

THE
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TO THE
GALATIANS

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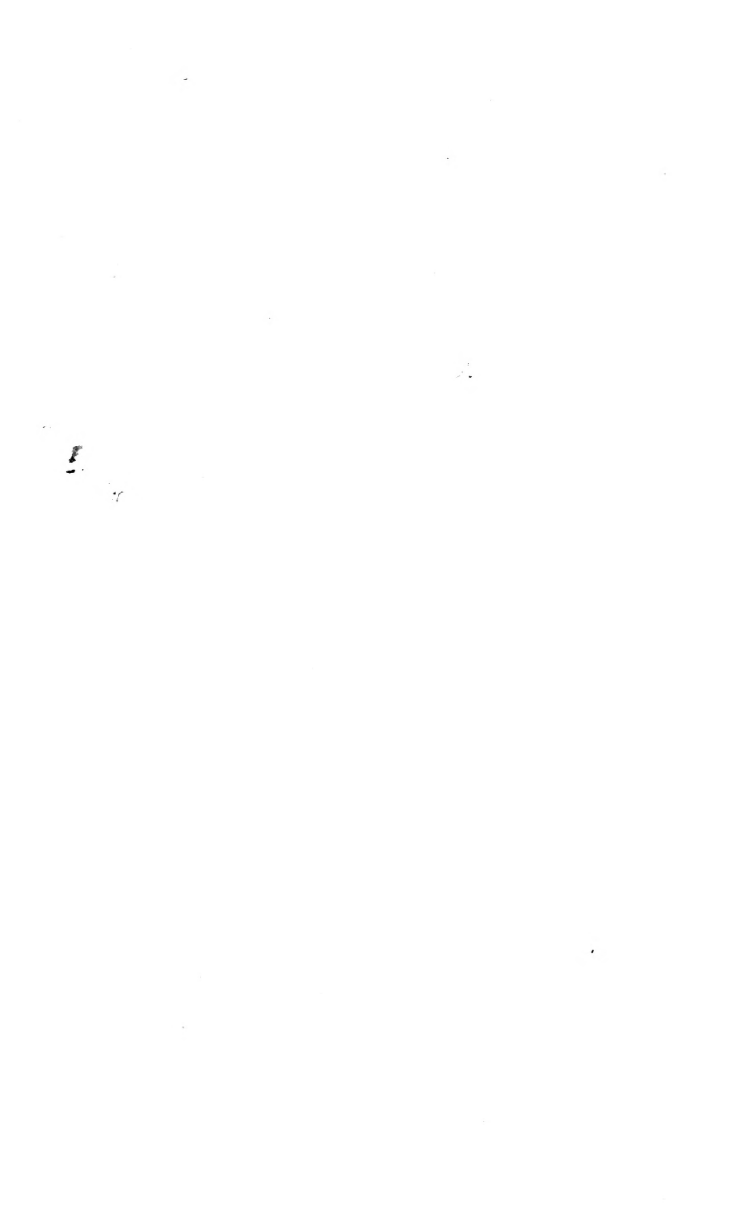
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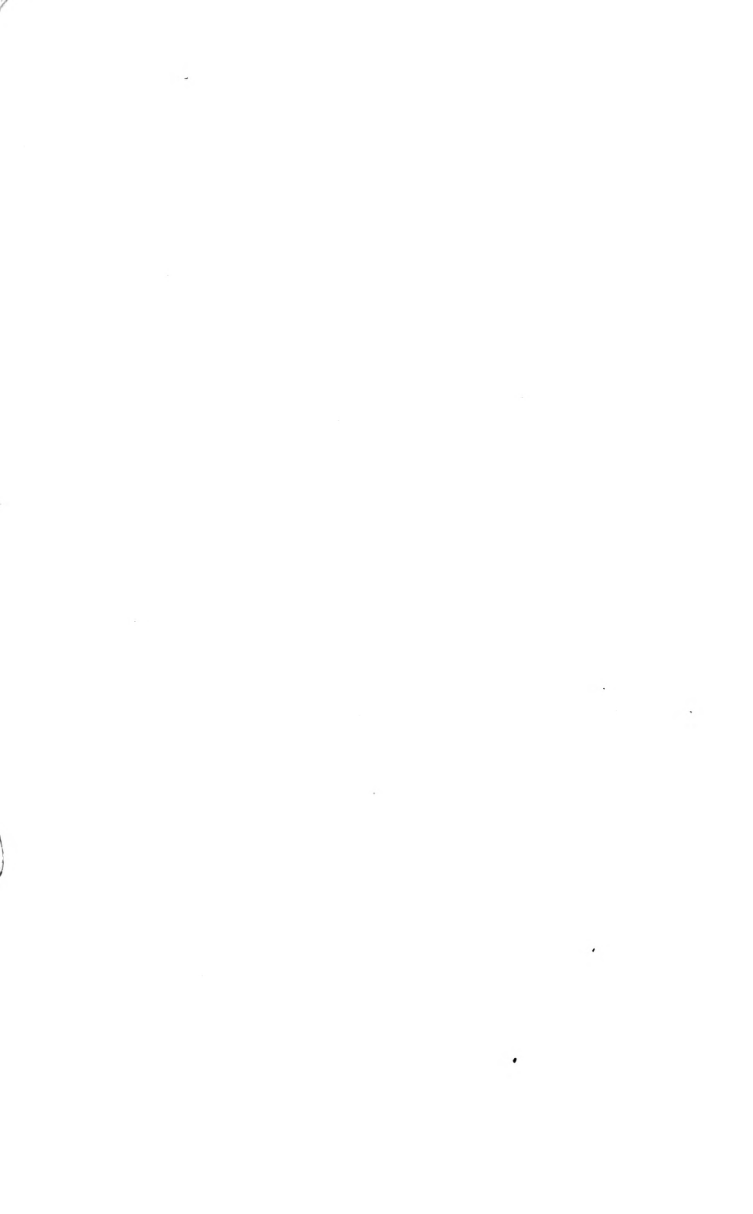
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**THE EPISTLE TO THE
GALATIANS.**



THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS.

The Ancient Merchant Lecture for January, 1895.

BY THE REV.

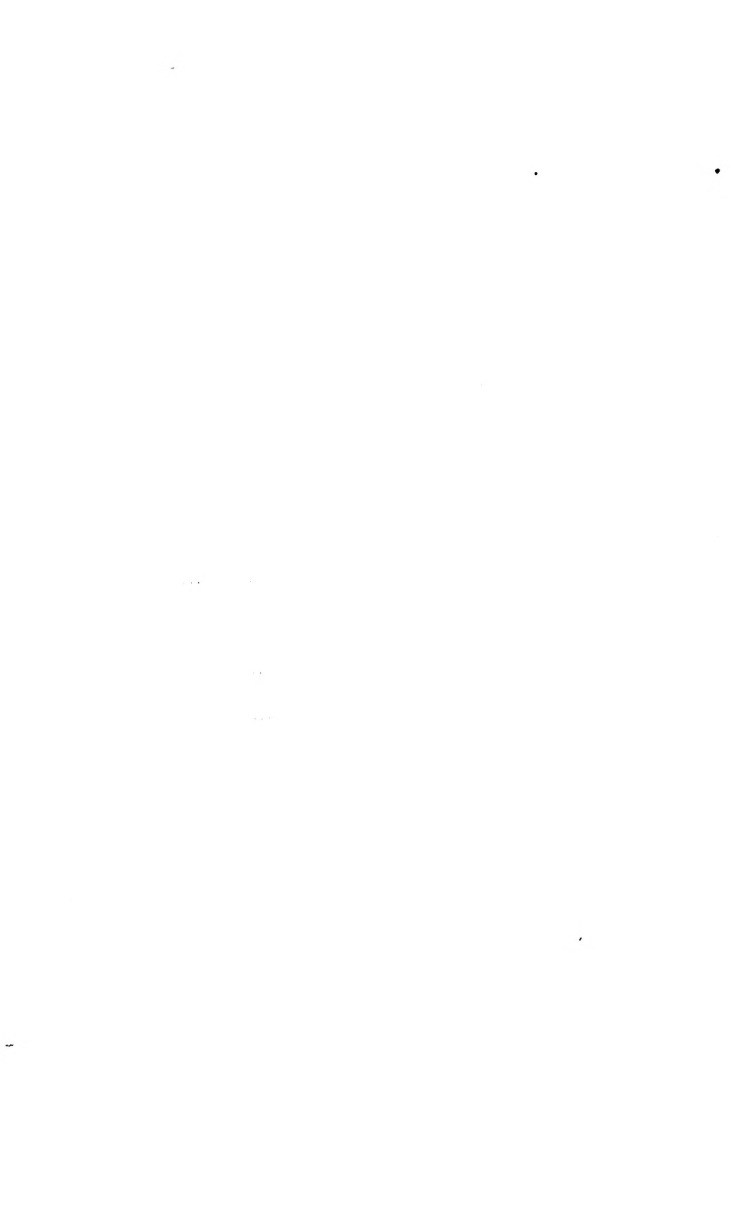
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LECTURE I.
PROPOSITIONS AND
ILLUSTRATIONS.

—And, like a man in wrath, the heart
Stood up and answered, “I have felt.”
TENNYSON.

PROPOSITIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

GAL. I., II.

It cannot too much be thought of, said the late Frederic Myers, that "he who has dared to dissent from *Rome* has done a deed which involves him in consequences he can never get rid of. He has come out from the only visible shelter in Christendom into the wide open plain, and henceforth there is nothing over him but the infinite heaven."

