

THE
MERCERSBURG REVIEW.

OCTOBER, 1872.

ART. I.—NATURE AND GRACE.*

BY J. WILLIAMSON NEVIN, D. D.

No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.—John iii. 13.

To reach the full sense of this remarkable declaration on the part of our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to have clearly before us the occasion on which it was uttered.

There was a man of the Pharisees, we are told, by name Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, and a leading master or teacher in Israel. The same came to Jesus by night: and said unto Him; “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him.”

The object of the address was to draw the Saviour into an exposition of His views and aims, in the prophetic character in which He appeared; and it was prompted by the serious thought, no doubt, that the new prophet might be indeed the

* A Baccalaureate Sermon preached to the late Graduating Class of Franklin and Marshall College, on the evening of the last Sunday in June, in the First Reformed Church of Lancaster, Pa.

Messiah promised to the fathers, and that the time had come possibly for the solemn inauguration of His kingdom. In this feeling Nicodemus was not alone, at that time, among the rulers of his nation. He spake for others as well as for himself; "We know, that thou art a teacher come from God!" The miracles performed by Jesus were the seal of His divine mission; and those who sat in Moses' seat, the guardians of the ancient Jewish faith—some of them at least—were inclined to come to an understanding with Him in regard to the kingdom of God He had in His mind, and if it were found satisfactory to join also the weight of their character and influence with Him in bringing it to pass.

All this, however, rested as we can easily see on a radically defective apprehension, both of the person of Christ and of the work for which He had come into the world. The stand-point of Nicodemus, over against the revelation of God in Christ, was that of rationalistic supernaturalism. Christ was for him at most a teacher sent from God, a prophet like unto Moses, holding in His hand an outward commission from heaven, duly certified by His miracles as outward seals. He was a man clothed with divine powers for the accomplishment of a divine work; but the divinity which was perceived to be in Him and with Him, came to no real union with His humanity. This was the defect of the Jewish idea of the Messiah in general; a defect, for which there was no effectual help indeed, until Christ Himself appeared as the full object of the Christian faith. Before that the Messianic conception was necessarily dualistic, and the dualism had no power to save itself from ultimate humanitarianism as expressed in the creed of Nicodemus, "Thou art a *man* come from God." It is in substance the Ebionitic heresy, which figures so largely afterwards in the early history of the Christian Church. In the view of such thinking, Christianity could be only a continuation of Judaism out to its own last result and end, and nothing more. The days of the Messiah were to be in some way the efflorescence simply of the Old Testament theocracy, in the midst of outward signs and wonders, into the highest perfection of its own order of life. So

Nicodemus, with others of like mind with himself, looked for the advent of the kingdom of God, and mused in his spirit at this time on the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth might be that prophet raised up of God to bring about the restoration of Israel by its means.

To this general wrong posture of mind on the part of the venerable Jewish rabbi, rather than to his somewhat diplomatic speech directly, our Saviour addressed His profoundly soul-awakening reply: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

It is unfortunate certainly, that the Greek term ἀνωθεν, in this passage, should be rendered in our version by the adverb *again*, when it signifies in truth, properly and immediately, *from above*. Any birth indeed that is new, however it may be brought to pass, is of course a regeneration, or being born again, and may be properly so named. But plainly it is not just the thought of being born *again*, in the ordinary religious sense of the term regeneration (familiar as this was to the Jewish mind in connection with the Jewish proselyte baptism), that our Saviour here means to press on the attention of Nicodemus; it is rather, instead of this, the thought that lies immediately in the primary sense of the word ἀνωθεν itself, as denoting a birth "from above," from beyond the natural order of the world's life; and His declaration should read accordingly: "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This kingdom was not to be considered a mere last product of the constitution of Judaism in any form; it was the revelation of a new, higher order of life in the world, descending directly from God Himself; and the first condition therefore even of seeing it, or of understanding in any way its true nature, could be nothing less than a principle of new heavenly life proceeding also from God, or in other words a new birth derived from the womb of the kingdom itself which was to be thus known and entered.

That this was our Saviour's meaning is rendered plain from what He adds immediately after: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can-

not enter into the kingdom of God." Here being "born from above" is made equivalent to being "born of the Spirit;" while the conjunction of the water with the Spirit serves of itself to sunder the sense of all previous Jewish purifications and lustrations (ending in the baptism of John), from the higher consecration thus brought into view. The terrestrial symbol was to become full and complete now through actual union with its true celestial sense; according to that word spoken to the Baptist: "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." The birth from above is more than the washing of a simply moral or theocratic regeneration even in its highest form; it goes beyond all this; it is a birth not of water only, but "of water and of the Spirit." It is the introduction of a new divine principle into the being of the soul. It is not in any way of nature, or from the powers of man's life existing before itself. As related to all this it is transcendental and supernatural. It is in such view the opposite of all earthly natural birth, a birth literally and strictly *from above*.

