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## ART. I.—THE SPIRITUAL WORLD.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”  
Eph. vi. 10-13.

In this startling conclusion the Apostle gathers into one, as it were, the doctrinal and ethical parts of his great evangelical epistle going before. Christianity is a theory of salvation made known by divine revelation. It is then, as proceeding from this, a rule of life, by which the theory is to become effectual for its end. The heavenly vocation is unto righteousness. This demands, however, more than outward conjunction simply of one with the other. Theory and practice in the case, truth and life, are here so involved each in the other, that there is no room to conceive of their standing apart. The moralities of Christianity mean nothing in disjunction from its spiritualities. They are necessarily one in origin and power. The entire economy of salvation, including in it all the possibilities of the Christian life, can hold throughout only in constant living union and communication with the supernatural world. It is not enough to be told of that world, or to acknowledge its existence theoretically. The powers of it are in fact touching us all the time. Our need of redemption has its main force there; and there it is mainly that the actual work of redemption has

been accomplished for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. The chief perils of the Christian life for every one of us are still there; and there, then, of course, also our help must be sought and found, if these perils are to be overcome. No simply human resolution or strength can place us in right relation to such a warfare as this. Our wrestling is not with flesh and blood, but with the powers of evil in full infernal form. Hence the exhortation, Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Nothing less than the life of heaven in us, can ever make us equal to such contest with the life of hell.

Flesh and blood, we see at once, stand here for the powers and forces of the present world in its simply natural view. Our connection with this is immediately through the body, but it takes in largely also the life of the mind or soul, constituting thus altogether what St. Paul calls the "present evil world," from which we are delivered by the redemption of Christ. With this, of course, we are required to do battle continually in our Christian calling. Nature, and the forces of evil holding in the moral world as merely natural and fallen, must be wrestled with and overcome, in ourselves and in the world around us. All religion resolves itself in this way into self-renunciation and conquering of the world. In what sense, then, is it to be understood, when the Apostle tells us that the Christian contest is *not* with the powers of the natural world, characterized as flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers belonging to another order of existence, namely, the spiritual world in contradistinction from the natural?

The opposition is relative only, not absolute. Flesh and blood, self, the world and the things of the world around us here in the body, are indeed part of the hostile force we are called to encounter in our way to heaven; they are not the whole of this force, however, nor are they the main part of it, by any means. That belongs always to a more inward and far deeper realm of being, where the powers of the spiritual world are

found to go immeasurably beyond all the powers of nature, and to be, at the same time, in truth, the continual source and spring of all that is in these last, whether for good or for evil. The Christian conflict thus, even where it regards things simply of the present life, looks through what is thus mundane, constantly to things which are unseen and eternal; and in this way it becomes in very fact, throughout, a wrestling not with flesh and blood, but with the universal powers of evil brought to bear upon us from the other world.

So much we are taught in the form of our Christian baptism itself, by which we are engaged to "renounce the devil with all his ways and works, the world with its vain pomp and glory, and the flesh with all its sinful desires." In one view, these may be regarded as separate enemies; but we know, at the same time, that they form together but one and the same grand power of evil, no one part of which can be effectually withstood asunder from the diabolical life that animates and actuates the whole. To wrestle with the world or with the flesh really, is to wrestle at the same time really with the full power of hell. If the struggle reach not to this, it may issue in stoic morality or respectable prudence, but it can never come to true self-mastery or victory over the world in the Christian sense. The field for any such conquest lies wholly beyond the realm of mere flesh and blood. The conquest, if gained at all, must be won from the hosts of hell; and then, of course, by the aid only of corresponding heavenly hosts and heavenly armor; which is, in truth, just what our baptism means. This is the victory, the only victory, that overcometh the world, even our faith, making us one with the Lord. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God," and therefore in His glorified Humanity a Divine fund of life and salvation for all men that draw near to God in His name!

A glance at the terms in which St. Paul describes the universe of evil with which we are called to contend in the spiri-

tual world, is sufficient to fill us with a sense of its dread reality. To think of resolving his language into Oriental hyperbole or rhetorical exaggeration, must be considered simply absurd. Plainly, his thought struggles with the greatness of its object, and labors to find speech for its proper expression. It is interesting, in this view, to fix attention on the original text. Not against flesh and blood have we to wrestle, but against principalities and powers—organized polities of multitudinous evil in eminent presence and form, having their life and activity wholly in the spiritual world as distinguished from the natural. Not against simply terrestrial and material foes, but against the rulers (*κοσμοκράτορας*) of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness, or literally the spiritualities of wickedness, *ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις*, in heavenly or high places; that is, in extra-mundane or unearthly state, from which they are regarded as exercising a bad cosmocracy over the darkness of the human world in its present fallen condition, reaching with more or less mysterious effect into the constitution of nature itself. A thought that meets us elsewhere, when Satan is brought into view as the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; or when he is spoken of by our Lord Himself as the prince of this world who was to be cast out through the glorification of His humanity, when He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

