will make allowances for the defects of their obedience and love. To shew them how they should live, He commissioned an eminent prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, to appear upon the earth and set them a perfect example ; and this prophet even yielded himself to a martyr's death, that He might perfectly illustrate the duty of submission to the Divine will. The great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh ; the idea that the justice of God would not only permit, but appoint, the sacrifice of a perfectly innocent being, in order (as they say) that he might exercise his other attribute of mercy ; the doctrine that a poor, dependent creature like man cannot approach his Creator, even to ask forgiveness of his sins, without an intercessor ; and that to secure the Divine favour a supernatural change of the whole moral nature is indispensable : these and the like doctrines are repugnant, in their view, to all honourable and rational conceptions of the character and government of God. So that, in making up their system of religious belief, they leave out what, in their judgment, encumbers and deforms a proper view of the Supreme Being and of His dispensations towards men, retaining only what comports with their idea of His paternal character and manifestations.

It is obvious that the Scriptures in this case are not consulted as an unerring record of Divine truth. Nothing is received on their simple authority as a matter of faith. So far as they teach what approves itself to human judgment they are accredited, but no further.

Now, it will be perceived that the position of those who receive Holy Scripture as entirely and altogether of Divine authority, believing alike what is and what is not within their comprehension, is far from an arrogant one. It may be that

others, from a different stand-point, have a wider survey of the interests of the universe, and of the laws and ordinances that will best subserve the glory of its Creator. But we admit our ignorance, and ask for light. We receive as true what we cannot understand, much less explain. We are conscious of existence; but why, how, or for what end we exist, we are very superficially informed. And as to the unseen world, its inhabitants, and their modes of intercourse, and the vast designs of infinite wisdom and power in ordering the affairs of His universe, of which the earth, with its thousand millions of inhabitants, is but a dim speck,—of all these we are profoundly ignorant, except so far as Holy Scripture enlightens us.

That God reigns, that He is supremely good and wise and just, we are assured; and what His purposes are we know, so far as knowledge of them is needful for our safety and happiness. As in the natural world we are sufficiently cognizant of its laws to protect and provide for ourselves, though we are ignorant of ten thousand mysteries which those laws involve; so in the spiritual world we have light enough to guide us to the realms of everlasting day, though the deep designs and counsels of the Almighty are wrapped in clouds and darkness, and will remain so as long as the finite is less than the infinite.

But what are clouds and darkness, lightnings and tempests, to one who stands securely on the Rock that is higher than all?

CHAPTER III.

Influence of a Divine revelation on intellectual character—Is there an innate idea of God?—Possible condition of unfallen man—Effect of association—Faith a means of invigorating the mental and moral powers—The happy old man—Sir Humphrey Davy.

THERE is one view of the bearing of a Divine revelation upon human welfare which is of great interest to my mind. I refer to *its indispensableness as the basis of a symmetrical moral and intellectual character*. An objectless, aimless, pointless life can end in nothing great, or good, or happy.

Stability depends on singleness of purpose. But the purpose must be adequate to the absorption of the energies of the mind and will. The pursuit of a bubble or a butterfly with a single purpose would not produce stability, but fickleness. The pursuit of some great temporal object, like the discovery of some new principle of art or science, may give exclusiveness of purpose, and prevent frivolity and sloth; but it must be a purpose commanding all the powers and faculties, the pursuit of some attainable but vast and interminable good, that will give perfect and permanent stability.

Assuming that the Creator of the human mind understands perfectly its capacities and wants, we cannot doubt that, in His infinite benevolence and wisdom, He would prescribe laws for its government, the observance of which would secure the highest measure of happiness of which its nature is capable. And had our first parents obeyed the Divine command, we are assured they would have continued in the enjoyment of the Divine favour to the present hour, and of course would have been steadily advancing in knowledge and happiness.

We may have fancied, perhaps, the exquisite satisfaction with which man—the newly-created product of the Divine hand—beheld the fair temple which had been built and furnished for his abode. As he surveyed the countless forms of joyous life and immaculate beauty which surrounded him—and especially when favoured with such intimate communion with his Maker as was then allowed him—the spontaneous language of his heart would be love and praise, and his highest and holiest aspirations would be for perfect conformity to the Divine will. But the scene suddenly changes. Over all that was just now glowing with Divine radiance is spread the pall of midnight. Such a transition is but faintly emblematical of the change in the circumstances and prospects of the human soul when SIN was admitted to its secret chambers. The man still retained capacities and desires which assimilated him to his Maker. He had power to discern the wonders of this lower creation, and to comprehend in some degree the immeasurable vastness of the heavenly bodies, and the laws which guide and govern them in their sublime courses. But as to any knowledge of the existence and attributes of the God whom man was made to worship, the uninstructed mind is a perfect blank. The first and direst effect of sin was the alienation of the soul not only from the favour, but from the knowledge of God. Fallen man “does not like to retain God in his knowledge.”

Curious investigations of this subject have often been made. The late Rev. Thomas H. Gallaudet, whose name and life were so closely identified with the instruction of deaf-mutes, was of the opinion that the notion of a Creator or moral governor of the universe does not exist in the mind anterior to instruction. He mentions cases to illustrate his views, of which one was an intelligent young woman, nineteen years of age, whose parents were sure they had succeeded in giving her some idea of God, because whenever the word “God” was

shewn to her in the Bible, she would look very serious, and point reverentially to the sky. After a course of instruction in a school for deaf-mutes, she became a professor of religion, but uniformly affirmed that before she was nineteen she had no idea of a soul distinct from the body, or that would survive it, and that all her notions of God were that it was some person in the sky that sent down the wind and rain and snow upon the earth.

He speaks of minds of the highest order of intelligence, keenly observant of all the concerns of life, of acute sagacity in discovering the relation of cause and effect, both in human conduct and in mechanical contrivances, and capable of adapting means to ends with surprising readiness and ingenuity. And when he had asked them what they used to think when they saw the sun, and moon, and stars, and the earth, and all that lives and grows upon it, and if they never inquired who made them, or whence they came, "NEVER," has been the uniform answer.

So it was in the case of the deaf-mute, *John Britt*, whose history by Charlotte Elizabeth you may have seen. After he had been for some time under instruction, he pointed one day towards the sun, and making motions with his hands like a person kneading dough, he asked his teacher (by signs) if she made it.

She shook her head.

"Did your mother make it?"

"No."

"Did Mr Shaw or Mr Roe make it, [referring to two Protestant clergymen,] or the priest? [meaning the Roman Catholic priest.]"

"No."

"Then what? What?" he inquired, with a frown and stamp expressive of the utmost impatience. His teacher pointed upwards with a look of reverential solemnity, and spelled the word God.

At a later period, he said that, as to the sun, "he could not look at it long enough to determine how it was made; but the moon," he said, "is a dumpling sent rolling over the tops of the trees, as I send a marble across the floor." And as for the stars, "they could be cut out with a large pair of shears, and stuck into the sky with the end of the thumb." Having thus settled his system of astronomy, he looked very happy, and patted his breast with evident self-applause.

The very early period at which religious impressions are received in the midst of religious scenes and services do not militate against the doctrine that religious ideas (*i. e.*, ideas of the true God) are not *naturally* in the human mind. I have before me at this moment a letter from a dear friend, who had suffered the loss of a darling little boy, in which he speaks of the child's knowledge of religious truth with admiration. "He was but two years and four months old when he died; and yet he had thought, knowledge, and feeling about God. He knew that God made all, sees all, keeps all, and loves all." The child's grandfather, an illustrious man of God, made it a practice every day, for months, to call the child to him, and say, "Now, I am going to pray for you." He would then lay his hands on his little head, and pray. He never hesitated a moment to leave his play at this call, and never shewed any weariness or levity. The afternoon before his death, being, to all appearance, perfectly well, he cheerfully gave his father some toys with which he was playing, on being told it was God's day. Some time after, he was playing again, but suddenly left his play, put a chair in the middle of the room, kneeled with a solemn air, and distinctly said, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. Amen." An hour before he died, he put up his hands and said, "I want to say my prayers."

There are, probably, many cases parallel to this, and even still more remarkable, which are never brought to public notice; and they all go to shew that religious truth may be

inculcated at a very early age, and that the susceptibility of just impressions of duty to God is much greater in infant minds than is generally supposed ; but not that a knowledge of Him is possessed until communicated.

Much that is mysterious in man must be ascribed to the fact that he is separated from God. He is like a wondrous palace, forsaken of the only being that could diffuse light and life and joy through all its magnificent apartments ; apply all the curious, richly-wrought furniture to its proper use ; and direct the whole fabric to the fulfilment of its true destiny. And whenever that being returns to the full possession of it, all apparent inconsistencies will be reconciled, ambiguities explained, and harmony and utility at once prevail.

“Since then, my God, Thou hast
So brave a palace built, oh, dwell in it,
That it may dwell with Thee at last.”

Our race is, we suppose, the lowest in the scale of intellectual beings. Whether it was originally so, is more than we can affirm. It is impossible for us to conceive what position we might have occupied, if sin had not invaded Paradise. What we might have known of God from His works alone, had not our intellectual and moral sense been perverted by sin, it is impossible to say. Such a union as our nature exhibits, of a material, mortal body with an immaterial, immortal soul, we do not know to exist in any other part of the universe. What such a nature as man's, in his unfallen state, was capable of becoming, we know not. It is not impossible that, but for the apostasy of our first parents, our race might have exhibited to other orders of beings the spectacle of a wonderful mode of existence in the simultaneous development of spiritual and physical capacities in one and the same individual. The fact that our blessed Saviour ascended from earth with a body in form like ours, and that Moses and Elias appeared on the mount of transfiguration with bodily

organs like ours, may teach us what havoc sin made with God's handiwork in the human frame, that not only sickness and suffering should accompany it all the way through life, but that, to reach the exalted destiny to which it may aspire through redeeming grace, it must pass through the mysterious—and, to nature, the revolting—process of death and dissolution.

The force of the phrase, "fallen creatures," so often flippantly used in speaking of our race, is seldom realised. Holy Scripture represents us as having left the service of the only Being in the universe who has the supreme claim to our love and obedience, to enter the service of the only being in the universe who has the will and (we consenting) the power to destroy us, and make us miserable for ever. This is a fall, indeed!

To construct from such a complete ruin a temple for the abode of a pure spirit, demands Divine power and skill. We are conscious of the disorder and perverseness of our minds. We cannot control our thoughts. They control us. They dictate to us what books to read, what amusement to seek, what company to join, what calls to make, and in what pursuit to engage, and we obey their voice. They are excited by whatever we see or hear. They excite each other. A crowd of them, evil and good, wise and foolish, follow each other with inconceivable rapidity. Now and then one of them fixes itself upon a single object of observation, memory, or anticipation, for a longer or shorter time, and, perhaps, returns to the same object again, after a brief interval, and brings other thoughts with it; and, at length, the individual may be so absorbed by it, that the humour and character shall take their complexion from it. Think a moment of the action of your mind for the past hour, and see if you cannot recognise these phenomena.

If the object on which they prefer to rest is, on the whole, worthy, and if the contemplation of it is fitted to elevate and

expand the mind, the effect will soon be seen ; and not less soon and certainly if it is unworthy.

“He who loveth mean and sordid things doth thereby become base and vile ; but a noble and well-placed affection doth advance and improve the spirit into a conformity with the perfections which it loves. The images of these do frequently present themselves unto the mind, and, by a secret force and energy, insinuate into the very constitution of the soul and mind, and fashion it unto their own likeness. Hence we may see how easily lovers and friends do slide into the imitation of persons whom they affect, and even before they are aware they begin to resemble them, not only in the more considerable instances of their deportment, but also in their voice and gesture, and that which we call their mien and air ; and certainly we should as well transcribe the virtues and inward beauties of the soul if *they* were objects and motives of our love.”

It was while CAREY, the cobbler, was teaching a group of children in a village school the division of the population of the globe into Pagans, Mohammedans, &c., that the thought suggested itself which proved to be the germ of one of the most vast and imposing systems of modern missions. The mind needs to be drawn towards some object fitted to give healthful exercise to its highest powers. When one faculty is unduly tasked, or when they are all engaged on objects of inferior interest or importance, the effect is analogous to that produced upon the body when any of its organs are neglected or abused : deformity, disease, and decay will ensue.

What I maintain is, that a right apprehension of the truths of revealed religion entertained at your time of life, will do more for the healthy and harmonious development of your intellectual nature than all the skill and labour of the most accomplished educators. There are sciences the study of which is supposed to give the pupil extraordinary powers of abstraction ; but, if we would have *all* the faculties trained to the

highest use of which they are capable, they should be employed, from the first, in the contemplation of the character and attributes of the Creator, advancing from the rudiments which a little child can comprehend to the things into which angels desire to look. Hence, independently of all religious considerations, I would, *as an educator merely*, desire that the knowledge of God, as He is revealed in Holy Scripture and in the works of creation, should be made the basis and prop of all intellectual improvement. Exercise of the mental powers, stimulated only or chiefly by the love of science or the desire of fame, must oftentimes exhaust and confound them. But when the human soul receives by faith those doctrines of Holy Scripture, which the unlettered peasant can understand as truly, if not as fully, as the profound philosopher, a light is struck within that ruined temple which nothing can extinguish. What was before mysterious and perplexing becomes plain and clear, and thenceforward there is a beautiful and healthful concurrent development of the whole intellectual and moral nature.

Intelligent and highly-cultivated men are sometimes found—men of extraordinary powers as poets, orators, mathematicians, and astronomers—who betray a marvellous weakness of intellectual perception when discussing religious truth,—not because of any obscurity in the object, but, as there was no early subjection of the understanding to the influence of faith in the simple doctrines of our holy religion, their powers have unfolded unequally, and the deformity cannot be concealed.

It is for want of understanding the force and scope of such doctrines, and failing to recognise their Divine origin and authority, that large numbers of men and women are carried hither and thither at the whim of some impudent errorist, making a total wreck of character, prosperity, and peace in the espousal of some inexpressible absurdity.

It cannot have escaped your observation, I presume, that

those who are most ignorant of the Bible are most easily duped by the propagators of error. Untaught as they are in the principles and requirements of revealed religion, the mind is prepared to receive and entertain the grossest forms of superstition and delusion. A senseless repetition of words—perhaps in an unknown tongue—a round of formality, or the mere counting of a string of beads, is well fitted to their capacity. The proposal to make their salvation sure by doing this or abstaining from that, without the trouble of thinking or inquiring, is, of course, grateful to them; and so they commit the cure and care of their souls to some priest of sin, Satan, and the Pope, (it matters little which,) and then close their eyes and fold their hands to sleep. It is not impossible, too, that now and then persons of more enlarged intellectual views may be so destitute of religious culture, or that their religious capacities may have been so dwarfed and weakened by neglect, that they will resort to some similar mechanical process, and intrust their immortal interests to the keeping of one who has enough to do in working out his own salvation. They must, of course, lack the liberty which creatures of God feel when God himself is the supreme and absorbing object of their faith and love,—that liberty with which Christ makes men free.

I need not say to you how closely the powers and achievements of the mind are identified with the character and force of our moral principles. The love of life and the fear of pain are instinctive. The dread of punishment restrains many from crimes; and the apprehension of what may follow makes death terrible. Remove this fear, and what would not some men do? And yet how uncertain such a motive is, and how feeble it must become sooner or later! How many cases have occurred of persons who have been led along from one stage of iniquity to another, emboldened by the hope of eluding suspicion or escaping detection, until some audacious act, or

perhaps a trivial incident, has betrayed them into irretrievable disgrace and ruin ! Not so with the motive which the fear of God supplies. Its controlling power is uniform, permanent, and universal. Acting under it, I am conscious that an eye is upon me from which nothing can be concealed. An omniscient, omnipresent God is with me "in my going out and in my coming in, in my lying down and in my rising up." To sin is to offend His infinite majesty. It is to pollute my own soul. It is to widen the chasm between me and all holy and happy beings. It is, in a word, to destroy myself !

Who does not see the incomparable advantage of such an element as this in the constitution of a human character ? The habit of judging of the right or wrong of any action by direct reference to the unerring standard of Divine truth ; shrinking instinctively from the temptation to sin ; holding no parley with the tempter, nor weighing for a moment the probabilities of exposure, is of inestimable value, if it were only for the stability and symmetry it insures to the character. Reflection upon past life, and my observation of the subtle ways in which men are tempted to the first wrong act, convince me of the value of a maxim which I commend to all my young friends ; and that is, *never to do a thing, no matter how trivial, which you would be tempted to deny if you were questioned about it.* If it is a case of doubtful morality, and you feel disposed to ask, "Is there any harm in doing this ?" answer the question by asking yourself another—"Is there any harm in letting it alone ?" For a familiar example, if I had the opportunity to read a book, or a newspaper article, or a letter, which I should feel reluctant to acknowledge I had read were I asked, this of itself should deter me from reading it. Or if I were disposed to take a walk, or make a call or an engagement, and should be unwilling to have it known anywhere and by everybody, this very unwillingness is a safeguard which I should scrupulously preserve. Nothing

is so sustaining and invigorating to the whole moral and intellectual character as the consciousness of perfect uprightness in our acts and motives.

But there is still another aspect in which we must regard the influence of a belief in Divine revelation upon the formation of character as of essential importance. It chastens the natural affection for transient and unsatisfying enjoyments. It is not to be denied that there are interests and pleasures pertaining to the present world in the pursuit of which there is much agreeable excitement. The vivacity and love of frolic which characterise childhood are not unfrequently retained to mature age. To children such dispositions are appropriate. It is the mode in which their physical nature unfolds itself. They run and dance and sing as naturally as they eat and breathe and sleep. If they have food, clothes, and kind treatment, their life is a continual flow of animal spirits. God forbid that it should not be so! And yet their exuberant spirits are curbed, and their buoyant and active natures are subjected to the severe—almost unnatural, but still needful—discipline of the nursery and the schoolroom. And then how often sickness overcasts the sunniest skies of childhood, and, if it does not end their little pilgrimage, dooms them to pursue it with a saddened spirit, and, perhaps, a deformed frame, with the probability of premature decay and death! Beautiful as the world is to the healthy and gay, there is a felt need of something brighter and better for such as are limping through it on a crutch, or without eyes to see the stars and flowers, or ears to hear the birds.

And if they pass this first joyous stage of earthly existence without a sigh or a pain, how often there await them, at the very threshold of maturer life, sorrows which no human sympathy can assuage! And then what burdens and privations attend upon the trembling footsteps of age! And on what shall the old man lean with confidence and hope in the absence of a covenant God and Saviour? But with what

attractive grace and dignity does he whose faith recognises the benevolence and tenderness of a Father's hand, bow to the rod, and even kiss the hand that holds it !

It is wonderful with what tenacity the memory retains religious impressions once made upon it, and what strength there is in early religious habits to sustain and brighten life in the soul when the powers of body and mind have fallen into decay. It was my privilege once to know a gentleman, formerly engaged in extensive mercantile business, whose old age furnished an impressive illustration of this remark. I saw and conversed with him in the ninety-second year of his age. His silvery hair, his ruddy complexion, and soft unwrinkled skin would attract any one's attention. He had then been nearly ten years blind ; but he never spoke of his sight as *lost* ; it was only very "defective." He was as happy as a little child. He could sing with a clear, melodious voice, and often went through favourite hymns and chants without the mistake of a word or a note. Sometimes in the stillness of the night his voice was heard singing a chant ; and, to shew that it was not a mere mechanical exercise, he was accustomed to say, "Isn't that a noble chant?" or, "What a beautiful hymn that is !"

His mind dwelt on the most pleasing objects,—as fragrant flowers, the music of birds, or the ripple of water. His fondness for children, and theirs for him, was noteworthy. He was accustomed to speak of his wife (who had been dead many years) as still a beloved and loving companion, offering nice things to her at the table ; and when told she was not there, he would reply, "Well, I suppose she will be back in a minute or two."

Such a green old age harmonised well with the upright and honourable life he had previously led, and with the immortal hopes which early faith in the gospel of the grace of God had inspired.

Do you wonder that your Christian friends should be

anxious to forearm you against the reverses and trials of which the providence of God forewarns you? You have heard of Sir Humphrey Davy, the great philosopher and chemist. Distinguished among the men of his time for the extent and utility of his scientific researches and discoveries, he enjoyed an unusual share of whatever ministers to earthly enjoyment. But what is his testimony? "I envy no qualities of the mind or intellect in others; nor genius nor power, wit nor fancy; but, if I could choose what would be most delightful and, I believe, most useful to me, I should prefer a firm religious belief to every other blessing; for it makes life a discipline of goodness, creates new hopes when all earthly hopes vanish, and thrives over the decay, the destruction of existence; it is the most gorgeous of all lights; awakens life in death, and from corruption and ashes calls out beauty and everlasting glory."

Happy they who are seasonably armed for the good fight of faith, that they may lay hold on eternal life, and plant their feet on the "Rock that is higher than" they, before the winds blow and the floods roar!

CHAPTER IV.

A soliloquy—The true end of life—Two classes of facts, and representative cases—The sea-bird.

SOME of you may, perhaps, regard what you hear from the pulpit and from Christian friends as all very true and very good, but still as quite theoretical. You ask yourself, "What are the *facts* of my present being? A bright morning opens upon me. The air is filled with the aroma of flowers and the music of birds and insects. My life would 'go a-Maying with nature, hope, and poesy.' It would

'flash along
O'er airy cliffs and glittering sands,
Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore,
On windy lakes and rivers wide,
That ask no aid of sail or oar,
That fear no spite of wind or tide.'

Must I be denied what bees and birds enjoy? It is indeed a beautiful world, say what we will; and, for my part, I can see no harm in making the most of it." And this is the very thing we would have our young and gay friends do:—"Make the most of it."

Suppose you had an inch of candle by which to do a winter evening's work, or a pound of bread, or a pint of water, upon which to subsist as you cling to a piece of a wreck and float upon the mountain-billows till you are descried by a passing vessel or drifted to land: you would learn what it means to "make the most of a thing." Would you ask how much time you might waste and still have enough of the remnant of your candle left to enable you to accomplish your work, or how much of your little store of provision you might consume and

yet sufficient remain to last till your deliverance comes? Or would you not more wisely say, "I have a certain and momentous work to do in an uncertain time. I have to act in view of a possible exigency as if it were a present reality. It may be that my candle will be consumed just one moment before my task is done; and that one moment I will redeem now. It may be that a single crumb of bread or drop of water will sustain me at the very crisis of my danger; and I will count that as its value now?"

And is it not so with life? Is its only or chief purpose to eat, drink, and be merry? Is its highest or purest enjoyment that which springs from exuberant health and spirits? May not these gifts of heavenly kindness be welcomed with joy and gladness, and yet be improved for a better end than the gratification of sense or the pursuit of pleasure and excitement?

There are other FACTS of life not less real and obvious than the joys of youth and health. There is a peace with God that passeth all understanding. There is a hope full of immortality. There is a joy with which a stranger intermeddeth not. Surely he makes not the most of life who neglects to prepare himself for its trials and reverses. He is not a wise navigator who does not provide for the perils of a voyage as well as for its pleasures.

It has been beautifully said that "it is the privilege of a child of God to rejoice even in tribulation. When his sorrows are heaviest, his joy in God is purest. Like some birds of which naturalists tell us, whose plumage is too cumbrous to fly against a strong wind, and therefore they soar above its range: so the elements which seem hostile to the Christian's progress only invigorate him to seek and obtain a region nearer the throne of his covenant God and Saviour."

You are, doubtless, familiar with records of the emotions with which persons in various grades of society, and differing widely in education, intellectual endowments, and moral qualities, have reviewed life and contemplated its close. I am not

particularly partial to biography as an exhibition of human character. It is only on the inspired page that we have perfectly candid and reliable specimens of it ; and, indeed, we can expect them nowhere else. But as we have a Divine warrant for testing the tree by its fruits, we can judge for the wisdom of a course of conduct, or of the soundness of a principle, by its results. There is no man who, in his sober senses, would deliberately PREFER to lead a useless and vicious life.