The contrast could not be put in stronger terms than it is by what our Lord adds in explanation of it: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The life of nature can have no power to transcend or rise beyond itself. Its birth is the measure of its capabilities whether physical or moral. If man is to attain then to a true divine life, it must be by the coming down of this life into him as something more than flesh. He must be born of the Spirit. Only what is from the Spirit in this way can be itself spirit, capable of having place and part in the kingdom of God.

The necessity of a communion between earth and heaven, between man and God, that should be something more than a moral or spiritual rising simply of the human to the divine in the order of the human itself; the necessity of a real coming down of the divine into the sphere of the human, to make room for such supernatural communion, as the only true idea of the kingdom of God; that is the great thought which governs and underlies throughout the discourse of our Saviour with Nicode-

mus, and which leads also in the end to the true view of what Christ Himself was as the solution of this problem and the founder of this kingdom. He was no mere teacher come from God, the reporter of divine oracles attested in an outside way by divine miracles. He was nothing less than the very presence of God Himself among men in human form. "We speak that we do know," He says, "and testify that we have seen." He was empowered to tell of heavenly things, not as knowing them in an earthly way by outward testimony or argument, but as one who was Himself an inmate of heaven, and an eye-witness of the things that are there. That was the capacity in which He appeared among men. That was the nature of His mission and work in the world. That was the key to the true and full sense of the Messianic kingdom which He had come to establish, and of which Nicodemus was now present to inquire. So much, and no less, the idea of that kingdom demanded, if it was to be what the need of the world required, a real restoration of man to the lost life of heaven. No such restoration could start from below, from the fallen life of man himself; it must descend upon man from God. "No man," as our text has it, "hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven"

There is brought into view here what may be termed a fundamental and universal law of our human spiritual life. This is determined in its very nature toward God, by a force which can become effectual for its end at the same time only through power descending into it from God. "Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise," says St. Augustine; "for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rest in Thee."

In a still wider view, indeed, the whole world is in this way carried toward God as its ultimate end; and its upward movement everywhere is upheld and sustained, in each stage of its rising course, by the energy of a higher existence flowing down into it from above. In other words, final causes everywhere are the actuating soul of efficient causes.

Thus it is that the unorganized elements of nature, air, water, light, heat, force, have their full meaning only in the

metamorphosis or transmutation they are made to undergo through the law of life, and first of all the plastic principle of plant life, bringing them into a new and higher mode of existence. And just so it is again that this first and lowest order of organization, the plant world, reaches forth of itself toward that which is above it, the sphere of animal life; into which it has power actually to pass, however, only as it is itself caught up again, by a force descending into it from that superior sphere itself; a force which imparts a new quality, by assimilation, to all the elements that come under its action, and which serves to advance them thus one degree nearer than before to the last grand object of their creation.

But it is in the transition of nature from the animal to man, in whom nature transcends itself by rising into the life of mind or spirit, that the law in question comes finally to its clearest manifestation. Here is a metamorphosis or glorification, a sublimation of the world, which surpasses immeasurably all going before, while it throws a sea of light, at the same time, back on the whole movement of creation, revealing what had been in truth the inmost working sense of it from the beginning. But that sense or end (the teleology of the entire cosmos) is now most of all seen to be a power, working down into nature, and lifting it up into its own higher sphere. "There is a *spirit* in man," we are told, "and the inspiration or inbreathing of the Almighty giveth him understanding." It is as joined with this higher principle in man, as transmuted in this way into the spirituality of thought, and made to mirror itself in the human intelligence, that the world in its natural order is as it were carried above and beyond itself, and is thus raised to its highest glory in the scheme of creation.

And all this, we now say, is but an analogy and adumbration in the world of nature of the great spiritual law, presented to us by our present subject; the law, whereby the rational nature of man again, in which the lower world becomes complete, is inwardly necessitated to seek its perfection and supreme good also beyond itself and in God; while it is able to do so effectually, at the same time, only as the

light and life of heaven are made first to flow down into it for that purpose.

It is not simply the existence of *sin*, as sometimes seems to be imagined, that requires this order. Apart from the fact, of the fall altogether, and before the fall, we meet with it in the Garden of Eden. The image of God which belonged to our unfallen nature there, formed of itself for this nature the necessity of its communion with God; while that communion, however, had place only by the coming down of the Divine presence to make it possible. God revealed Himself to our first parents in Paradise, and they heard His voice, we are told, as of one walking and conversing with them in the most immediately personal way.