All this means clearly that the battle of our salvation is to be fought out literally, and not in a metaphorical sense merely, with the powers of darkness in the other world, and that the theatre of it lies mainly and essentially in that world, and not in the world of time and sense with which we are here surrounded in the body. The case is so presented, moreover, as to show that these powers of darkness are not abstractions, impersonal forms of evil and falsehood, but concrete personal agents, living embodiments of intelligence and will, positively bent on our de-

struction, and waiting always for opportunity to involve us in their own ruin. Still more, they are not single and separate agencies only, as is often imagined, besetting the paths of men with occasional more or less transient assault; they are embattled hosts; they are principalities and powers; they press upon us continually as an organized encampment, placing us in constant deadly peril from all sides. Indeed the plain doctrine of the Bible, in the passage here immediately before us and elsewhere, is nothing less than this, that the redemption of every human being is something to be accomplished only in the face of the combined strength of the universal empire of darkness in the other world. That empire is one; and to be conquered in any part, it must be conquered as a whole. Its relation to the Christian life on earth, is like that of the ocean to an embankment holding it back from territory which it would otherwise overflow on the opposite side; in which case, as we know, the resistance to be effectual at any point, must be such as to withstand in truth the pressure and stress of the universal sea thus held in check. So all the powers of hell, the forces of darkness and sin accumulated into one vast diabolical system, are engaged always in common cause against every child of Adam struggling to show himself a child of God. And who among men is sufficient of himself for such a contest as this? Who must not feel here the absolute hopelessness of all human strength, not backed and upheld in like real way by the powers of the spiritual world in heavenly form—the only conceivable counterpoise, as all may at once see, to such an array of these powers in infernal form?

The conception of any such comprehension of our life here in the general spiritual order of the universe can be no better than foolishness, we know, for the reigning materialistic thinking of the present time. But it is in truth the only rational view of the world's existence. Philosophy, no less than religion, postulates the idea that the entire creation of God is one

thought, in the power of which all things are held together as a single system from alpha to omega, from origin to end; and all modern science is serving continually more and more to confirm this view, by showing that all things everywhere look to all things, and that everything everywhere is and can be what it is only through its relations to other things universally. So it is in the world of nature; so it is in the spiritual world; and so it must be also in the union of these two worlds one with the other. It is to be considered a settled maxim now, a mere truism indeed for all true thinkers, that there is no such thing as insulated existence anywhere—such an *inconnexum* must at once perish, sink into non-entity. It is no weakness of mind, therefore, to think of the spiritual world as a vast nexus of affection and thought (like the waves of the sea endlessly various and yet multitudinously one), viewed either as heaven or as hell. Without doing so, indeed, no man can believe really in any such world at all. It will be for him simply an abstraction, a notion, a phantom. And so again it is no weakness of mind, in acknowledging the existence of the spiritual world (thus concretely apprehended), to think of our present human life, even here in the body, as holding in real contact and communication, organic inward correlation we may say, with the universal life of that world (angelic and diabolic), in such sort that our entire destiny for weal or woe shall be found to hang upon it, as it is made to do in the teaching of God's Word here under consideration. It is no weakness of mind we say, to think of the subject before us in this way. The weakness lies altogether on the other side, with those who refuse the thought of any such organic connection, between the life of men here in the body and the life of spirits in the other world.

The full significance of what Christianity is represented to be, in the Apostle's description of it, as a battle with the universal power of hell, comes into view only when we consider how room has been made for it first of all, through the work of

redemption accomplished for us by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is called the "Captain of our salvation" as going before us in the Christian life, the "author and finisher of our faith," (or rather of *the* faith, that is, of Christianity itself); not in the sense of mere outward leadership, most certainly, but clearly under the view of His being in Himself, comprehensively, the whole power and possibility of the Christian life, as it might be prosecuted by others afterwards, following at vast distance in His steps. Now, in this archetypal character, Christ as the Author of our salvation, comes into view everywhere in His own Word, as waging war personally, in the first place, with the powers of hell, and triumphing over them once for all in the most real way, in order to bring in the power of righteousness and victory for His militant Church, to the end of time. Different theories of the atonement have prevailed in different ages; it has been thought of as a price paid to Satan, and then again as a price paid to God; but, however we may try to explain it otherwise, we come to the true ground of it unquestionably only in the necessity of this great life-battle by which alone it was possible for our Lord to throw open to men the way of salvation; and then it includes in its meaning, of course, all the conditions that were required to make His life equal to such mighty purpose. These conditions lay in the mystery of the incarnation itself, by which His humanity was carried forward progressively, through inexpressible hellish temptations and conflicts, to its full glorification at last by His passion on the cross.