Multitudes leave the world without any opportunity or power to reflect or to anticipate. They "die and make no sign." Others contemplate an exchange of worlds as a destiny, and submit to death as they do to a drought or storm. Many are filled with terror—not always, nor perhaps generally, from the apprehension of evil ; but there is something appalling to their minds in the idea of closing one's eyes for ever on this sunlit, busy, beautiful world, with at best but a vague and dim impression of what awaits them in the next. That remarkable expression upon the dying lips of a most distinguished statesman, "THIS IS THE LAST OF EARTH !" gives us a vivid idea of the eventful transition. The last moment in time ! The first moment in eternity !

But oftentimes the emotions are more definite, and afford us unequivocal evidence of the value of a Christian hope. Whatever may be said of the influence of physical causes in accounting for the tranquillity and even ecstasy with which this momentous change is sometimes attended, it will not be denied that in a multitude of cases it is the result of Christian faith. Like the child leaping joyfully into a dark cavern from which she heard a father's voice telling her that he was there to receive her in his arms, they have welcomed the summons and embraced the messenger as an angel of mercy.

Many years ago I was intimately acquainted with a man of uncommon intellectual powers and social qualities, which endeared him to a large circle of friends. He had keen wit ;

was a close observer of character ; courteous in his manners : he was without a personal enemy in the world. His parents were people of simple but fervent piety ; and so were most of his immediate connexions. He was bred a lawyer ; but his circumstances were such as to exempt him from the necessity of pursuing his profession for a livelihood ; and this, unhappily, left him, for much of the time, without systematic employment. He was accustomed from childhood to attend public worship, and continued the practice—though not regularly—when he became a man. His social disposition proved a snare ; and he fell into the vice of intemperance, by which so many strong men have been cast down and destroyed.

In the meridian of life he was seized with a pulmonary affection, which defied medical skill, and he slowly sank into the grave. I was glad of opportunities to minister to his comfort by watching with him two or three nights towards the end of his illness. On each of these occasions he was in good spirits,—made a jest of the emaciation of his limbs, and betrayed no apprehension in view of the change which was obviously near. A few days previous to his death, however, this state of mind was entirely reversed. A horror of great darkness came over him. His Christian friends hoped that such a sense of his guilt and helplessness might be vouchsafed to him as would lead him to “the Rock that was higher than he ;” and they watched with sleepless anxiety, and prayed with earnest importunity for some token of mercy. But he still wandered in the wilderness where there was no way. A sister’s gentle voice inquired if he felt no relief ; his uniform reply, given in broken and despairing accents, was, “Not a ray of hope yet !” “Not a ray of hope yet !”

Among his near relatives was an uncle, a patriarch in years and appearance as well as in piety, who resided in a distant city. On one occasion the silence of the chamber was disturbed by an exclamation from the sick man, who seemed to have been musing upon the dreary hopelessness of his condi-

tion :—“*I used to laugh at Uncle I.'s prayers; but I would give the world for an interest in them now.*” In this state of fearful apprehension and despondency the poor man went down to the grave,—the very last intelligible words he uttered being, “*Not a ray of hope yet!*”

Taking from this melancholy picture the impression which it is well fitted to give of the terrible dreariness and dismay with which a soul, (to human appearance) unsanctified by the spirit of holiness, approaches the grave, we gladly turn from it, but not from the presence of death.

Directly before me in the church where I was accustomed to worship, was a family that interested me before I became personally acquainted with them. One of the young ladies, who was then perhaps fifteen or sixteen, attracted my attention. She was constant in her place, remarkably modest in her manners, and scrupulously tasteful in her dress. Her older sister was a teacher in a Sunday-school, with which I was also connected; and through her I was introduced to the family.

The mother was originally a member of the Society of Friends. The father was a rigid Scotch Presbyterian. The eldest daughter became a professor of religion early in her career as a teacher, and adorned her profession. But her sister was not so inclined.

I well remember that at one of my earliest visits to the family she came into the room to excuse her sister, who was indisposed. She was all ready to step into the carriage that was expected every moment to take her to a bridal party; and I have rarely seen a more attractive object. Her complexion, features, and figure, her perfectly chaste and simple apparel, and her graceful motion, combined to form a picture of loveliness seldom surpassed.

Two or three years after this her mother died, and the hue of her worldly life was sadly changed; but not so much as to divert her from a pursuit of its pleasures. Then her health

failed. I had, in the meantime, seen much of her, and had been enabled to gain some measure of her confidence. Her sister married and removed to a distant city. She had new cares and responsibilities, and with them came new trials. She had now learned that life has higher ends than enjoyment or excitement, and to discharge her duties in the sphere to which she was called was evidently her prevailing desire. Her conscientiousness was exquisitely sensitive. To do right, to act from pure motives, to be governed by just principles in everything, she sought and strove with commendable earnestness. I had frequent interviews with her in her seasons of illness and depression. She was teachable as a little child, and seemed always grateful for any attempt to solve her difficulties or shed light upon her path. Her questions were evidently the result of study and reflection, and, while very simple and natural, plainly indicated the current of her thoughts. She was, I had almost said, morbidly distrustful of herself, and especially reluctant to express any religious emotions, through fear that they might be transient, or give promise of what would never be realised. A public profession of religion often occurred to her as a duty; but she shrunk from the responsibilities which such a step seemed to her to involve. Her removal to another part of the country deprived me for a time of all opportunity to watch the development of her Christian character, except as an occasional letter disclosed it; but she became an active, earnest, uncompromising disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, and yielded all her powers of body and mind to His service.

I saw her occasionally after she took up the cross, and never without having my convictions of her elevated piety confirmed. But her earthly service was to be brief, and her crown to be early won.

The last time we met, her health was greatly impaired, and she had come to P—— for medical advice. The nature of her disease was not at first fully apprehended; and though some

alarming symptoms were detected, she was cheerful and hopeful. For an account of her homeward journey, and the incidents which followed, I was indebted to her sister and dearest earthly friend :—

. . . . , “ By the good providence of God, we reached home on Saturday morning, not quite three weeks from the time we left P——. You cannot conceive of dear A.’s rapture at being once more in the bosom of her beloved family. It seemed to give her weary spirit such new energy, that we were almost deluded into the belief that she might be spared to us many years. But an immediate return of all her distressing symptoms and increased debility warned us that her improvement had not been radical. Still, we did not anticipate so speedy a blight of our hopes. She still took her daily walk, still rode on horseback occasionally,—sometimes saw her friends and smiled upon them all. She still gathered her little Sunday-school children around her, that she might not lose her hold upon them if she should ever be able to resume her duties as a teacher. Only two Sabbaths before her final illness was her seat vacant in the house of prayer. My heart told me that sickness must have made deep inroads upon her strength, or she would have been still there.

“ Very suddenly after a ride on horseback she went to her bed in excruciating pain, and for nearly three weeks suffered tortures which I will not pain you by describing. They were fearful and unremitting, exhausting even those who only witnessed them. But no one heard her murmur or say, ‘ It is more than I can bear.’ Again and again she said, ‘ Pray for me. That only brings relief.’

“ On Saturday evening she expressed that if she should be living the next morning, public prayers might be requested in her behalf that she might retain her reason to the close ; but she suddenly checked herself, saying, ‘ Shall I dictate to my heavenly Father ? His will be done in this and in all things. Pray only that I may be perfectly submissive to that.’

“ On Sunday evening she said, in a feeble voice, ‘ It is almost over.’ And to the inquiry, ‘ How does your faith endure !’ she replied, in broken words, and with a most painful effort, yet with perfectly characteristic meekness, ‘ You know I never had the assurance which many enjoy ; but I believe Jesus will be with me to the end.’

“ The two following days her little strength failed rapidly ; and on the afternoon of Tuesday she took an affecting leave of us all, in the expectation of an immediate release. She rallied, however, and a paroxysm of acute pain seemed to give her supernatural energy. She continued giving minute directions to five of us, who, for hours, took turns to hold her in our arms,—the only position in which she could find a moment’s respite. Shortly before noon, in a distinct, energetic tone, she called us each by name, telling us what to do. She said to me, as I was holding her head and shoulders, ‘ Now give me a drink.’ I did so. She held the glass, drank its contents, passed it back to me, and in less than a minute, as I gazed intently into her agonised face, that look of agony was changed, as by a supernatural power, into a smile of rapture. Her up-turned eye, as it quickly closed on all earthly objects, seemed to have caught a glimpse of heaven. The weary head sank heavily on my bosom. Then there was a gentle sigh ; another, and another, still more gentle, passed her lips, and then all was silent ! I felt for the moment a thrill of delight. I seemed to have accompanied the departing soul of my beloved sister to the very gates of the celestial city, and could almost hear the fluttering of angels’ wings as they came to welcome her ransomed spirit to their assembly.” . . . To her it was not

“ So much even as the lifting of a latch—
 Only a step into the open air
 Out of a tent already luminous
 With light which shines though its transparent walls.”

“ That clime is not like this dull clime of ours,
 All, all is brightness there ;

A sweeter influence breathes around its flowers,
 And a far milder air.
 No calm below is like that calm above ;
 No region here is like that realm of love.
 Earth's softest spring ne'er shed so soft a light ;
 Earth's brightest summer never shone so bright.

“ That sky is not like this sad sky of ours,
 Tinged with earth's change and care !
 No shadow dims it, and no rain-cloud lowers—
 No broken sunshine there !
 One everlasting stretch of azure pours
 Its starless splendour o'er those sinless shores ;
 For there Jehovah shines with heavenly ray ;
 There Jesus reigns, dispensing endless day ! ”

I am sure you will not doubt that, as a *matter of fact*, there was a prop to the spirit of my young friend, which faith supplied and which proved itself adequate to extraordinary emergencies. Nor is it any less a *matter of fact* that for want of this sustaining principle the entrance of my other friend to the valley of the shadow of death was shrouded in appalling darkness. You will not understand me to say or to believe that, in the absence of other evidence, the emotions exhibited in the hour of death are reliable indications that the “ heart is right in the sight of God.” But it is not less in accordance with His providence than with His Word, that, while “ the righteous hath hope in his death,” the “ wicked should be driven away in his wickedness.”

That you have vigorous health and overflowing spirits, that the world has attractions, and that life is given us to enjoy, are *your* facts. That health and spirits are transient, that worldly pleasure soon palls upon the sense, and that a life devoted to it ends in unutterable disappointment, are *my* facts. I set before you two representative cases, and ask you to decide calmly for yourselves which commends itself to your judgment for imitation. Looking at it (as you would feel bound to look at any question of less absorbing interest) with due regard to the bearings of your decision upon the broadest

and most momentous relations of your whole existence, which strikes you as the path of safety and true happiness?—the enjoyment of the present at the risk of the endless future, or a preparation for the endless future at the sacrifice (if need be) of the fleeting present? You know the story of the two men who were sitting by the wayside, when one derided the other for his needless concern about the life to come. To condemn the folly of his comrade out of his own mouth, he called a school-child and offered him his choice of a sugar-plum or a guinea. The child eagerly seized the sugar-plum.

“Tut-tut, there, you little fool; don’t you know the guinea will get you a bagful of sugar-plums?”

“Not a greater fool than yourself,” said his companion, “if you would forego the joys of an eternal future for the sake of a moment’s present gratification!”

For myself, I cannot doubt that it is the part of true wisdom to anticipate the season of darkness and tempest, and climb, while I have light and strength, to the “Rock that is higher than I.” I cannot doubt that even my present joys will be brightened and purified by connecting them intimately with those which await the redeemed soul when its hour of release from sin and sorrow shall strike. Beautifully has this thought been expressed by the poet:—

“I’ve watch’d the sea-bird calmly glide
 Unruffled o’er the ocean tide :
 Unscared she heard the waters roar
 In foaming breakers on the shore ;
 Fearless of ill, herself she gave
 To rise upon the lifting wave,
 Or sink, to be a while unseen,
 The undulating swells between :
 Till, as the evening shadows grew,
 Noiseless, unheard, aloft she flew.
 While soaring to her rock-built nest,
 A sunbeam lighted on her breast,—
 A moment glitter’d in mine eye,
 Then quickly vanish’d through the sky.

“ While by the pebbly beach I stood,
That sea-bird, on the waving flood,
Pictured to my enraptured eye
A soul at peace with God. Now high,
Now low, upon the gulf of life
Raised or depress'd, in peace or strife,
Calmly she kens the changeful wave.
She dreads no storm—she fears no grave ;
To her the world's tumultuous roar
Dies like the echo on the shore.
' Father! Thy pleasure all fulfil,
I yield me to Thy sovereign will ;
Let earthly comforts ebb or rise,
Tranquil on Thee my soul relies.'
Then, as advance the shades of night,
Long plumed, she takes her heavenward flight ;
But, as she mounts, I see her fling
A beam of glory from her wing,—
A moment—to my aching sight
Lost in the boundless fields of light ! ”

CHAPTER V.

What is prayer?—Vague ideas—Prayer natural—Its power—Not only a duty, but a privilege—Remarkable answers to prayer—The tenor of Christ's earthly ministry as bearing on the efficacy of prayer—Prerequisites to effectual prayer—Reflex influences upon the suppliant—Simplicity of the duty—Value of intercessory prayer.

LEXICOGRAPHERS tell us that prayer is "a petition to God." This definition is as satisfactory as that of other terms of the same class,—as, "God, the supreme being," "Man, a human being," or, "Love, an affection of the heart." When the Lord said to Ananias concerning Saul, "Behold, he prayeth," there was reference to a *state of mind* in the new convert which prompted him to pray. As in the case of a person taken from the water apparently dead, the exclamation, "Behold, he breathes!" would indicate the restoration of the vital functions generally, and not respiration merely; so the supernatural annunciation respecting the converted persecutor, "Behold, he prayeth!" denoted a complete revolution in his moral and spiritual nature, of which prayer was the significant token.

There is no duty more plainly and frequently inculcated in Holy Scripture than prayer, and perhaps none that draws more largely on faith for its proper discharge.

"All philosophic objections to the efficacy of prayer are met and answered by an appeal to fact. The God of the Bible is the hearer of prayer; the history of the Church is an exposition of its value: in the whole compass of divinely-appointed means it occupies the highest place and possesses the mightiest efficacy."

We have not only the positive command to pray repeated

thousands of times and in every variety of form, but there are numberless explicit testimonies to the efficacy of prayer in specific cases. And, in addition to all this, the inspired page is full of motives and incentives to prayer, which even a little child can apprehend and appreciate.

The apostasy did not *break* the bond which unites the spirit of man with the Spirit of God his Creator. Though a prodigal, he was still a son ; and the mysterious annunciation which was made to him when he forfeited the Divine favour, that, though lost, he might be redeemed, kept alive a spark of hope. So complete, however, was his alienation from God, that of himself he could have had no disposition to return even to ask forgiveness ; nor, indeed, was there any way by which he could return, save that which infinite grace provided in the mission and atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. Still, in the very constitution of our nature, there is a sense of want and dependence. Not more instinctively does feeble infancy stretch out its hand for support and guidance, than the human soul, when made conscious of its darkness and defilement, reaches after something to enlighten and purify it. A scriptural view of the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being, His eternity, His omnipotence, His holiness, and His benevolence,—a consideration of the requirements of His perfect law,—and the slightest glimpse of the turpitude and odiousness of sin,—cannot fail to produce in a thoughtful mind the deepest emotions.

Can the image of God be restored to my soul? Can a creature of His be happy while alienated from Him? Were I like Him, would not all my desires, affections, and dispositions be coincident with His perfect will? And would not this be the highest condition of happiness of which a finite being is capable? To be like Christ is to be like God ; for Christ, the Son of man, is God manifest in the flesh,—“the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of His person,” “in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” To

follow Christ is to be like Him. To do whatever He has commanded is to be His disciple indeed. The life of such a one is "hid with Christ in God." But in order to this he must have become a new creature. "For the natural [or unrenewed] man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Christ came a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in Him should not abide in darkness. What I need, and what you need, is faith to believe in Christ; and faith is the gift of God. Can I obtain it? ASK, and ye shall receive. SEEK, and ye shall find. KNOCK, and it shall be opened unto you. This is the reply of Scripture to our inquiry. But I need faith in order to pray. My heavenly Father knows this; and the very conviction of this need is His gracious work, prompting me to fall on my knees, in all my weakness and sin, and say, "Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief!" "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

The power of prayer is beautifully set forth by one who evidently felt it to be something more than a required duty:—

"There is an eye that never sleeps
 Beneath the wing of night;
 There is an ear that never shuts
 When sink the beams of light.
 There is an arm that never tires
 When human strength gives way;
 There is a love which never fails
 When earthly loves decay.
 That eye is fix'd on seraph throngs;
 That arm upholds the sky;
 That ear is fill'd with angel-songs;
 That love is throned on high.
 But there's a power which man can wield
 When mortal aid is vain,
 That eye, that arm, that love, to reach,
 That listening ear to gain.
 That power is PRAYER, which soars on high,
 Through Jesus, to the throne,
 And moves the hand that moves the world,
 To bring salvation down."

Without entering into the philosophy of prayer, I would affectionately urge it upon you not only as a duty, but as a *privilege* of inestimable value. However impossible it may be for us to conceive that the counsels of the Infinite God can be influenced by the prayers of His creatures, we may be assured that, unless there were some very important results to ourselves and to our own happiness involved in the observance of the command "to pray and not to faint," it would not have been so prominently prescribed nor so constantly urged.

If your attention has not been already drawn particularly to it, you will be surprised to find how numerous are the prayers recorded in Scripture, and the answers to them,—as if God would teach us to dismiss all doubts and cavils on the subject by just putting before us the facts. I will cite but two or three, and you can easily multiply them at pleasure.

Manasseh, king of Judah, fell into the hands of the king of Assyria, and was carried a prisoner to Babylon. And when he was in this affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and prayed unto Him, and the Lord heard his prayer, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom.

The brief prayer of Elijah, when he would vindicate the claim of Jehovah to the exclusive worship of His creatures in opposition to the prophets of Baal, was answered on the spot; and the prevalence of his prayer for dearth, and then for rain, is referred to by an apostle as a warrant for any man to expect the like return to a prayer offered in the like spirit.

The prayer of Daniel is recorded in full by the pen of inspiration, and the answer was given before the supplication was finished. Paul's thrice-repeated prayer was answered graciously, though not in the specific form he contemplated; and the memorials of godly men and women in all ages abound with evidence, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

A young friend of mine once said to me, "I have prayed every day for more than a month that God would convert my

soul ; and I am satisfied it's of no use to try any longer." It was suggested to her, that if she had any just conception of what she was asking for, she would not have been disposed to give up so soon. Suppose you were in a house or ship that was on fire, would you so readily desist from an effort to save yourself, and sit calmly down to await the issue ? Would you not rather run distractedly from end to end of the ship, or from one opening to another of the house, seeking a way of escape from the devouring flame at any hazard ?

Suppose it were an earthly father whose displeasure you had incurred. His affectionate heart has been deeply wounded by your disobedience and ingratitude. He still treats you as his child ; but there is no smile of love, no complacent regard, no warm sympathy between you. The whole complexion of your life is changed. Nothing in the house or in the garden, or in any of the scenes or pursuits of your life, is as it used to be, —and all because you have forfeited your father's favour. Weary and wretched, you at length resolve to seek reconciliation. The first opportunity for an interview is eagerly seized. You confess your fault and ask forgiveness, but are surprised and disappointed by the result. His apparent indifference is quite inexplicable. He seems to doubt your sincerity, and to receive your professions of penitence and love with distrust. You withdraw, and brood over your repulse till you are ready to justify your unfilial conduct, and to reproach your father with injustice. All this time his treatment of you is unchanged. With affectionate care he watches over you ; but his face wears the same look of disapprobation, and his very kindness upbraids your conduct more severely than words. Again you confess your fault and beg his forgiveness, but with no better success, and finally conclude that further effort is useless,—a reconciliation is impracticable. What, in such a case, would be the judgment of others as to the depth of your sorrow, or the ardour of your affection ? If in your first interview you had refused to go from your father's presence till you

were forgiven, or till you had received from him a smile such as once expressed his love,—had you evinced a grief and shame which nothing but a restoration to his favour would remove,—if, in a word, you had imitated the example of the woman in Simon's house, who in meek silence bathed her Saviour's feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head,—think you his warm and tender heart would have felt no relentings towards you? Do you doubt that he would have clasped you in his arms, saying, "Be of good cheer, my daughter. I am convinced of your penitence and love. You have my hearty forgiveness and blessing?"

And will our heavenly Father be satisfied with less unequivocal tokens of our contrition and sincerity? The very fact that you relinquished your suit at all, and especially that you relinquished it with so little compunction, shews that either your faith is very defective, or your desire of forgiveness and favour very weak. "Prayer is, the 'Lord save us—we perish' of drowning Peter; and you will not say that you offered it. Nor was it ever offered and denied."

I do not know how far I succeeded in setting before her the probable cause of her failure; but she afterwards became a professed follower of Christ.

Prayer is the universal language of dependent creatures; and those who neglect it, or affect to contemn it as a religious duty, nevertheless resort to it instinctively when in anguish or peril. But how mean and basely ungrateful it is to share profusely in the gifts of God's providence, and yet not recognize His liberal hand!—to be protected and preserved by Him every moment, and yet never acknowledge our dependence, or commit ourselves to His keeping until all other resources fail,—and even then only while danger impends!

We often mistake the nature and design of prayer. In our intercourse with God, words and actions are of no account. We may stretch forth the hands and lift the eyes towards heaven, and utter words of deep devotion, and it may be all a

vain show. "Man looketh on the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh on the heart." The faintest emotion of love, the weakest effort of faith, the feeblest struggle for the mastery over a sinful appetite or passion, is marked by Him as promptly and distinctly as the anguish of a weeping Peter, or the triumphant exultation of a martyred Stephen.

Our heavenly Father is not spying out our sins and follies that He may have somewhat against us. We thrust them into His sight with a carelessness that would provoke, to our hopeless condemnation, the anger of any earthly monarch. In all our wanderings from duty and happiness, His pitying eye is upon us, and His hand is stretched out all the day long to encourage and uphold the first feeblest motions of our return to Him.

Let me commend to you, in this connexion, a careful review of the footsteps of our Divine Redeemer during the three years of His incarnate ministry, with special reference to His tender compassion for sinners, and His readiness to receive and relieve all that sought His help. Point, if you can, to a single instance in which the faintest supplication for His pity and help was unheard and unanswered. And, at the same time, mark the Divine tenderness with which He regarded those who were neglected, despised, and condemned by their fellow-men. Study the case of the Syrophenician and Samaritan women; of the two blind men in the suburbs of Jericho; of the family at Bethany; of the sleeping disciples in the garden; of the treacherous Peter, and of Mary at the sepulchre, and then reflect that He who gave to these scenes and incidents all their significancy and glory is revealed to us as "God manifest in the flesh." And, though removed from corporeal sight, He was the same yesterday, and is the same to-day that He was eighteen centuries ago, and that He will be for ever.

In prayer, then, you are left to no vain, mythical object of worship. Christ left this world in a body like ours, and will so come in like manner as He was seen to go into heaven; and

when we kneel in true worship we may feel assured that we have, in advance, His sympathy who is our elder Brother—our prevailing Intercessor ; and if we ask and receive not, it must be that we ask amiss.

Perhaps it may never have occurred to you that the disposition to enter into your closet and to shut the door and pray to your Father which is in secret, is an unequivocal token of Divine grace. And if He is more willing to hear than you are to ask, more ready to bestow the Holy Spirit (the chiefest blessing, because it includes all others) than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children, no one can repair to His mercy-seat in vain.

“ All night the lonely suppliant pray’d,
 All night his earnest crying made,
 Till, standing by his side at morn,
 The tempter said, in bitter scorn,
 ‘ Oh, peace! what profit do you gain
 From empty words and babblings vain?
 “ Come, Lord, oh, come,” you cry alway;
 You pour your heart out night and day;
 Yet still no murmur of reply,
 No voice that answers, “ Here am I.” ”

“ Then sank that stricken heart in dust!
 That word had wither’d all its trust;
 No strength retain’d it now to pray,
 While Faith and Hope had fled away.
 And ill that mourner now had fared,
 When by the tempter’s art ensnared,
 But that at length beside his bed
 His sorrowing angel stood, and said,
 ‘ Doth it repent thee of thy love,
 That never now is heard above
 Thy prayer,—that now not any more
 It knocks at heaven’s gate as before? ”

“ I am cast out. I find no place,
 No hearing, at the throne of grace:
 ‘ Come, Lord, oh, come,’ I cry alway;
 I pour my heart out night and day,
 Yet never e’en till now have won
 The answer, ‘ Here am I, my son.