But if the union of man with God needed even before the fall this bowing of the heavens, this coming down of the divine into the sphere of the earthly and human, to make it a reality and not a mere aspiration or dream, how much more must the same condition be regarded as holding necessarily of what the state of man became after the fall, through which the light that was in him has been turned into darkness, and the strength of his original righteousness, is changed into the melancholy weakness of original sin!

How incompetent he is in such fallen condition to solve the great problem of religion, and thus satisfy the inmost and deepest need of his own being, by rising above himself and entering into true life-communion with the heavenly and divine, is shown abundantly by the history of his efforts and endeavors in this direction from the beginning.

The old mythological story of the earth-born giants striving to scale the heavens in an outward physical way, by piling high mountains one upon another, is but an image or parable of these struggles, by which humanity thrown upon its own resources has vainly sought in the use of its best powers, through all ages, to rise with inward moral elevation to the true knowledge and possession of the Divine.

Neither in the way of intelligence nor in the way of will, neither in thought nor in life, was the ancient *Paganism* able

in any sort to actualize what was felt to be here the inmost sense of religion, and the chief end of man. Its heroes rose to the dignity of demi-gods by their imaginary virtue; its philosophers soared high above the earth by their imaginary wisdom. But in neither case was there any true ascending into heaven, any true bringing down of God and heavenly things into felt union and communion with the life of man on the earth. That was something which no moral Hercules, and no speculative Pythagoras or Plato, had power even in the least degree to compass or bring to pass. Virtue in such form, and wisdom in such form, were after all humanitarian only; flesh, born of the flesh, and not spirit, born of the Spirit; which as such accordingly could neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God.

The history of the Pagan world before Christ was in this way a preparation for His advent. It was a grand demonstration of the total inability of the world, to fulfil the idea of religion by raising itself to a true knowledge of God; and an argument thus for the necessity of a descending movement on the part of God Himself, a Divine self-revelation on the side of God in the fullest sense of the term, to make such religion possible. It was an experiment indeed, according to St. Paul, for this very purpose. "After that in the wisdom of God," he tells us, 1 Cor. i. 21, "the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Christianity came as the easy and simple answer for faith to the question of ages, which for the wisdom of the old Oriental world, the wisdom of Egypt, and the later wisdom of Greece, had been through long centuries before, a source only of interminable confusion and despair.

But granting all this in the case of the Gentile world before Christ, how does it affect, it may be asked, the case of the *Jewish* world before Christ? Was not the want of the Gentile world actually met there in the form of divine revelation, ages in advance of His advent in the flesh; and was not this a real solution of the great life problem of humanity, the uniting of man with God in the way of religion, back altogether of what

our Saviour here, in His conversation with Nicodemus, declares to be the only true solution of it, namely : His own personal descent as the Son of Man from heaven ?

To this there can be but one answer, if Christ Himself is true. All revelation before Christ was relative and partial only, having its ultimate reality in Him alone; and so all religion in the Jewish form was also only relative and partial, a prolepsis simply as far as it went of the full new birth of Christianity, the "shadow and not the very image" of what it prefigured, that as such could reach its own full completion only beyond this life, and after Christ actually came (Heb. xi. 13, 39, 40). Christ was in the world, as the eternal Logos, before He became incarnate, and so also was the Holy Ghost; but neither one nor the other in the same sense, or with like power, as afterwards. The difference was that between Christ coming (or about to come) and Christ actually come; that between the promise of the Holy Ghost, as the power of the new creation in Christ Jesus, and the actual gift or sending of the Holy Ghost, which took place when Christ was glorified, and which could not, we are told, take place before (John vii. 39.)

Judaism thus, as we know, was also but a preparation for Christ; not a mere negative preparation indeed like Gentilism; on the contrary a Divinely ordered positive preparation, the very portico of entrance itself, we may say, into the glorious sanctuary of His presence; but still a preparation only for the Christian fact, and not the full power of the fact itself in its own proper form. What the Baptist says of himself, holds good of the whole dispensation ending in his person. It was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord and make His paths straight." It was not the kingdom of God or of heaven, of which our Saviour speaks in His discourse with Nicodemus.

In a profound sense, therefore, the declaration, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven," applies in all its force to the Old Testament prophets no less than to the heroes, lawgivers and sages of the ancient heathen world. Moses, Elias, and Isaiah, had been as little

able in their time to ascend up to heaven; in the sense of this declaration, as either Zoroaster or Confucius, Pythagoras or Plato. Not even the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, by which they were moved, carried them to any such height as this. They spake as they were thus moved, but the oracles they uttered had not their origin in themselves, and were not drawn directly and immediately from their own knowledge. They could not say of the things of heaven, as Christ does, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." They performed miracles and uttered prophecies; but no one of them could have dared to say with Jesus Christ: "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me: the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works."