Other ages of the Christian Church have made more of this dramatic view of the work of redemption, than is commonly made of it now. With many, at the present time, it is felt to be little better than crass superstition, to conceive of it at all in this way. In the view of such persons, the warfare of Christ with the infernal world, is made to restrict itself almost entirely to Gethsemane and Calvary; and is then so thought of,

if it be seriously thought of at all, as to be sundered in reality from the other world altogether, becoming in this way at most, a sort of moral transaction merely between the obedience of the Son and the justice of the Father, for the benefit of men, on the plane of their simply terrestrial life. It would be easy to show the damaging influence of this departure from the old faith on the theology and life of the Church generally; but that is no part of our present task; we touch the point only, by the way, for the purpose of adding emphasis to what we now go on to say of the intense realism with which the Bible clothes the idea of redemption everywhere, as a battle fought and won in the most actual way against the universal strength of hell.

The Old Testament is full of this grand Messianic thought. It is the key that serves to interpret the inmost sense of the Prophets. Their one subject throughout is Christ, represented in His relations to the Universe, and to His Church, all turning on the thought of redemption as a battle fought out triumphantly, first of all, with hellish forces in the invisible spiritual world, and then as condition and cause reaching over continually into the whole progress of the same contest between light and darkness, heaven and hell, in this world.

So it is also with the Psalms. It has been common to divide these into two classes, one having prophetic regard to the Messiah, and the other not; and much learning has been employed to assign to different Psalms, in this view, their proper exegesis. But there is no room really for any such distinction. If the Psalms belong to the Word of God at all, they are all Messianic. They are so, not merely in the way of any secondary accommodation, but in their primary essential intention and sense.

And who may not see that if it be thus with the Prophets and Psalms, it must be so also with the other parts of Holy Scripture? All its laws, institutions, and histories, even in what may seem their most external and accidental character, must be



regarded as looking primarily to Christ and His kingdom. That is their original inward sense, and all else they may appear to mean, is but the outward drapery of this—something which is there, not for its own sake, but for the sake of what is under it, and within it, in such mysterious way. So much, the case of itself supposes and demands. We cannot honestly believe the Bible to be the Word of God—the veritable embodiment of the Divine itself—if we think of it less honorably than this. Doth God care for oxen? Can His self-revelation, coming down through the heavens as infinite spirit and life, for us men and for our salvation, terminate anywhere on mere mundane accidents, on mere human secularities, not to say human frivolities, follies and profanities, for their own sake? No; any such revelation must be Divine in every point and tittle, *all* glorious within, however seemingly marred for the moment in outward visage and form; or else it cannot be at all God's *Word*. For any truly thoughtful mind, there can be no escape from this alternative.

So regarded, the Old Testament becomes at once Messianic in full, from beginning to end. It is not merely a collection of sacred laws, records, histories, lyrics, and prophecies, looking remotely and vaguely to Christianity, and allowing more or less fanciful application to Christian fact and doctrine (in the way of much that we meet with as evangelical exposition of the Scriptures); not this merely, we say, indeed not this at all primarily. But in broad distinction from this, it is what our Lord declared and showed it to be, after His resurrection; when, as we are told, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded” unto the two disciples going to Emmaus, “in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself;” and when again, to His disciples in full meeting, we hear Him saying, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the

Psalms, concerning Me." To which it is added, immediately: "Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day."

Who is not made to feel that the opening of the understanding here spoken of, means something infinitely beyond all the light that can ever come into the mind of man from the Word, through the mere letter of it studied with any imaginable amount of so-called biblical and theological learning?

It was the life of the risen Lord Himself, shining into the written Word, and through this into the mind of the disciples, which, by inward correspondence served to open their understanding to the proper knowledge of both. And, as it was then, so it is still. We learn what the written Word is, only by light from the incarnate Word; but, then, again we learn what the light of the incarnate Word is, only as this shines into us through the written Word. A circle, it is true; which alone, however, brings us to the true ground of the Christian faith.