“O dull of heart ! enclosed doth lie
In each ‘Come, Lord,’ a ‘Here am I.’
Thy love, thy longing, are not thine, —
Reflections of a love divine :
Thy very prayer to thee was given,
Itself a messenger from heaven.”

We are never to forget that to secure an answer to our prayers there must be in the suppliant's heart an aversion to all sin, and a willingness to do whatever is needful to make the bestowment of the blessing asked consistent with the principles of the Divine government. The child cannot claim or expect the father's forgiveness while cherishing a purpose to repeat the offensive act ; yet by entreaties and tears his forgiveness may be won. Not so with our heavenly Father. All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do ; and if we regard iniquity in our hearts, we are forewarned that the Lord will not hear us.

You will readily perceive that a tractable spirit must also attend a successful plea for mercy. The child asks his parent's forgiveness with an ill grace while indisposed to do a parent's will. The temper of our minds has quite as much to do with the success of our prayers as the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts. An earnest struggle with some besetting sin, an honest effort to suppress some selfish or worldly desire, will give wonderful fervency to our prayers. Indeed, it is in making such efforts that we learn our weakness, and are thereby prompted to repair to the Strong for strength.

A little incident, in one of my daily walks, served, by its very simplicity, to impress this thought upon my mind. A child, three years old, perhaps, was attempting to trundle a rudely-made, diminutive hoop ; but her driving-stick was too long, and interfered with her dress, which, in running, was thrown back by the wind. She laid her hoop down, and, putting the stick under her feet, and raising the ends of it with her little hands, she tried to break it. But it was green, and

would only bend. Just as I came up to her, she had made a last desperate effort, but without better success. I stopped, and she turned her flushed face up towards me, but said nothing. "Your stick is too long, my little girl, isn't it? Let me shorten it for you." She was still silent, but passed the stick to me. She watched me with profound deference, as I slowly took off my glove, opened my knife, and cut the stick in two, giving her the shortest piece; and, with a single bound, she was off in full chase of her hoop. *It was the effort to help herself that convinced her of her weakness, and led her to avail herself of offered aid.*

As I have often said to you, the benefit of prayer is all felt by the petitioner. God does not stand in need of any such recognition of His power and authority as our supplications imply. To earthly monarchs and governments such acknowledgments may be grateful and necessary; but our prayers to God are all and altogether for our benefit. They are not "needed to inform God of our wants, which are known to Him; nor necessary to move Him to be more benevolent than He otherwise would be, for He is more willing to give than we are to receive; but they are demanded as a method of honouring the ordinations of Heaven, and as a means of bringing our own minds into a state of preparation for the reception of spiritual blessings."

Under the Old Testament dispensation, patriarchal and prophetic, God revealed Himself in various ways:—in dreams and visions of the night, as to Abraham and Jacob; in fire, tempest, and smoke, as on Horeb and Sinai; in a whirlwind, as to Job; and by angels, as to Daniel and Ezekiel;—but "in these last days He has spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." There can be no doubt, however, that under both dispensations the economy of grace is the same and that the way of access to Jehovah which was open to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was that by which apostles and

martyrs and saints of later days have approached Him. The manifestation of God in the flesh fulfilled all things pre-figured in the ancient covenant ; and now we have the simple, faithful saying, (which is worthy of all acceptance,) " That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners ; and that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." He is the mediator of the new covenant—the way, the truth, and the life. No man can go to the Father except by Him ; but to go to Him is to go to the Father, for he that hath seen Him hath seen the Father.

Did you ever carefully ponder that most wonderful language of the apostle—" OUR LIFE IS HID WITH CHRIST IN GOD : so that when He who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory ?" Just analyse these few words, and let your mind dwell calmly on their infinite import.

Most mysteriously united in Him are the Deity, the priest, the altar, and the sacrifice. He is at once a Saviour, an Intercessor, and a Sovereign Dispenser of the blessings which His own obedience and death purchased. How simple, direct, and unembarrassed is this new and living way ! We have no need to ascend into heaven to bring Christ down from above, nor yet to go down into the deep to bring Christ up from the dead ; for we have the word of faith, which teaches us that if we confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in the heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, we shall be saved. The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him in truth.

The benefits of prayer result in no inconsiderable degree from the state of mind in which the true suppliant must be in order to his acceptance ; and hence there is quite as much truth as poetry in the familiar stanza :—

" Prayer is the Christian's *vital breath*,
The Christian's *native air*,
His watchword at the gates of death ;
He enters heaven with prayer."

And hence, too, we greatly err if we measure the success of our prayers by the direct answers to them. A wise earthly parent often denies a dutiful child's request with a view to bestowing a far greater favour in some other form ; and when we seek from our heavenly Father a particular blessing, the denial of it is no token that our prayer is rejected ; for if the temper in which we ask is what it should be, we cannot fail of an answer, and may safely trust to infinite wisdom and love to determine the form.

Prayer brings the soul into immediate contact with the Former of our bodies and the Father of our spirits, from whom all good counsels, all holy desires, and all just works do proceed. We think of Him whom we worship as the God of the spirits of all flesh ; and it is natural that, in seeking blessings for ourselves, we should seek the bestowment of similar blessings upon those of our kindred and friends whom we love and cherish as we do our own bodies. Holy Scripture presents numerous and emphatic exhortations to prayer and intercession for others ; -and various classes of persons are mentioned as particularly entitled to such remembrance. Did you ever seriously consider to what extent a righteous man's prayers may avail to bring down blessings upon others who are not even aware of their being offered ? Is it not possible that, in answer to prayers offered years ago by those who may be now dwelling in the world of spirits, you have been exempted from temptations by which multitudes are overcome and destroyed, and are now surrounded with restraints and safeguards to protect you from a similar catastrophe ? Who knows how far the daily mercies which descend upon a thoughtless and thankless world—the rain and sunshine and fruitful seasons, exemption from pestilence, earthquake and flood, and the bands laid upon bloody and violent men—are in answer to the prayers of men of like passions with ourselves ? A godly spirit inhabiting some weak, deformed, or bedridden body in country lane or city alley may prevail with God to save or

destroy, to help or hinder, in emergencies which involve the destinies of stately thrones and powerful empires.

In the appointments of a wise Providence, the most stupendous events are brought about by agencies and instruments so remote from the proximate cause that their connexion with it may be utterly untraceable: so that the obscurest individual and the minutest incident may exert an influence on the order of events which no finite mind can measure or compute. The king's butler is commanded to provide a fat capon for his majesty's table. Scarcely anything could be imagined of less importance to people outside of the palace. The capon is provided. The fragment of a little bone finds its way into the king's throat and strangles him. His death is the signal for a revolution which involves a continent in the plagues and curses of war.

The childlike submission of the soul to the will of its Father in heaven, which is characteristic of prayer, is not inconsistent with the most earnest supplication for needed blessings. It is as if one should say to an earthly parent, "My dear father, you know much better than I do what it would be right and proper for me to do; and I would not ask anything which it is not entirely in accordance with your views and plans to grant. I greatly desire the favour I am about to ask. I feel as if I could not be denied; but I am so sensible of my own incompetency to judge, and so confident of the wisdom and love which govern all your acts towards me, that I gladly submit the whole matter to you, and will heartily acquiesce in your decision."

Though the chief and most intimate communion of the soul with God is secret and personal, the duty and advantages of *social prayer* are plainly revealed. When a favour is to be sought from an earthly potentate, the larger the number who unite in seeking it, (other things being equal,) the more probable is the success of the petition. There is a special promise of the Saviour's presence wherever two or three of His disciples

are gathered together, and the history of the early Christians is replete with evidence that they regarded social prayer and praise as among the chief auxiliaries to growth in grace and in fervency of spirit. We cannot doubt that the daily sacrifice under the Jewish law, and the custom, at a later period, of resorting daily to the temple at the hour of prayer, so far as the service was spiritual and not formal, must have contributed to detach the mind and heart from the things of time and sense, and so have exerted a sensible, salutary influence on the current of life. Hence, the observance of a daily service of prayer, which still prevails in some portions of the Christian Church, so far as the form is endued with spiritual life, is but the natural and spontaneous expression of a devout and earnest mind. The large measure of formality and insincerity that may be mingled with such services takes nothing from the duty and advantage of engaging in them on the part of those who are spiritually minded; nor does it, of itself, furnish any reason for dispensing with them.

Of late years there seems to have been, in various Christian communities, an increasing conviction of the efficacy of prayer; and though many of the weaknesses and infirmities of our nature may be detected in incidental circumstances, there can be no doubt that large accessions have been made to the army of the living God in answer to prayers of His people in their daily assemblages.

The *sublimity* of prayer never impressed me so much as when the CHRISTIAN WORLD was recently moved to one united and spontaneous offering of supplications to God for the salvation of our race. "The event was unique and unexampled. Nothing like it has occurred from the beginning of the world until now. That a little band of men in a remote province of India,* unknown by name except to a few persons, and carrying on a mission, the very existence of which was to most equally unknown, should have been called to move the whole

* Lodiana.

Church to prayer, is so remarkable, that it may well awaken the exclamation, 'This is the finger of GOD!' Had the movement originated in some great gathering of representatives of the leading denominations of Christians, it might have been equally of GOD, though less manifestly the work of Him who is excellent in counsel, and carries on His mighty plans in such a way that no flesh should glory in His presence."

This simple voice from the desert was as though the prophetic announcement were fulfilled, which declares that "the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: we will go also;" and as though "the set time to favour Zion had come." "On the second Monday of January 1860, at the rising of the sun, there began a series of meetings for prayer in the furthest east, which was kept up and carried round the world, with the advance of the luminary of day, to the furthest west; and, ere prayer was concluded in the islands of the Pacific Ocean, the strain was again taken up by Christians in China; and thus, through all the hours of the week, continuous prayer was offered for the kingdom and glory of the Redeemer, in beautiful harmony with the inspired saying of the sweet singer of Israel in relation to the MESSIAH, his SON and LORD:—"Prayer shall be made for Him continually, and daily shall He be praised."

Will you not be persuaded, then, to cultivate the spirit of prayer? Many hours of sadness and darkness, days of weariness and nights of watching, may be appointed to you, and who can be such a refuge and stay, such a helper and guide to you, as the everlasting God?

Those who have had the largest and fullest experience of the benefit of prayer know best what its power is to compose troubled thoughts, and give rest and tranquillity to the weary and heavy-laden. The albatross is seen by navigators hundreds of miles from land. When "the gale is at its highest, and with difficulty the eye can pierce the atmosphere, thick

with driving sleet and foam, suddenly, through the contending elements, his shrill cry is heard above the storm, and he darts quickly by. Then, returning, he hovers for a while, now skirting over the breaking seas and through their crests; then, settling down on the bosom of some huge wave, with his head beneath his wing, he peacefully and gracefully sinks to rest, all unconscious of the fierce tumult raging around him."

" This outward life, with all its busy forms
Whirling like flakes of snow in Alpine storms,
Confuses, chills, and in a shifting grave
Entombs the spirit that the Eternal gave;
Yet look through these to Him. Undaunted strive
Through drift and darkness, saving Faith alive,
And He will be beside thee still,—uphold,
Enlighten, cheer; with Love and Hope make bold,
And, in worst hours of fear, before His eye
The mountain ice and gulfs of snow shall fly;
Thou on His ROCK shalt stand secure, and raise
Thy wings towards heaven, to join its songs of praise."

CHAPTER VI

Reasonableness of the doctrine of regeneration—A positive and conscious change—Notable illustrations—The early occurrence of such a change desirable, and why—What favours, and what hinders it—Cases—A natural question.

HAVING considered the leading doctrines of the Christian faith, the source from which they are derived, and their adapt-
edness to meet the exigencies of sinful beings subject to the government of an infinitely holy God, it may be profitable to separate one of them from the group, and look more particularly into its claim to our cordial entertainment. And we will take one which lies at the bottom of any scriptural system of belief. I mean that which is familiarly known under the term of REGENERATION or the NEW BIRTH. I hold that this event or crisis in the life of the soul of man is not only perfectly reasonable, but such as the analogies of God's providential government would lead us to expect.

We have seen that it is only from Holy Scripture that we obtain any just knowledge of God or of His ways. If our minds were unclouded and unperturbed, as was the mind of man before his apostasy, we should learn His Divine nature and perfections by immediate communion with Him. But, with our passions all disordered and corrupted, our affections roving after forbidden things, and our whole moral nature alienated from the source of all light and truth, we are incapable of receiving correct notions of God's character, or of our relations to Him, otherwise than by a direct revelation. As we have already seen, the history of our race from the beginning shews conclusively that, without a revelation of God's mind and will, such as Holy Scripture alone furnishes,

we should strive in vain to "find out God." Assuming, then, that what we call the Bible is a true record of what holy men of old spake under the immediate inspiration of the Divine Spirit, we must accept its testimony not only concerning God's character and law, but also concerning man's condition and estate under His government. We find, then, that man being in honour abode not. He transgressed the righteous and reasonable law under which he was placed, and thus incurred its penalty—DEATH. That condemnation involved him and his posterity in alienation from God, and in absolute unfitness for the enjoyment of holy duties, or for the society of holy beings.

The fountain being thus embittered, no sweet waters thereafter flowed from it. The tree thus corrupted could no longer bear good fruit; for no one can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. The holy nature with which our first parents were endowed assimilated them to God; and, had they obeyed the law which was made the test of their allegiance, that nature would have been transmitted from generation to generation, and our world would have been still the garden of Eden, indefinitely enlarged for the dwelling-place of its happy and holy inhabitants. But, as we have seen, by the transgression of that law they lost the favour of God and His image in their own souls, and, of course, could transmit to their posterity no nature purer than their own. No one will deny that this disobedience of our first parents completely changed their moral character and relations. It left them in God's hands as their Lawgiver and Judge, but separated them from Him as their friend and companion. Before that woful catastrophe, they walked with God, and His favour was the light of their life. After it, they hid themselves from His presence, and shrank instinctively from communion with Him. It was in the likeness of this alienated, corrupt, ruined nature that Cain and Abel came into the world; and the same odious image have all subsequent generations borne.

Admitting this to be a true account of mankind, as an order of God's creatures, and that God possesses the attributes of holiness and justice which the Scriptures ascribe to Him, is it not manifest that moral natures so entirely at variance can have no sympathies, no enjoyments, no pursuits in common? Can there be but one answer to the question of the prophet, "How can two walk together except they are agreed?" or to that of the apostle, "What communion hath light with darkness? or what concord hath Christ with Belial?"

The case is not very unlike that of two persons whose natural faculties, capacities, and tastes would, under ordinary circumstances, lead them to the pursuit of similar objects, and to the enjoyment of similar pleasures, but who have lived from infancy in entirely different conditions. One has been accustomed to the purest air, familiar with the most sublime mountain scenery, and alive to all the glorious works of the Creator. The associations of the other have extended but little beyond the dark, narrow, filthy alley in which he has what he calls his home. The former has been drinking all his life long from the fountains of wisdom and knowledge, and is familiar with the maxims of the greatest and best of men. The latter has spent his days in idleness and ignorance, or, if he has had access to books, they have been of a character far from elevating or purifying to his nature. The former has refined manners, and a highly-cultivated taste, and an exquisite perception of the beautiful in nature and art. To the latter all objects are alike uninteresting that do not suggest some gratification of the animal appetite, or favour the vulgar inclinations in which he delights. Suppose these two persons should fall in company on a journey: does any one doubt that there would be an instant, instinctive, mutual aversion? Would not each of them embrace the first opportunity to seek solitude, or other society? How could it be otherwise? What topics of reflection or conversation could they have in common?

What objects, by the way, would they be likely to regard with mutual interest ?

But how inadequate is such an illustration to set forth the dissimilarity in moral nature and character between our Creator and His creatures ! What is man, that he should be clean ? He is represented as "abominable and filthy" in God's sight, and as "drinking in iniquity like water." When you hear such representations of the natural character of man denounced as absurd and libellous, just consider whether these or any other terms can possibly express wider extremes than holiness and sin. I will not contend for a form of words. I am willing to forego the phrase "total depravity," which is not found in Scripture. I only insist that in the character with which every human being comes into this world there is not that element of holiness without which no man can see the LORD.

Is it not, then, clear that this evil nature must be made good, this polluted soul must be cleansed, these carnal and corrupt desires must be made holy, before heaven and God's presence can be entered with joy ? Could an impenitent sinner, an unbeliever in Christ, be happy with angels and holy beings for his only companions ? Is it not clear that if he had not been born at all he could not have beheld the light of the sun, nor any of the objects of beauty and glory which it reveals in the natural world ? And is it not equally clear that unless he is "born again" he will never discern the infinitely higher and more glorious objects which are to be revealed in the spiritual world ?

Having shewn you the reasonableness of such a transformation of our nature as regeneration or the new birth implies, it need scarcely be said that the occurrence of it must be a subject of distinct consciousness. I do not say the exact *time* of its occurrence, or the attending *circumstances*, but the *fact*. He who is born again knows it. In some cases the circumstances are indelibly impressed. It is impossible that the

jailer at Philippi should not have been conscious of a wonderful revolution in his feelings and sympathies during the eventful night in which his prisoners became preachers of righteousness, and instruments of salvation to him and his household. Lydia could have no doubt that she was governed by new views of truth and duty after her "heart was opened to attend to the things which were spoken of Paul."

There may be cant phrases in vogue expressive of this transformation, which are as little to my taste as they can be to yours; and doubtless there are cases in which people are deceived and deceive others (not intending it, perhaps) in supposing themselves to have been the subjects of regenerating grace, when they are really and truly in their natural state of alienation from God and all holy beings. But such a change does take place when the soul is brought into reconciliation with God by the power of the Holy Ghost, and in consequence of the atonement for its sins by the Lord Jesus Christ, is an incontrovertible fact; and the party is as conscious of it as he is of waking out of sleep, or of passing out of a dark room into the light of noonday. There is no plainer declaration in Holy Scripture than the words of Christ himself—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

This change is called conversion, in the same sense in which we say that a person who embraces an opinion which he has before opposed is converted to that opinion; or that the drunkard who forsakes his cups is converted into a sober man; and that the worldling who renounces the world and accepts the salvation of the gospel is converted to Christ, and becomes one of His disciples.

That the evidence of this moral transformation is in all cases equally satisfactory, even to one's-self, is not affirmed. Faith—true and energetic faith—may co-exist with a very indistinct and limited conception of Divine truth.

"Among my earliest inquirers," says a pastor, "was a married

lady, of German origin, whose views of Divine truth were very imperfect and vague. She seemed to feel that she was a sinner, and that the gospel promised salvation to all who believed in Christ; but of the extent and obligation of the Divine law, or of the depth and guilt of her depravity, or of the necessity and value of the death of Christ, she had no definite opinions. 'I am a lost sinner,' she said, 'and wish to be a Christian. I have never lived as I ought; and I want to begin now,' were the sum and substance of her convictions of native enmity to God and condemnation by His holy law. I explained to her, as I thought, with great simplicity and fulness, the Scripture doctrine of man's native depravity and helplessness, of the Saviour's incarnation and death to save a lost race, and of the need of the Spirit's agency to renew and sanctify the heart. In several successive interviews I presented these truths in various forms and relations, and thought she attained some distinct apprehension of them; but at our next meeting the effect seemed wholly lost, and her views of truth were as dim and shadowy as ever.

"She cherished at length a hope that she was a Christian, but could refer to no particular time when conscious of a change of heart and feeling. No passage of Scripture had brought comfort. No wrestling prayer had given peace. No known duty performed, or cross taken up, had relieved her burdened spirit. She thought she loved the Saviour, and found pleasure in prayer, and had no other wish than to live wholly for God; and these were about all the evidences she could furnish of true conversion.

"I was greatly perplexed. I could not be satisfied with her inadequate views of truth. I was doubtful of the reality of a conversion in which the successive steps were invisible. I feared that her religious impressions were superficial and transitory, and that she would soon fall back into a worldly life. I accordingly postponed her application for admission to church ordinances, and urged her to study the Bible with

prayer, and try to understand distinctly its most important truths. But delay produced no change. Her opinions were still shadowy, while her walk was humble and consistent.

“She was finally received among the professed disciples of Christ. I watched her course for many months with anxiety. I feared for her stability. But year after year rolled by, and she continued to lead an humble and consistent life. Her example was almost blameless in word and deportment. She was a woman of prayer, and loved the Bible. She adorned the profession she had made, and no one in the world ventured to doubt her piety. But her views of the doctrines of the Bible never attained clearness or coherence, and she never advanced much beyond her first lesson—that she was a great sinner, and Christ a perfect Saviour. I learned the lesson, that the heart is often better than the head, and faith may flourish when knowledge is imperfect.”

Such cases of vagueness and uncertainty in religious convictions are exceptions to ordinary experience and observation. The laws which govern our minds on other subjects, control them here.

The records of eminent statesmen, learned philosophers, and brave generals, do not furnish more specific evidence of their principles and acts than the records of Christian experience supply of the principles and acts which distinguish the disciples of Christ from others. And we may as reasonably question whether Edmund Burke was a statesman, Sir Isaac Newton a philosopher, or George Washington a general, as whether William Wilberforce, John Wesley, and Edward Payson were the disciples and followers of Christ in such a sense as to distinguish them from the great majority of mankind.

Not only is this distinction obvious where it really exists, but in many instances (perhaps in most) the process that leads to it is a matter of personal consciousness as much as the loss or recovery of bodily health. It may be that in seasons of excitement persons of a peculiar temperament will suppose

themselves to be the subjects of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, when in truth they are deluded by the vain fancies of a fervid imagination. But in most instances the commencement of a religious life, which we call the new birth, and all the stages of after-growth, are as real to the experience of the individual as the growth of the body from helpless infancy to vigorous manhood.

Let me tell you something of the history of the Rev. L—— ———, of Paris, by way of illustrating what I have said of the *conscious reality* of the change we are considering. It is the more impressive because of the volatility and fickleness which are supposed to belong to the disposition of the French people.

He was educated a Roman Catholic. His father became a soldier, and entered the army of Napoleon I. at the age of fourteen. He was very fond of his children, and especially of L——. Though enjoying the advantages of a good school, he was much averse to study. A more active life suited him better ; and, after trying several employments, he finally settled upon that of a brassfounder. He entered an establishment for the purpose of learning the business, and soon shewed remarkable expertness : so that, though he entered with the understanding that he was to receive no remuneration for his services until he became skilful in his work, he soon earned ten or twelve shillings a day ; and when he had accumulated a sufficient sum, he resolved to expend it in travelling over the kingdom, and visiting similar establishments. When he applied for admittance to workshops, they often laughed at his diminutive size and boyish countenance. Sometimes he would propose to them to let him try his hand at some work ; when he soon convinced them of his superior skill. Some of his work was sent to a distant town, containing a population of ten thousand, and, coming under the notice of some capitalists, they resolved upon erecting a foundry, and immediately sought him out and invited him to an interview. When they saw him, they

declined the negotiation, at least for the present, till after the return of a partner who was abroad. He told them he should leave in the morning, and must know before then, or he should make other arrangements. They concluded to go on, admitted him to a share in the concern, and gave him charge of the whole enterprise. He went forward with great success. His youth, coupled with so much skill and efficiency, excited general notice. He employed all his leisure moments in reading Voltaire, Diderot, and other authors of the infidel school. He went to no balls, theatres, or pleasure-parties. He mingled not at all in society, read much while others slept, and, strange to say, his great and constant aim was to make himself believe that there is no God and no future state. He was uneasy, and attributed his uneasiness to impressions which were entirely superstitious, as he supposed; and, if they were dispelled, he believed he should be happy.

On his way home in the evening, he was accustomed to pass a lowly house, where he once heard singing. Being fond of music, he stopped and listened. The door was open, and he went in. Perhaps fifteen persons were present. The preacher was a Missionary of an Evangelical Society, and had just commenced his labours in that place. His subject was brotherly love. L—— heard him, and despised what he said,—considering it all arrant hypocrisy. He hastened away, went home, and betook himself to his favourite authors, Diderot and Voltaire, again.