The Church of Rome has antiquity, learning, prestige, perfect organisation, and the force of vast numbers on her side. Cardinal Vaughan recently claimed to voice the feeling of 240 millions when he said that there can be no compromise—no give and take between his Church and

other churches, and that the reunion of Christendom can only be effected by all the denominations of error returning as penitents to the fold—prodigals to the ancestral home, surrendering their individuality, and consenting to be absorbed by the Church that has always claimed to be Catholic.

There is something splendid in such audacious assumptions, such perfect self-confidence, supported as they are by such a long history, such a magnificent array of names, and such unwearied industry in the prosecution thereof.

How then can *we* justify our dissent from this august body? We cannot claim superior *wisdom*, profounder *learning*, or more devoted piety. What, then, are the grounds on which we exercise our private judgment in so momentous a matter as that of religion?

Our answer is THE BOOK. “Councils,” said Luther, “have erred, and popes have

erred. Prove to me out of the Word of God that I am wrong, or else I will retract nothing. Here stand I. I can no other, God help me !”

Here, too, stand we—on *the Book as a whole*, on the Epistles of the New Testament in particular, and on the Epistle to the *Galatians* in especial.

For this Epistle, in dealing with the right—nay, the duty—of Christians to emancipate themselves from the bondage of the Jewish Church, and to stand fast in the liberty of Christ, has disposed by anticipation, as Freeman Clarke well says, of every other possible claimant to lordship over the souls of men. For, great and imposing as are the claims of ROME, they pale into insignificance compared with those of JERUSALEM. And if he who dares differ from Rome has done a great thing, he who has dared differ from Judaism has done a much greater thing.

The Jew, alone of all men, can claim Divine sanction for the constitution of his

church, for its ritual, its psalmody, its order of service, its day of rest, and its mode of worship.

We can adduce no stronger reason for our methods than expediency, tradition, and taste.

We can only trace our hymns to the genius of men and women. We can point to no Scriptural authority for our order of service, nor quote chapter and verse for our day of worship. But in the *synagogue* everything is done according to the pattern in the mount. The hymns sung there are Psalms given by inspiration, and the day of worship is that same *seventh* day on which God rested, and which He commanded His people to keep holy. The Jew has chapter and verse of the Book which all Christians accept as divine for all that concerns his church.

And *yet* Christianity, at the outset led by Jews, by *men who revered the Old Testament* and loved the temple, claimed, notwithstanding the Divine constitution

of Judaism, its right to dispense with the whole ceremonial law, to disregard the directions of priests as to time, place, and method of worship, and to have in these matters no *master but Christ*.

Now if the earliest Christians were justified in *this*—in asserting their freedom even from the bonds of a Divinely-constituted Church, the case against every OTHER claim is settled beforehand, for no other claimant can possibly adduce such a title to the lordship of the Church as the Jew held and still holds.

II.

Well, in this letter to the Galatians, the authenticity of which has never been doubted, St. Paul, who, more than any other man, was entrusted by God with the task of universalising Christianity, shows the grounds on which he based the doctrine of *liberty in Christ*.

When on his second missionary journey,

he was passing rapidly through the province of Galatia having no intention to preach there, he suddenly became ill on the way, and was forced to stay a while among the Galatians. Finding himself a prisoner, he at once thought of preaching as the best medicine for a sick apostle, and, despite his own great weakness, he found once more that he had no need to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it proved itself to be the power of God among the warm-hearted, impulsive Celtic people. They received the Gospel with avidity, and the preacher with affection. They received him as *an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus*; and would, if they could, have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him.

But action and reaction are in proportion. St. Paul was followed by other teachers with other teaching. (Strolling Jewish recruiting preachers came and presented the credentials of Judaism, and claimed the new disciples of Jesus

for Moses and his law, with *the result* that the Galatians fell away from their liberty in Christ—fell so quickly—allowed themselves to be captured *so easily* that St. Paul, with all his long experience of the mutability of human nature, was surprised at the rapidity of their decline. *I marvel*, he says, *that ye are so quickly removing from Him* that called you in the grace of Christ, to another Gospel.

III.

But how, it may be asked, could the Galatians resist such strong claims as those of Moses? What could they urge in reply to demands that seemed sanctioned by the seal of the Most High?

Well, in this epistle—which Luther called “his wife,” the partner of his joys and sorrows, the true helpmate that God had provided for him in the arduous work of the Reformation—St. Paul puts the case of Christian liberty as *against Moses*,

and *therefore*, as against the *Pope*, the *State*, and *all others* who at any time may presume to lord it over the heritage of Christ. And, because his argument is so inclusive and far-reaching, this letter, which was written to the Galatian Church in the first century, is pertinent to the circumstances of the churches in England in the end of the nineteenth. It is, indeed, not a tract for the time, but for *all time*.

And now that I have ventured to step into the position vacated by Rev. E. White, who held it so long and filled it so worthily, and who has carried with him into his retirement the admiration and love of all who know him, I intend to devote my first series of lectures to a brief exposition of this Epistle, because I believe that the questions that troubled Christ's people in Galatia are, in a very slightly altered form, agitating the churches in this country at the present time.

With a brief word of prayer for his

preface, but not a syllable of his wonted praise, St. Paul plunges at once into the very middle of his subject. In the opening verses of this first chapter he lays down three important propositions, which virtually cover the whole ground of his argument; and then in the rest of the first two chapters he brings forward three illustrations drawn from his own experience in proof of his doctrines.

I will therefore now ask your attention to these two divisions.

I.—THE THREE DOCTRINAL PROPOSITIONS.

II.—THE THREE HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS.

I.

The Propositions.

(a) *That he held his own commission as an apostle immediately from Almighty God.*

Considering the part that St. Paul has played in the development of Christian doctrine and in the extension

of the Christian Church, I venture to say that after the nature of Christ's own person the nature of St. Paul's *commission* comes next in importance.

What, then, was this wonderful man, the very last at the start, who yet so easily became the first, and who, not having seen Christ in the flesh, yet knew Him better than those who had, and who carried out the ideas of Christ to lengths unthought and undreamt of by James or Peter or John? What account does he give of himself?

“Paul, an apostle, not from men,” neither from God through *a man*, but through *Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead*. He was called and commissioned, not even by Christ *in the flesh*, as were the other apostles, but by the glorified and risen Christ; yea, by the *very God who* on Easter morning had *called Him* from the sleep of death to the bliss of life everlasting.

(b) The second proposition is: *That the*

spiritual liberty he claimed for himself and others was of the very ESSENCE of the Gospel of Christ; "our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of the Father." Christ gave Himself according to God's loving will, "gave *Himself* for our sins," thus securing the free flow of forgiveness, abolishing all human merits and excluding all righteousness born of works, and all privileges born of race and creed; "gave Himself that He might *deliver* us from this present evil world," that in Him all His people might be *free*—free entirely from all forms of bondage to things material and temporal, and *free* for ever—from the world in its totality.

All the references to the death of Christ in this Epistle are in harmony with this opening statement, *that death*, whenever it is mentioned, is linked with *Christian liberty* in some one of its many phases. Thus, according to St. Paul, spiritual freedom takes rank with the forgiveness

of sin, being one of the main objects for which our Lord died.

(c) The third proposition is: That to *tamper with, abuse, or in any degree contract the spiritual liberty of men is to assault the Gospel itself in that which is most vital.* “*Though we*”—Paul himself, his companions, or fellow apostles—“*though we or*”—to go still higher—“*an angel from HEAVEN should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached*”—viz., the gospel of forgiveness and freedom—“*let him be anathema,*” let him be *accursed!* Yes, terrible though the word be, he deliberately repeats it, “*I say again, let him be anathema!*”—*accursed.* He is guilty of the worst of deeds and merits a heavy punishment.

II.

The Historical Illustrations of these Doctrinal Positions.

(a) *As to the nature of his own commission:*
“The gospel which was preached by me

. . . is not *after man.*” It is not a human invention, nor the fruit of human genius. It is divine. “*Neither did I receive it from a man.*” God gave him many chances to receive it from men, but he closed his ears against the gracious message. “*Nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ.*”

He was a Jew, a Pharisee, a bigot, a persecutor, hating the Name, and zealous to stamp out the cause, of Christ. Of all men then living he seemed to be, from the Christian point of view, the most hopeless, the most absolutely impossible. He was the very last that could be thought of as succumbing to the power of the Gospel. In fact, as he himself said, long after, he was exceedingly “*mad*” against the disciples. But when, as once before, upon the Mount, the disciples had failed to heal the poor possessed youth, the Master came in radiant power from the heights and healed him with a

word, so now that the disciples had again utterly failed with this terrible madman of Tarsus, who was making havock of the Church of God, as if possessed with a legion of the cruellest demons—behold once more the Master Himself descends in glory and great power, clad in robes white above the shining of the Syrian sun, and with a *word* casts the madman to the ground, and drives forth the evil spirit that had possessed him, saying, as of old, “enter no more into him.” “*When it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from birth, and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*” The call was too manifestly divine, and though it was a call to reveal the very Christ he had hitherto reviled—a call to preach the grace of God to the GENTILES, whom till now he had counted as the dogs of the street, or as the dirt of the road—a call that was like a two-

edged sword, cutting on the one side into his hatred of Christianity, and on the other into his contempt for heathenism, yet he *obeyed it*, asking counsel neither of apostle nor church—for what were *they* to a man thus called of God?