The testimony of Jesus, then, is in very truth the spirit of prophecy, the animating life of all sacred Scripture. This, without any exception or qualification. The testimony of Jesus is Himself, first, the absolute truth of God manifested in His person and life for the salvation of the world; and then, in the next place, the going forth of His power and glory in the heavens, His mighty acts of redemption, His angelic kingdom, His Church on earth, and every believer regenerated into His likeness and image. It is all one testimony or witness, repeating through the ages one and the same truth, Christ the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God and its end. This is what the Word of God has for its actuating spirit in all its parts. It regards immediately and supremely everywhere Christ and His kingdom. He, then, and no other, is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Lord of heaven and earth,

the mighty God of Jacob, the Redeemer of Israel, who showed wonders in the land of Egypt, and led His people like a flock through the wilderness. And thus it is, that all this outward history, as is indeed generally admitted in a dim way, becomes at once graphically representative of Christ, and His work, and His kingdom, as they come into view ultimately through the gospel in their true spiritual character and form. Representative at all points and in all details, so that what comes last must be regarded as the real informing sense and spirit of what comes first in the case, from the beginning and throughout.

How the depth and wealth of the Scriptures are made to grow upon us, as soon as we come into the perception of this great thought, and find strength to apply it to its proper use. Omitting now all other applications, see what it involves for the point with which we are at present more immediately concerned; namely, the biblical view of Christ's work of redemption, as being mainly and inmosty a combat, in the most real way, with the universal strength of hell in the other world. Many passages in the Prophets and Psalms, along with direct declarations of the New Testament, have always been felt to have this meaning; but it comes out still more fully in the Old Testament history, where the true spiritual sense of it comes to be perceived in the way we have now seen. The Lord comes before us there as a man of war, the God of battles, Jehovah of hosts or armies. His people are delivered by mighty hand and outstretched arm, from the midst of Egypt and through the Red Sea. "Wars of the Lord," is the title given to a sacred book before the time of Moses; and in the same sense we have wars of the Lord again in the journey through the wilderness and in the land of Canaan, under Moses, under Joshua, under the Judges. What are we to understand by all this, and a great deal more of like outward significance, if it be not intended to set forth the coming of our Saviour Christ into the world under the corresponding character of battle and victory accomplished

in the depths of hell; the contest issuing first in His own glorification, and through that then in the power of eternal salvation for His people. "Now that He ascended," says St. Paul, "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." This is spoken of immediately before as His "leading captivity captive," and so having power to bestow celestial gifts on men.

Thus "it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the *archegos* or leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings." In Him, we see the full nature of the Christian life; while, however, we see at the same time how it is made possible also for His followers. They, too, must confront the universal strength of hell, a task demanding infinite resistance, such as only the Lord of life and glory could bring to it. How then can they follow such a leader? How shall they be found conformable to this glorious archetype? How may they wrestle and conquer here as Christ has done? Not certainly by the power of their own might. That can be but as a leaf before the wind, in such an evil day as this. Only can they do so, we answer, as they are made strong in the Lord Himself, and in the power of *His* might. Only, in truth, as *His* conquering of the powers of hell, is made to pass itself forward into them not as an example merely, but as the "force of an endless life," so as to become *their* conquering also, enabling them to stand and withstand in the evil day as He has done before them. In this view, the battle of redemption belongs wholly to the Lord. He is the one sole Redeemer, who has wrought out salvation for the human world once for all, by the painful task of His own human glorification. "He saw that there was no man," it is said, "and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness it sus-

tained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon His head; and He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak." (Isa. lix. 16, 17.)

It might seem here, indeed, at first view, that the conquering of hell by the Lord in this whole and sole way, as a work once for all full and complete, would have the effect of exonerating His followers from all participation in such combat; so that the benefit of it should accrue to them thenceonward by outward reckoning only, without the need of any such inward living continuation of the actual hell-battle in themselves as that now mentioned. But salvation in that way would be magical, and not real. The Bible teaches an altogether different lesson. *We* wrestle, says the Apostle, we ourselves, against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and the spiritualities of evil beyond this world. In this most real struggle we need of course more than ourselves, we need the help of Him who has gone before us as the one sole "Captain of the host of the Lord" to bring us into the Land of Promise. But we need this help in inward not outward way. It must be Christ related to us, as the vine is to its branches. Outside of Him we can do nothing; in Him we can do all things. That is what St. Paul means, when he says: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." That is what he means, when looking at the unearthliness of the Christian fight, he adds: "*Wherefore*—because you are called to grapple thus with the empire of darkness in its full extent—take unto you the full panoply of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

The subject which we have been thus far discussing is not of theoretical interest merely, but of the most intense practical account. It is a small matter here to have the truth in our mind, if it be not also in our life. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." How then are we to carry into

effect the heavenly exhortation, To be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might? What we have to say farther, in answer to this question, may be presented briefly under three general heads or topics.