Not long after, he heard singing repeated at the same place, and went in again. He thought the preacher spoke the language very well and was proper in his deportment; but he found that going there increased his uneasiness. Nevertheless, when he went by the place and saw it open, he was always inclined to go in,—though he rushed out as soon as the service was ended.

By and by, as he was sitting in this place, without anything from the minister, or any other extraneous influence to suggest it, the idea struck him like a flash of lightning,

“Christianity MAY BE TRUE ; and, if it is, I am a lost man.” All the fortresses of his infidelity disappeared like the dew of a summer morning. He was conscious of great agitation, and was sure it would be observed. He sat a while. The preacher then, as on former occasions, urged them to read the Bible and seek light and wisdom from God by earnest prayer. The preacher’s wife was there, and sat near L—— ; and the moment the usual benediction was pronounced, she laid her hand on his arm, and said,—

“ You seem to have been interested in the preaching of the gospel. We have noticed you as an attentive listener ; and, if you would like to speak with the preacher, he will be glad to see you,”—at the same time giving him his address.

“ I did not want to speak to anybody. [We now use his own words.] I wanted to be alone. I hastened home in a state bordering upon despair. I felt that the Christian doctrine is true, and that my unbelief was a grievous sin. I could see no way of escape. I thought how many books I had read, and yet I had never read a word of the Bible, which the minister urged the people so earnestly to read. So I determined to buy one. I went to the obscure place where Bibles were sold, and, with an assumed careless air, asked for a copy. When this was bought, I said, ‘ Now I want to buy a New Testament,’—not knowing that it was part of the volume I had just purchased. The man, supposing I wanted it for a pocket-companion in addition to the Bible, sold me one. I went home with them, locked myself in my room, lay down on the bed, took my new book, and began at the beginning to read. After reading rapidly the first five or six chapters of Genesis, I thought it was supremely absurd, and felt so chagrined and imposed upon that I threw the book violently across the room, and composed myself to sleep. When the servant saw the book the next morning and took it up, I told her to lay it away on the shelf out of my sight.

“ For weeks I was the most wretched creature in the wide world. I used to speak of myself freely as a lost man ! a lost

man ! and people would confer with each other about me, saying,—

“ ‘ Do you remember that young man who came here and set up the foundry at — ? Poor fellow ! he has gone mad. I thought it would be so. Always reading ; never going to places of amusement. Pity that such a bright young fellow should destroy himself ! ’

“ I could not attend to anything. The conviction that the Christian doctrine is true, and that it condemned me, haunted me wherever I went and whatever I did. At last I resolved to go and see that man—the minister,—and perhaps he would tell me what I had better do. I went. He opened the gospel to me, and I received it, and was happy. •

“ I soon stuffed my pockets with religious tracts and Testaments, and gave them to those I met. When such as had previously known me asked what had wrought so great a change in my feelings and habits, I gave them a Testament or a tract, saying, ‘ Read that, and you will know. ’ Some, who saw me so happy, who had lately been so cast down, said, ‘ Poor fellow ! it is often so with people that lose their wits : they are first at one extreme and then at the other. ’

“ I now made up my mind to dissolve my business connexions. I told my partners that I would stay my year out if they wished ; but it would not be for their advantage or mine, as my mind was absorbed by another and a greater object. We very pleasantly separated. The minister became my friend ; but my father disowned me. He considered that the change of my religion was highly discreditable to the family. I was anxious to return to Paris, but lacked the means. My father, soon after, saw a letter I had written, which induced him to relent, and to receive me with great cordiality, and, at last, he too became a follower of Christ. In process of time the thought crossed my mind that I might, sometime, be a missionary ; but it seemed so absurd that I dismissed it at once. The minister talked with me about my

plan of life several times, and suggested the preaching of the gospel ; and I asked him if he seriously thought such a thing possible. It was finally resolved upon. I commenced study. The Greek came very hard to me ; but I persevered, and in two years went through the course of study usually appropriated to eight. For those two years I studied, on an average, twenty hours in every twenty-four, and, finally, became incapable of sleep. My nervous system was excited to such a degree, that I could see visions at noonday with my eyes wide open. At the close of my examination, the teacher said I had accomplished my object, but I had sacrificed my life. Soon after, I left Paris, and went to the South of France—(as my friends supposed) to die. But the change of air and scene and new occupations revived me, and I soon returned with confirmed health. The minister, whose little meeting first drew me under the sound of the gospel, is now a missionary in C——. I have just returned from a visit to him ; for I was not willing to stay a day on the same continent without visiting him.”

Can any one doubt that this narrative describes an actual, sensible change in moral feelings and aspirations ?

Suppose you should hear a soldier's account of a skirmish in which he was wounded in the knee. He describes the march ; the position of the enemy ; the preparations for the fight ; the assault ; his fall ; the nature of the wound ; the removal from the field ; the hospital to which he was carried ; the treatment received ; and his recovery, though with an incurable stiffness of the joint, which is plain enough when he attempts to walk. You would have no more doubt of the truth of his narrative than if you had been by his side in the battle. And why is less credit due to the history of a change in one's views and principles, so great and radical as to be but feebly represented by the transition from darkness to light, or even from death to life,—and that, too, oftentimes connected with a conflict of passions and emotions so

sharp and protracted as almost to crush the spirit of a strong man ?

A very intimate friend of mine—a lawyer by profession, and a man of irreproachable morals—was the subject of such a fearful struggle. He was so exemplary in his habits, and so punctilious in his observance of the outward duties of religion, that most of his acquaintances (professional as well as personal) supposed him to be an avowed disciple of Christ. During a season of unusual interest in the subject of religion, two or three of his nearest friends were particularly moved in his behalf. And though his high intellectual endowments, his stern integrity, and his social standing were all arrayed in opposition to his humbling himself, and becoming as a little child, the Spirit of God overcame them all ; and a fiercer tumult of feeling it has never been my lot to witness than that of which the bosom of my dear friend was the theatre for some two or three weeks. Familiar as he was, from childhood, with the doctrines of revelation, and accustomed as he was to the discharge of the outward duties of a religious life,—including those of the most private devotionāl nature,—he was, nevertheless, a stranger to the power and malignity of “the strong man armed” that possessed the castle of his heart, until the approach of “a stronger than he” to dislodge him ; and this called them into terrific exercise. When the hour of submission came, and my friend found peace and joy in believing, the reality of the transformation was as distinctly marked as it would be in an Ethiopian who should change his skin, or in a leopard which should shed its spots. He at once made a public profession of his faith, relinquished the practice of law, and has been for many years an able and successful minister of the New Testament.

Oftentimes, however, the mysterious process is accomplished with little, if any, external emotion. It is as silent and gradual as that of leaven in the measure of meal ; and there are instances in which the nature to be changed is so

gentle and childlike, that the putting off of the old man, and the putting on of the new, is like the turn of the tide, or the emergence of the dawn,—definite, and, in point of fact, certain, but imperceptible in point of time. In other cases, each step in the process is as distinctly taken, and each stage as consciously passed, as were the steps and stages of the man Moses, when he ascended Sinai to commune with Jehovah. One such case occurs to my mind, which may stand as a representative of thousands.

Mr P—— was a native of Connecticut, where he enjoyed the advantages of judicious home and school culture. He graduated at Yale College; studied law; married and settled in Western New York. Being a shrewd business man, he soon acquired wealth; and, finding the field of his operations too narrow for his ambition, he determined to dispose of his large real estate, and take up his residence and pursue his profession in the city of New York. While this was in contemplation, a deep religious excitement pervaded the neighbourhood. He purposely avoided subjecting himself to its influence; and, with the hope of finding occupation for the evening at a public lecture or some political gathering, he sallied out, and, meeting with a friend, inquired if there was anything of interest going on.

“Why,” said his friend, “I do not know that there is anything that would interest *you*. Religion seems to be at the top just now. There is a prayer-meeting for members of the church at —— Hall; and a prayer-meeting for young converts in Dr ——’s lecture-room; and a meeting for inquirers at Mr ——’s house in —— Street; but I guess there is nothing going on that would be likely to suit *you*.”

The thought flashed on Mr P——’s mind, “No meeting for me! I am neither an inquirer, nor a convert, nor a professor.

He was uneasy, and could not conceal it. A tract was given to him; and he read it, but found nothing to allay his

anxiety or shed light on his path,—though it was of some service in directing his thoughts. He prayed, read the Bible, and attended several times upon the unusual religious services which were appointed; but all to no purpose. Business now lost its attractions. The plan of removing to the city was abandoned, and the world suddenly became a blank to him. He spent whole days alone in his office, taking the key inside, and answering no knocks. Finally, he resolved to put an end to such indecision.

One evening he went into his office, lighted an extra-sized spermaceti candle, and laid another one on the table by his side, took his Bible, and determined that he would never leave that spot till he had fixed his mind on one side or the other and cleared up all his doubts. He began to read, but it soon became an irksome task. He leaned back in his chair, and began to reason thus with himself:—“Why, this is all folly. I am required to love the Lord Jesus Christ. This is merely a matter of *feeling*. Well, to feel, I must see a person, or know something of him; but I have no idea of Christ as an object of peculiar affection or interest. On what ground am I required to give Him my heart? Has He done anything for *me*? He is said to have saved me; but from what? What was my condition, that rendered His interposition necessary? Looking back upon my life, I find I have done—what? Why, absolutely nothing, but take care of myself and seek my own gratification. I have not had in view the glory of God—my Creator and Preserver and Benefactor—in a single act. I have not sought the welfare of my fellow-creatures. I have been absorbed with SELF. Well, is not all this contrary to the will of God? Can there be fellowship between such a God as has taken care of me all my life long, and even sent His Son to die for me, and such a selfish creature as I am?”

He pondered this view of himself till he had such an idea of the contrast between God's law and his own character, that he says “the thought of going into the Divine presence was

like being pushed up to the mouth of a seven-times-heated furnace. It was intolerable !”

“And did Christ throw Himself into such a deadly breach for me?” he asked. “Did He bear the stroke of Almighty vengeance, and die that a sinner such as I might live? Why, this is literally

‘Love beyond degree.’

Were my dearest earthly friend to do such a thing for me, I could not find words to express my admiration and gratitude ; but there is everything in my character to make it odious in the sight of every holy being. So true is it that ‘while we were yet *enemies*, Christ died for us !’”

He soon found himself admiring the holiness and perfection of the law, government, and character of God, while he loathed and abhorred himself as a sinner, and joyfully accepted Christ as the Rock of his salvation. Late in the night he went to bed, resolved, by God’s grace, to begin a life of communion with Him. As soon as day dawned, he addressed himself to new duties, under the influence of new motives. A course of active piety succeeded. He abandoned secular business and betook himself at once to efforts for the salvation of souls, and has been from that day, and still is, an earnest labourer in the Lord’s vineyard.

I apprehend that the marks of a radical, moral change in this man’s nature were as distinct as those which attended the restoration of the lame man at the gate of the temple, who had been lame from his mother’s womb, but who, by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, received such strength in his “feet and ankle-bones” that he entered with the apostles—who had been the instruments of his cure—into the temple, “walking and leaping and praising God.”

Supposing the process which we have been analysing works a real, substantial change in the character and dispositions of a human being, and his relations to God, so essential that without it there can be no admission into the kingdom of heaven,

I persuade myself that you are ready to inquire what you can do towards its accomplishment in your own heart. I think I hear you say, "If such a change is the starting-point in a life of devotion to God, I can be neither safe nor happy until it occurs; and surely it will be a source of great satisfaction to me to look back upon an active *life* spent in His service, rather than upon a few months, or even years, for which I could find no other employment."

This is sound reasoning. When spending the Lord's-day in Charleston, S.C., some years since, I was misinformed as to the time of public worship, and, having half-an-hour unexpectedly on my hands, I strolled through the graveyard adjoining one of the oldest churches in that city. My eye fell upon a moss-covered gravestone, on which was inscribed the name of a person who died at the age of eighty. The inscription stated that sixty-eight years she was an exemplary member of that church, shewing that she joined it at the early age of twelve. Who would wish the number set against such a record of his life to be exchanged for two, or twelve, or twenty-two, or fifty-two, or even sixty-seven years?

It is an interesting question, which some of you have more than once asked, Whether the **TIME** of such a revolution in the character is not entirely beyond our own control? This may indirectly involve a subject of speculative theology, which I am neither competent nor inclined to discuss; for, as you know, we have never allowed such questions a place in our studies. But experience and observation may aid us in determining, in part, to what extent this important crisis may be retarded or hastened by human agency.

If we look back upon life, we can discover many incidents which, though trivial in themselves, have given an important direction to our pursuits, or essentially affected our character, which were apparently within our control. When I was a little boy, living in a country town, I was sent with a light, covered pail to a grocery for some brown sugar. It was not

too heavy for me to carry. I had more than once done the same errand alone. On my way home, I met another boy, about my age, with whom I had been forbidden to play, because he was believed to be very vicious; and he offered to take hold of one side of the pail and help me to carry it. I was perfectly conscious of pleasure at the thought of having any plausible excuse for being in his company.

I could have said, "No! I thank you: it is not too heavy for me to carry." But I accepted his offer. He turned about and went with me. That walk of fifteen minutes was one of the most important events of my life. Wrong impressions were made upon my mind, which will never, never be effaced while I live. That one act of disobedience to the known will of my parents changed the current of my moral feelings, just as a pebble or a twig turns the little bubbling brook, and may determine its course when swollen to a mighty river. It removed, for the time, one of the barriers which parental love would provide for my safety; and, but for the interposition of a kind Providence, might have proved the turning-point in my history. It would not be difficult to fill a volume with illustrations of the principle that, in the appointments of Divine Providence, men choose for themselves what to do and what not to do, and upon that choice are suspended results of stupendous interest.

You know how it is in the ordinary affairs of life. You are about to take a journey. There are various routes and various times of setting out. You ascertain and compare them, and finally decide to go by rail at ten o'clock. A carriage is ordered in season, but does not come, and you are disappointed. The train you intended to take meets with a terrible disaster, —so terrible and general as to make it scarcely possible that you could have escaped. Why were you not there? The little child of the owner and driver of the carriage swallowed a bean with which he was playing, and was in danger of being choked. This absorbed the father's attention, and he forgot

his engagement. All parties in this case acted with perfect freedom ; and yet the act of each had an essential bearing on the conduct and interests of others.

You have read, I presume, the eventful history of Mrs Ann H. Judson, and have admired the fortitude and patience with which she encountered the most appalling trials of life among the heathen, and the constancy with which she maintained her faith when all hope seemed to be cut off. The step which, to all human appearance, decided the question whether she should be a giddy votary of the world, or a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, was taken, in a moment of time, at a party of pleasure.

The record of her religious exercises is embraced in several biographies ; but there is a scrap of personal history which is so pertinent to the subject in hand, and so unlikely to reach you from any other source, that I cannot refrain from giving it. It shall be in the very words of the narrator, as they were committed to paper a few hours only after they were spoken :—

“In 1806 I was preceptor of the academy at Bradford, (Mass.) I had not such a hope in the genuineness of my own conversion that I was willing to enter the sacred ministry, to which I had looked forward from my boyhood, but was waiting for that preparation of heart which is from the Lord. I boarded in Mr H——’s family. He and his wife and four daughters (one of whom, Ann, became the wife of Dr Judson) were then uninterested in the subject of personal religion. Mr H—— maintained a form of prayer ; and we were accustomed to lead the devotions of the family alternately. The daughters, and their companions generally, were very gay and frivolous, —as were the pupils of the academy and the people generally.

“A social party in the neighbourhood brought together a large number of the most influential families of Bradford and the adjoining town of Haverhill. It was a very large and gay assemblage. Soon after tea, having determined to make a stand against the prevailing worldliness and vain amusements,

I left the company and went into another room. Soon others followed; and among them were two* whose connexions and education gave them great influence. I expressed my surprise and mortification that I had been there a year, and had so lived as to lead them to suppose that such a scene of mirth and folly could be agreeable to me. We conversed freely upon the manners and customs, the pursuits and amusements, which were allowed or forbidden to those who have professed to deny the world and to have forsaken its pomps and vanities. We did not return to the convivial circle; and the decided stand made that night was never abandoned. A marked seriousness was observed in the individuals concerned, which continued and extended to other families. This became a subject of remark. The young ladies maintained their ground; and, in the general attention to religion which followed, the two to whom we have particularly referred became the disciples of Christ. The religious exercises through which they passed, before and after this period, are minutely stated in their published biographies.

“As I led the devotions of the family one morning, while Miss H—— was under deep religious impressions, I commended her to the grace of God; and the next morning her father, in attempting to lead in the form of prayer to which he had always been accustomed, became so confused that he paused, sat down, and wept profusely. This was on Friday. The Tuesday following found him a happy believer in the gospel; and his wife and four daughters soon after united with him in a public profession of their faith.

“A Miss W—— was a pupil of the academy. Her father was a magistrate, and a man of much influence. When they found that their daughter, on whose education they had bestowed great expense, was inclined to a religious life, they were quite indignant, and hoped she ‘would not make a fool

* Miss Ann Hazeltine, before mentioned; and Miss Harriet Atwood, afterwards Mrs Newell.

of herself.' She embraced religion, and in about a year afterwards died suddenly in a fit. Her parents, after her death, were inexpressibly grateful for the hope they had that she was not unprepared.

"A Mr F——, of Boston, had a daughter and niece at the academy, who were both interested in the subject of religion. When the term ended, he expressed his desire that if they should return to the academy I would desist from any conversation with them on religious subjects. I replied that I had always found free conversation with my pupils, on their studies and pursuits, tended to give me such a knowledge of them as our relations to each other required; and, as their religious interests were certainly paramount, I could not refrain from proper and seasonable reference to them. 'Then,' replied Mr F——, 'they come here no more!'

"When the vacation expired, however, their father found them so steadfastly intent upon returning that he consented. They both became subjects of grace, and were instrumental in inducing their father to attend at an evangelical place of worship.

"Much anxiety was expressed lest the absorbing interest excited by these scenes should interfere with the proper duties of the academy, and that the trustees, some of whom were not friendly to religious emotion of any kind, would throw obstacles in the way of further proceedings in that direction; but the public examination was more than usually satisfactory, and God was pleased to convert one of the Board of Trustees, from whom opposition was chiefly expected; and none was shewn. Soon after, the clergyman of the place publicly deplored his past negligence and unfaithfulness in dispensing the truth; and thirty were added to his church as the fruits of the religious attention then in progress. So much for a single conscientious stand taken resolutely against 'the world, the flesh, and the devil.'"

In the most trivial occurrences of life there often lies con-

cealed a chain of events so intricate and so extended that the mind is lost in the attempt to trace its unwinding.

Indeed, it sometimes startles one to think with what thoughtlessness the ordinary business of life is transacted, when every step is taken in such utter uncertainty as to its consequences. Not only are the issues of our present existence, our happiness and that of our friends, our character, our influence, our social engagements and our success or failure in business, dependent on these single isolated acts, but the complexion of an endless future may be taken from them. A mistake, made in a moment, and with scarcely a thought, may entail upon ourselves and upon those connected with us a series of calamities from the very thought of which we turn with dismay.

Is it strange, then, that in the matter of the soul's salvation so much may depend on a single act? Such is our constitution, and such the constitution of the moral government under which we live, that it cannot be otherwise. You are asked to read a book, to join a Bible-class, or to go on an excursion to a pic-nic; to take a walk, or to attend a particular religious service. Your ear receives the invitation and carries it to the mind. It is considered with more or less deliberation, and accepted or rejected. Is it anything strange that the decision of such a question should be followed by a train of consequences terminating, perhaps, far, far beyond human thought, on the other side of the grave?

We are all familiar with those periods in our religious annals that are called "revivals,"—a phrase importing legitimately nothing more than a season when "those who profess and call themselves Christians" are led to a more diligent discharge of their duty, and the careless and thoughtless are excited to inquire with unusual earnestness what they shall do to be saved. The means of grace may not be any more available than before; nor is the way into the kingdom of God broader or easier than it always has been. The simple rationale of the thing is, that the prayers of the servants of God are more fervent, and the means

of exciting attention to the perils of the soul and the retributions of eternity are more faithfully and perseveringly used ; and in answer to these prayers, and as the result of the use of these means, an extraordinary interest is awakened to the subject, and many are found seeking the way of life and peace.

Such seasons, though fraught with rich blessings to the Church of Christ, are not without corresponding dangers. Many mistake transient excitement for a change of principle, and the emotions of sympathy with those around them for supreme love to God wrought in the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit. But, nevertheless, periods of unusual interest and religious inquiry are eminently favourable to an entertainment and decision of the question of personal salvation. There is often a peculiar tenderness of conscience ; the introduction of the subject is less embarrassing and more natural at such a time ; and more freedom is felt by interested friends in urging the acceptance of an offered Saviour : so that, while we do well to guard against mere impulse and excitement, we greatly err if we neglect the appointed means of grace or misimprove the favourable opportunity which such a season presents for securing the "great salvation." It may be

"The hidden boundary between
God's patience and His wrath."

CHAPTER VII.

What is satisfactory evidence of a good Christian hope?—A simple view of its origin and foundation—The office of the law of God—No injustice in the dispensation of mercy—The assurance of hope.

YOU ask, What is satisfactory evidence of the possession of a Christian hope? In answering this question, we shall do well to confine our attention to the simplest view of the subject. To treat of it methodically would be beyond my sphere. You have opportunities for that higher grade of instruction from those who are called to the office of public teachers of religion in your several places of worship. There are a few thoughts, however, that fall in with my present purpose, which may not be unprofitably considered.

We have seen that the only foundation for Christian hope (as the term itself implies) is CHRIST; for it has relation to the perfections and promises of God in Christ, and to the whole work of human redemption, beginning, continuing, and ending in Christ. It is the same, *in kind*, with any other hope. The sick man hopes to recover, and the poor man hopes to be rich. The object of hope must be something desirable and attainable. No one hopes that he shall not die; but every one hopes to avoid death by a slow fire or by crucifixion. Hope is to the heart of man what the air is to his lungs,—essential to existence. In the most desperate extremity it inspires courage and prompts to effort. In the narrative of the shipwreck suffered by the apostle Paul on the voyage to Rome, we are told, that “when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on them, all hope that they should be saved was taken away.” But there was one hopeful heart on board. Their Christian prisoner exhorted

them to be of good cheer, for he could assure them of safety ; and *his* hope in the special promise of God excited *their* hope, and induced confidence in his assurance that not a hair should fall from the head of any one of them ; and forthwith they went to work manfully, lightened the ship, and made toward the shore, which they reached, and “escaped all safe to land.” Paul’s hope was closely connected with his faith. An angel brought a message to him from God, and, “believing that it should be even as it was told him,” his hope became as an anchor to his soul. There are certain laws of vegetable life, the operation of which is uniform and open to observation ; so that

“There is HOPE of a tree,
If it be cut down, that it will sprout again,
And that the tender branch thereof will not cease.
Though the root thereof wax old in the earth,
And the stock thereof die in the ground,
Yet through the scent of water it will bud
And bring forth boughs like a plant.”

The Christian hope is founded on laws not less exact and uniform than those of the natural world. God, the supreme ruler of the universe, requires us to love Him with all the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. Obedience to this precept would make us holy, and therefore happy. We have transgressed it, and are condemned by it. Conscience is beforehand with the Judge, and forces us to confess our guilt. “The law,” being but an expression of the Divine will, is, of course, “holy, and just, and good ;” and it makes no provision for the pardon of transgressors. It is not, like laws of human enactment, blindly made and blindly administered, and so making necessary reviews, new trials, reversals of judgment, and pardons. The Divine law was framed with a perfect knowledge of all possible contingencies of human actions, and all possible bearings of human motives and influences ; and it is administered with infinite and unerring rectitude. Nothing in heaven, on earth,

or beneath the earth, can possibly affect, in the slightest degree, the exact equipoise in which the balance is held ; so that nothing can be more hopeless than the condition of the transgressor of such a law under such a government. No wonder the apostle should exclaim, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God !"

In this desperate extremity of the human soul, the voice of mercy is heard. A free pardon, full salvation, and eternal life are offered to the chief of sinners. To appreciate such glad tidings, one must be conscious of the impossibility of escaping the just judgment of God in the irrevocable exile of the guilty from His presence, and, of course, from all the joys and hopes which his immortal nature must for ever crave. We need not resort to the fearful imagery which the writers of Holy Scripture (under Divine guidance) employ to set forth the ultimate destiny of those who die impenitent. Privation, exclusion, what they shall NOT feel, what they shall NOT know,—this is a penalty sufficiently appalling.