No one of them could have dared to say, with Him: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the Father." Or that other word of like astounding import: "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father; and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him." Speech of this sort, we all feel, would have been horrid blasphemy from any lips other than those of Jesus Christ; whereas proceeding from Him it is felt as only in harmony with His universal character and presence, and produces no shock. He stands alone among the Old Testament prophets; the end of their glorious succession, and yet immeasurably more than all of them put together, as we are expressly told by the last and greatest among them, John the Baptist. "Of His fulness," he says, "have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

We have the same broad contrast of relative and absolute revelation brought into view again in the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it is said: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers

by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." —Heb. i. 1, 2, 3.

This transcendent order of the Saviour's ministry is plainly set forth in what took place at His baptism; when, as He came up out of the water, the heavens were opened unto Him, we are told, the Spirit of God descended upon Him in bodily form, and from above was heard the voice of the Father Himself, saying: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This it was indeed that proclaimed to John the Baptist the full sense of His Messiahship over against all the inspirations and theophanies of the Old Testament, and enabled that great witness to say: "I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." Heaven and earth were joined together in His person. He was the true tabernacle of God among men.

Of like import with this demonstration on the banks of the Jordan was the vision afterwards of Tabor; that high mountain apart into which Jesus brought Peter, James, and John his brother; and where He was transfigured before them, so that His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. In the midst of this splendor, there appeared unto them, it is said, two men, also in shining apparel, which were Moses and Elias; who talked with Him, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. And, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, the symbol of Jehovah's presence, and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." Here, the secondary and dependent character of the universal Old Testament revelation, as related to Christ, is brought into view in the most solemn and impressive manner. Its great representatives, Moses and Elias, the founder and the restorer of the Law, had ages before ascended to heaven—the last even in an outward chariot of fire, and without the usual form of death. Yet here they appear as owing all their glory to Him who had

come after them, and their presence is but the occasion for showing forth the absolutely incomparable majesty which belonged to Him, as the Son of Man, who was at the same time the only begotten Son of God.

These two titles, meeting in the conception of the Messiah, condition each other and come in the end to the same sense.

The law of centralization runs through our whole human life, and finds its end at last only in the idea of a grand central Man, who as such must be at once one and universal, the second Adam, the head and representative of the race in its true ideal perfection. That, and nothing less, is the meaning of the Messianic title *Son of Man*.

But such an ultimate centre of humanity, having power to recapitulate and hold together its universal life as one, must be at the same time more than human, must be the power of a higher divine life revealing itself in and through the human, for the purpose of raising it into real union and fellowship with God. This is what St. Paul has in his mind where he speaks (Eph. i. 10,) of the gathering together in one of all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth. No simple ascension of the human out of its own sphere, not even the translation of an Enoch or the fiery sublimation of an Elias, could open the way for any such intercourse and communion between earth and heaven. The power making this possible must first of all start from above. The life of God must reach down into the life of man, so as to lift this up into its own higher sphere. So much, and nothing less, is what is signified to us by the Messianic title *Son of God*.

Only the Son of God thus *could* be the Son of Man; and Jesus is the Messiah, because He was in the days of His flesh, and still is, and will always continue to be, the union of these two distinctions, "conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary," both God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.

The central exclusiveness, and absolute completeness, of the mediation of Jesus Christ, are expressed alike in both titles; and faith in the one is necessarily at the same time faith also in the other.

“Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel,” exclaimed Nathanael, struck with the first evidence he had of the superior nature of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, in reply, intones the correlative significance of what He was on His earthly human side. “Thou shalt see greater things than these,” He tells him. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the *Son of Man*.” Heaven in free communication with earth; angels ascending and descending between the two otherwise sundered worlds; but all centering in the glorious mystery of the Incarnation, where the Son of God and the Son of Man meet together as one. The descending movement in this way first; only so, however, as to become at once an ascending movement also, raising the life of humanity into real union with the life of God.

“Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” To this question of our Lord, we are told (Matthew xvi. 14), the common answer ran, “John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremias, or one of the prophets;” humanitarian conceptions all, at best, of the Messiahship required for the full ideal completion of the human race. But for Peter, and his fellow-apostles, the Son of Man was infinitely more than this. “Thou art the Christ,” they say, “the Son of the living God;” and the answer, as we know, was the heaven-inspired response of faith to the challenge of the divinity itself, which shone forth immediately from His person. They saw and felt in Him a man, who was greater than all men besides. A man, who stood solitary and alone among the children of men, and yet comprehended in Himself the inmost and deepest sense of humanity. A man, in one word, the absolute completeness of whose humanity showed Him to be more than man, revealed in Him and through Him the glory of a higher world, and thus proved Him to be the world’s true Christ or Messiah, the Son of Man who was at the same time, as such, the only begotten Son of God.