I. We must make it our care to *know and believe the actual existence of the spiritual world.* That amounts to much more than is commonly imagined. True, indeed, it is in one view something unnatural, *not* to have such faith; for the spiritual is at all times and everywhere close upon the natural; it is the region of ends and causes from which continually go forth as effects all things belonging to the world of nature. And more still, our own human life, even here in the body, holds all the time interiorly, whether we know it or not, in the spiritual world, just as really as it holds exteriorly through the body in the natural world. We ought, therefore, to have the two orders of existence so joined together in our minds always, that the natural should be for us a perpetual and universal parable of the spiritual (as it is in fact), through which this last would look us continuously in the face, as we read the soul of a man in his outward countenance. This would be our normal state. But our present existing state is fallen and abnormal; and one great evidence of its being so is found just here, that the sense of the natural has become with us so predominant as to overwhelm in great degree the sense of the spiritual; so that it is with the greatest difficulty only the spiritual can come with us to any proper recognition whatever. It may be acknowledged easily enough in word and notion; that is common, especially in what are called Christian lands. But the inward realization of it as something substantial, and not imaginary, is neither common nor easy. True belief in the reality of the spiritual world, as the state of men is at present, can come only of much culture and effort. Our natural habit in the case is unbelief.

This unbelief reveals itself in two seemingly opposite forms: first, as Sadducean infidelity, the open denial of any life for

men other than that which they now have here in the body ; secondly, as what we may call abstract spiritualism, or the resolution of the whole idea of spirit into the mere negation of corporeity or matter, whereby it is left in the cold, as it were, outside the universe of all warm positive existence, so as to become in truth mere visionary emptiness and nothing. The two modes of unbelief are related to each other, in polar opposition, like Ebionism and Gnosticism, between which our Lord has been made to endure crucifixion through all ages from the beginning down to the present time ; each extreme playing forever into the service of the other, and both coming together always in the end as one and the same mystery of iniquity, fighting against the mystery of godliness—the revelation of eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gnostic heresy here—abstract spiritualism, or the resolution of spirit into the notion of matter attenuated into sheer nihilism—is that on which we need especially to fix our attention. It meets us from all sides, in all guises and shapes. Our modern science and philosophy, for the most part, have no sense of spiritual existence beyond this. It is hard indeed for mere science to avoid falling into such error ; there is that danger for it in its very constitution. And hence it is, that even the study of divine truth itself in this way, theological science as we call it, is just as liable to lose itself in the Gnostic notionalism here described as any other science. Perhaps indeed more so ; according to that word, “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” And it is easy to see then, how from school and pulpit, sanctuary and synod, the general mind of the Church may come to be impregnated with the virus of the same spiritualistic disease, so that amid all the forms of apparently right Christian thinking and worship there shall be found among professed Christians as little actual sense of another life (substantial and not notional) as in the world at large outside of the Church.

Much, very much of our religious sentiment and opinion, by courtesy called faith, it is only too sadly plain, is just of this character. It is at best simply mythologic fancy, like that of the Pagan world, playing not with Greek or Roman or Scandinavian legends, but with the legend of Christianity, held in the form of its own particular tradition.

Spiritualistic necromancy, in all its phases and forms, is a striking exemplification of this substitution of the spiritual in false view for the real spiritual, which goes then to destroy this as Gnosticism sought (and still seeks) to destroy the true Christ. What is known so widely as *Spiritualism* at the present day, comes properly under this head. It has great significance as a protest against the Sadducean spirit of the age, and as a voice in the waste of our human existence, showing its irrepressible need of communion with the unseen world. But no such necromancy ever has been, or ever can be, a real answer to this need. It lies under the Promethean curse of all magic, being an attempt to coerce the heavenly into the service of the earthly and natural from below; whereas the everlasting order of things is just the other way, the spiritual first and then the natural, the heavenly from itself and of its own accord, everywhere and always, kissing the earthly, and warming it into the image of its own life. It is a misnomer to dignify such necromancy with the title of spiritualism. It should be called spiritism or spiritualisticism.

Over against this whole array of materialistic infidelity, now, we owe it to ourselves to make sure at least of our own personal hold on the realness of things unseen and eternal; so that the spiritual world shall not be for us a shadowy utopia simply, but a positive substantiality, coming close home to our daily interest and thought. Such habit of mind cannot be in us with the facility of mere natural growth. It requires heavenly planting, and much inward attention and culture. It would carry us too far to go here into the details of this culture.



Meditation, prayer, the right use of God's disciplinary providence, intimate converse with the Word of God, where the powers of the spiritual world are always at hand as indwelling "spirit and life"—these, and other cognate applications, furnish the training by which the great end here proposed is to be prosecuted, and by which also it may be surely reached. Above all, the steady gaze of the soul toward the Lord of life and glory Himself, in and through whom alone all the substantialities of the world to come, as well as all the promises of God, come to their everlasting "Yea and amen!" So only can we come into the fellowship of St. Peter's grand assurance: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father, honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when WE WERE WITH HIM IN THE HOLY MOUNT."