Neither went I up to Jerusalem . . . but I went away to Arabia—and came back to Damascus, and, without consulting any one, went about doing God's hard work among the heathen, till even the Judæan churches which were in Christ, not knowing me personally, but hearing that he who once persecuted the faith now preached it, and seeing whose work this was, seeing in it another of the miracles of Christ, they glorified God in me.

This is the story of the call and commission of St. Paul. He himself had no doubt that he was called to his great task of freeing Christianity from its Jewish chrysalis by God the Father, and he so lived and worked as to convince others also that he was a man

sent from God for this special and all-important work.

(b) The second doctrinal proposition was *that spiritual liberty is of the very essence of the Gospel, and is directly, organically, and vitally connected with the central fact of Christianity, viz., the death of Christ.*

In the opening verses of the second chapter we are presented with a very striking illustration of this truth.

After the space of fourteen years, St. Paul went up to Jerusalem, taking with him Barnabas his colleague, and Titus his convert, and laid before the Apostles and leaders there the Gospel which he had preached among the Gentiles—a Gospel, one of whose fundamental doctrines was the freedom of all in Christ through the death of Christ for all. Some of those who heard it on that occasion were inclined to condemn it as defective. It had no *temple* in it. It was too bare, too curt, too unofficial, too simple. Living, there, under the very shadow of the Temple, steeped

in the ancient traditions, tolerated by the priests, on the theory that Christianity was only a new sect of the Jewish Church, which would by-and-by be absorbed in it, some of these Jerusalem Christians took alarm, and suggested that Paul should put a little more of Moses into his teaching and of Aaron into his practice.

But he did not give place in the way of subjection to these counsels; "*No, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you!*" Not even Titus, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. He held his own at every point, and upheld his contention that Christ is Christianity, and that where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there is liberty.*

But of far greater importance than his victory over these obscure reactionaries was the fact that he found the premier apostles, Peter and John, and even James, the Lord's brother, *at one with himself on this great matter.* They recognised the *Gospel*—the glad tidings of their Master

and Lord in St. Paul's preaching, and acknowledged that liberty from the burdens and constraints of legalism was one of the characteristic and essential benefits of Christ's death; and they further acknowledged that God had committed this free, untrammelled Gospel to St. Paul in trust for the great heathen world.

They did not say that *they* would preach it to Jews in the same way that *he* preached it to Gentiles. There were national differences to be taken into account, and Paul must no more coerce Peter than Peter dictate to Paul.

So these Apostles, agreeing as to what the substance of the Gospel was, viz., that Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, agreed to differ both as to their spheres of labour and their methods of presenting the truth, insisting only that the feelings of the Jews be respected in every place, and above all that wherever

any of them went they should be careful to remember the poor in the spirit of Christ.

Oh! the wisdom of those simple children of the Spirit! In things essential, unity; in things indifferent, liberty; in all things, charity! Certainly, as Bacon puts it, it is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth.

(c) The third and last historical illustration is designed to *show that to abuse, tamper with, or in any way contract the spiritual liberty of men, is to assault the Gospel itself in its most vital parts.* This occupies the concluding portion of the second chapter.

St. Peter, the Rock-apostle, who had followed Christ from the first, came, on one occasion, to Antioch, the city where Christ's sheep and lambs, whom he had been told to feed and teach, were first called *Christians*. Mindful of the lesson God had given him on the housetop in

Joppa, he *ate with Gentiles*, for he no longer dared to call those whom God had cleansed and hallowed common or unclean.

“He ate with them.” It was a great triumph of Gospel truth to see Peter at Antioch thus practically recognising that in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, male nor female. It was a great sight. One would gladly travel a long way in order to see the Peter of our day eating with “Gentiles.” But when certain from James came down, Peter’s old weakness found him out; he grew timid, he drew back, at first stealthily, and then later he publicly “separated” himself from his Gentile brethren. After all, they *were* Gentiles, they *were* common and unclean! Others, of course, speedily followed the example of so eminent a man. So great was the exodus from liberty to the old bondage, so impetuous was the rush of the separatists, that even Barnabas, Paul’s colleague, was

carried as by a flood of dissimulation. Thus Christ was denied *again*. Again Peter had said, "I know not the Man!" He who once denied Christ in His Person, now denied Him in His people, and a great chorus of voices joined with him and said, No! we know not the Man in these Gentiles!

Here then was a case to test the sincerity, courage, and resource of St. Paul.

St. Peter, the Jews, and Barnabas even, by their conduct were proclaiming *another gospel* to the people of Antioch!

But Paul saw well enough both what they were doing and what, under the circumstances, it behoved him to do. "When I saw that they walked not uprightly"—with straight feet—"according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all"—what?

First, that he, the leader of this inglorious exodus, had been guilty of gross

inconsistency. "If thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles"—*i.e.*, since the vision on the housetop—how dost thou *now*, by this sudden change of front, seek to *compel* the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? Yes, *compel*; for this act, backed up as it is by the force of numbers, practically coerces the Gentiles to become proselytes of Moses as well as disciples of Jesus, in order to enjoy fellowship with the great pillar-apostle who had seen the Master face to face. There is inconsistency here. One of these courses of action must be *wrong*. Either it was wrong to eat with the Gentiles, or it was wrong to separate from their fellowship. Which, then, is wrong? Very much, nay, *all*, depends on the answer to that question.

For if, as Peter's conduct implies, it was wrong to eat with them, then the *vision on the housetop*, too, must have been wrong. The great sheet that seemed to descend from above must really have come from below, and the voice which

Peter mistook for God's must have belonged to him who is a liar from the beginning, and who, by this false, specious vision, was seeking to lead Peter into error and sin.

Nay, more. St. Paul ruthlessly pushes the dreadful question back to the sacred boundary-line of his own and Peter's life—their conversion to Christ. Peter's conduct in withdrawing from fellowship with Christ's "other sheep" has raised the question of the rightness or wrongness of Christianity as a whole.

"We," says the apostle, you and I, were Jews by nature—we relied on the works of the law of Moses for salvation. Then something happened to both of us. Christ crossed our path, and, listening to His voice, obeying His direction, we renounced our dependence on the works of the law, and trusted only in the love of God revealed in His Son. It was a great step to take—were we right or wrong in taking it? Was Christ a minister of

sin? Did He lead us to do wrong? The thought is intolerable! Nay, but it *must* be faced, for if it be wrong for Christian Jews to associate with Christian Gentiles *now*, it was wrong to follow Christ at the first. "For if I," now and here, "build up again those things which," under Christ's inspiration, "I destroyed," I prove *myself* a transgressor, and not myself only, nor chiefly, but I set forth Christ as the chief transgressor, since it was He that led me from the law, and impelled me to ignore many of its precepts. Let me make the matter quite clear, he continues. Jesus Christ is responsible for my present life, "for I died to the law that I might live to God; I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in *faith*—in absolute trust in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." The Jew in me as well as in you, Peter, instinctively shrinks

from contact with the Gentiles. It is the Christ in me that overcomes the Jew. He, who in the days of His flesh sat and ate with publicans and sinners, moves me to sit and eat with heathen of every nation under heaven. If I am right in doing this, the glory of it is not mine but His; and if I am wrong, as your conduct implies, then the blame and the shame are not mine but Christ's!

But I believe that the Christ in me is *right*; and because I believe it I do not follow your lead, though the Jews and even Barnabas go with you. I do not, by going back to the old Jewish law, *make void the grace of God*, for that is what it comes to: if righteousness is still through the law, then the "grace of God," the whole dispensation of the Gospel is *void*, empty, meaningless, valueless; then "Christ died for *nought*." The blood was a blunder, the ransom a waste.

If liberty from the law did not come by

the Cross, then *nothing* has come from it. Christ died for *nought*!

Well might he to whom these piercing words were spoken in the hearing of all go out, as he had gone out of old, and weep bitterly, since by his action he had wounded the sheep he should have tended, and cast so deep a shadow on the life and death of his Lord.

St. Paul says nothing of the effect of his words, but he has said enough to show that spiritual liberty is one of the fundamental elements of Christianity, and also to show us what is our clear duty in the face of whatever attempt is made to tamper with it in our own day. It is with Peter's defection that we also have to deal; with men who love our Lord and yet deny Him when He comes to them in another form. God grant us Paul's wisdom and courage to deal with the Peter of to-day!

LECTURE II.

THE GOSPEL IN HISTORY.

A simple meal
Was set before us, cakes of bread, and wine,
Such as our peasants drink. . . .
O happiest hour! . . . Yet there came
A moment higher still. Upon our heads
Those feeble hands were laid, and through our
frames,
With strange vibrations of a rushing flood
Of thoughts and powers, fresh kindling into life.
THE SPIRIT came.

PLUMPTRE,

"Thoughts of a Galatian Convert."

THE GOSPEL IN HISTORY.

GAL. III. 1-6.

It was the special task of St. Paul to achieve the perfect freedom of Christianity from the trammels of Jewish doctrine on the one hand, and the limitations of the Jewish Church on the other. The Jewish doctrines were provisional and therefore imperfect, the Jewish Church was local, and therefore temporary. Christianity is the *absolute religion*. Jesus Christ is both Alpha and Omega. He is not to be judged by anything. All things are to be judged by Him, and His Church is a universal one whose field is the whole world of human life, and whose aim is the kingdom of God on earth.