Such in a general view is the order of the Christian salvation, the economy of the kingdom of God, on which our Saviour seeks to fasten the wondering attention of Nicodemus, in the

passage we have before us as a text at this time: "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."

In full symphony with this, we seem to hear St. Paul's triumphal pæan (Eph. iv. 9, 10,) chanted so grandly to the Ephesians: "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things."

Redemption for man, deliverance from the power of sin and death; not in the mode of any outward superficial change merely wrought from below, through the natural resources of humanity itself, or by the illapse even of heavenly influences coming in to adjust these resources in their own order; but only in the mode of a new divine life, proceeding forth from God in personal form, and taking hold of the fallen life of the world in a real historical way, so as to rescue it from the captivity of Satan and raise it to the light of immortality and heaven: this is what Christianity means, and it is not possible that it can be rightly understood or made of proper practical account in any other view.

From the whole subject allow me now in conclusion, my dear pupils, members of the Graduating Class of 1872, to draw in brief terms a few general lessons of high practical moment, which I ask you to take with you from the solemnity of the present hour as my paternal farewell charge, for the use of your lives in time to come. The lessons you will at once perceive, are not new; they have formed in one way or another the burden of what you have been taught in the way of religion through your whole college course. But they are lessons at the same time which can never grow old, and which it is especially proper therefore to emphasize and enforce upon your attention on this occasion.

1. Christianity is not primarily a doctrine for the understanding, nor a rule of conduct for the will, but a principle of life for the soul deeper than either understanding or will, and carrying in it the power of a divine regeneration for all that the soul is, or is capable of becoming, in any other view.

2. As *life* in this sense, accordingly, religion is infinitely more than the conception of any supposed natural morality and virtue, which under the name of life is made too often to stand in the room of all religious theory and faith; as when it is said:

“For points of faith let graceless zealots fight,
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.”

Practice in *that* view is just as little true life, in the deep Christian sense of the term, as knowledge or doctrine. Life in the Christian sense of the term involves faith; for it is a birth from above, which as such cannot be without some apprehension of its own supernal origin and source.

3. So much is comprehended at once in the idea of this supernal birth itself, as it is presented to us in the Gospel. For it is no re-ordering merely of the natural powers of the soul; nor yet any general influence simply of the Divine Spirit upon the human spirit, that the new birth here signifies, as we have now seen from our Saviour's discourse with Nicodemus. On the contrary, what it signifies is incorporation by the power of the Holy Ghost, figured in holy baptism, into the new life which has been brought into the world by the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; “who, being God of God, very God of very God, dwelling in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, at last when the fulness of the time was come, came down from heaven, and became man, for us men and for our salvation;” who “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification;” who, “by His appearing hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel;” and who by the sending of the Holy Ghost, and the institution of the Church, has made room for the real, historical and objective presence of this new order of life among His people to the end of time.

4. We cannot then make too much of the Person of Christ, regarded as the principle and ground of the Christian salvation. He is not the mere functionary simply through whom this salvation is administered and made known; He is the very substance and power of the salvation itself; it holds through-

out in the constitution of His mediatorial life, which by its very nature has been, and is still, in the most real historical way, the entire mystery of godliness, ordained before all ages for the redemption and glorification of the world. To the question: "What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?" it is not enough for us to respond: "He is the son of David." He must be for us in full earnest at the same time also the Son of the Living God. In other words, He must be to us in His own personal being more than all His heavenly teaching and divine working. These are great, and greatly to be magnified, as the objective matter of Christian faith; but deeper than all this, and before all this, He is Himself the ultimate fundamental object of that faith, and it is only as the entire matter of it is apprehended as growing forth from that in this central view, that any part or portion of it can ever be rightly apprehended under any other view.