II. In close connection with the topic now presented, we need to consider well what is in fact the *reigning spirit of our own time*, with regard to the "world to come whereof we speak." We are all, more or less, the children of the age, (as we are as of the people also,) to which by birth and education we belong; and hence it is, that in any question involving for us either theory or life, it becomes for us a very first desideratum always to be rightly aware of the mind around us in relation to it; that if this be wrong, especially, we may be all the more engaged to maintain our ground against it, as one of the strongest "wiles of the devil."

Any full analysis of the spirit of the present age toward Christianity is seen at once to be again something quite beyond the range of our present discussion. The period is one of boundless promise in the way of what seems to be outward secular progression for our human life; while it is plain, at the same time,

however, that this progression is itself approaching a terrifically solemn crisis, by precipitating us on vast moral and social problems, which in itself it clearly has no power to solve. In this view, as related to the spiritual world, the general animus or mind of the age is sufficiently plain. It must be pronounced supremely sensuous, earthly, and unspiritual.

In terms freely borrowed from another, we may say, "that so far as the records of past history instruct us, there never has been a period in which *naturalism* prevailed to the same extent as at present; meaning by this word a looking to and thinking about and caring for and recognition of things of this world, rather than of the other; nature rather than spirit; secular interests of all kinds rather than those of religion. We may go back to ages so remote that we know little of them, but their monuments remain and tell us what a vast proportion of the labor of different races was expended in the service of religion; and we may infer what a hold it had upon the thought and care of rulers and peoples. So coming down through the ages. In the Christian centuries we find the strongest men—and very strong were some of them, especially in what we call the dark ages—devoting their most earnest thought to religion. The magnificent cathedrals of the middle ages tell the same story. We say nothing of the actual worth of these activities and works; but speak only of the bent of mind they show toward religion and the other world. And how now in comparison does it stand with our own age? Let the railroad, the steam-engine, the telegraph, answer. We see a more earnest and successful devotion of human effort to science and arts, in their application to this life, than was ever before known. It may safely be said, that within the last hundred years there have been more inventions, promotive of human activity and effort in the direction of the enjoyments of this life, and a greater utilization of all the forces of nature to that end, than all the previous centuries taken together have contributed. In a word,

never was there known a period approaching this in the earnest devotion of thought to every thing which is of the earth, earthly, and in the decay and feebleness of interest in that which concerns the spirit of man and his eternal life. Naturalism at this day dominates the thought of Christendom as it never did before."

And naturalism, as here described, is necessarily infidelity. There is a disposition with many, we know, to ignore and repudiate such implication as applied to the acknowledged earthliness of the Christian world at this time. They will have it that the merely mundane interests of the time are in the way somehow of advancing and building up the general cause of Christianity; and that the Church, in its several sects, and as a whole, is more successfully than ever before, in the face of all false science, literature, and philosophy, moving onward as the embodiment of heavenly powers, toward the overthrow of all unbelief, and the reduction of the nations to the obedience of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can only say, alas for the transparent delusion! There may be in the religious outlook of the age, indeed, a promise of the second advent as near at hand. But not in the age, as carrying in its womb, in this way, the positive birth of any such millennium. If there at all, it can only be as answering to that fearful word of our Lord himself, When the Son of Man cometh, *shall He find faith on the earth?* If the dying out of faith be the sure precursor of this glorious *parousia*, then may those who sigh for it lift up the head and rejoice, for their redemption draweth nigh. By that sign, the Lord is of a truth at hand.

Skepticism—not so much open and blatant, as in the form rather of general nerveless insensibility to all the realities of the world to come—has indeed settled like a mildew on our intellectual, moral and nominally Christian life in all directions. It flows around us as an evil spiritual malaria, on every side. Whether we think of it or not, we are all exposed continually to the poison, with which it has infected the air. If this be so,

how we need to know it, that we may stand properly guarded against such great danger, and be led to cast ourselves all the more resolutely on Him from whom only can come, in the Christian conflict, our help and our salvation. Here exactly comes in with full force the Apostolic exhortation: "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked (the unbelieving naturalists previously described), 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."

III. Having armed ourselves then, with firm belief in the spiritual world, being rightly awake to the unspiritual temper of the now living generation of men in the present world, and holding in mind that the great stress of the Christian battle is for all of us, in the way we have seen, against hellish principalities and powers, pressing upon us from the realm of the unseen, let us take home to ourselves the full conviction finally that the only hope for us in this conflict, does in very deed depend on our *being in the Lord, and the power of His might*, in the strictest sense of the Apostle's injunction.