To emphasize this aspect of Christianity, St. Paul was specially called of God, and throughout a long and eventful life he

was passionately faithful to his great commission. Augustus said that he found Rome brick and left it marble. St. Paul could have said that he found Christianity a sect and left it a Church.

It was a great work, and nobly was it done. Had the Church but kept her Bible open, had men but cared to read the contents of their charter, St. Paul's work would never need to be done again. And even as it is, given over as the Church is to the power of popes and monarchs, encumbered with the armour of Saul, and bound hand and foot with the ancient vestments of Aaron, the instruments of her liberation to-day are to be found in these very epistles wherewith St. Paul first set her free.

There is none like that, said David, of Goliath's sword, *give it me*, and truly there is none like this sword of the Spirit which Paul handled, for fighting the battle of our Christian liberty. His words are half battles for the true, and his epistles are like the tower of David, builded for

an armoury, wherein hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.

The first two chapters of this epistle are chiefly autobiographical. The Apostle tells his readers the *story of his call*, and how he had obeyed the heavenly voice. God had called him to reveal Christ crucified—Him alone—to all the world. Though a Jew and a Pharisee, he was not told to preach Moses or Aaron, but CHRIST—Christ only, the *whole* Christ, and nothing but Christ. He was not commissioned to proselytise the Gentiles, but to evangelise them, not to make Jews but Christians of them, and the outcome of his whole Christian experience was that Christ by Himself is able to save to the uttermost, and *faith* in Christ alone is the condition of life with God—hence, that by its very *spirituality* Christianity sets all men free from the bondage of priests and temple, scribe and law. But at this point the Apostle suddenly changes his note—from flowing narrative he passes into a series of abrupt, in-

sistent questions. The Galatians, no longer an audience listening with breathless interest to extracts from St. Paul's autobiography, find themselves, by a stroke of the pen, turned into witnesses undergoing the ordeal of a searching cross-examination, plied on every side with interrogations that cut like knives into their souls.

The third chapter opens with a rush of questions in which Paul throws down the gauntlet, and challenges his readers to say whether on the whole their experience of Christ does not coincide with his own. *He* had found the Gospel a charter of liberty, had not *THEY*? He had found it a source of unique blessing, a fountain of unique power, had not *they*? He dares them to deny it.

Now these questions appear to me of such paramount importance that I feel bound to devote a whole lecture to them alone. I will divide what I have to say concerning them into two parts—first an *exposition*, and then an *argument*.

I.

The Exposition.

If we reckon these questions we shall find five of them, but if we *classify* them we shall find that they fall into two *divisions*, the first question standing by itself and dealing with the *organic connection between Christian faith and spiritual liberty*. The other *four* deal with the vital connection of Christian faith and all *spiritual blessing* and power.

1.

Let us take the *first*, viz., the one that *deals with spiritual liberty as being of the very essence of the Gospel*.

O foolish Galatians—Men not by *nature* stupid or witless, rather endowed with much quickness of apprehension, but foolish in the practical sense of not *using* the resources which they possessed. They had allowed themselves to be *bewitched*, to be *fascinated*, to be carried

away as by magic into doctrines and practices of which they could give themselves no rational account, and this when they had *Jesus Christ upon the Cross, the spiritual emancipator of mankind, set forth openly before their very eyes*. The words “*set forth*” may mean either a *placard* or an *amulet*.

If a *placard*, then it points to the *publicity* and *glaring plainness* with which Christ crucified had been preached in Galatia. The King’s placards must be placed where every one can see them, and couched in language that *every* one can understand, so perhaps these words mean that St. Paul, as a herald of the Cross, had *placarded* all Galatia with this great proclamation of the King—had proclaimed Christ with an arresting and unmistakable plainness. With those *placards* before your eyes, how could you go astray as to the message of the King? O foolish Galatians!

Others say that the words signify an

amulet or *charm*. The Galatians, like all Celtic people, were very superstitious. They believed in the power of witches and the *evil eye*, and many carried about with them *charms* with mystical words and figures to protect them from enchantment. Probably Paul alludes to this. "I *knew* that men would cast evil eyes of envy upon you and try to draw you away, but I had taken care to provide you with a real amulet—with a perfect charm. Not a secret piece of writing, but a charm posted up in public like the brazen serpent in the wilderness—" *even Jesus Christ crucified.*"

Had you but *looked* to Him you would have been saved; you would have been free to-day. O *foolish, foolish* Galatians! to allow yourselves to be *bewitched* when all the time you had the perfect charm against all such black arts before your very eyes!

At this distance of time they do indeed seem to have been utterly stupid—in fact,

they stand pilloried in history as the *foolish* Galatians. Yet were they no worse than multitudes that came after them. The history of the declension from the purity and simplicity of the Gospel is the history of the most astounding folly. Think of the simplicity and beauty of Christ's religion, and then of the intricate and complex thing that theologians and priests have made of it, so that, as one said, it is an *ingenious* thing to be a Christian ! Think of the distance from the Sermon on the Mount to the Athanasian Creed ; from the Lord's Prayer to the great liturgies in which the poor are crowded into narrow spaces, while royalty and riches, as in daily life, dwell apart in roomy and splendid petitions ; from His little informal Supper, improvised at the close of the passover meal, to the elaborate pomp of the mass ; from Him and His college of rustic apostles in homely garb walking the fields, threading the lanes, riding the waves, but ever like the sower sowing the

word of God, to the vested priest, the punctilious ritual, the gorgeous altar, the consecrated church, filled with a dim religious light and pervaded by an air of unearthliness and separation from the natural life of men. Think of it all! It is a tremendous distance, and no clear account has ever been given of how men have travelled so far away from the ways of the Master. It is as St. Paul says, a sort of magic, a species of bewitchment.

And one reason why this magic is so successful age after age is that men will *not* read the King's placards—will not use the *charm*, which alone secures against enchantment, viz., *Jesus Christ crucified*. Where priestcraft abounds the Bible is little read. Other books—catechisms, creeds, guides to devotion, &c.—are carefully studied; but the Charter itself is neglected, and the perfect Charm is disused.

O foolish Galatians!

So the experience of St. Paul and that of the Galatians, though seemingly much

at variance, really prove the same thing; for St. Paul preserves his spiritual liberty because *he holds fast to Christ*, and the Galatians have lost theirs because they have gone away from Christ; and thus both Paul's experience and the Galatians' proclaim Christ to be the true Emancipator of the world. Where spiritual liberty abounds it proclaims Christ as its Source; where captivity reigns it is Christ alone that is lacking.

2.

We now come to the second class in which are four questions, all dealing *with FAITH in Christ as the sole condition of the highest spiritual blessing.*

“*This only would I learn from you, Received ye the SPIRIT by the works of the law, or by the hearing of FAITH?*” *i.e.*, the Gospel ye heard and believed. On the answer to *this* everything depends. For the reception of the Spirit is the cardinal fact of Christian life.

“To receive the *Spirit*” is for a man to know God within Himself, to feel the life of God flowing into him, to have *power*, to have *peace* and *joy*, to cease to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, a Levite in the outer courts, to become a priest, to pass into the holy place where the veil is lifted, and God manifests Himself to all that love Him, face to face. This is the goal of religion, this is the crown of Christianity—to receive the *Spirit*, to have the witness within and the joy of a heart at rest.

Now St. Paul wishes to know from these Galatians *what*, according to *their experience*, is the channel of this inestimable gift of God? Find that and *you find the most important of all things in the Church*, the thing to divide upon, to fight for, and, if needs be, to die for. Is that channel the works of the ancient law? Did any of those bring you face to face with God? Or was it the message of the Gospel received into your heart? Was it not

through Christ that you first felt the richness, the nearness, and the dearness of the Father?

Yes! it was through faith in *Christ ye received the Spirit*. St. Paul dares them to deny that. What, then, can compare with Christ and with faith in Him?

“Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, do ye now make an end in the FLESH? Did ye suffer so many things, *i.e.*, receive so many transcendent gifts from God’s hands IN VAIN!” Have ye learned nothing?

But this is not all. Let us bring the question forward to the *present moment*. What there is of spiritual life among you *still*, where does it come from? And how does it reach you?

“*He that supplieth to you now the Spirit, and worketh powers among you—*”

These Galatians had gone far from the purity of Gospel creed and practice, but God had not therefore deserted them. He

does not deal with men or churches after their sins, neither doth He reward them according to their iniquities.

He continued to supply His own Spirit to these Celtic perverts. His light pierced through the clouds of error and folly, gladdening their eyes with its beauty and their hearts with its warmth.

But how? By the works of the Jewish law, which they had taken to perform and had lifted to a place among the essentials of salvation? *or* by the old way of the message of faith, which they had dishonoured? In which channel did the Spirit still flow? Oh! in the old channel—only in that—God still honoured that, and that alone, by making it the medium of His Spirit. Paul dares them to deny it.

To the question, “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or the hearing of faith?” both the past experience and present consciousness of the Galatians answered, “By the hearing of faith.”

And the result of St. Paul’s appeal to

the religious experience of Galatia was that faith in the message of the Gospel had vindicated itself as the ONLY means by which men were saved from sin and lifted into close fellowship with God the Father, to breathe his Spirit and to share His power.

The cisterns of ceremony which they had hewed out for themselves appeared to be sacred and venerable, chiselled as they were after patterns so ancient, but they held no water for the thirsty—water had still to be got from the living Fountain in Christ.

Thus far the exposition.

II.

The Argument.

Well, these questions which the Apostle put to his perverting converts, well-nigh two thousand years ago, cover most of the ground in dispute among the different Churches of Christendom to-day.