A school-boy was disobedient to his mother. It was not the first time. Kind reproof had followed affectionate exhortation ; but there seemed to be a purpose of heart to resist the mother's authority. The father came home to dinner, and was told of the child's offence. He went out and stood upon the door-step, awaiting his return from school. He soon appeared, with his arm full of books, and a playful smile upon his face, when the following dialogue took place :—

Father.—“ Well, my son, I am sorry to find that you cannot make this your home any longer. Even in such a little community as our family, peace and happiness depend on a compliance with the laws of the house. Your mother and I are invested with authority over you, and, without obedience on the part of our children, we shall soon have general disorder and consequent suffering. You do not seem disposed to submit to this government ; and we think it better that you should seek a home more to your mind.”

Child.—"But, father, I don't want any better home."

Father.—"That may be ; but *we* want a more dutiful son ; and if you remain and continue to disobey us, the other children will become disobedient ; and if one law is broken, all may be ; and then, you know, peace and happiness will be at an end. No ! I will take your books, and you can go where you like and select a home where you can have your own way."

Child.—"But who will take me ? Everybody will ask me where I came from, and why I went away from you." This was said with compressed lips and evident emotion.

Father.—"Perhaps they will ; and you can tell them that you had a father and mother who insisted on your obeying them, and you refused, and so they said you could not stay with them."

(Just at this point the dinner-bell was heard within doors.)

"There ! I must go in to dinner ; and you can go where you please."

His lip quivered ; the tears rushed to his eyes in a flood. His spirit was thoroughly subdued ; and he promised that if forgiveness could be extended to him he would henceforth be an obedient and tractable son. The thought of being disowned by his father and mother, and excluded from the protection and enjoyments of a happy home filled him with grief and fear. Not to be at home was to be without safety or pleasure. **SO NOT TO BE IN HEAVEN IS TO BE IN HELL.**

Hope in the pardoning mercy of God must have a firm foundation, or it will perish ; and it can be built only on a sincere and cordial acquiescence in the Divine will. It is only when we see that the law which condemns us is holy, and just, and good, that the grace which pardons us appears rich, and free, and boundless. There is a passage of Scripture which, to many persons, is entirely enigmatical ; and yet the language is very simple, and its meaning very obvious :—
"The LAW of the LORD is PERFECT, CONVERTING THE SOUL,"
(Ps. xix. 7.)

If we consider the force of these terms separately, we shall more easily comprehend their entire meaning. "The law of the Lord" is the whole revealed will of God. It applies to the government of all worlds—spiritual and material. It is, in fact, a transcript of the Divine character, the image of the invisible God, impressed on all His works and ways. The biography and teachings of our Divine Redeemer constitute a complete commentary on the law of God. His spotless life exhibits its extent and spirituality, while His mysterious passion and death illustrate to angels and men the infinite inviolability of its sanctions. Of course it must be a perfect law. But how does it convert the soul?

The strength and safety of a wall depend upon its being perfectly upright. With the first brick or stone that projects from the true line begins an irregularity that will grow more and more obvious and dangerous as the wall rises; so the workman is furnished with an instrument called a plumb-line, which is so contrived that, if applied to the sides of the wall, it will at once reveal the slightest departure from an exact perpendicular. The least projection or depression will appear, and at this stage of the work is easily corrected; so that we may say of a perfect plumb-line that it first reveals the irregularities of the wall, and it is then drawn into conformity with itself.

We have been an inmate for a day or two of a happy, godly family,—the parents intelligent, judicious, and devoted to the happiness of their children, and they (with a single exception) dutiful and affectionate to their parents. The father was a man of most exemplary habits. His piety was a fountain of peace and joy, revealed in all his words and ways. His cheerful temper and uniform kindness to everybody and everything could not but be attractive to all beholders. But his second son was a profligate. In his early school-days he began to exhibit a perverseness of character, which was encouraged by evil company; and neither the correction, nor the reproof, nor the instruction which he received from parents and teachers

seemed to have the slightest influence to turn him from his crooked ways. At length he was detected in a grave offence, and, under an assumed name, became the tenant of a convict's cell. All intercourse between him and his abused and disgraced family had ceased; and he had studiously concealed from them his residence and pursuits.

In the quiet twilight hour of one Lord's-day evening, as he was musing in the solitude of the prison-house, suddenly, and without any conscious cause, he was transported in fancy to his father's house. The same thing had happened before, and he had hastened to divert his mind from the painful vision. But now there was a strange welcome ready for it; and he was soon completely absorbed in a review of his depraved and foolish life. Such a home as he had voluntarily forsaken! Such infatuation as had drawn him away from the society of the virtuous and happy, and made him the companion of fools, — an object of reproach and derision! How could it be?

But that which impressed him most deeply was the remembrance of his father's faithful and affectionate treatment. He could not but call to mind the graces of his father's character, the faultlessness of his example, the purity of the motives which evidently governed him, and the elevated and dignified position he held among his fellow-men; and the contrast with his own irretrievable disgrace and degraded condition filled him with the deepest mortification and regret. He saw the unreasonableness and meanness of his conduct in the glowing light of his godly father's example, and could not but abhor a character (though it was his own) every trait of which was at variance with it. He saw that the tendency of the law which had governed him was to mar and destroy all virtue and happiness; and a comparison of his life with the law by which his father was evidently governed, revealed its hideous deformity and filled him with self-loathing and penitence. He sought and found help in his time of need, and forthwith turned his steps to the straight and narrow path which his father was treading.

The "perfect law of the Lord" is given to us as the rule of our life. It is the law which secures the happiness and purity of the countless hosts of heaven. It embodies the infinite holiness of God; and perfect obedience to it brings the soul into the most absolute and intimate communion with God of which it is capable. It is as impossible for a finite mind to comprehend the holiness of God's law, as it is to comprehend His existence or His attributes of justice and mercy. They are all "past finding out." The earthly course of the Redeemer gives us the clearest view we could possibly have of the perfection of the law of the Lord,

"For in His life that law appears,
Drawn out in living characters."

A steady contemplation of this heavenly pattern can scarcely fail (under the promised blessing of God's Spirit) to excite in a reflecting mind a deep abhorrence of sin in every shade and degree. Nor can we compare with this Divine rule the conduct and temper of the holiest child of Adam that ever lived, without perceiving at once the appalling deficiencies. It was a view of the holiness of the character of God that led the patriarch to exclaim, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Such, upon the apostle's mind, was the effect of a just perception of the requirements of this law that all hope of salvation under it was instantly extinguished. Without the law, or a proper sense of its purity, he was alive. He seemed to himself to have the functions of a spiritually living man. But when the commandment came, with its broad and unyielding demand of conduct, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," sin revived, and he died. Sin was seen to be the living, active principle. He found he must look to some source of life out of himself, as by the law no flesh living could be justified. Thus the law became a pedagogue to lead him to Christ, as servants are employed to lead young children to school.

The power of sin and the intimacy of sin and the soul are set forth by the great apostle. The law is represented as sustaining the same relation to the soul that the husband and wife sustain to each other. The soul is bound to obedience, and the law controls its destiny; and there is nothing that can separate them but the death of one or the other. If the soul dies to the law, or ceases to live by it, or if the law dies to the soul, or ceases to be a source of life, the surviving party is at liberty to form a new connexion. The sinner is bound to the law so long as the law is to him the source of life, and obedience to it a ground of hope or a means of salvation; but when the law, as a medium of salvation, is disowned, then the soul can be united to Christ; but it must be a perfect, untrammelled union. Every thought of the dead law, as source of life or peace, is the token of a divided and inconstant, if not a treacherous, mind.

The soul that is thus brought to see its sinfulness in the light of the law of God, to feel its poverty and helplessness, and to cast itself on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus for salvation, is CONVERTED; and thus it is that the perfect law of the Lord converts the soul.

It is not, however, by any inherent power in itself that the law accomplishes this work. It is the special office of the Holy Spirit—the Comforter—who is sent into the world to *convince men of sin*, to reveal to them the deep and dreadful depravity of their nature, and their need of a righteousness not their own to render them acceptable to God.

We see, then, that to the transgressor of God's law the gates of heaven can never be unbarred until some adequate atonement is made for his sin. There is a bountiful feast, prepared at great expense, and the invitations are extended gratuitously to all; but the guests must accept, and must, moreover, be arrayed in a prescribed dress, before they enter the banqueting-room, or they will be ignominiously thrust out. The dress is furnished gratuitously, as well as the feast. You are aware of the force of this figure. Without a better righteousness than

any which our apostate nature can attain, we can never find our way into the kingdom of heaven. Hence the devout believer exclaims,—

“ Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress ;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,
With joy shall I lift up my head.”

It is not one sin, nor any number of sins, that exclude us from the “bright world of joy.” IT IS A SINFUL NATURE. As we have already seen, this nature must be renewed ; and one of the fruits or qualities of that renewed nature is FAITH, or the power of spiritually discerning things which the carnal or unrenewed nature can neither see nor know. Another is HOPE, which rests securely in the promise and covenant of God, as the ship's anchor takes sure and steadfast hold in the hidden depths of the ocean. To the eye of faith, Christ crucified is revealed as “the Lord our righteousness.” By his obedience, sufferings, and death, he wrought out a righteousness of which the believer is by faith made a partaker. How this perfect righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ avails, in the counsels of eternal purity and truth, to the justification of the believing soul, so that it may be said that Christ, “who knew no sin, is made sin for us,” and that we, who are altogether sinful, are “made the righteousness of God in him,” is beyond all finite comprehension. We are to receive the revelation of such a scheme of mercy with the deepest reverence and humility. And the moment a sinner accepts this offer of a free salvation—which he is made willing to do in the day of God's power—his moral relations are changed. The power of sin is subdued. To serve Christ his Redeemer is thenceforth his supreme desire and steady purpose. He hears or reads the invitation addressed indiscriminately to all men by the Saviour himself,—“COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.” He believes that the utterer of these words—who was once on the earth in human form, conversing

with men, eating, drinking, and sleeping as we do, yet evincing, by the signs and wonders which He did, His absolute divinity—now lives in heaven and dispenses gifts of mercy and grace to all needy suppliants. He believes that he virtually accepts the invitation if he obeys Christ's precepts and conforms to His example. His faith relies on the historical facts that Christ died for his sins, that He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and obtained gifts for men. In the light shed upon his conscience by the Divine Spirit, he sees himself to be a sinner, condemned by God's law, and in himself incapable of restoration to the favour of his heavenly Father. And the Saviour, who presents himself as an object of his faith and supreme love, is just suited to his forlorn condition; for He does all for him when he cannot do anything for himself. Thus Christ is formed in him the HOPE of glory. And now his language is,—

“ Sweet were the bitterest smart
That, with the bended knee,
Would bow this broken heart;
For who, my Saviour, who could be
A sufferer long that flies to Thee ?

“ As needle to the pole
There fix'd, but tremblingly,
Such be my trusting soul,
Whate'er life's variations be,
For ever pointing, Lord, to Thee !”

There is something in this feature of the economy of Divine grace which has occasionally perplexed even persons of intelligence and candour. It is said that no account is made of the natural virtues and graces of the human character. A truthful, ingenuous, affectionate disposition is, in the sight of men, of great price. Is it less so in the sight of God? Are the generous, manly, heroic spirits, whose deeds have adorned the annals of our race, to be ranked with the selfish and craven, whose existence has been either a blank or a blot? Will you put honesty and fraud, chastity and dissoluteness, honour and

infamy,—the best and the worst,—on the same level? Does not this encourage the wicked to pursue their evil ways?

These questions spring from a misapprehension of principles. Shall I venture to attempt a solution of the difficulty by an illustration? A large landholder employs a thousand men to cultivate his farm. They are at liberty to use whatever they can raise; and he who reaps a thousand bushels of wheat from an acre of ground shall become the sole owner of his estate. They enter upon their work. Those who are industrious and skilful obtain larger harvests than they can consume. None but the careless and idle fail to secure a comfortable livelihood; while even the most diligent does not approach the product which is to secure for him the ownership of the farm. Not an hour's labour is bestowed by any which does not find a reward independently of the munificent conditional donation. The hands are all dismissed at the close of the season; and has any injustice been done? Has not each received what it was agreed he should have?

Now, suppose the landholder concludes to give away his estate unconditionally; and, for reasons best known to himself, selects as the object of his bounty one of the most idle and thriftless of the hands who had been employed on his farm. Does it lie in the mouth of the nine hundred and ninety-nine to say that the reward of their industry is any less for such an act, or that it operates as a premium on idleness and sloth? The reward of their industry was a matter of debt. Those who earned their living enjoyed it. The bestowment of the farm was a matter of grace; and was received and improved as such. He who received it acknowledged that he had no title to it, and that it might have been bestowed with equal *justice* on any other.

The virtues which adorned the character of the young ruler who came running and kneeling before the Saviour were so rare and conspicuous as to command His love; but while he lacked ONE THING the gates of paradise were as effectually

barred against him as against those who lack everything. The whole scheme of human salvation is characterised by this grand feature, GRACE—FREE GRACE; and hence the virtuous and admirable traits which we justly applaud and present for imitation, though of great value to the possessor, and of inestimable advantage to society, are of no account in determining how the gifts of grace shall be distributed. If a score of debtors owe more than they can possibly pay, an inexorable creditor will not discriminate between the different amounts of their indebtedness. They will be cast into a common prison. Such an inexorable creditor to us is the law of works. His language is, "Pay me that thou owest." And he will not allow us to depart till we have paid the uttermost farthing. But in an appeal for relief to a throne of grace, the terms of acceptance are all changed. He who owes five hundred pounds is no worse off than he who owes fifty or only one. It is not wealth, but want—not innocence, but penitence—not obedience, but faith—that finds acceptance there.

There is a story told by a Persian poet, resembling, though utterly inferior to, the narrative of the interview, at the house of Simon the Pharisee, between Christ and the woman that was a sinner.

The poet says that when the divine prophet was on earth he was entertained on one occasion in the cell of a monk, or dervish, of eminent reputation for sanctity. In the same city there dwelt a youth who was distinguished for being addicted to gross sins. This youth presently appeared before the cell of the monk, and, as if smitten by the presence of the divine prophet, began to lament bitterly the sin and misery of his past life, and with abundant tears implored pardon and grace. The monk, indignantly rebuking his presumption for thus appearing in his presence and that of God's holy prophet, assured him that it was in vain for him to ask forgiveness; and, in proof of the inexorable doom of the poor youth, he exclaimed, "May God grant me but one thing—that I may

stand far from this man on the day of judgment!" On this the divine prophet said, "The prayer of both shall be granted. This sinful but penitent youth has sought mercy in an accepted time, and it shall be shewn him. His sins, though many, are forgiven. This monk desires not to be where the forgiven sinner is; and thither he shall never come."

The austere monk has no merit that justice can recognise; and the pleading penitent has no sin for which grace has not a pardon.

In the frequent interviews I have had with young friends who were inclined to think upon their ways, I have met with not a few who were unwilling to allow that their remaining in a state of alienation from God was any fault of theirs, but never with one who would not allow that something had been left undone that might have been done to secure a reconciliation.

Now, a clear apprehension of the mission and offices of Christ, a simple, childlike confidence in His power and willingness to save ME—individually, personally—and a cheerful, complete surrender of soul and body to His service for ever, make me one with Him, and beget in me a HOPE, more or less distinct and buoyant according to the strength of my faith, that "because He lives I shall live also." If I can trace, in my prevailing emotions and habitual conduct, a predominant reference to His will, and an influential desire to do those things which I believe to be well-pleasing in His sight, I may HOPE that "He is mine, and that I am His;" and if, upon such evidence, confirmed by the witness of the Spirit, I am warranted to regard myself as a child of God, then I am an heir—"an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ" If I suffer with Him, I shall be glorified with Him. I shall be like Him; for I shall see Him as He is. To be like Him is to be holy; and to be holy is to be happy.

The HOPE of such a portion fills my soul with peace and joy. The light afflictions which attend my brief sojourn in

this vale of tears become insignificant. Life itself seems like a vapour that appeareth for a little time, only to vanish away ; and then comes a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory—a tearless, sinless, endless rest !

Such a HOPE lifts me above all the changes and chances of time. It lives on the very borders of heaven, and catches glimpses of the glories and faint echoes of the songs of the redeemed already there.

In the midst of a busy world, and in the full tide of health and prosperity, the mind is slow to realise the value of such a hope. But to the child of sorrow, to the sufferer by sad reverses, to the disappointed and care-worn, to the weary occupant of a sick-bed, what can irradiate the future with a gleam of gladness like the HOPE of perfect, blissful, eternal rest at last ? Some of you have been long, and perhaps often, absent from home. Have you not noticed, when you returned even after a brief absence, and drew near to the place where so many of your dearest joys are garnered up, how vividly imagination presents the beaming smile of a welcoming group, and the warm embrace of loving parents ? The anticipations of heavenly joy and glory which the souls of the righteous often experience are not less vivid and animating. Their most intimate communion has long been with the scenes and inhabitants of the spiritual world. Long has

“ The rapt soul

Listen'd, as if celestial harmony
Her powers enchain'd—as if the paradise
Of blessed ones unfolded to her view
Inviting entrance.”

You have heard or read (perhaps with incredulity) of the ecstasy with which many of the disciples of Christ have entered the valley of the shadow of death. Whatever may be properly put to the account of extreme nervous sensibility or derangement, in some of these cases, there are others in which the structure of the mind and the complete self-possession of the

sufferer forbid any such deduction. There was no anterior period of their lives in which more unequivocal evidence of intellectual vigour and the clear conception of truth was given than when their spirits were about to pass into the unseen world.

It has been my chief purpose to produce in your mind the conviction, that the Christian hope is no shadowy, dreamy expectation of a mere possible, or even probable, good, to be attained in some way, but where, or when, or how, is an unsolved mystery. It is this false view of the character of such a hope that leads many to undervalue, if not to discredit it.

If he attempts to conceive of the self-existence and attributes of God, or to fathom the counsels of eternal love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, or to bring the administration of Divine Providence, extending to all worlds and throughout all ages, into harmony with the judgment of the creatures of yesterday, his efforts will be alike presumptuous and futile. But if he will take the volume of Holy Scripture reverently into his hands, and consult its inspired pages with a prayerful, humble, devout spirit, he will not be long in discovering the true nature, basis, and value of a Christian hope. "The meek God guides into judgment, and the meek doth He teach His way." When the Spirit of all truth comes to the soul with enlightening and sanctifying power, its language becomes at once that of filial confidence and buoyant hope :—

"Holy Saviour! Friend unseen!
Since on thine arm Thou bidst me lean,
Help me throughout life's varied scene,
By faith, to cling to Thee!

"Blest with Thy fellowship divine,
Take what Thou wilt, I'll ne'er repine:
E'en as the branches to the vine,
My soul will cling to Thee!

"Without a murmur, I dismiss
My former dreams of earthly bliss,
My joy, my consolation this,
Each hour to cling to Thee!

“ Oft, when I seem to tread alone
Some barren waste with thorns o’ergrown,
Thy voice of love, in tenderest tone,
Whispers, ‘ Still cling to Me !’

“ Blest is my lot, whate’er befall ;
Nought can disturb me, nought appal,
Whilst, as my ROCK, my strength, my all,
Saviour, I cling to Thee !”

CHAPTER VIII.

Further of the Christian hope and its influences—Not an inert principle—
The duty of professing it before men—What such a profession implies
—Mistaken views of its obligations—A letter to an inquirer on that
subject.

THERE is a vagueness in the ideas which are often entertained of the Christian hope, which I should be sorry to suppose prevails among you ; and yet, in a matter of so much consequence to our comfort and safety, it may not be amiss to analyse it a little more carefully.

It is spoken of in Holy Scripture as a “lively” or living hope, “to which we are begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ;” and it is, in its very nature, ACTIVE and INFLUENTIAL. The hope of saving a human life exposed to danger by fire or water inspires an extraordinary courage and energy. The hope of regaining health braces up the sick man to the endurance of the most repulsive remedies. The hope of realising large gains prompts the adventurer to incur all the hazards of unhealthy climates, and of journeying through unexplored territories and among savage tribes. It is represented as holding the soul “sure and steadfast” in calm self-possession—in the midst of life’s severest calamities, as the gallant ship rides securely at anchor against fierce winds and mountain waves. We may reasonably expect, therefore, that its presence will be indicated by very decided tokens. Among these, alacrity and earnestness in the discharge of all the duties to which such a hope is fitted to stimulate us, would not be the least conspicuous.

The Christian hope has its origin, life, and end in CHRIST. To resemble and serve Him here is the predominant desire and

effort of His true disciples, while their joy and glory will be to behold and dwell with Him for ever hereafter. Of course, obedience to His commands will be the first and plainest duty; and of these commands none is more clear and peremptory than that of confessing Him before men.

In what FORM such a confession is to be made, is not so clear. There have been periods in the history of Christianity, as you well know, in which any recognition of Christ's claims to the love and confidence of men exposed the party to cruel mockings and scourgings, to torture, and to death. All testimony to Him as the Son of God was then sealed with blood. At other times, the like profession has been a passport to credit and influence, and has often been made from motives which could not but be offensive to the "Searcher of hearts."

In almost all Christian communities, the act or ceremony by which those who embrace the faith of Christ become distinguished outwardly from others, is their union with some organised body of believers, with whom they commemorate the death of Christ in what is called the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. With the various forms, terms, and conditions under which this introduction to the visible fold of Christ is accomplished, it is not my purpose to perplex you; nor would it be worth while to explain to you the various constructions or interpretations which have been put upon the words and acts of our Saviour and His apostles to support these several theories. Suffice it to say that the duty of some avowal of our religion and attachment to Him is clearly implied in the declaration from our Saviour's lips, that "whosoever confesseth Him before men, him will He confess before His Father which is in heaven."

The first and most important question to settle in your own mind and in the sight of God is this:—Do I REALLY WANT TO BE A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST?

To one who appreciates in any degree the love which brought the Son of God to our earth to make Himself an offering for

our sins, it would seem superfluous, and almost impertinent, to put a confession of our obligation on the footing of a mere *duty*. It would seem as if natural instinct would prompt the object of such matchless love to a fervent and ceaseless tribute of gratitude and praise. The modes and forms of doing it would be overleaped in the irrepressible gush of grateful emotions.

You must allow me, in this connexion, to refer to a regret sometimes expressed, that a profession of religion rendered the inconsistencies of life so much more glaring. Such a view shews an entire mistake as to the true cause of regret. The obligations to a religious life are altogether above and anterior to any external profession. Every intelligent creature upon earth is bound to love God with all the heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and his neighbour as himself. Those who live nearest to God can do no more; and those who are farthest from Him have no valid excuse for doing less. Nothing can be more inconsistent than for a creature of God to forget or disobey his Creator. The duty of a child to love and reverence his parents is not made more clear or imperative by the child's profession of love and reverence. The acknowledgment of a debt may revive evidence which has been rendered doubtful by lapse of time; but it adds no force to the claim of the creditor or the obligation of the debtor. In like manner, whatever duties we owe to God or to our fellow-men are not made more imperative by our public recognition of them. The disciples of our Saviour were all under as much obligation to follow Him through evil report and through good report as was Peter. They were all equally reprehensible for deserting Him in His extremity; but Peter's pusillanimity was specially marked by its contrast with his professions of fidelity and devotion. If he had joined himself to the disciples, as Judas Iscariot may have done, *with the intent to betray Him*, the crime would be greatly aggravated. And so, if one connects himself with the visible Church of Christ by a conscious false

profession, he adds the detestable sin of hypocrisy to that of disobedience, which is in itself an offence against God, independently of all church-relations.

Have I disabused your minds of the impression that by not making a profession of religion you avoid the obligations to love and serve God which lie upon church-members? In other words, do you not see that, whatever love or service to Christ is required of His followers, it is no more than every one is bound to render who hears the gospel?