What that strict sense means has been already shown. As holding against the universal world of evil, and not in any case against any separate fraction of it singly, the battle of our salvation is necessarily, first of all, one work belonging to our Lord Jesus Christ alone, in whom only is infinite and everlasting strength. Our Redeemer is, and can be, no other than the God of the whole earth, the Holy One of Israel, Jehovah of hosts. And yet He cannot save us by any mere outward act, by the simple fiat of His will, by phantasmagoric drama, or by imputing to us the credit of a righteousness not in itself ours in fact. Hence it is, that we must ourselves meet the universal power of evil in the spiritual world as Christ Himself has done; but with this great difference, that the way is open for us, through

His glorification, to stand on the vantage level of His victory (which is not a dead past fact, but a perennial power of life and order in the spiritual universe), so as to work out our salvation not at all from ourselves, but really and truly from what must be considered the reaching into us continually of His human life, perfected for us once for all, as the root and principle of the whole new creation.

We know full well, of course, how this must strike the abstract spiritualistic thinking of the age—which we have just seen to be materialistic naturalism in disguise; we have had experience of its temper, time and again. But we know with no less certainty, that what we assert is the simple verity of God's Word; as it is the last sense also of all sound philosophy, the only principle indeed on which it is possible to construct any sane philosophy of the world at all. It is the plain sense of our Saviour's words, when He says, referring directly to the glorification of His humanity just at hand: "Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me; because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." And in the light of this declaration, it is the plain sense also of St. Paul's exhortation, "Be strong *in the Lord and in the power of his might.*" But why stand here on particular texts? The entire sense of the Holy Scriptures, is on this point one and the same. From beginning to end, it turns everywhere on one grand issue, namely, the controversy between God and man in regard to the possibility of any true intellectual or moral life for men as in and of themselves. It comes out first in the story of Eden, the subtle insinuation of the serpent, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," and the consequent expulsion from Paradise. It meets us again in the whole Jewish history and ritual; breathes upon us from the psalms; runs with thundering or wailing tone through all the prophets; in one word, forms the one grand key for the right understanding both of the Old Testament, and of the New. It is the key of

keys, in fact, for the interpretation of God's Word, better than all tomes of criticism or commentary without it. Man nothing of himself; God all in all; with the power and possibility, however, of His so being in men, that they shall have in them in that way a higher, better life than their existence can ever be conceived to be in any other view. All comes to this: "Thus saith the Lord: Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited." This is not mere figure of speech, but parable; and sets forth graphically what the life of the soul is universally, when cut off from its only true fountain of life in God. Just as on the other hand, the man whose life flows inwardly from this fountain, has his correspondence (not likeness simply) in "a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, which shall not see when heat cometh," but her leaf shall be green and her fruit sure. (Jer. xvii. 6-8).

Religion has been well denominated the *life of God in the soul of man*. It is not life put into a man by God's miraculous outward gift, so as to be then man's separate possession or property; nor is it simply an impression or effect divinely wrought upon his soul. It is God's very life itself entering into the soul of man, and finding place for itself there as in a fit habitation or temple. In a lower view, as we know, God is in all things; for in Him, it is said, we live, move, and have our being, and in Him all things exist and consist. He is in them as their life, whatever that may be, according to the form and measure of what they can receive in such way. But it is only in man first that he finds form and measure, answerable to the going forth of his life in its full spiritual freedom. There his creation has risen to the height of mind or soul, made in the image of God, and having in it a capacity to receive His life

into itself in a spiritual and not merely natural way. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration or continual inbreathing of the Almighty giveth Him understanding. This is God's life in the soul. It is not there as in the dark forces of nature, but in the way of intelligence and freedom. What God thus occupies and actuates in man is nothing less than the factors of the soul itself, the will and its affections, the understanding and its perceptions. The idea of religion as the life of God in the soul of man, comes to all this, and cannot stop short of it without self-nullification.

But this is not all. The life of God, thus in the soul, which is the love of God—for God is love, that, we are told, is His very being—cannot be there as a movement simply from the divine side to the human. There must be corresponding movement also from the human side to the divine. All love demands reciprocation; *must* have it indeed to reach in full its own end. So religion, as God's life in the soul, is at the same time the soul's life in God. In other words it is the whole selfhood of the man turned toward God, in answer to the challenge of the Divine life flowing into him in the way we have seen. But how can the human side here sustain any real reciprocity or communion with the divine side, since there is between them, as finite and infinite, no co-ordination, no ratio of comparison? To this question (and it is a very great question, sadly overlooked for the most part by our religion and theology) there can be but one rational, as there is but one biblical answer. That, in the soul of man, with which the life of God joins itself in all true religion, is and can be nothing less than the life of God itself already there, as the presence of the infinite and eternal (only for this reason, indeed, called *eternal life*), made to belong by free appropriation to men as if it were their own, while at the same time they know, as far as their faith prevails, that it is not their own in fact; and are ready thus to join with all the holy angels in the universal song of the new creation: "Not unto us, O Lord,

not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake."