What WE want *first* of all is, like St. Paul, to find *what* among all the different

customs, rituals, and sacraments of the Churches is that by which the Spirit of God comes to men. What is it that brings men near to God and makes them strong for goodness? That is the chief thing—the thing to divide upon, and fight for, to die for. What is it? Is it *one thing*, always the same, or are there many channels through which the Spirit flows? The answer that St. Paul gave for the Galatians, and dared them to contradict it, was that there was *only one* channel—the *message of faith—the Gospel of Christ received into the heart*, and that answer is the answer of all the ages that have since elapsed.

1.

TAKE THE GREAT CHURCH OF ROME.

She has departed more widely than, perhaps, any other from St. Paul's Gospel. She has not scrupled to borrow largely both Judaism and Paganism. She has adopted the Jewish division between priest and

people, and adapted the polytheism of the heathen in her worship of the saints. She has laid the temples and shrines of Jerusalem, Greece, and pagan Rome under tribute for furniture wherewith to deck her churches and embellish her altars.

And yet who can doubt but that *she has in every age received the Spirit of God—and is receiving it now?* By her missionaries, among the noblest and bravest of the heralds of the Cross, by her multitudes of mighty men that shine like stars in history, and by her vast company of saintly women, whose memory is like the fragrance of immortal flowers—by all these we know that God has supplied to her, in all her corruption, His *own Spirit* and wrought powers in her midst.

Well, but how? by what channel has the living water reached her?—by works of righteousness of her own invention? by the saints in her calendar? by the simple Jewess, whom she blasphemously calls the queen of heaven and mother of God?

No! not by any of these have saints in her communion been brought face to face with God and made to feel the peace within, but by that which they held in common with all Christian people, *their faith reposed on Christ*, the Son of God and Son of Man! Whenever in her long history she has had men or women of marked spiritual power, they have borne unequivocal witness to this fact, that the source of their power and the foundation of their hope was God in Christ. And not only in distinguished individuals like Bernard, Francis or Catherine of Sienna, but, as Ritschl says, even in some of her own familiar formularies the Roman Church sets forth faith in Christ as the sole condition of the highest blessing. "Whenever she places herself in the attitude of prayer it is inevitable that in the expression of her religious discernment, in thanksgiving and in petition, all the benefits of salvation should be referred to God or to Christ; the daily need for

new grace, accordingly, is not expressed in the form of a claim based upon merits, but in the form of reliance upon God.”*

And in her solemn office for the dying she clearly exhorts the departing soul to repose its “confidence upon Christ and His passion as the sole ground of salvation. The ordinance is the origin of the jocular saying current among Lutherans in Würtemberg, that every Catholic becomes a Lutheran upon his death: the sober fact is that the Romish Church, in dealing with her members at *this* point, sacrifices her own particular pretensions to the universal Christian truth.”†

Brought, then, to St. Paul’s test, the answer of Christian experience, even from the altars and cloisters of Rome, is clearly this, that faith in Christ is ever and only the medium of men’s highest good. And what is needed to-day is for some Paul-like

* Ritschl’s History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification, p. 115.

† Ibid.

man, endowed with the power to speak the truth in love, to rise and drive home the Apostle's other question: "Are ye so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, do ye now make an end in the flesh? Have ye received so many benefits in vain?" Shall all the powers God has wrought among you by His grace go for nothing? All His wonders be wasted?

Your Church has burned men, has shovelled the earth on the faces of living women for your peculiar tenets, and for these you keep open the wounds of Christ to-day, for things that have never been the channel of the Spirit, and to which you yourselves cannot trace any great good that you enjoy in life, or hope for in the solemn hour of death! The long and eventful history of your own Church clearly shows what, amidst the many doctrines with which your creed is crowded, it is your duty to divide upon and fight for; viz., the message of God in Christ!

2.

Again :

TAKE THE ANGLICAN CHURCH.

Vast numbers in the State Church of this country have Judaised. Her clergy have chosen to copy Rome so closely that even a Roman Cardinal pays them the dubious compliment of admitting that it is very hard to distinguish between the copy and the original. But, nevertheless, God continues to supply His Spirit to this great Church. He has to-day, as He has always had, His multitudes of holy men and women in her communion. It were the rankest blasphemy to deny it, and we Nonconformists do not deny it—nor ever have denied it. We gladly acknowledge it. We rejoice in it. We thank God for it. But by what means does the river of life—the free Spirit of God—flow into the Anglican communion? By what are her people brought into touch

with God? Is it by means of bishops' hands laid on their heads? or sacraments dispensed by priests in places duly consecrated for the purpose? Is it by any of the institutions or rites peculiar to this branch of the holy Catholic Church? Oh no! but only by that which is common to all churches "the hearing of faith." Ask her great divines, and there are none greater; ask her singers, and there are none sweeter; interrogate her mystics, and there are not many that go further into the deep things of God; and from all you will get one clear answer, "Christ—let Jesus Christ be praised."

Men are brought to know God, to love God and see God in the highest ritualistic churches by the same means that simple country people, kneeling, as I have often seen them, on the earthen floor of some peasant's cottage in a village prayer-meeting, without priest or ritual, sacrament or litany, but just pouring out their hearts before the Lord, and growing con-

scious as they pray that Jesus Christ Himself, according to His promise, is in their midst, and that the power of the Most High is overshadowing them. Thus of the Churches of Rome and of England alike it is true that God supplies His Spirit to both, and works powers in both by the self-same means—faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

3.

BUT there are OTHER Christian communions known as the Free Churches of this country. They differ widely from the Anglican Church, and still more widely from the Roman. Indeed, they differ among themselves, not greatly on matters of faith, but very distinctly on points of order. Some are Presbyterian, while others are Congregational in their polity, but *all* are manifestly Christocentric, and each acknowledges the others as brethren in Christ. They believe in the validity of each other's orders, there-

fore pulpits are frequently exchanged and members constantly transferred from one communion to another. Thus, without any attempt at, or even deep desire for *uniformity*, a greater degree of Christian UNITY exists among these apparently heterogeneous sects than obtains in any other part of Christendom.

And yet both the Roman Church, which looks down upon the Anglican, and the Anglican, which looks up to the Roman, alike look down upon these Free Churches as schismatics and heretics, and deny that they have either orders or sacraments.

Dr. Newman, in his essay on Private Judgment, declares that *seceders, sectarians, independent thinkers* and the like, whatever they call themselves, whether Wesleyans or Dissenters, are in GRIEVOUS ERROR, and ought to abandon their own communions and return to the fold.

Well, but what of Romanists, Anglicans, and the Greek Church? How are

their differences to be harmonised? Should Rome turn Anglican, Anglican Roman, or both Greek? Oh, no! "As YOU WERE," is the order for each of these.

Why? Because "*Is it not certain, even at first sight, that each of these branches has many high gifts and much grace in her communion?*"

"*The test of a prophet,*" he continues, "*is the Divine blessing upon his teaching or the eventual success of his work. A test under which neither Church, Roman or Anglican, will fail, and neither is eminently foremost. Each Church has had to endure trial, each has overcome it, each has triumphed over enemies, and each has had continued signs of Divine favour upon it.*"

Finally he says, "Roman Catholics are accustomed to consider *that eventual failure is the sure destiny of heresy and schism. What then will they say to us?*" he asks, being at the time in the English

Church. "The English Church has remained in its present state *three hundred years*, and at the end of the time is stronger than at the beginning. This," he adds triumphantly, "does not look like an heretical or schismatical Church."

Verily, this is a Daniel come to judgment. His words are full of solemn truth. They only need a little *wider application*. Let us apply them. We readily and gratefully grant that each of the *three* branches he names has many high gifts and much grace, and has had continued signs of the Divine favour upon it; *but is there not a fourth branch of which all this is equally true?* What of the "seceders," the "sectarians," the "Wesleyans" even, and the "Dissenters"; have they no high gifts? No grace? No signs of the Divine favour?

Dare any one that knows Scotland deny that in her little grey kirks simple souls have had clear visions of the Eternal, and been as "*far ben*" as any saint in the

Roman Calendar? By the holy men and women that move in the pages of Barrie, Crockett, and Ian Maclaren I *challenge a denial*.

Dare any one that knows rural England, north, central, or south, deny that the dissenting communities, persecuted and caricatured as they have been, have, by the grace of God, produced characters of the finest quality, and have been consoled by the smile of the Master for the frown of the world?

By George Eliot's "*Dinah Morris*," by the Paisley weavers of Gilmour's "*Pen-folk*," and Pearse's "*Dan'l Quorm*," I *challenge a denial*.

And no one who knows my native country, as many of you know it—a country debarred for centuries from the advantages of education and culture, and shut off from the rest of the world by the almost impassable barriers of an ancient tongue; inhabited, for the most part, by the very poor, to whom justice was

administered in a foreign language, and who, in spiritual matters, were handed over to the care of pastors who were often hard masters, and among whose endowments the gift of tongues was unknown—I say no one who knows Wales at all will deny that, despite all her disadvantages, she has produced men and women second to none in holiness, and that in her religion she has found at all times a peace which the world can neither give nor take away; and has received direct from Christ all those blessings which other churches—Roman, Greek, and English—claim to enjoy, through the intervention of priests. I challenge a denial.

But Dr. Newman says that each of the three churches he names has had to endure *trial and has overcome it*. Well, what of the *fourth* branch? Has *it* had no trial to endure? Has it received no baptism of blood? Has not its history been an almost unbroken history of the most ardent struggle from the first?