The exhortations to Christians, as such, which are so frequent in the Bible, are not addressed to them rather than to others because their obligations are of any higher or different character, but because their deficiencies or inconsistencies are and must be more conspicuous. The case is simply this. We are all under obligation to be the servants of the most High God. The large majority of the world around us virtually deny all allegiance to Him. "They regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operations of His hands." The line of separation between the followers of Baal and the children of Israel, when at the prophet's summons they assembled in the shadow of Mount Carmel to test the respective claims of their objects of worship to be God, was not more distinct than is the line which actually separates the servants of God from the rest of mankind,

To be classed with the former requires a positive stepping out from the ranks of the latter, and a conscious, visible coalescence of affections, sympathies, and purposes with the former. A profession of religion, by whatever form or ceremony it is made, is the taking of this step. It is an avowed renunciation of the world as the portion of the soul, and an unreserved voluntary self-dedication to His service. It is no more than *all* are bound to do who acknowledge the right of their Maker and Redeemer to their love and confidence; and not to do it, is in effect to remain with those who practically say to God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy

ways." I am quite sure that any position of your relations to God could not be *less* desirable in your eyes than this ; and hence my conviction that you will not feel disposed further to urge an objection to a public profession of religion on the ground of its subjecting you to restraints which are not equally imposed upon all men everywhere and under all circumstances.

Questions often arise as to particular points of duty in connexion with this subject. In conversation with young friends who were favourably disposed towards a profession of their faith, they have sometimes spoken of their unfitness to sit down at what the apostle calls the "Lord's table." "It would be a great privilege," they say, "to do so ; but they feel so little love to Christ, and are so often betrayed into follies and sins, that they cannot persuade themselves that such a step in their case would be warranted." And perhaps it would not be. Yet is there not a still more important question lying behind that ? Admitting their apologies for neglecting a profession of religion, that they are not fit to sit down at the table spread in the wilderness for the refreshment of weary pilgrims on their way to the land of Canaan, may we not ask if they are any more fit to sit down with the redeemed at the marriage supper of the Lamb, when their pilgrimage is accomplished ? Whether they partake of the elements of the body and blood of Christ on earth is a matter of very little moment compared with their true and hearty acceptance of Him, by faith, as their only and all-sufficient Saviour, and their preparation for His perfect and eternal service in heaven.

I have sometimes inquired of such apologists what they supposed they would do if the Saviour should reappear on the earth in our nature, and walk our streets as He did the streets of Jerusalem and Capernaum. He is pointed out to you as Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour of sinners. You see a crowd around Him, but are at no loss to distinguish His figure and features. You are with a friend on the opposite side of the street who does not recognise His authority as a teacher sent

from God, nor His claims to be regarded as the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world. A few follow Him wherever He goes, listen eagerly to His words, witness with wonder His miracles of mercy, and avow their determination to share His reproach and maintain His cause. These are His disciples. You say to your friend,—

“I would like well to make one of the little group that surround that despised Nazarene ; but I do not feel as if I were good enough to be in such a company.”

“Why,” your friend replies, “I thought His pretended mission was to call, not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. I have heard that one of His sayings is, ‘They that are whole need not a physician ; but they that are sick.’ Indeed, they call Him, by way of reproach, ‘the Friend of sinners.’ If that is really His office, the worse you think of yourself the more you must be drawn towards Him. If I thought of myself as you do of yourself, I should make haste to join Him.”

Unmoved by this pungent exposure of your inconsistency, you turn the next corner, and soon are out of sight of the multitude, and out of hearing of their hosannas and curses. Could you flatter yourself that it was really a sense of unfitness to be His disciple that deterred you from following Him ? Is it credible to yourself that what true love would prompt you to do under such circumstances, humility would restrain you from doing. “The woman that was a sinner” had quite as lowly an opinion of herself as you can have ; but she ventured where few like her would have dared to go. She expressed her love and faith by acts which betokened the depth and fervour of both ; and she received extraordinary assurance of forgiveness and peace from Him “who spake as never man spake.”

I do not know that I can offer any suggestions to you on the subject of a public profession of religion in a better form than by transcribing a letter which I addressed some time ago

to a young friend, not yet out of school, who was perplexed about her duty in this respect. Many circumstances in her domestic and social relations increased the embarrassments which youth and inexperience would of themselves occasion; and though my reply to her inquiries may not cover all the points of doubt and difficulty which beset that crisis in religious thought and emotions, it may supply some general principles by which they may be solved, at least in part:—

“I need not say, my dear ——, that your note interested me very much; but I feel no little perplexity in respect to a reply. I should be unwilling to say a word to you which I would not say in presence of your parents, to whom (next to your Creator) your first duties are to be paid. They have the first right (of all earthly relations) to your obedience and affection. But I am confident they would never interfere with what they believed to be your conscientious convictions of duty on the subject of religion. They are bound, you know, to instruct you in matters of truth and duty, and to counsel you in respect to the course you should pursue in the discharge of your religious obligations. But in the matter of *personal* salvation the responsibility is an *individual* one. If you should follow advice that misleads you, while your own convictions are stifled, it would avail but little to say that you *supposed* your adviser knew. You have your own conscience, which, if neither corrupted, blinded, nor seared, will give true answers to all important questions of right and wrong. God has given you a mind capable of weighing evidence and affections, which can be moved towards Him as well as towards an earthly benefactor. He has put into your hands a revelation of His will, which is simple and plain; and by faith in it the soul is made wise unto salvation. In condescension to our weakness and natural aversion to what is holy, just, and good, He has promised to add to all other gifts the influence of His Holy Spirit, to enlighten and sanctify us. This gift is

the purchase of the sufferings and death of Christ, who, by making Himself an offering for sin, has opened the way by which the chief of sinners may return to God, and find pardon, peace, and eternal life.

“ Religion is something immeasurably above Presbyterianism, Episcopacy, or Methodism. When people are spoken of as intelligently ‘religious’ persons, we think of them as acknowledging their obligations to serve God, and as striving constantly to fulfil them. To be truly religious, is to be a child of God, a disciple of Christ, a subject of regenerating and saving grace. And if these qualities and relations exist, it is a matter of very subordinate consequence to what particular class or communion of the Christian body we join ourselves, except as the requirements and usages of one may be better fitted to advance us in the divine life than those of another. Of this we must judge on our own responsibility, though not without due deference to the opinion of those whom we are bound to love and respect.

“ *To be religious* is the duty of every human being ; and every human being who desires to be so, has the means and opportunities, though not the same means nor the same opportunities. *Not to be religious* is to fail of the great end of existence !

“ For wise reasons, the Founder of the Christian faith has required that those who embrace it shall make an open declaration of their choice or allegiance. The world is alienated from Him ; and so radical and complete is this alienation that He has said, ‘ Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.’ From the beginning of the gospel dispensation, the confession of Christ before men has been prescribed as the condition on which He will confess or recognise His professed followers in the day of final retribution. No one supposes that a profession of discipleship, *of itself*, makes one a disciple. Nor does a man’s joining the army on the eve of battle prove his good soldiership, or his loyalty to his country.

But, if such a one would be counted other than an enemy or a spy by both sides, he will not fail to avow his sympathy with one or the other. It cannot be doubted, I think, that where there are two parties, occupying antagonistic positions, one of which we believe to be altogether right and the other altogether wrong, the influence of a *neutral* spectator is really given to the wrong.

“The Bible represents the whole world to be ‘lying in wickedness;’ and our natural sympathies are with it. Of course, those who do not separate themselves from it by an open, unequivocal espousal of the service of God, virtually side with the world. The duty of making such an avowal should be clearly apprehended; and care should be taken that the motives prompting to it are neither impure nor transient; and then may come the question of *time*.

“My own conviction is, that the step should not be long delayed after the mind is deliberately and intelligently made up to take it. If the Bible is to be received as a revelation from God, there is no obligation resting upon us to be compared in importance and solemnity to that of acknowledging our indebtedness exclusively to Christ for our hope of salvation. ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his *friends*; but God hath commended his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners [and, of course, *enemies*] Christ died for us.’ Holy Scripture exhorts us to give ‘thanks to God for His unspeakable gift.’ Hundreds of thousands of Protestant Christians, in every part of the world, unite in weekly, if not daily, thanksgivings to God, ‘above all things, for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.’

“Had you never known your parents, but yet had received from them daily and hourly tokens of their love ever since you were born, and should you unexpectedly find yourself in the same room with them, and be told that to them you owed all the comforts and blessings of your life, would you ask

time to consider when and how you should express your gratitude? Or would you hasten to make your heartfelt acknowledgment, and repel the thought of waiting as unnatural and base? And have we a single comfort or blessing, privilege or hope, which has not been purchased for us by the sacrifice of Christ? Have not His mysterious incarnation, obedience, and death prepared the way for our return to our Father's house, in the sure and certain hope of forgiveness and acceptance? Could we anticipate admission to the marriage supper of the Lamb if a wedding garment had not been purchased for us at such an inconceivable price?

“Ah! my dear —, we have very inadequate ideas of the holiness of the Divine law which condemns us, of the penalty which we have incurred by the transgression of it, and of the helpless and hopeless condition of our race; and that is the reason why the infinite grace of God, displayed in the person and offices of His Son, our Saviour, does not fill us with wonder, love, and praise. Why we should delay to acknowledge our indebtedness to Him in accordance with His commands, after we have been led by His gracious Spirit to feel our need of Him, and are assured of His power and willingness to save us, I cannot conceive.

“There is in many minds a reluctance to assume the position of a disciple of Christ, through fear of dishonouring Him. But surely we are doing nothing to honour Him or His cause by neglecting to avow a faith we feel or an obligation we acknowledge. If He were now present, and you were persuaded of His claims to your confidence, would you forbear to join His followers from a fear that you might afterwards desert Him? Would you not rather go to Him the sooner, saying, ‘My gracious Saviour! I am a poor sinful creature, with a treacherous heart and wayward affections; but I desire to follow Thee through good report and evil report; and, while I do my best to cleave to Thee, I must rely solely on Thy grace and strength to keep me from betraying or deserting Thee.’

“You know our Saviour called Peter to be one of His disciples with full knowledge that he would prove false; but if he had not gone when he was called, he would not have proved false, it is true, but neither would he have been the pioneer apostle of the Christian faith.

“It is a very dangerous thing to defer the discharge of any known duty. I am aware that persons have been over-persuaded to make a profession of religion, and have deplored their error; but thousands and tens of thousands have bitterly lamented their neglect to do it.

“You will not understand me to regard a *profession* of religion as a *means* of becoming religious, nor as essential to salvation. If it is not the expression of unfeigned sorrow for sin, true faith in and love to Christ, and a determination, with Divine aid, to serve and glorify God, it is worse than a form. It is not only empty, but impious. And for myself, I can truly say that I have never urged any one to make such a profession until the duty and desire were so deeply and intelligently felt, that not to do it would be to violate both.

“And, now, I will only say a word about the *place*. The diversity of views and usages which separate different communions of Christians from each other, to which you refer, is, indeed, very perplexing. But ‘we have a sure word of prophecy,’ to which we are admonished ‘to take heed as unto a light shining in a dark place.’ In all those various groups that hold to the cardinal truths contained in what is known as ‘The Apostles’ Creed,’ there are men and women whom Christ owns as His disciples. In determining which of them we will join, we are authorised to inquire in which we shall be most likely to grow in grace and in knowledge and in likeness to our Divine Redeemer. We should be careful that no private, selfish, or worldly motives are allowed to influence our choice; and, as far as may be consistent with the clear convictions of conscience and the development of God’s will, we should avoid acting contrary to the wishes of those to whose opinions we are

bound to shew deference. In questions involving duty to God and testimonies against the world and its pomps and vanities, there can be no compromise. When the converted Saul was restored to consciousness, his first inquiry was, 'Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?' He conferred not with flesh and blood; nor must *we*, when the path of duty is plainly revealed.

"I have mingled much with evangelical Christians of various denominations, and have found equally earnest, devoted, and godly people in them all. I think the considerations which usually sway persons in their choice of the church which they shall join, are not very definite or well settled. Education, habit, taste, casual association, or a preference for this or that preacher, doubtless influence multitudes. If a child of mine should choose to join a different church from that to which I belong, I should not object to it, provided I was convinced that the choice was intelligently made, and that the truth, as revealed in Christ's gospel, would be faithfully preached, and His ordinances duly administered in it. Of course I should wish to be satisfied that the associations would be favourable to the healthful and harmonious development of Christian character.

"Had you asked me whether you should make a profession of religion, I might have replied, 'Yes, if you are religious;' had you asked *when*, I might have replied, 'Whenever a suitable opportunity occurs;' and had you asked *where*, I might have said, 'Wherever you will be most edified.' But such replies would not relieve your perplexity. I am aware of the delicacy of your position. Some of your dearest friends—and among them those to whom you owe much—are not favourable to your making any religious profession; and it must be very painful to you to take so important a step without their full sympathy. But they will be the last to hinder you from doing what, before God, you feel it to be your duty to do. And they will fully accord in the sentiment that kindred and friends, and life itself, must be surrendered freely and cheerfully if they

cannot be retained without a violation of conscience or neglect of duty to God.

“Your best counsellor is always with you, and His love is stronger than a mother’s. I can gladly commend you to Him, with the assurance He himself has given, that whatsoever you shall ask of Him, believing, you shall receive.

“Very truly and affectionately yours,

“ ——— ———.”

“Take for your motto, till this question is settled, Psalm xxxvii. 5.”

CHAPTER IX

What is expected of those who make a profession of religion—The hidden life—Traits of Christian character.

OF an act more solemn in its nature, or more important in its relations and consequences, than a person's public consecration of himself to the service of Christ, it is difficult to conceive. For though, as I have often told you, it does not add any force to pre-existing obligations under which we all lie to serve and glorify God, it is a deliberate, express acknowledgment of them.

Perhaps some of their acquaintance expect to see some strange metamorphosis of their habits and manners. They may look for a graver expression of countenance, and an abstinence from what, heretofore, they have regarded as lawful indulgences. Have you never noticed how very common it is to regard "belonging to the church," or not belonging to it, as the criterion for determining whether the individual will pursue this or that course of conduct? A party of pleasure is proposed. In making out a list of persons to be invited, a name is mentioned, and it is immediately said, "You needn't invite him, (or her,) for he is a member of the church, and will not go, I am sure." Or some one speaks of having met A, B, or C at a convivial party, or some place of equivocal character, when another expresses his surprise, "Why, I thought he was a member of the church?" Or some gross moral delinquency comes to light, and, after all other aggravating circumstances have been alleged, the climax is capped by saying, "And, only think! a member of the church, too!"

All these modes of expression indicate a prevalent popular

notion that joining the church is embracing Christianity, whereas, in truth, it is only the avowal of a faith which may have been in full exercise for months or years, or which may not exist at all even now. It is assuming a position which authorises the world to hold us to a certain line of conduct. If our young friends who have joined the Church were prepared for the step they have taken, as I trust they were, the revolution in their views and principles was an anterior event, the result of which must of necessity be a new purpose and tenor of life, new pursuits, affinities, and associations, among which is this connexion with the people of God.

Whatever there was attractive or agreeable in their appearance, disposition, and deportment before, becomes more so by virtue of this new element of character. You know how often the fascinations of feature and figure are eclipsed completely by grace of manners and rare colloquial powers; and I dare say you have seen with what facility a meek and gentle spirit wins admiration, which even the most captivating personal accomplishments fail to secure.

I need not say to you that there is no virtue or grace in the mere act of partaking of the consecrated elements-used in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The partaker is the same after as before, unless his pre-existing or concurrent faith has been strengthened, and his affections, already supremely fixed on God, have been quickened and elevated by this appointed means of grace. Outward ordinances are the steps by which we climb Mount Zion; not the mountain itself, nor yet the beautiful temple which crowns its summit, and which we are striving, by slow and toilsome steps, to reach. The distinction I make is one of great practical importance. There are few more fruitful sources of error than the substitution of the modes and forms in which religious emotions are expressed for religion itself. The spring of all such emotions is hidden from human view. The man, so far as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life" are concerned, is

dead. "His life is hid with Christ in God." The tokens of this inner, hidden life correspond with its nature. They are spiritual. Was your friend naturally truthful, affectionate, and gentle? Her religion, if it is genuine, will give new strength and lustre to these qualities: It may, indeed, present to her new objects of sympathy, and excite aspirations and hopes to which she was previously a stranger. But it cannot possibly diminish or deform anything in her character that was pure, lovely, and of good report, or divest it of any quality that could properly command your esteem.

Suppose we inquire briefly for some of the traits which may be reasonably looked for in a young Christian, but which are too often very imperfectly exhibited.

1. *Religion ought to make us cheerful.* Perhaps no impression is more general upon worldly minds than that religion sours the temper, and gives a supercilious and austere character to the bearing of its professors. As if the green earth were not greener, the bright stars brighter, the glowing sun more genial, and all the creatures of God more glorious and beautiful, to one who has been adopted into his family, than they can be to strangers and aliens!

The child of God has implicit confidence in the infinite wisdom and benevolence of all his Father's doings. He cannot comprehend His counsels, nor the vast arrangements by which He accomplishes His ends; but, like the feeble, ignorant, trustful child of an earthly father, he is glad to be led, step by step, in whatever path may be chosen for him, and is cheered by the confidence that none of his steps shall slide. No change of time, no shock of sorrow or adversity, no assaults of malignant adversaries can much confound or long disturb him that "dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High."

When we see persons whom we suppose to be sincere Christians yielding to violent emotions of grief or mortification under some sore calamity or unexpected reverses, we may hastily conclude that they distrust the wisdom or love of their heavenly

Father. But we forget that our religion does not profess, nor is it designed, to enervate or blunt our natural affections. The end would be defeated by such a result. Its Divine Founder was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Human nature knows no deeper emotions than He manifested in the days of His flesh; and now that He "is exalted above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named either in this world or in that which is to come," He sympathises no less deeply in human sorrow, and offers no less liberally His succour and support.

When you see one whom you have supposed to be a disciple of Christ groaning and weeping under the pressure of sorrow, think of a crucible in which a refiner is purifying some precious metal from dross. The glowing heat, though almost intolerable to the refiner himself, is indispensable to complete the process; nor (as it has been beautifully said) will it be complete till the metal is so pure that his own image is reflected from its surface. True religion is a purifying principle; and the afflictive dispensations of God's providence are designed not only to test its genuineness, but to increase its strength and activity.

"The ground may be covered with gay flowers, and yet be a desert; but when it is broken up and harrowed I feel sure the husbandman has been there, and that he means to sow seed there, and in due time I shall look for a crop."

Sustaining grace is bestowed by the same hand that holds the rod; and hence the apparent paradox of "joy in tribulation." If there were no tears, who would know the blessedness of having them wiped away in the world to come?

"Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
 God's messenger sent down to thee. Do thou
 With courtesy receive him; rise and bow;
 And, ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
 Permission first his heavenly feet to lave,
 Then lay before him all thou hast. Grief should be
 Like joy—majestic, equable, sedate,
 Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free;

Strong to consume small troubles ; to commend
Great thoughts—grave thoughts—thoughts lasting to the end.”

2. *Religion also checks undue elevation and excitement in seasons of prosperity.* The desires and affections are kept in that state of quiet, submissive, satisfied repose which is most conducive to the true enjoyment of the present world, and to the due preparation of the soul for the next. I can conceive of no condition so completely adapted to the wants of the human soul, through its whole being, as that of one who has fully consecrated himself to the service of God ; merged his own will in the will of God ; accepted the pardon of his sins through divine mercy in Christ, with a grateful, penitent, trustful heart, and relies upon covenanted grace for strength to obtain the victory, and more than a victory, in every conflict,—even the last. I can conceive of nothing that would add to the safety or happiness of such a one. With nothing to mar his present joy, nothing to overcast his bright future, who should be cheerful if not he ? Why should a scowl of discontent ever cloud his brow, or an anxious sigh escape his lips ? The voice he hears in the stormy wind and tempest is the same that speaks to him in the genial sunshine and gentle shower. The present life and the future are only two conditions, in which the same service is to be performed for the same Master : *here*, imperfectly, and with many clogs and drawbacks ; *there*, purely, perfectly, and eternally. Let every Christian be cheerful, buoyant, and happy, if he would persuade his fellow-men that his religion is his chief joy.

3. *Religion, if genuine, will prompt us to do all the good we can,*—not only embracing opportunities of usefulness which present themselves, but seeking them out, and qualifying ourselves for the highest improvement of them.

Some persons act as if a connexion with the church absolved them from all further responsibility. They go from the world into the church as a traveller steps from a wharf to the deck of the vessel that is to convey him to a distant port. But, in

truth, to become a church-member, is to assume the profession and garb of a labourer in the vineyard of the Lord ; and though the service may not be entirely new, it is entered upon with more system and under new advantages. A constant and punctual use of the means of grace, which such a connexion affords, is an obvious duty. Attendance at the house of prayer, the careful observance of appointed ordinances, and a warm sympathy with the various plans and agencies for extending the blessings of the common salvation, may be reasonably expected ; and yet to some of these duties young Christians are very apt to grow indifferent. It is not unusual to observe a *religious activity* which has but a remote relation to *active religion*.

In the earnest, impetuous, perhaps conscientious, endeavour to be very useful, persons may neglect the cultivation of those graces which are essential to great usefulness in Christian enterprises. The traveller who is in such haste to accomplish his journey as to neglect to feed and rest his horse shows more zeal than judgment. There is a mistake not unfrequently made by those who are regarded as masters in Israel. It is in urging young persons to the occupation of conspicuous and responsible positions, for which they are ill qualified, as a means of giving them confidence and courage. If such experiments could be tried without putting in peril other interests quite as important, such a mistake would be less mischievous. It is very common to press quite young professors of religion into the very sacred and delicate office of teaching children in the Sunday-school, or of leading in the devotions of social assemblies. When the invitation is declined on the ground of conscientious incompetency, instead of commending the modesty which prompts a little delay, and using the interval for such instruction and training as shall prepare the party for better and more enduring service in a year or two, immediate entrance upon the work is urged,—oftentimes to the lasting disadvantage of all concerned. Many a man has carried deformed

limbs to the grave in consequence of being put upon his legs before they were strong enough to bear his weight. While we should not shrink from any duty which the providence of God plainly imposes, but, as just now intimated, should watch for opportunities to be useful, it is safer and better for us to occupy well an humble sphere than to attempt what may prove too high for us. Some travellers fail to reach their journey's end because they set out at a pace which they cannot maintain; and young Christians often become disheartened in consequence of abortive efforts to accomplish what is not within their province or power.

4. Naturally connected with the preceding cautions is some reference to the *private personal duties of your new profession*. The divine life once commenced admits of no halting. When the hand has been put to the plough there must be no looking back. No human being is, in his moral condition, to-day what he was yesterday. He is nearer to God or further from Him.

We have often discussed the various methods by which the life of God is maintained in the soul of man. The foot of the mysterious ladder upon which the angels of God ascended and descended rested upon earth, while its top was in heaven; and it is thus an appropriate emblem of the way of access which has been opened for sinners to the throne of grace. There is such a thing as communion with the infinite God even while the soul of the believer is imprisoned in the earthly house of this tabernacle; and it is only by such communion that it is nourished and strengthened, and armed for conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Every victory over a spiritual foe, every earnest prayer, every holy desire, gives the soul an upward impulse.

The Scriptures testify of Christ: and by reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting them, we are encouraged to hope for higher and further communications of the Spirit that dictated them. It is a good habit to read studiously, in soli-

tude, every morning, one chapter of the Old Testament and one in the New, and *no more*. Use a Bible with references ; and when important doctrines or duties are disclosed by the texts, carefully examine parallel passages. When doubt or obscurity occurs, it is sometimes of service to consult a commentator ; but consult him as you would an intelligent Christian friend who happened to be in the house,—not as conclusive authority, nor to save yourself the trouble of thinking, nor for the gratification of curiosity to see of what ingenious interpretation it may be susceptible, but to gain the advantage of a comparison of opinions.

Read with care. Preserve, if possible, in the mind or on paper, some connexion between the portions read, so far as it exists, or so far as the references enable you to trace one. It is well after reading to allow the mind to dwell for a little season on the particular scope of the passage, and to seek, both before and after, those gracious influences by which the dark understanding is enlightened, and the mind enabled to discern, the conscience to apply, and the heart to feel and yield to the truth.