Thus it is that we have the life of God in us mediately only through the glorified humanity of Christ, and not as Christ Himself has it immediately as His own. He hath life in Himself, as the Father hath life in Himself—absolute, essential, original life; and, therefore, He is absolutely one with the Father, and in Himself the ever-living and the only true God. To think of life as belonging to men in any such independent view, is to deify man as the serpent did with his infernal mockery in the Garden of Eden—not religion, at all, but its most diabolical opposite. This is the generic difference which our Lord draws everywhere between Himself and His disciples, and on which He lays such special stress in His last words as reported by St. John. His union with the Father, the foundation of their conjunction also with the Father; not however, in any like direct way, but only *through* the medium of His self-sanctification, making it possible for them also to be sanctified through the truth, that is, through His own life thus raised into the full glory of heaven. Because I live, He says, ye shall live also—your life proceeding from mine. "I in my Father;" and then, not ye in the Father, nor the Father in you; but "ye in me, and I in you," and so both together in the Father; but Christ absolutely ("the way, the truth, the life"), His disciples only by derivation of His life into them through their faith. So He prays: "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us;" still, however, only in the order just stated—"I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me."

This is what our Saviour means when He says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever." This is what He means when



He says: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." This whole passage, John xv. 1-11, is eminently classic for our subject; as it is of vital significance also for putting us on the right course toward a true realization in ourselves of the great mystery of godliness of which it treats.

When the question rises, *How are we to be made in this way partakers of the living Christ, so that our religion shall be in very deed—not a name only, nor a doctrinal or ritualistic fetich merely, nor a fond sentiment simply of our own fancy—but what Henry Scougal calls the Life of God in the Soul of Man, what St. Paul calls Christ in us the hope of glory, what our Lord describes as the vital oneness of Himself and His people, "They in Him and He in them;"* when this question rises before us, we say, with its proper practical solemnity, it will be found to have its proper answer only where our Lord places it in these valedictory chapters of St. John's Gospel. "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love. If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." All turns in the case on our standing in the Divine order, as it reaches us from the Father through the Son. That meets us in the Written Word of God, which in the way we have before seen, is nothing less in its interior life than the presence of the Lord of life and glory Himself in the world. This is what He means by "my commandments—my words—my sayings," on the keeping of which is here made to hinge so strangely, the manifestation of Himself to His disciples, and His consequent abode in them as the presence at the same time of the Father.

We cannot now follow out the subject with any sort of adequate discussion. We will simply say, therefore, that what our Lord says here of His words or commandments, is just what the Scriptures everywhere attribute to themselves in the same respect and view. They claim to be spirit and life, to have in them supernatural and heavenly power, to be able to make men wise unto everlasting life, to be the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever—not the memory or report simply of such word spoken in time past, but the always present energy of it reaching through the ages. The Scriptures—God's law, testimonies, commandments, statutes, judgments, His word in form of history, ritual, psalmody and prophecy—are all this through what they are as the "testimony of Jesus;" and, therefore, it is that they are in truth, what the ark of God's covenant represented of old, the conjunction of heaven and earth, and in this way a real place of meeting or convention between men and God. To know this, to own it, to acknowledge inwardly the presence of Christ in His Word, as the same Jehovah from whom the Law came on Mount Sinai; and then to fear the Lord as thus revealed in His Word, to bow before His authority, and to walk in all His ways; or in shorter phrase, to "fear God and keep His commandments," because they *are His* commandments and not for any lower reason; this is the whole duty of man, and of itself the bringing of man into union with God. The full verification of which is reached at last, only in and by the Word made glorious through the glorification of the Lord Himself; as when, in the passage before us, He makes the keeping of His commandments the one simple condition of all that is comprehended in the idea of the mystical union between Himself and His people.

What we have to do then, especially in the war we are called to wage with the powers of hell, is to see that this conjunction with Christ be in us really and truly, through a proper continual use of the Word of God for this purpose. In that way

only, can we be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. The strength will then be at once ours, and at the same time not ours. The armor too which we use will be our own, and yet immeasurably more than our own. It will be the panoply of God brought down, in a certain sense, to our finite measure; but having in every part and portion of it still the evidence of its higher origin, the quality of its derivation, we may say, from the infinite truth and righteousness of Him, who has gone before us in this conflict and so made it possible for us to follow in His steps. Let the words of the Apostle, then, sink deep into our hearts in this their spiritual force: "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one: and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

J. WILLIAMSON NEVIN.