And if, finally, it is claimed that Anglicanism cannot be wrong because it has not failed, but rather, at the end of three hundred years, is stronger than at the beginning, cannot *we* put in the self-same claim.

Nonconformity is not a thing of yesterday. It is practically as old as the English Church in its present form, *to say the least*, and it is stronger at the end than at the beginning. "*This does not look like an heretical or schismatical Church.*"

We are not perfect, nor do we claim perfection, but we have at least survived many trials, triumphed over many enemies, the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of our Church, and, *best of all, God has been, and is, with us.*

4.

This being so, the argument resulting seems to me clear and irresistible. We may not be ripe for the reunion of

Christendom *yet*. Perhaps we have too much of the spirit of David to be allowed to build that glorious temple of peace, but the indubitable facts of the history of the Gospel in our midst demand that we all make a contribution towards union by a reverent recognition *of the grace of God in all communities of believing people*.

This, at least, is clearly due from all.

“If,” said Peter, when the Jews blamed him for preaching the Gospel in the house of Cornelius, “GOD gave unto THEM the like gift as He did also unto us when *we* believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that *I* could withstand God?”

If God has given the Spirit to millions in the Protestant Church, who are *you*, my Lord Cardinal of Westminster, or even *you*, your Holiness of Rome, that you withstand *God*?

If God has poured forth His Spirit on

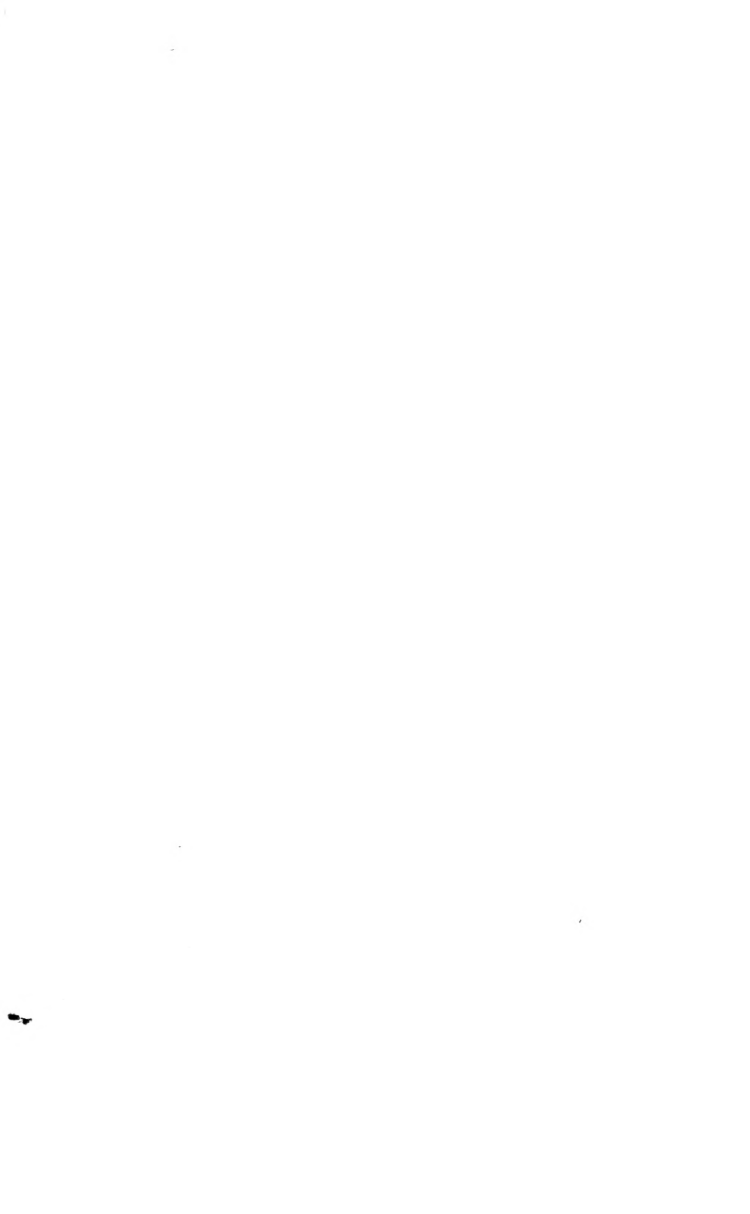
millions in the Roman Church, who are *you*, oh ye Protestants, that you should identify that Church as a *whole* with the scarlet woman of the Revelation and thus stand against God?

And if *God* has breathed His Spirit on the Free Churches of our land, who are you, ye archbishops, bishops, and all dignitaries, that ye should withstand God, and call that common which He has hallowed, unclean which He has cleansed?

What other conclusion, then, can we draw from the history of the Gospel but this—that faith in Christ is the sole channel of spiritual blessing and power, and, therefore, that it is the one thing to divide upon, fight for, die for?

Let each Church, according to taste, culture, circumstances, use what rites it chooses, but let it not judge others by them, nor let others judge it by them. Seeing rather that the history of the Gospel proves beyond a doubt that where ceremonies most abound Christ alone is

efficient as the source of blessing, and where ceremonies are few, or even wholly absent, Christ alone is sufficient for an equal blessing on His people, shall we not look for a time when Christendom, “scaling and unpurging her long-abused eyesight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance,” shall unite to crown *Him* Lord of all?



LECTURE III.

THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE.

“It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life.”

JESUS.

THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE.

(GAL. III.)

WE have here an apostolic lesson in the difficult art of *Bible-reading*.

Hitherto in this epistle St. Paul had met the contentions of opponents by a plain statement of facts. “*He never saw the Lord, therefore he cannot be an apostle,*” they said. “*But I am an apostle, called of God, and have done an apostle’s work for many years,*” was the answer.

“*No man can be saved without the works of the law,*” they declared. “*But I was saved, and thousands upon thousands of men and women in all lands have also been saved apart from the law,*” was the cogent reply.

What are arguments to facts?—men’s thoughts to God’s living things? If the rose in her pride should say, “*No flowers*

but in the garden," I would hie me to the open fields where wondering daisies gaze all day at heaven, where violets nod to the breeze, where the cowslip hangs her bell in the summer wind, where myriads of bees and insects are busily botanising, and a fragrant posy culled from meadow and moor should be my answer to the proud flower's taunt.

When Rome said, "There are no flowers outside *my* walls," Germany, Switzerland, France, England, Scotland, and Wales answered her boast with living facts—with flowers whose colour and sweetness gave her the lie in the face of the world.

When *to-day* the priest says, "You cannot have Christ without me," our best answer is our *consciousness* of the fact that according to His word, "He is with us all the days."

2.

But behind and above all individual experience stood the great witness of

Scripture—the ancient and holy writings of the Old Testament, which both St. Paul and his readers accepted as the infallible rule of faith. What did they say on this point?

The Judaisers boldly claimed the Bible on *their* side. *It* was the Book of the Law. The law was the main thing in it—its holy of holies; and surely the gist of its testimony *was*, “No salvation without the works of the law! We appeal to the Scripture,” they said; and St. Paul, accepting their challenge, opens his well-worn Bible, and in these verses gives us *his* reading of the Old Testament.

The Bible, like all other books, depends much upon its readers. The greater the reader the greater the book.

Now many of St. Paul’s contemporaries were very poor Bible-readers. They had no eye for perspective, no thought of proportion. They seized on texts and phrases. They built stupendous fabrics of dogma on single expressions, expressions

which very often the following verses proved to be erroneous. Practically, too, their Bible began at Exodus, by the foot of Sinai.

Now Exodus is a great book and Sinai is a mighty mountain. No hill in all the world casts so vast a shadow. But the Bible does not begin at Exodus. Nothing great or lasting begins there. No river has its source on Sinai.

Genesis is the Book of Beginnings. All the great rivers spring thence. *Genesis* is greater, broader, deeper than *Exodus*.

Its revelation of God is sublimer. In *Exodus* He is the God of a people. In *Genesis* He is the God of all.

His actions are greater. 'Tis no great thing for God to overthrow Pharaoh, but who shall not fear Him who created heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is?

The religion of *Genesis* is at once simpler and deeper.

In *Exodus* religion is a cult, the priest

is a man apart, and God dwells in a separate and jealously-guarded tent.

But in Genesis the tabernacle of God is with man, He walks by His side, cares for him like a father, clothes him like a mother. Religion blends with the daily life of men as sunshine with the air. Every housefather is a priest to his family. Sin is not the infringement of arbitrary ceremonial injunctions, but an act of disobedience to the will of God revealed in conscience.

In fact, we greatly wrong Genesis when we think of it as *one* of the Five Books of Moses. Moses *may* have written it, though it is not likely ; but whoever wrote it, it is not one of five. *It is a book by itself.* It is nearer akin to Job and the Psalms, to Isaiah and the prophets, than it is to Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers ; but it is nearer still to the Four Gospels. The nearest point to Genesis is St. Matthew, and to Abraham, Christ. As Professor Findlay has remarked, the Gospels, at the

outset, strike the key-note of Genesis. St. Matthew opens with the words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of *Abraham*. When Mary the blessed among women sang *Magnificat*, she said, "The Lord hath visited and redeemed His people . . . in remembrance of the oath which He sware unto *Abraham* our father."

Zacharias, too, the priest turned poet by the joy of fatherhood, cried, "He hath helped Israel . . . as He spake to Abraham and his seed for ever."