5. Such a preparation for the duties and temptations of each day must be followed up by a *watchful superintendence of the heart and tongue*. The more exact the rule and rigid its application, the more obvious the inequalities of the surface to which it is applied. People who compare themselves among themselves slip along very easily ; but he that looks into the perfect law of God, as into a mirror, will readily discern deformities and defilements which will keep him humble. His secret sins will be revealed in a light so strong and clear that he will be driven for succour and safety “to the Rock that is higher than himself.”

No wonder that the young disciple is often baffled in contests with the prince of darkness. He would be cast down and utterly destroyed were it not that his faith is in One whose

strength is made perfect in his weakness, and who has promised a complete victory to those who are not faithless, but believing. The nearer he approaches to God, the more hideous and revolting will sin appear. What a joyful, animating thought it is, that when admitted to His blissful presence we shall be beyond the reach not only of sin, but of temptation!

CHAPTER X.

Religion a pervading principle—Apparel and amusements—Exercise—The Lord's-day and its occupations—Sunday reading.

THERE are some topics, of subordinate importance, perhaps, upon which you will allow me to give you a few hints.

When the leaven is hid in the meal, its influence pervades the whole mass, Not a particle escapes. "The whole is leavened." So the Christian principle, when fairly installed in the government of the thoughts and conduct, exerts its power over every act and purpose.

You will agree with me, I presume, that good taste is as much evinced as sound judgment and propriety in *simplicity of apparel*. This may be observed without excluding from one's wardrobe a single item which would contribute to real grace, dignity, or personal attractiveness. You are perhaps scarcely aware of the transparency of the motive which prompts the superfluous adornment or ostentatious display of the person. There can be no doubt of the lawfulness and, indeed, the duty of making ourselves agreeable to others, not only in our manners and conversation, but in our personal carriage and appearance; and hence it is right to consult propriety and good taste in the adaptation and congruity of dress. But the slavish regard to prevailing fashions, the restless desire to be in them, and the obvious intent to attract notice by a display of personal ornaments, are as repugnant to good sense as to religious duty and consistency. There is something very suggestive and humiliating in the familiar couplet of the child's hymn:—

"The art of dress did ne'er begin
Till Eve, our mother, learn'd to sin."

I would advocate no ultraism in either direction, but a steadfast adherence to that simplicity which is equally removed from severe plainness and garish display, and which betokens the absence of any desire to attract observation.

The apostle's injunction does not forbid a proper regard to taste and propriety in the matter of apparel.

To what extent you may safely adopt the practices, or mingle in the pursuits of the fashionable world, you need be at no loss to determine. You may be assured that no one has more unfeigned pleasure in witnessing the social enjoyments of young person than I have. I would promote them in all lawful ways. I am sure innocent indulgence in the pleasures which our heavenly Father has so bountifully provided and given us capacities to enjoy, contributes to health and to the full and harmonious development of our moral and physical nature. Nevertheless, I could not entertain the idea for a moment that to secure such enjoyment it is needful to be one of the giddy throng of fashion, gossip, and display, or to suffer with them the waste of vital energy, the encroachments on time, and the dissipation of all sober reflection, to say nothing of the fondness for flattery and admiration which is sure to be engendered. Of the absorbing demand thus made on the thoughts and purposes, the exposure of health, and the temptations to overstep the bounds of propriety and self-respect, I need not remind you.

On the subject of *amusements* I am well aware there is much diversity of opinion; and it is very difficult to prescribe any rule by which to fix the boundary between the harmless and the hurtful. My impression is, that the law of Christian duty interdicts much that is in itself perfectly innocent, and in which you and I (but for this law) might safely indulge; and hence it must be left in some measure to an enlightened conscience and a proper regard to the well-being of others to resolve many questions that may arise touching the lawfulness of this or that amusement.

It is certainly true that our physical and intellectual nature

is so constituted that amusement of some sort is craved with an eagerness not to be repressed. The moderate relaxation of mind and body is one of the first requisites to the health of either.

Sedentary amusements are well enough in their place, and, if not connected with the excitement of vicious passions nor conducive to the formation of vicious habits, should be encouraged. Cards are open to both these objections. In dancing, as it is practised in modern times, there is very little healthful exercise. The most fashionable forms in which it prevails are well fitted, and, doubtless, were originally designed, to minister to the lowest passions of our nature. No one pretends that the graceful motions of the body adjusted to the measure of music by two or more persons is, in itself, objectionable as an amusement; nor can any one look without pleasure upon a group of children in a private parlour engaged in this way. But who is illogical enough to argue from this that there is no less harmlessness in the indiscriminate association of the sexes in a public room, with all the display of person and dress which accompanies such scenes; the encroachment upon hours which nature claims for repose; the exposure of health by sudden transitions from one temperature to another, and the exhaustion of physical and mental powers which must necessarily succeed such irregularities? I cannot say that no one could come out of such a fiery trial of virtue and purity unscathed, but I am sure it is a risk which no considerate Christian would voluntarily incur; and I apprehend that familiarity with such scenes, however attractive and exciting at the moment, does not afford substantial satisfaction even to the votaries of the world.

The cultivation of a musical taste, and the moderate indulgence of it, is quite lawful and laudable. Whether the time and money which are bestowed on the mere accomplishment are wisely expended is not so clear. Few persons avail themselves of it in after-life as a source of amusement; and fewer still attain such a degree of skill as is needful to give much satisfaction to themselves or others. But our present business is

rather with the propriety or lawfulness of some of the forms of catering to the musical taste of the public which are regarded as objectionable.

Among these the opera holds the chief place. It is nothing more nor less than a dramatic composition set to music and sung upon the stage, accompanied with musical instruments and the usual machinery employed for stage effect. There can be no doubt that the appendages to the opera, apart from its musical attractions, are not essentially different from those of the theatre. The performers are generally of no better social or moral character. The incidents represented are not less open to animadversion, and the excitement is substantially the same in kind and degree. No one will pretend that attendance at such a place of amusement is fitted to prepare the mind for those daily duties which no Christian or servant of God would willingly neglect. Who does not encounter enough hindrances to a religious life, without going out of his way to multiply them?

There are those who attempt to fasten a charge of inconsistency upon such as oppose the opera, and yet admire some passages of the music, and even favour their introduction into the services of public worship. It would be quite as logical and just to say that because one quotes a sentence or two of sound truth from a very bad book, he indorses the book itself.

Some persons who condemn ordinary theatrical amusements shew favour to the opera as a means of cultivating a refined taste for music. Others regard all dramatic exhibitions as of evil tendency, and attendance upon them as inconsistent with Christian character or high moral principle. Without entering into an analysis of the arguments by which the advocates and opposers of theatrical or operatic amusements maintain their respective views, it will answer my present purpose to suggest a rule by which a conscientious person may determine the lawfulness or expediency of a proposed amusement. Many things lawful in themselves are interdicted because of their inexpedi-

ency. The professed follower of Christ occupies a peculiar position, and recognises peculiar laws. What may be lawful for others is unlawful for him. The philosopher, who is absorbed in investigating the laws of nature, is not diverted by a boy's top or bag of marbles ; nor is the boy attracted by the library or apparatus of the philosopher. The former never inquires if he may not spin a top just once, or play just one game at marbles, and still retain his standing among philosophers ; nor does the latter long for a peep at the books or a part in the analysis, if he could have it without losing caste among schoolboys. So the craving which a worldly mind feels for worldly amusements, in whatever sense the term is used, is not felt by the soul that has taken Christ for its portion. Its presence would of itself betoken a deceived heart.

My rule, then, would be, when your attendance is asked at a place or scene of public amusement, the propriety of which, in your own judgment, or in that of any judicious friend, is at all doubtful, the safer course is to abstain. It may, in any event, do you harm to go. It certainly can do you none to stay away ; for I presume there is no amusement so indispensable to happiness that to forego it would cost more than a momentary self-denial.

The conclusion to which we are brought on this point is, that to those who profess not to be their own, but to have voluntarily surrendered themselves, soul and body, to the service and glory of their Creator, worldly amusements in themselves considered must be altogether so distasteful as to make any prohibition of them superfluous. Knowing that the fashion of the world passes away, they live above it while they live in it, and use it as not abusing it.

The same general principle applies to the positive precepts of our holy religion. The desire of the new-born soul is not to relax or escape from the restrictions and obligations to which its spiritual birth introduces it. The dutiful and affectionate child does not ask how little she can do to testify her

love and gratitude to a faithful and loving father or mother. Let us apply this principle.

In the whole economy of Divine benevolence, affecting the condition of a human being in this world, there is scarcely a feature of more interest than the institution of a *day of rest*. We need not trouble ourselves with any elaborate inquiry into the time or manner of its inauguration, or in what way or to what extent it is connected with the Jewish Sabbath, nor how far the mode of observing it is prescribed or indicated by scriptural authority. Here we are in a Christian land, and here is an ordinance claiming a divine origin, and sanctioned by the laws and usages of Christian society. It requires us at intervals of six days to separate ourselves as far as practicable from the ordinary cares and employments of our daily life—"the things seen and temporal"—and give a few hours more exclusively to the interests of the soul—"the things unseen and eternal."

A false view of the character and design of the Christian day of rest is sometimes given by those who are most earnest and conscientious in urging its observance. It is inconsistent with any just or intelligent conceptions of the Divine character to suppose that such an appointment is not eminently adapted to the well-being and happiness of the world. "THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN," not for Pagan or Mohammedan, Jew or Christian, but for MAN—for man as a mortal and immortal creature, and a subject of God's government. That such an appointment is coeval with the race, is as capable of demonstration as any other historical fact. The lofty and indestructible monuments of its existence and observance stand out in all the annals of intervening ages; and one might as well deny that the sun was one thing in the days of Abraham, Isaiah, and Christ, and another now, as that the day of sacred rest which we enjoy was not substantially the same with that which awakened the sweetest tones of

"David's harp of solemn sound."

A moment's reflection must satisfy you that, apart from any requirements of the divine law, it is a most wholesome and needful respite from the whirl and bustle of ordinary life which the observance of such a rest every seventh day affords. The provision required for our bodily health and sustenance—the constant solicitation of our thoughts and sympathies by the things of time and sense—the strong disinclination (perhaps we may say aversion) of most minds to give heed to the interests of the remote and obscure future—are such, that, even with this periodical suspension of earthly cares, it is not easy to stem the tide of worldliness, and give even a few hours to the contemplation of the soul's better portion. Hence, instead of arguments being required to enforce the obligation to observe the Lord's-day, one would think any attempt to abridge or abolish it would be resisted as an assault upon liberty or life.

To make such a privilege available, it is clear that the observance must be general. Were different portions of time appropriated to this purpose, the affairs of life would be deranged. You have probably seen places of business, occupied by Jews, closed on Saturday, or the seventh day of the week ; and if others selected the second, or sixth, it would virtually leave us without either a day of rest or days of business : so that, to give us any advantage from such a season, it must be generally observed by all classes.

It is not my purpose to discuss the arguments for the Divine authority of the Lord's-day, or the various questions which have been debated (sometimes with more heat than force or judgment) as to what is lawful or unlawful on that day. Of one thing you may be assured. Those who treat the day with neglect or contempt, or ridicule the religious observance of it, seldom profess or feel much reverence for any other institution of religion. Those who have no sympathy with an ordinance so obviously designed to bring man into communion with his Maker are not likely to desire a knowledge of His ways through any other medium.

How shall this holy time be spent in order to derive the greatest advantage from it? is an inquiry I have often heard from my young friends, but which it is not possible to answer satisfactorily in general terms. So much depends on the circumstances and associations of each individual—on age, health, temperament, and opportunity—that no uniform method can be prescribed.

Let it never be forgotten that the Sabbath is no “day of wearisome forms, of gloomy bondage, and austere observance, of lifeless, monotonous worship, of listless, irksome vacancy, but one instinct with peace, with life, and with hopefulness, spent not in painfully seeking a half-unknown God, but enjoying and conversing with a Saviour, known, trusted in, and found faithful.”

In the reverent reading of Holy Scripture; the lifting up of the desires to God and heaven, the habitation of His holiness; in meditation upon the providence and grace of God; in the careful review of the way already trod, and earnest supplication for light and strength to pursue life’s journey; in devout attendance upon public worship; in such offices of charity and benevolence as can be consistently performed; and, above all, in holy meditation upon the glorious work of human redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ, of whose resurrection from the dead the day is chiefly commemorative, you will find abundant and grateful employment for every hour of sacred time.

I hope you will never be betrayed into the delusion that the religious observance of the Lord’s-day has no scriptural warrant.* But, even if it had not, its indispensableness to the physical and moral welfare of our world entitles it to all the reverence and regard which its warmest friends claim for it.

* Those who deny such authority would find it difficult to explain the language of St John the divine—“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” (Rev. i. 10,) without admitting that a day was recognised by the apostles, after the ascension of our Saviour, as the Lord’s; and it is for them to shew when or by whom it has been abolished.

In an age of great enterprise and activity like ours, it is difficult to sit down quietly and say imperatively—

“ Be earth, with all her scenes, withdrawn ;
Let noise and vanity be gone ;
In secret silence of the mind
My heaven, and there my God, I find.”

CHAPTER XL

Books and reading—A case—Instinctive precautions—Agency of the press in subverting truth—The mode of operation—Power of words as signs of ideas.

IN no former period of the world have such facilities existed for the diffusion of knowledge by means of the press as now; and it would be contrary to all the experience of mankind from the beginning, if the powers of darkness were not busy to avail themselves of them for purposes of evil. If two streams were running in different channels, side by side, one of which was turbid and poisonous, and the other pure and wholesome, the thirsty traveller, with his eyes open, could readily discern that there was a difference between them without tasting. But if they were flowing on together in the same channel, and the healthful and baneful currents could only be distinguished by great care and close examination, or even chemical analysis, he might well thank any one that should furnish him with a test.

Books have a prodigious power. I had a young friend once whose early years were passed under decided religious influences. He was endowed with unusual strength of mind, and at a very early period of his life became distinguished as a public man. He had been an observer of the devoted piety and triumphant death of Christian friends, whose hope of salvation had no basis but the blood and righteousness of Christ; and his own views until he reached maturity were settled (at least speculatively) upon the same foundation. But a printed sermon, by a distinguished preacher of a radically different faith, was put into his hands, and, with the help of peculiar personal associations, changed at once the whole current of his

views, and persuaded him to adopt a system of belief in which Christ and His cross occupy a very subordinate place, if recognised at all. I do not cite this case to encourage a blind adherence to one set of opinions, however hoary with age or fortified by venerable names or by the authority of powerful sects, but to illustrate the influence of a book over a strong mind and long-settled convictions.

If we could trace the means which have contributed to form our present views to three principal external sources, viz., what we have *seen*, what we have *heard*, and what we have *read*, we should probably find the last by no means the least active or fertile. A book is a silent, but most intimate, companion. It does not ask attention, nor take offence at neglect. Its name and dress give us no certain clew to its character. The opinions of others as to its value may be the result of prejudice or ignorance. We are told that to know what it is we must read it; and to read it is to subject ourselves to its influence for better or worse.

Prudent travellers in public conveyances, or sojourners at hotels, are very careful what intercourse they encourage or allow strangers to have with them; for a pickpocket is not always distinguishable by dress or manners from an honest gentleman. But how much more vigilant should we be to preserve the mind and heart from contact with what may pollute or pervert, than to protect our purse or watch from light fingers!

When you take up a book to read, of the character of which you are wholly unapprized, is your presumption less than when you admit to your confidence one to whose principles and motives you are a stranger? It might, indeed, be easier to throw the book aside than to discard the treacherous friend; but, on the other hand, the former may conceal the poisonous fang till the fatal wound is made, while the latter, by his tone and manner, will be very likely to betray his character in season to defeat his evil purpose.

Direct and open assaults on the Christian faith are rare in

our day. Its principles commend themselves so generally to the wise and good, and are so obviously necessary to the well-being of society, that it requires no little boldness to impugn them ; and, besides, there is a way of sapping their foundations which has become quite common, and, while it is much more effective, it excites no odium and very little resistance.

Those who are not aware of the Protean shapes assumed by these subtle supplanters of our faith are very likely to find themselves in the midst of a plausible argument against some cardinal doctrine of the Bible before they suspect their proximity to danger.

In the graver class of books—as histories and biographies—insidious attempts to subvert sound principles, implanted by a careful education, are by no means rare. But the more common theatre for the display of such skill is the lighter and cheaper literature which finds its way into the hands of all classes and communities. Cart-loads of printed trash are in constant transit over the thoroughfares of the country ; and though you may be protected by your social position from direct contact with them, you can scarcely fail to feel their incidental influence in the general deterioration of moral sentiment and intellectual vigour which they are sure to produce. So rapid is the accumulation of printed matter, good and bad, that but a small portion of it can be read even by those who have no other occupation. Some selection is, therefore, indispensable ; and in making it you should have reference to the cultivation of taste, the improvement of the mind, a proper familiarity with the current topics of interest, but most of all to the establishment or confirmation of right moral and religious principles.

There will be no difficulty in finding as much reading as you desire, both secular and religious, outside of all obnoxious or equivocal productions. You will have neither time nor inclination to investigate questions of speculative theology ; and as to the teachings of Holy Scripture, few religiously-dis-

posed people at the present day would insist on a higher, or be satisfied with a lower, standard of orthodoxy than is found in Hannah More's writings.

If you should decline to read a book or periodical which a friend commends to you, on the ground that you stand in doubt of the author's views, or that you do not wish to read anything which advocates what you regard as error, you will perhaps be at once rebuked for a course so narrow and illiberal. How will you ever know what truth is, it will be said, unless you examine it in contrast with error? A pretty judge, indeed! To make up your mind upon hearing one side! You set down all who differ from you as errorists. To be right, they must embrace your opinions; while you withdraw yourself into the shell of your infallibility, and refuse to examine the grounds on which they rest their convictions!

There is something very plausible in this appeal. There is an appearance of bigotry or pusillanimity in declining a challenge to investigate the grounds of another's convictions. And yet it is eminently unjust. Two men are about to engage in business. One decides to embark in manufacturing cotton goods, and the other betakes himself to mining coal. They have severally considered the probabilities of success, and each has acted upon his own convictions. It would be no evidence of narrowness or illiberality of views if the manufacturer should decline to go into argument with the miner upon the comparative eligibility of the two pursuits. All his thoughts and energies must be bent to the prosecution of his own business. To spend his time in reading or hearing arguments to unsettle his confidence in it, would be only to insure his failure. If each has used all proper and available means to obtain information, and has then embarked heartily and energetically in the chosen enterprise, their success depends upon turning the eye and ear away from all diverting sights and sounds. Blind men who think they see are very unsafe guides for those who are conscious that they are blind. Why

should one who has been convinced, upon evidence satisfactory to himself, that, as a descendant of apostate Adam, his nature is unholy; that his violations of the Divine law have made him obnoxious to its terrible penalty; that provision is made in the gospel for the pardon of his sin and the remission of deserved punishment; that by faith in Christ and repentance towards God he may obtain eternal life; and that faith and repentance are gifts of God freely bestowed in answer to prayer,—why should such a one willingly read a book or hear a sermon or lecture in which these convictions are assailed? Why demolish a house, built with so much care and on what appeared to be a rock, in order to try some other foundation which cannot possibly be so safe? Why leave a good harbour and put out into a stormy sea, upon a vague suggestion that as safe anchorage may be found somewhere else?

Would a dutiful child willingly read or hear an argument against the obligation of the fifth commandment? Would a trustworthy and contented labourer patiently listen to evidence that his employer is a tyrant or a fool? To shew the drift of these questions, I may say that if I were asked to read a treatise advocating the doctrine of universal salvation, I should courteously but peremptorily decline, on the ground that my views on that subject were well settled from such an examination of the Sacred Scriptures as I had been able to give, and that I had no desire to know how much could be said in support of some other theory, so long as I was entirely satisfied of the truth of the one I had embraced.

“But,” says my friend, “you want *me* to adopt *your* views; and to this end you ask *me* to read *your* books and tracts; and yet you decline to hear or examine what may be said in support of my doctrine.” By no means. If, after proper inquiry and investigation, you are convinced that my views of this subject are not in accordance with Divine revelation, but that yours are, you should resist every attempt I may make

to persuade you to renounce or modify them, and should cleave to your own convictions with invincible pertinacity.

While on this subject, it may be proper to advert for a moment to a common idea—that evangelical truth would be more welcome to men if it were expressed in more courtly and agreeable terms. It is said that expressions which are well enough in themselves become offensive by their association with some religious sect or school or system, and that if the same sentiment were conveyed in other terms it would be received with favour, or, at least, without repugnance. “You need not be concerned,” said a clergyman of some distinction, in reply to a friend’s expression of his fear that the distinctive principles of evangelical religion were presented with more vagueness than formerly. “You need not be concerned. The substance of truth is preached as boldly as ever; but the phraseology used in stating it has been modified. I well remember,” he continued, “how broadly the doctrine of the Trinity used to be expressed in words needlessly revolting to the minds of those who rejected it. Now it is stated with equal distinctness, but in a manner which divests it of what used to give it offence. So of the doctrines of depravity, the new birth, &c.,—they are preached, but with more philosophical exactness and rhetorical propriety; and hence the more intelligent errorists on these subjects are gradually renouncing their views and are (perhaps insensibly to themselves) adopting orthodox opinions.”

Words are signs of ideas, but very imperfect signs at best. So enfeebled and confused are the powers of the greatest human mind, that its conceptions of truth are partial and obscure; and when these conceptions are clothed in words they are open to misapprehension and misinterpretation. To modify materially phrases which have been current for a long period among the various denominations of Christians as an expression of leading doctrines, is a hazardous experiment.

And it is also quite needless ; for the language of Holy Scripture is amply sufficient to meet all our wants in this respect ; and, as you have often heard me say, adherence to it in religious discussions would save much controversy. There is no vital doctrine of Christianity which is not set forth as plainly in the language of the inspired writer as it needs to be ; and it cannot be doubted that most of the controversies which have brought Christianity into discredit with a certain class of minds have turned upon terms and phrases invented by men. You will find it a safe rule, in expressing your own views, to adhere as closely as possible to "the form of sound words" found on the pages of inspiration ; and when those who differ from you assail your opinions or urge their own, hold them kindly, but resolutely, to the use of words "which the Holy Ghost teacheth."

It cannot be too deeply impressed upon the mind that clear convictions of duty are not to be trifled with. Many persons have been known to me whose early moral instruction was not neglected, and who had been well disposed towards a religious life. But upon reaching the age when the social circle is enlarged and the influence of companions and books is more decided, they have yielded to the temptation to break from early restraints, which is often very powerful ; and one of its first forms of approach is an appeal to independence of thought and a renunciation of what the tempter would persuade them to regard as musty and obsolete formulas of faith imposed upon the credulity of childhood !

A lady of my acquaintance, of rare personal attractions, of superior intelligence, occupying a high social position, and enjoying great advantages of religious and literary education, came to mature age with a well-balanced mind and eminent qualifications for great usefulness. By some means she was persuaded to distrust the grounds of her faith, though its fruits had been to the praise of God's grace. Of the stages of her progress in error it is not in my power to speak posi-

tively ; but it terminated in a rejection of the distinctive and vital doctrines of revelation, and in the adoption of some of the most flagrant and absurd delusions of modern times. From her own experience, she knew the power of early associations ; and when she desired to persuade others to make like shipwreck of their faith, her efforts were concentrated upon this stronghold.

In writing to a friend considerably her senior, she says :—“ Don't cling to old ideas because you were taught to believe they were true. Don't be afraid when your heart begins to shed its coats. They fall off like the leaves of autumn,—not because the tree is dying, but because it is gathering its life-forces up in order to renew its foliage in spring.” Not more subtle was the language of the prince of darkness to the first woman ; nor more sure was he of his victim, than any of his servants may be who can obtain a listening ear to counsels like these.

If the mind has been furnished and the heart impressed with the great doctrines of our holy religion by the lips of parents or teachers, let it be a subject of ceaseless gratitude to our heavenly Father. It is a formidable barrier against the incursions of merciless foes. It may be strengthened and perpetuated by proper care ; but the slightest breach will expose the whole fabric to weakness and ultimate ruin.