5. We are bound thus to allow full scope and range to the Messianic title *Son of God*, in our conception of Christ and His work. We may not narrow it into the notion of a mere official dignity; we may not resolve it into the character of a pale Gnostic abstraction. It must be allowed to condition for us practically the height and depth, the length and breadth of the Christian redemption. This redemption can be no accident or after-thought in the economy of creation. It is no figure of speech simply, to parallelize the new creation, as St. Paul does, with the old. It is only our miserably low way of thinking of Christ, that can ever tempt us to any such thought. The principle of the two creations is the same, and the end therefore, here as elsewhere, must have in it not only all, but more than all, the cosmical significance of the beginning. Only the "first-born of every creature" (Col. i. 15, 18) could become also the "first-born from the dead;" the Father being pleased thus "that in Him *all* fulness should dwell." The predestination of grace in this way antedates the predestination of nature, having had place in Christ, we are told (Eph. i. 4), "before the foundation of the world." Grace in such view is older than nature, deeper than nature, more comprehensive than na-

ture. Christ is the alpha and omega of both, and of both joined together as one. He descended, as the Redeemer of the world, *into the lowest parts of the earth*, that He might ascend up in His work far above all heavens, and so fill all things. The powers of the kingdom of heaven in His hand take hold on the deep places of the earth, the lowest foundations of the world's being and life. They are cosmogonic, world-historical, and world-teleologic in the profoundest and inmost sense of these terms, ending at last in the "new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

6. All this, we say, belongs to Christ as the Son of God; but in all this we are bound again to see and own in Him at the same time, in its full unbroken force, the Messianic dignity of the *Son of Man*. Only as thus gathering up into Himself the absolute and last sense of humanity, could He be at once the deepest and highest sense of the world, the alpha and omega of the world's life. He took upon Him the nature of man; had a real human birth; grew in wisdom and virtue as He grew in years; was tempted and tried as we are, only without sin; as a man, wrestled with the curse of sin that lay upon our general race, with death and with him that had the power of death; as a man, triumphed on the cross, went down into hades, rose again on the third day, and finally ascended up on high, leading captivity captive; where He sitteth at the right hand of the Father, and from whence He shall come again, as a man, to judge the quick and the dead (Matt. xxvi. 64; Acts xvii. 31; Rev. i. 7). Through all these stages, and under all these aspects, His humanity challenges our full unflinching acknowledgment and faith; and the whole power of the Gospel for us depends on our power to communicate with it as an earnest reality in this way.

7. True man, without sin, and yet at the same time true God, as our Catechism puts it; or as it runs in the old Athanasian Creed: "God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds, and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; perfect God, and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting." That is the great

mystery of godliness, the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, "which, except a man believe truly and firmly," we are told, "he cannot be saved."

8. Such *believing* is determined directly and immediately by the authority of its object, before all power of understanding the nature and constitution of the mystery itself which is thus embraced. The apprehension of faith is not from knowledge, but in order to knowledge. The fact of the Trinity manifested through the fact of the Incarnate Son of God, goes before the dogma of the Trinity comprehended theoretically in the dogma of the Incarnation; and the faith of the Church was sure of both facts in the beginning, as we know, long before the sense of either was brought to any clear dogmatic expression. And thus it is that universally true Christian faith regards primarily Christ Himself, and not any doctrine of Christ; although Christ is at once for it again the root of all right doctrine, as well as the principle of all right life. To believe in Christ as very God and very man, it is not necessary that I should be able in the first place to see *how* the Divine can be thus inwardly and organically joined with the human in His person. I may feel the full force of the fact as it confronts me in the evangelical history, without being able to understand it. Theological science has not yet been able to express it in full; perhaps will never be able to do so in this world. It is a study even for angels; and how then should it be otherwise than largely incomprehensible for men? But faith here waits in no sense for theological science. It finds the whole Gospel in the personal Christ Himself, and finds it to be here at the same time the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation.

9. The saving power of faith lies thus in what it embraces, which is ultimately always "Christ come in the flesh," and not in any worth of faith itself otherwise considered. Its whole worth holds in its office of apprehending in a real way the objective revelation which God has been pleased to make of Himself in His Son Jesus Christ; which revelation, thus apprehended, Christ Himself assures us (John xvii. 3), is nothing

less than life eternal. The Christian salvation in this way, while it ends in subjective experience, draws all its force primarily from realities which are beyond and high above this experience. There can be no true experimental piety in the Christian sense, that is not the product of these heavenly and supernatural realities, working upon the soul and taking hold upon the life from their own objective sphere. The objectivities of the Gospel, as we may call them, are in this way of more account than its subjectivities. They are emphatically those "powers of the world to come," that are spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews as entering into all Christian experience; powers, which flow down into men from above, issuing from Christ, the Lord of life and glory, and mediated for the apprehension of faith by the power of the Holy Ghost through the word and sacraments. Forth out from the prison-house of self, and away from the transitory, perishing show of things seen and temporal, through the aspect or look of faith continually turned toward Jesus, the great forerunner and champion of the Christian faith; that is the wisdom of the saints, the virtue of the just, and the only law of deliverance from this present evil world. "For this is the victory that overcometh the world," according to St. John, "even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John v. 4, 5).