And the chief feature of St. Paul's Bible-lesson in this chapter is that it begins at the beginning, goes back past Exodus and Moses to Genesis and Abraham, and thus obtains a new and true perspective by which he is able to see Bible-things and Bible-men in their true proportion.

Read as it usually was, and indeed still is, the main thing in the Old Testament is the Law of Moses with its extraordinary rites, its endless and various details, its

repulsive ceremonies, its altar smoking with burning flesh and wet with sprinkled blood—*this law* seems to dominate the whole revelation.

But as St. Paul read it in the light of Genesis, the law dwindles to the proportion of an episode, or a parenthesis, while the great *outstanding fact and leading theme* of the book is seen to be *spiritual religion*—the eternal Gospel that the Father Himself, who *loveth* all men, is bent upon blessing all men, and that the sole condition of salvation for all is a grateful, trustful acceptance of the Father's gift of eternal life. The Bible is not the Book of the Law, but the revelation of grace and truth in Jesus Christ. To prove this St. Paul lays down three statements in this famous passage of his epistle.

I.

That salvation by faith is the oldest thing in the Bible. Salvation has always

been by faith, while from the law nothing but condemnation has fallen on men.

1. He takes Abraham as his type of the saved man. "*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.*"

Outwardly we know that Abraham's life was imperfect. His knowledge of God was very incomplete, and his creed no doubt was defective, but his *faith*, his trust in God and goodness was glorious. It was the strongest thing in a strong man's life, and this childlike faith was imputed to him as righteousness ; for

It is the *seed* of act

God holds appraising in His hollow palm :
Not act grown great thence in the world below,
Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire.

'Tis not so much what a man is, but what he wants to be, that saves or damns him. And in Abraham's intense desire to be right and true lay the seeds of all noble qualities. The heart of God in heaven was glad because on earth he had one friend, not a slave nor a subject living

by law and rule, but a *friend*, whose law was love, whose rule was trust in God.

Abraham was saved by faith, and thus in the early morning of the world the spirituality of religion was declared and illustrated.

Abraham was saved by faith, but not Abraham only. God knows no partiality. His grace is universal. If He saves *one* by faith it is because faith is the way of salvation for all. "Know ye, therefore, that they which are of faith (*i.e.*, whose spiritual life has its origin and spring in *trust*), these—these *only* are the sons of Abraham," the true Israelites whose God is the Lord.

"And the *Scripture* itself," foreseeing this fact, "foreseeing that God would justify the *Gentiles* by faith, preached the Gospel"—the good news—"beforehand unto Abraham, saying, 'In *thee*'—in the very fact that thou art blessed through faith lies the assurance that the same blessing of justification shall come to all

on the same terms, in the same way, "in *thee* shall *all* the *nations* be blessed." Within the gift to this one man was hidden a gospel for humanity. "Abraham saw the day of Christ and was glad," and "they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." This is the everlasting Gospel that man is saved by trust in God. This binds the ages together. All whose religion is inward and spiritual are Abraham's children, citizens of the commonwealth of Israel and members of that most ancient and immortal community, the earthy *friends* of the Heavenly Father.

2. On the other hand, "So many as are *of* the works of the law"—those whose characteristic moral condition, as Meyer puts it, is produced and regulated by observance of the law—all these *are under a curse, for* it is WRITTEN, "Cursed is *every one* that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them."

Continueth, i.e., abideth ever within the narrow boundaries of the law, never in word or deed overpassing the limit of the commandment—nay, abides within that enclosure in such a way and in such a spirit that the eye of the all-seeing God Himself shall find no flaw in the action, no speck in the motive.

Who is able to do this? Is it not evident that no man is justified by the *law* in the sight of God? “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall *stand*?”

Those that are under such a law know no peace nor rest; they worship ever in the shadow of their own sins; they are under the curse of failure, and one of the latest of the prophets sums up the experience of the race when he says, “The righteous shall live by *faith*, not law.”

3. Finally, the crowning proof that faith alone brings salvation, while the law everywhere carries a curse, is found in the

Death of Christ; for Christ died to deliver Israel from the curse of its law, and rose again that the Gospel of faith might be preached in all the world.

Christ redeemed *us* (the Jewish people) from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is *every one* that hangeth upon a tree.” That was the death—the extremest form of punishment decreed by the law for the worst offenders. Well, Christ not only died, but died so, “the death of the Cross.” He was reckoned among transgressors, and His Body counted as a Thing that defiled the land, in order to deliver Israel from the curse of the law, and bring the law of Moses to an end as a condition of life, in order *that*, by means of an emancipated Israel, the long-promised *blessing of Abraham* might come to the Gentiles; that the day which the Patriarch foresaw with gladness might dawn upon the world—the day in which the Risen Christ could say, “Go, preach the Gospel

to the whole creation"—a *day* in which each man could say to his fellow—

I say to thee, do thou repeat
 To the next man thou mayest meet
 In lane, highway, or open street,
 That he and we and all men move
 Under a canopy of love
 As broad as the blue sky above!

II.

That the Gospel of Salvation by faith is the PERMANENT element in Revelation, while the law of Moses was provisional and temporary.

What was done through Moses was for a time; what was done in Abraham was for all time. The Gospel is the oldest thing in the Bible, and the only thing in it that endures. It is Alpha and it is Omega. It is kernel—the rest is husk and sheath.

But, said the objectors, "The law came *after* the universal promise—does not the law, therefore, abrogate, or at *least* modify,

the promise? Must not what God said to Abraham be joined on to what He afterwards said to Moses?"

No, replies the Apostle. Take an illustration from home affairs. A man, we'll say, makes his will. He, out of the love he bears certain persons, bequeaths them his goods. But man is a changeable creature. His love may cool, may turn to hate; he may alter or destroy the will he once made; but if, when at length Death lays on human mutability the indelible seal of Unchangeableness, the will is found intact; if, when the man dies, the testament is confirmed—proved, as we say—then no one can annul or alter it any more. *The will stands.*

But we, in this matter, have to do with *God*, not man; God, who can neither die, nor lie. In the beginning of time God made known His will. He did not merely enter into a *covenant*; He announced His *will* with regard, not to *one man or nation*, but to *all nations and ages*; to *Christ*, as

the Representative and Head of the race. He *confirmed—ratified* that declaration of His will by an oath, and sealed it with the great seal of his Godhead.

Can it, then, be thought for a moment, St. Paul asks, that the law of Moses, which came 430 years after, can either alter or annul such a promise? Break the great seal of God? Make void the oath of the Eternal, and thus reduce the *word* of the Lord to the level of the ever-shifting words of men!

It is unthinkable! The will stands!

2. It is the *law that is provisional and temporary*. It was added, not to abrogate or modify the promise, *but because of transgression*, to curb sin and develop conscience in a rude, sensual people. It was an item in the national education of the Jews, and does not rank with the Gospel for the world.

The promise came *direct* from God, but the law was “ordained through angels by the hand of a Mediator.” The law re-

vealed God less clearly, less nearly, less truly, than the promise did. It had much in it that was imperfect. It was forced to make compromises with human corruption and frailty. It granted divorce because of the hardness of the people's hearts. It had "*carnal ordinances imposed until a time of reformation.*" It was a *covenant* rather than a TESTAMENT, for a *Mediator is not a Mediator of one*. A Mediator implies two parties, and the law implied not only God, but the nation also. The chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and the chain of the law was hopelessly broken, because human nature was one of the links that composed it.

But *God is one!* The Gospel of Salvation by faith is the immutable will of *One*. God Himself was the Mediator by whom the promise came to Abraham, and God Himself in His Son Jesus Christ is the Mediator through whom the Gospel still comes to man.

Thus the Gospel, the oldest thing in

the Bible, must abide, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it: but the law was only added until the seed should come. Like Moses, its mediator, its function was to pilot one nation across a narrow strip of desert, but not to lead humanity into the promised land. That is the office of the Love which was before, shall be after, and ever is, above the law.

III.

That the Gospel of Salvation by faith is supreme, while the law of Moses is wholly subordinate.

Do law and Gospel clash? asks some one. God forbid, is the reply. No! There is no room for clashing. Their functions are too distinct for any shadow of rivalry.

The purpose of the Gospel is to bring life to the race—the purpose of the law was the humbler office of keeping a nation

in ward till Christ should come to set it free—of leading a people to Christ—that He might teach it the oracles of God.

The law was a gaoler, a slave taking a child to school, a guardian; Christ is the Emancipator, Teacher, and Redeemer of mankind—what clashing can be here? What relation can there be except that of the *subordination* of the religion of the letter to the supremacy of the religion of the spirit?

Thus the Old Testament Scriptures, as St. Paul read them, go to show that while the law of Moses was an episode in the life of a nation, a parenthesis and a digression, in which one special people was taught one much-needed lesson, *Salvation by trust*, spiritual religion, is the *oldest thing* and the newest; the first, the last and the chiefest thing in the Book. Christ is the goal of Revelation from the First, and its Centre for evermore.

A reperusal of the Sacred Writings leads back Paul to his old conclusion.

Christ! I am Christ's, and let the Name suffice you.

Ay, for me, too, He greatly hath sufficed;
Lo! with no winning words I would entice you,
Paul has no honour and no friend but Christ.

Yea, through life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning,

He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed;
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.