You will not understand these principles as imposing any restriction on freedom of inquiry or of conscience. A child is not bound to believe as the parents do, nor to receive their opinions as the wax takes the impression of the seal. But if a kind Providence has given you the privilege of intelligent, godly parents, who have imparted to you the knowledge which has made *them* wise unto salvation, it would be in the highest degree presumptuous to break these bands asunder and cast these cords from you—in order to shew your independence.

I have been unconsciously led to a wider range of discussion than may seem to be included in the subject of books and

reading ; but the topics I have considered are so intimately connected, in my own experience, as well as in my observation of the inclinations and habits of my young friends, as to make it very natural to treat of them together.

There are enough books and periodicals to answer all the purposes to which I have referred in this connexion, whose authorship or character are well known to those in whose opinions you would be disposed to confide ; and I am sure your safety and happiness are alike concerned in eschewing what you have not every reason to believe would have their approbation.

From the most unexceptionable productions of the human mind you may turn with infinite advantage to the oracles of God. In those you will often find shifting sands and treacherous pitfalls ; but here your feet are planted upon a ROCK against which the floods lift up their waves in vain.

CHAPTER XII.

Uses of life—Extremes—The Sunday-school—Public charities—"Orders"
—One thing—Perplexing questions—Home—School-days—Spheres of
duty—Little seeds—The work and its prospects—The Rock.

IN previous chapters I have attempted to set before you the authority of the Holy Scriptures, the reasonableness of the doctrines which they reveal, and some of the duties which they enjoin, or which grow out of a genuine Christian faith. Supposing you to occupy the position of a disciple of Christ looking abroad upon the world, impressed with the uncertainty of life and all its plans, and desiring to use your acquirements and influence for the best end, there are two or three considerations which I will venture to suggest as to your duty :—

1. It is a saying attributed to Luther, that the human mind is like a drunken peasant on horseback, who, if you put him on one side, is sure to fall over on the other. There is danger in indolence, and there is danger also in activity. Piety may languish and decay in idle, dreamy abstraction or sentimentalism ; and, on the other hand, its vitality may be exhausted in an outward growth, while no nourishment is afforded to the root. For the true relation of the active and contemplative duties of religion is not inaptly illustrated by the sap, which, rising from the root, flows into every branch and twig of the tree, but returns to the soil again for replenishment. "Whatever may be the amount of nourishment absorbed by plants from the atmosphere through the agency of the bark and leaves, all of it is forced to enter the stems through absorption by the roots." So, however earnest and active Christians may be in works of charity and efforts to do good, the vigour and spring

of their life are derived only from communion with God through Christ by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

Among the most appropriate spheres, outside of the family, for active duty, the young Christian finds the Sunday-school. If an opportunity occurs to engage as a teacher in a well-conducted Sunday-school, you would do well to embrace it. A faithful discharge of the duty will involve the necessity of familiarising your mind with the truths to be taught; and to attempt to teach others is a very effectual method of teaching ourselves. The study of character and of the ways of influencing other minds is also of great value. The circumspection which the office of a religious teacher (especially of children) demands, and the habits of attention and punctuality which are indispensable to great usefulness in it, make it a desirable method of self-discipline. The intercourse with the families represented in a class, which becomes needful and natural in the periodical visits of the teacher to the pupil, offers an invaluable opportunity of reaching parents, elder brothers and sisters, and neighbours also, with salutary influences.

By some it is regarded as an advantage, and by others as an objection, that the occupation of a Sunday-school teacher is favourable to social intercourse. You need not be told that uniform unfeigned Christian courtesy is due and should be cheerfully shewn to all with whom you are associated in this or any other good work. To shew this demands no sacrifice even of the conventional proprieties of life; nor does the specific duty of a Sunday-school teacher require the contraction of intimacies which would not otherwise be formed. The more single and simple the motives that prompt our benevolent efforts, the more likely are they to be successful. Should it be your duty to accept the post of a teacher, you will find manuals and treatises of various kinds to supply such information as you may need in the details of the service.

There are other spheres of usefulness not less adapted, perhaps, to your temperament and circumstances than Sunday-

school teaching,—such as daily schools of charity, and asylums for neglected children, ministering to the necessities of widows and to the comfort of the sick, the bedridden, and the dying who are within your reach. However useful associations for these various objects may be, the spontaneous action of individual Christian hearts, and the personal sympathy which refuses to flow through artificial channels, or to accept the services of stipendiary almoners of public or private charity, are most to be desired in all efforts to elevate or ameliorate the condition of the suffering poor. You will find more satisfaction in one *personal* essay to relieve a burdened heart than in the most liberal devices of benevolence by proxy.

“The rich man who goes to his poor brother’s cottage, and, without affectation of humility, naturally, and with the respect which man owes to man, enters into his circumstances, inquires about his distresses, and hears his homely tale, has done more to establish an interchange of kindly feeling than he could have secured by the costliest present by itself. Public donations have their value and their uses; poor-laws keep human beings from starvation; but, in point of eliciting gratitude, all these fail. Man has not been brought into contact close enough with man for this. They do not work by sympathy.”

I need not caution you against the delusion that these charitable offices require one to lay aside the ordinary duties and relations of life, and adopt a peculiar apparel, or become associated with a particular order or class of persons who devote themselves to such a service. I would not question the sincerity or usefulness, nor detract in the slightest degree from the merit of such persons; but I maintain that whatever works of charity are required, it is the duty of *all* Christian disciples to perform, and that they are most worthily and efficiently performed, in connexion with the ordinary relations of life. That is a most comprehensive and beautiful summary of both the personal and social duties of a follower of Christ which the apostle James gives us:—“Pure religion and undefiled

before God and the Father is this : to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The latter precept may be obeyed by proxy as well as the former ; and neither requires the renunciation of the ordinary relations of life, nor the assumption of a singular costume.

Many persons encumber themselves with so many engagements, and concern themselves with so many different schemes, that they actually accomplish very little of practical value. My counsel to you is to select the sphere of usefulness to which, under the guidance of the Spirit of all wisdom, you think yourself best adapted, and give your time and energies to *that*, declining all diverting or distracting avocations.

2. These active duties will, of course, bring you into communion with people of various characters and pursuits ; and you will see much to stumble and perplex you in the conduct of those whom you feel bound to regard as true Christians. Your own humble and consistent walk will be the most effective reproof of the delinquencies of others ; and he who best knows himself will be the last to condemn others.

The question will often occur to you, How can I bring a Christian influence to bear on this, that, or the other person,—a neighbour or his child, a servant, an errand-boy, the milkman or butcher, the miller or gardener, the wood-sawyer, the traveller, or even the miserable mendicant that begs from door to door ? Much discrimination, and a wise discernment of times and seasons, are invaluable qualifications for the right discharge of so delicate and responsible a duty. That we are bound to do all in our power to bring others to the knowledge of Christ as the only Saviour of sinners, no one will deny who believes His gospel ; and there is no plainer or brighter promise on the sacred page than that which is given to those who turn many to righteousness :—" They shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars, for ever and ever." Many favourable opportunities for calling the attention of

others to the subject of personal religion are lost through timidity, or a fear that our motives will be misapprehended, or a consciousness of defects and delinquencies which may well extort the exhortation, "Physician, heal thyself!"

There may be a morbid sensitiveness on this subject, which it is our duty to control; and if one way of approach is closed, we are to seek another. Sometimes a letter, or a book, or a marked passage in a newspaper, will be kindly received where a personal conference would be declined or evaded. We may also succeed in putting a friend or neighbour into a position more favourable to the germination or growth of religious principle than the one he occupies, or in gradually withdrawing him from influences and associations unfriendly to his spiritual welfare. In these and all other efforts to serve our most gracious and loving Master, we are diligently to seek His direction and blessing, and adhere as closely as possible to His precepts and example.

3. In nothing are the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator more manifest than in the constitution of the human family. We are made to depend in infancy on one with whom we are connected by the strongest instincts and sympathies of our nature. The first conscious emotions of faith and love are towards the most faithful and loving of all a child's earthly kindred—A MOTHER; and the first restrictions upon our self-will are imposed by the same gentle voice that has soothed our little sorrows, and enforced by the same soft hand that has patiently ministered to our ceaseless wants. Submission to the law of the nursery gives the most hopeful promise of submission to the sterner law of the family and of society, and ultimately to the perfect law of the gospel.

Our first duties, then, lie within the narrow sphere of *home*; and in their proper discharge we have the basis of whatever is most "pure, lovely, and of good report" in future life. A dutiful child and a loving brother or sister is the embryo condition of a kind neighbour, a good citizen, and a true philanthropist.

With the opening of school-days our circle of influence, active and passive, is considerably enlarged. New relations are formed, involving corresponding duties. Passions and emotions are awakened which may have been before asleep; and their regulation and control is found to be no easy task. It is the world in miniature; and every victory over one's self here is of invaluable service in preparing us for sharper conflicts and fiercer adversaries in the future.

School-days over, we enter on the active duties of life, but have still a well-defined orbit, within which our energies of body and mind will find full employment. The neighbourhood in which our lot is cast, and the humble, unostentatious, and perhaps unnoticed round of personal, social, daily duties to which we are called there, deserve the first attention. It is by the little rills of benevolence that flow silently, and unheeded by the world, among the sons and daughters of want, sorrow, and suffering in our own neighbourhood, that the weary are comforted and the perishing saved. Do not harbour the thought for a moment that the measure of good we do in the world is proportioned to the scale on which it is done. This has been an egregious mistake with many. While waiting for an opportunity to do some great thing, life and energy have ebbed away, and nothing is accomplished.

It is not needful, however, that we should withhold sympathy and aid from those more expansive means of blessing and saving men for which our age is distinguished. The universal diffusion of the Bible, and the introduction and establishment of the ordinances of our holy religion in the place of false and corrupt systems of idolatry and superstition, are projects of commanding interest to every thoughtful mind. Unless your attention has been turned particularly to the subject, you would not be likely to realise the vastness and godlike aim of these schemes of Christian benevolence.

Without entering at all into the vain speculations which have been often indulged as to the condition which awaits the

heathen in the unseen world, it cannot be doubted that it is the will and purpose of the Founder of Christianity that its benign principles shall be inculcated the world over, and that it is the first and chief duty of His disciples to see that it is done. The means and agencies for accomplishing it are within reach ; and our business is to select and employ them, under His guidance and blessing, trusting in the sure word of prophecy, that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." How far the humblest and most insignificant instruments may be made available for the most stupendous results, those best know who have scanned, most closely the mysteries of Divine Providence. That little girl in your class at the Sunday-school, whose father saws wood and whose mother takes in washing, brings her first-earned penny to you, and it is invested in a little sixteen-page hymn-book, and, falling into the hands of a little boy, awakens in his untutored mind a desire to serve and obey God. In process of time the seed thus silently and secretly sown comes to the fruit-bearing stage, and the little boy, now in vigorous manhood, is about to embark for the flowery land of Sinim. He bears glad tidings to the debased and ignorant disciples of Confucius. Thousands wait upon his ministry, and, by the grace of God, accept the offers of salvation ; and in successive generations, long after you and the little penny contributor and the missionary are buried, and peradventure forgotten, will the work of mercy, so insignificant in its beginning, stretch outward and onward beyond the limits of finite conception. It is this consideration which imparts so much sacredness and solemnity to the Christian vocation, and clothes every moment and act of life with so much importance. We know not how closely an act, a word, or even an unexpressed thought may be connected with the salvation of some soul, the happiness of an individual, of a family, or of the community, or the conversion of the world !

If we propose to ourselves at the outstart the one definite purpose of making all our powers and faculties, our acquire-

ments and opportunities, subservient to the welfare of those around us and the glory of our Father and Saviour in heaven, we shall find little difficulty in selecting the sphere of our effort or in determining the best way of filling it. Where such a principle predominates, pride and worldly ambition are kept at bay, and the path of duty is plain. That position is most elevated in which most can be done to make men happy by making them holy.

It will perplex you, I have no doubt, (as it has often perplexed others wiser than we are,) to account for the slow progress and comparatively limited triumphs of Christianity. Indeed, it is alleged by superficial thinkers and reasoners as an argument against its claims, that it does not make more rapid and extensive inroads upon the kingdoms of sin and darkness. Such persons forget that not to retreat or lose ground is sometimes a more conclusive evidence of power than the most brilliant victory. A fortuitous incident may decide the event of a battle; but to retain a position against fearful odds requires consummate skill and heroic courage. The whole tide of human depravity withstands the humbling, self-denying, lustrifying spirit of the gospel of Christ. Ephraim, joined to his idols, is quiet when let alone; but if his strongholds are assailed he becomes like a lion robbed of its whelps. Sin is the ruling spirit of an unregenerate world; holiness is the ruling spirit of the gospel. Their antagonism is as deep and broad as that of life and death. Sin has all the advantage of preoccupation and the sympathy of the invaded province. Christianity must win all its friends and allies from the enemy's ground.

Look at the world as it was when our holy religion was founded. The nation to whom had been committed the divine oracles,—the chosen people of God,—had incurred His displeasure, and were subject to a heathen power. Not only were they "scattered and peeled," but were given up to judicial blindness, so that when the promised and long-ex-

pected Messiah appeared, instead of being in their eyes as the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, He was "as a root out of dry ground—without form or comeliness." Instead of being the foremost to welcome Him as the antitype so long and so significantly represented in the rites and ceremonies of their Church, they despised and rejected Him. They opposed Him at every stage of His earthly ministry, and finally laid their wicked hands on Him and put Him to death.

As soon as His Divine power had been revealed by His sundering the bands of death and triumphing over the grave, His few humble disciples rallied, and, under His express commission, began to propagate His doctrines and proclaim His authority as head over all things to the Church. And what has been the result? In the absence of positive and exact information, which it is obviously impracticable to obtain, we probably approximate the truth when we set the number of disciples in the first century at five hundred thousand; in the fifth century at fifteen millions; in the tenth century at fifty millions; and in the eighteenth century at two hundred millions. Estimating the total population of the globe at ten hundred millions, it is probable that not far from one-third are nominally Christian; that is, they recognise the existence of one God, and receive the Old and the New Testament as a revelation of His will. Of these, nearly two-thirds profess to belong to the Greek and Papal Churches: so that the Protestant faith, as it prevails in the United States and Great Britain, embraces less than one-tenth of the population of the globe. The false religions of Asia have from three to four hundred millions of deluded disciples; the followers of Mohammed number from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty millions; and heathenism absorbs the remainder.

In regard to the methods by which the knowledge of the true God and of His Son Jesus Christ shall be most widely and rapidly extended, there may be some diversity of views. Much of the energy and means of the Protestant Church in our day

find an outlet through various organisations, more or less general in their character and objects. There are societies, as you well know, that appoint and support missionaries to the heathen and to such portions of our own country as are destitute of the Christian ministry and ordinances. There are societies to print and distribute Bibles and religious books and tracts; to organise and sustain Sunday-schools; to provide instruction and industrial training for ignorant and neglected children; to search out and relieve poverty and distress; to reclaim the juvenile delinquent; to protect and care for the widow and orphan; to look after seamen; to aid in building churches; to assist young men of professed piety in preparing for the work of the ministry; and for numberless purposes of a less general character. Like every thing human, such agencies are imperfect and liable to abuse; and, while we have abundant cause to praise the Author of all good that so much has been accomplished by their means, we may very properly inquire whether His own appointed methods of saving men have their proper place in the estimation of His servants. We cannot doubt that, in His infinite wisdom, instruments are provided fully adequate to the accomplishment of His purposes of mercy; and, though men are at liberty to adapt their methods of evangelisation to the shifting exigencies of the times in which they live, it cannot be doubted that there is a power in the great body of the followers of Christ, IN THEIR CHURCH ORGANISATION, to accomplish a far greater amount of good than all human devices combined. Under the ordinary circumstances of life, perhaps no safer course could be prescribed for one who would live to good purposes for his Saviour and for his race, than to identify himself, as early as practicable, with some church which he believes to be a church of Christ, and where his edification is most likely to be promoted, and give himself earnestly to work *in and by that divinely-appointed method* of advancing the well-being, temporal and spiritual, of fallen men.

It cannot be doubted that if the Church of Christ (meaning by that term the whole body of His true disciples) were united and earnest in obeying the simple requisitions of His gospel, and should illustrate its principles no more conspicuously than the primitive disciples did, there would be no form of human suffering, sorrow, or guilt for which provision could not be made far more effectively and economically than it is done at present. If the Church of Christ did its obvious duty, the blessings of education, of personal and national freedom, of domestic and social enjoyment, of peace, purity, and prosperity, would be diffused as widely as the habitations of men. The hoary systems of superstition and idolatry would pass away as prowling beasts retire to their coverts when the day-spring arises. The humblest man who walks with God wields a power by which fleets and armies, and the nations who put their trust in them, are saved or destroyed. What could the king of Israel and all his hosts do to avert the three years' drought which the prayer of one man, with passions like ours brought upon the land ?

The Church in our time is weakened and distracted by strifes of words and the struggles of various communions to propagate their peculiar doctrines or usages. Of the three hundred millions of nominal Christians, as we have said, at least two-thirds are enslaved to the grossest forms of superstition. They put darkness for light ; and wherever they gain a foothold there a new barrier is erected to the progress of the truth, instead of a new centre from which to diffuse its blessings. This is not said with any harsh or unkind feeling. However it may be with the leaders and propagandists of their faith, we must suppose the great body of the Papal Church verily think they are serving God according to His will ; or, in the absence of any positive intelligent conviction, are not conscious of acting contrary to it. Still, we must regard these two hundred millions of the human family—though professing to know the true God, and to receive the

same revelation of His will that we have—as slaves to a corrupt and superstitious faith. The remnant of Israel—perhaps amounting to five millions in all—are scrupulous believers in the Old Testament scriptures, but peremptorily and universally reject the New.

And now we turn our eyes away from every glimmer of light that Protestant, Papal, or Jewish religions supply, and look out upon some six or seven hundred millions of our fellow-creatures groping in the darkness of paganism, and degraded by all the vile passions and brutal vices which are inseparable from that condition. Here and there we descry a Protestant mission-station, established and sustained by a few devoted men and women, often at the imminent hazard of health and life, and with rare accessions to their number from the native population. Undaunted by danger, and undiscouraged by opposition and abuse, they hold on their way. Rarely is a station abandoned which is once fairly taken; and so great has been the success which has attended some of these invasions of the kingdom of darkness as to warrant the fullest confidence in the practicability of the work upon any scale which the faith and liberality of Christ's followers may propose.

It may interest and encourage you to reflect for a moment upon the number and effectiveness of the instruments by which so stupendous a revolution as the conversion of the world is to be brought about, compared with those which were at the control of the Church only fifty years ago. Then the Holy Scriptures were read in only thirty-six languages, and were available to only two hundred millions. Now they are printed in two hundred and sixty languages, and are available to six or eight hundred millions; so that in almost all the nations of the globe may be read by every man, in his own tongue, wherein he was born, the doctrines and requirements of the Christian faith. The press has advanced in power within that period more rapidly than in all preceding genera-

tions since the art of printing was discovered. The facilities of intercourse between the various nations of the globe have been multiplied almost indefinitely, and the incitements to peaceful and benevolent enterprises have kept pace with them. So that at this moment it may be assumed that access may be had to at least four-fifths of the people of the earth for civilising and evangelising purposes.

Africa has not for ages presented so many tokens that the time of deliverance is at hand for her degraded tribes. The report of every new exploring expedition reveals encouraging prospects for the introduction of agriculture, commerce, and the mechanic arts; and in some districts the blessings of civilisation are enjoyed in a higher degree than in many parts of Europe.

In Asia we find more than half the human race—six hundred millions being probably within the true estimate—of whom more than half inhabit the Chinese empire. The rest are divided among the Boodhist, the Brahmin, and the Moham-medan faiths. The very recent change in the outward relations of the Chinese and Japanese governments will unquestionably effect a rapid modification of their civil and moral condition. But it must be a work of time. The institutions which give a nation a high position and influence are the growth of centuries. No finite mind can conceive of the number which represents the population of the Chinese empire. Imagine that you stood in some favourable position for the purpose for the space of ten hours every day, and that in each hour one thousand of them passed before you. This would be ten thousand every day. How long do you suppose you would stand there before all the people of that vast empire would go by? Not less than EIGHTY YEARS!

What mighty agencies must be employed to effect a moral revolution in such a mass of depraved, degraded humanity! If they were divided into congregations of two thousand souls each, one hundred and fifty thousand ministers would be

required for their supply. Yet it is not an extravagant idea that China may be an enlightened Protestant nation before some who may read these pages have ended their pilgrimage. With all their absurd superstitions and gross vices, there is a striking fondness for knowledge among them. The religion of the people is not connected with the state, and they are rather atheistic than idolatrous. The leaven of truth once fairly introduced would spread with marvellous rapidity.

The one hundred and fifty millions of India are much nearer their emancipation from the cruel bondage of heathenism than they were fifty years ago. It may be doubted whether the late rebellion, fearful as it was in its direct consequences, may not have purified the moral atmosphere of the country and opened the way for the introduction more freely and extensively of the truth as Protestant England holds it. The suppression of suttee and infanticide to so great a degree, and the gradual adoption of the railway and the telegraph and a knowledge of the principles of their construction, must soon drive imposture and necromancy into their hiding-places, and prepare the way for the messengers of truth and freedom.

The blighting influence of Popery, though of late apparently spreading itself, is more likely to be crippled by causes outside of itself than any of the other corrupt religions of the earth. So close is its alliance with the political governments of the earth, and so dependent is it upon their guardianship and succour for its maintenance, that its destiny is inseparable from theirs. Popery would dwindle at once into an insignificant power if the countenance of civil despotism were withdrawn from it; and there is no hazard nor uncharitableness in saying that even now its recognition in Papal countries is a matter of state policy rather than as a medium through which the religious emotions of the people find an expression. Faith is reposed in the priest,—not in God. Worship is blindly paid to Mary, the creature,—not to Christ, the Creator. We may expect, therefore, that as light advances and truth asserts

her supremacy over the human mind the Papal power will wane and become extinct. It may be that those who are driven from her battered and dilapidated fortresses will take refuge in infidelity ; but the light of truth will follow them there, for none of the workers of iniquity can hide themselves from it.

The continued prevalence of *war* is sometimes ascribed to the want of vigour and force in the principle of Christianity. But this is a hasty conclusion. It is indeed a depressing thought that the countries of Europe, even in time of peace, spend annually nearly a hundred millions upon their armies, and forty millions upon their navies, and that fifteen of every hundred of their male adults are constantly under arms. But the very skill in the art of war which the most powerful nations of the earth now possess may be among the chief causes why wars are not more frequent and protracted. And it is not improbable that when the physical power of nations becomes more equally matched, a recognition of the principles of peace will be maintained consistently with national honour ; and that what is now vainly sought by brute force will be obtained by pacific and generous negotiation, so that we may feel encouraged to do what is in our power, however humble our position or narrow our sphere, for the advancement of every good work.

If you succeed, by the blessing of your heavenly Father, in implanting in a single human heart a seed of virtue, a principle of love and obedience, or even a faint desire for a better and purer life, you may have contributed to the grand result in a measure exceeding finite comprehension. Outside the family and Church no more powerful agency has been devised to bless and save than Sunday-schools. Were each one of the host of religious instructors employed in them duly impressed with the magnitude of the work he has in hand and the vastness of the aggregate results of individual skill and faithfulness, we might feel strong confidence that a bright

day is at hand for our country and for the Church of the living God,—a day in which the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days.

If you inquire, then, how you shall make your mark on the generation which accompanies you over the stage of life, the reply is, Qualify yourselves to contribute as largely as possible to the improvement and happiness of those who immediately surround you, and let these works of faith and labours of love be so pervaded and energised by the Spirit of Christ that neither time nor space can bound them. “What we love,” says one, “we find means to follow;” and this makes me earnestly desire for you that the love of Jesus may take full possession of your heart, and be what Dr Chalmers called “the great expulsion principle, which drives everything but Jesus out—the world, and self, and everything.”

“What should I be without Christ?” exclaims Elizabeth Fry. “Where should I stand? I never have known despondency. Whatever may have been my depths of suffering in mind or body, still, the confidence has never left me that all was and would be well,—if not in time, in eternity,—that the *end* would be peace. I never lose the feeling of this, and am always on the Rock. That conviction never leaves me.”

THE END.

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