10. Let us consider well, then, that we may always firmly hold fast, what is the true order of nature and grace, the right relation of earth to heaven, or of things which are seen and temporal to things which are unseen and eternal. We have to do here in our present life with two worlds. Our communication with one, the world of matter, is by sense and science based on sense; our communication with the other, the world of spirit, is by faith and knowledge proceeding from faith. The two worlds, of course, are with God one system, and in this view there can be no contradiction ultimately between the truths of natural science and the truths of faith; between the economy of the life that now is, and the economy of the life to come. They must be at last, we know perfectly well, one economy. But they are

not this at once for our present apprehension. On the contrary, they seem to be widely disparate orders of existence, that are in painful conflict on all sides, one with the other; so that it has been through all ages the great problem of life, how to harmonize their deep-toned discord. In the bosom of Christianity, especially, this conflict is brought to its fullest force and consciousness. It is the conflict here between nature and the supernatural, between science and faith, the history of which runs through all the Christian centuries; but the full crisis of which seems to have been reached only in our own time. Now it has become emphatically the burden of the world's universal life, the question of all questions for our universal modern civilization. It is moving the thunders of the Vatican in one way, and stirring the depths of all Protestantism in another way. It is taking hold of politics as well as religion; kings, princes, parliaments and statesmen are sorely troubled with its presence. All our science, all our business, all our education are entangled in the mighty dilemma one way or another, and have no power any more to hold themselves aloof from its practical challenge.

This it is, my dear young friends, that forms, beyond all other considerations, the grand and solemn interest of the period in which you are called to live and work in the world, and that more than all else, to my own mind, throws an awful responsibility prospectively on your future lives. The critical struggle between the terrestrial and the supernal, to which I have now been directing your attention, is one in which you must all from this time forward, as children of your time and age, take more or less active part. You cannot be neutral in the warfare. It is too broad and deep for that. Not to be on the side of the Lord here, is to be on the side of Satan.

How faith and science are to be ultimately harmonized, I am not prepared to say. It is not necessary, it seems to me, that we should be able to solve the question in full in our present state. There are, however, four general propositions in the case, which we are bound to assert and maintain:

First. The conflict between the two spheres, as the world now stands, is not imaginary only, but most positively real, and

it is growing in terrible significance every day. It has not been decided and ended yet, either on one side or on the other, and to ignore it is but the trick of the ostrich hiding her head in the sand to escape the hand of her pursuer.

Secondly. Science is not required to do blind homage to the authority of faith, exercised over it in an outward, mechanical way, according to the modern ultramontane theory of the Church of Rome.

Thirdly. Faith must not be required, on the other hand, to follow passively the authority of science, according to the fond view of the Spencers, Darwins, and Huxleys of our day; the modern *Weltanschauung* in general, as it is called in Germany, by which naturalism and humanitarianism are made to take the place of the old supernatural faith altogether, and Christianity is found resolving itself into a new moral creation springing up from the earth, instead of a new spiritual creation in Christ Jesus, coming down from heaven.

Fourthly. Then we are bound, and for our faith also it is possible, to reverse this order of looking at the world, and so to organize our scheme of thought and life, that the earthly shall be felt with us to depend upon the heavenly, instead of the heavenly upon the earthly.

This does not mean any such wilful immolation of natural reason and conscience on the altar of religion, as the modern Jesuitic theory of Rome demands. But it does mean that the principle of the Christian faith, as supernatural, shall be regarded as independent of the principle of all mere natural life and science; and that in the relation of the two principles to each other, moreover, the first shall be held to be of higher authority always than the second, because in fact coming before this in the true *idea* of the world, however seeming to come after it in the actual world-process. In other words, the only true ultimate order both of essential being and of knowledge, in the general relation of the world of nature to the world of spirit, is in reality not from below upward, but from above downward—not a scaling of the heavens by the powers of the earth, but a flowing down upon the earth of the powers of heaven. That, therefore, is the only law of harmony in the end be-

tween nature and the supernatural, between the human and the divine (illustrated and enforced by universal analogy in the natural creation itself); and faith, as independent of science and greater than science, consists just in the power of seeing and owning this, whether it be able at the same time or not able, to see in what way actually the claims of science are to be reconciled with its demands. If need be, faith can afford to wait for the final and full resolution of that "conflict of ages," till these outward heavens shall pass away as a scroll, and this panoramic time-vision shall lose itself at last in the light of the world that lies beyond time.

Need I say that the principle of Christian faith in this independent character, is not an abstract thought of any kind; the idea of the Absolute or Unconditioned in the sense of Kant or Sir William Hamilton, or that pure nescience which regards the infinite as the simply unknowable and unknown, in the sense of Herbert Spencer and the modern Humanitarian school generally? The principle plants itself, not on an abstraction, but on the very inmost reality of the world's actual being, which it is just the province and the special power of faith then (in distinction from sense, Heb. xi. 1-3) to authenticate and make sure to our human consciousness.

This objective reality is nothing other than the word of God, which is present as a living power in all divine revelation, as it has been spoken at sundry times and in divers manners through ages past by the prophets.

It is of His word in such wide general view God Himself speaks, Is. lv. 8-11, where He says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

It is of the word in the same broad sense that St. Peter also speaks (1 Pet. i. 23-25), where he says of Christians that they are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." To which he adds immediately: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

But what the divine word is in such supernatural and really objective view comes ultimately to its full, absolute sense and force, as we know, only in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; who is the Word Incarnate, the Divine Personal Logos, the eternal Son of God, incorporated into the very life of the world through union with our fallen nature, and made to be thus the Son of Man, for the great work of man's redemption. And here it is emphatically, therefore, that the grand descending order of God's creation comes fully and overwhelmingly into view, stultifying and turning into contempt the humanitarian imagination of an earth-born or earth-produced heaven in every shape and form.

"Ye are from beneath," we hear Him say; "I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John viii. 23, 24).

And so in our text: "No man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."

This is the Christian *Weltanschauung*, in difference from every world scheme that starts from below, from the premises of mere nature, from the study of man as the highest out-birth simply of the world in its present state, and claims the right then of measuring the possibilities of the infinite and eternal by the rules of science drawn from this empirical and purely terrestrial sphere.

And who will dare to say that this stand-point of faith, found directly and immediately in the historical heaven-descended fact

of Jesus Christ (the deepest truth of the world, if Christ Himself be true), is less rational or sure, either for the right understanding of life, or for the right use of life, than the posture of science undertaking to scan or scale the spiritual heights of creation from any lower position ?

Say not, that this supernatural, heaven-descended fact is itself, since Christ has returned to heaven, no other now than a theological theory or doctrine. It is still before us as an ever-living fact in the evangelical history, and it lives also through the ages in the faith of the holy Catholic Church. We have it in the Apostles' Creed. That Creed depends in no way on science. It is at once and in its own right, the vision of what is highest, and therefore deepest also, in the constitution of the world's life, flowing down directly from God the Father through Christ, as the power of a new creation needed in this way to complete the sense of the old.

Here, then, is the great practical issue to which we are brought by our subject: the issue of ages, which, I have said before, is upon our own time, perhaps, as on no previous time, and the full solemnity of which you are now called to meet in passing out into the world. The conflict between unbelieving science and faith, between nature and the supernatural, between the powers of what St. Paul calls "this present evil world" and the "powers of the world to come;" in one word, between the spirit of anti-christ, denying that Christ is come in the flesh, and the spirit of true faith, confessing this great mystery of godliness; this conflict, I say, which underlies so profoundly the seething, tumultuating forces of the time, is one in which you also are now called to take active side and part, and which you have no power to escape.

Let me urge upon you then the importance of not throwing yourselves forth upon the open sea of life, in these circumstances, without the ballast of firmly established principle; without the compass of heaven-directed intelligence and thought; without the rudder of a resolute Christian purpose and will; only to be at the mercy of all winds and waves, and to float hither and thither with any current into which you may

happen to fall. That would be indeed unworthy of your education, and might well cause us to feel that our labor bestowed upon you had been in vain. But I hope and trust better things of you, though I thus speak; and therefore it is that I call upon you on this occasion, to look the question before you squarely in the face, and to meet it at once with a full and clear-minded decision.

In the language of Joshua's farewell charge to the tribes of Israel, let me say to you now, in this parting address: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve;" and let your right election, made now and here, stand as the solemn memorial of a covenant between you and God, to be remembered in all time to come. Before you are the two *Weltanschauungen*, the two great world schemes, to which I have been directing your attention at the present time: the Humanitarian theory of thought and life on the one hand, making spirit the outbirth of nature,—the celestial, the sublimation simply of the terrestrial; and on the other hand the theory of Christ and Christianity, and of the Apostles' Creed, resolving the highest life of the world into the down-flowing life of heaven. In the face of this alternative, let me ask, what think ye of Christ? Whose son is He? "Whom say ye," He asks of you Himself, "that I the Son of Man am?" Here is the test at last of all true Christianity, whether doctrinal or practical. See that the right answer to it, as of old with Nathanael and Simon Peter, be with you also the one glorious guiding star of your lives.

"Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures" (James i. 16-18). "Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked" (the naturalistic, humanitarian scoffers of the age), "fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen." (2 Pet. iii. 17, 18).