Such, then, is St. Paul's reading of the Old Testament—a reading which has the support of the prophets and psalmists, whose chief emphasis is never laid upon rite or ceremony, place or time, but ever upon doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, and whose delight is in the law of the Lord, spiritually interpreted, not in the barren legalism which to the priest and scribe was the Holy of Holies of the Revelation.

Now it is clear that such a reading of the Old Testament, if generally adopted, must have a very important bearing on theology. For theology has, for the most part, read the Old Testament through Jewish spectacles, and, consequently, has hinged its doctrines on the law, rather than on those better promises on which the New Covenant is based. With the exception of the parable of Eden, on which it has founded its strange doctrine of the Fall of Man, Theology has neglected Genesis and its kindred books, and has laboured to discover the everlasting Gospel in Leviticus, and to understand the self-sacrifice of Christ by poring over the "carnal ordinances" of "a carnal commandment," imposed on Jews until a time of reformation.

But, leaving for the present this very tempting theme, and confining myself to the one subject of Christian liberty, allow me to point out two or three things that

emerge very clearly in view of St. Paul's reading of the Old Testament.

1. If St. Paul is right in his contention that the main thing in the Old Testament is the revelation of the spirituality of religion, how overwhelmingly strong is the case when from the Old we pass into the New?

What a small space, what a low position is *here* assigned to the rites and ceremonies, dogmas and churchisms, that among us assume such vast importance!

In the four Gospels, in the Acts, in the Epistles of Peter, John, James, Jude, Paul, and the great Unknown of the Hebrews, and in the Apocalypse, where, as in a final summing-up and peroration, the palmary truths of the whole Bible are made to pass in clear vision before our eyes, ending with that glorious representation of the religion of Christ as a holy city, a New Jerusalem, all of whose innumerable citizens are kings and priests, whose gates are open day and night, and within whose

walls there is no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it—in all this many-sided presentation, with what clearness and unanimity is the stress laid on faith toward God and love toward men as the chief constituent elements of Christ's religion!

Love is the fulfilling of the law. Love is the sole distinctive badge of the disciples of Jesus, according to the unmistakable teaching of the New Testament.

2. If St. Paul be right in his contention, how very widely has sacerdotalism, both at home and abroad, departed from the letter and spirit of the Bible!

Romanists and Ritualists, indeed, admit that there is little or no direct Scripture warrant for their peculiar tenets. They admit that such doctrines as the occult virtue of rites, baptismal regeneration, the Real Presence in the Sacrament, much less the supremacy of the Pope, the invocation of saints, and the glorification of

the Virgin Mary are not to be discovered anywhere on the surface of the New Testament. Newman, for instance, repeatedly makes this admission. These doctrines, he tells us, are arrived at by *inference*, by that process of *development* which is natural and inevitable in the case of ideas so great and fertile that the fulness of their contents and the range of their applications can only be realised by degrees and in the course of long periods of time.

He claims, however, that Romanism is a *true* development of the germs found in the New Testament. Christianity has grown, but in growing has not departed from the original type. Romanism is the Christianity of history. Its continuity has not been broken at any point. Protestantism is "*not* the Christianity of history. If ever," he says, "there was a safe truth it is this." Protestants are aware of this, and so they neglect the study of history. "The chief, perhaps the only, English writer who has any

claim to be considered an ecclesiastical historian is the infidel Gibbon." "To be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant."

Well, we have neglected history. We have written and spoken too often as if before 1662 nothing of importance had ever happened. But we have no *cause* to be afraid of history. For instance, Newman contends that the Roman Church in developing the doctrine has carefully preserved the type. There has been progress, but no *corruption*. But hear the verdict of history as delivered by the "chief, perhaps the only, English writer who has any claim to be considered an ecclesiastical historian": "In the long period of 1,200 years which elapsed between the reign of Constantine and the reformation of Luther, the worship of saints and relics *corrupted* the pure and perfect simplicity of the *Christian model*."

"The sublime and simple theology of the primitive Christians was gradually

corrupted, and the monarchy of heaven *degraded* by the introduction of a popular mythology which tended to restore the reign of polytheism. . . . The ministers of the Catholic Church imitated the profane model which they were impatient to destroy, and if in the beginning of the fifth century Tertullian, or Lactantius had been suddenly raised from the dead . . . he would have gazed with astonishment and indignation at the profane spectacle which had succeeded to the pure and spiritual worship of a Christian congregation.”

Speaking of the rise of Mohammedanism in the seventh century he says, “*that the Christians had insensibly relapsed into a semblance of paganism*; their public and private views were addressed to the relics and images that *disgraced the temples of the East* . . . the throne of the Almighty was darkened by a cloud of martyrs and saints and angels; and the Collyridian *heretics* . . . *invested the Virgin*

Mary with the name and honour of a goddess."

And finally, he declares that, "if the Christian Apostles, St. Peter or St. Paul, could return to the Vatican they *might* possibly inquire the name of the deity who is worshipped with such mysterious rites in that magnificent temple; at Oxford or Geneva they *would experience less surprise*; but it might still be incumbent on them to peruse the *catechism* of the Church, and to *study* the *orthodox* commentators on their own writings and the words of their Master." *

Clearly it was the very decided opinion of the only English ecclesiastical historian that in developing the doctrine Rome had *not preserved the type*, and that her so-called Christianity of history is not the Christianity of *ancient* history, much less of the New Testament.

If this be ecclesiastical history, I do

* Gibbon's "Decline and Fall." Vol. II., ch. 28; vol. III., ch. 50.

not see why a man may not be deeply read in it, and still continue to be a Protestant.

3. In conclusion, there being no doubt that Ritualism within the Roman and Anglican Churches has travelled a very long way from the primitive simplicity of the New Testament, I would ask, if St. Paul's reading of Scripture is right, by what authority has it done this?

If the law of Moses was not sufficient to annul or even to modify the spiritual nature of the religion of the Old Testament, to what event can you point in the history of the last 1,800 years of such magnitude that it can be held to justify the overlaying and obscuring of the revelation in Christ which is so much greater and clearer than that to Abraham? By what right have the men who call themselves the "Church" mixed Judaism with Paganism, and called the result Christianity? What has happened to authorise men to shift the emphasis from faith and love, character and life, to

such things as baptismal regeneration and the gross materialism of fasting communion?

Gentlemen! *nothing has happened*, nothing *can* happen, to justify so wide a departure from the great revelation of spiritual religion which flows like a river, clear as crystal, from the divine source in Genesis to the divine sea in Revelation.

Nothing has happened, nothing can happen; for if an apostle, or even an angel from heaven, preach another Gospel, let him be anathema!

“Little monk,” said one of the steel barons that guarded the door of the Diet of Worms to Luther, “little monk,” thou hast need of great courage, but if thou hast faith in these doctrines which thou teachest, in the name of God, go forward.” Luther paused a moment, then, throwing back his head, he answered, “Yes! in the name of God, forward!” We too, members and ministers of the Free

Churches, have need of much courage to-day. Many obstacles obstruct our progress, but we have faith in our doctrines, and for the rest,

In the name of God, Forward!

LECTURE IV.

FREEDOM AND BONDAGE.

“ It is not to be thought of that the Flood
Of British freedom, which, to the open sea
Of the world’s praise, from dark antiquity
Hath flowed ‘ with pomp of waters unwithstood,’
Roused though it be full often to a mood
Which spurns the check of salutary bands
That this most famous stream in bogs and sands
Should perish, and to evil and to good
Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
Armoury of the invincible Knights of old.
We must be free or die who speak the tongue
That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held. In everything we are sprung
Of earth’s first blood—have titles manifold.”

WORDSWORTH.

FREEDOM AND BONDAGE.

GAL. III. 23—V. 1.

“CHRISTIANITY,” said Dr. Boyd Carpenter the other day, “is greater than any of us think.” Much that goes by the name of Christianity is not great at all. From a practical point of view it cannot be said to differ much from other religions, or, indeed, from non-religion. It does no more for personal character, for consolation in trouble and peace in the prospect of death, for society and commerce, for the amity of classes and the comity of nations, than might be done under the same circumstances by Judaism, Buddhism, or Mohammedanism. But Christianity itself is a great thing, a very much greater thing than any of us think. We none of us realise the potencies that lie waiting

their development in a Gospel that shall yet lift the valleys and level the hill-tops, baptize the desert with streams, transform wildernesses into gardens of the Lord, harmonise the differences of men, and realise the will of God on earth.

Indeed, one great difficulty that Christianity had to contend with at the outset was that of finding men who had eyes to perceive the greatness of the change it involved, and courage to go with it to the full extent of the conclusions that flowed from its premisses.

Many who professed regard and reverence for Christ could or would not see the full significance of His work. They did not realise the magnitude of the revolution that He had so silently and gently brought about. Without externally disturbing any existing institution in Church or State, He had shaken heaven and earth. He had risen on human life like a sun, and in the new light that fell from Him *all* things had become new. But while

admitting that He had done much—very much—many could not be brought to see that He had done so much. They accepted His new wine, but they would fain pour it into the old bottles. They took the new cloth, but only to mend Aaron's old surplice. They still sought the living among the dead, and though God was speaking to them in His Son, they cried, "Let Moses speak to us and not God."

And all along its history Christ's religion has been hampered by this same difficulty of finding men prepared to take it seriously. According to the Bardic Triads the three essentials of a poet are an eye to see Nature, an ear to hear Nature, and a heart that dare go with Nature.

These, too, are the very qualities desiderated by the Gospel—a purged eye to behold the glory of the Lord, an ear quick to catch every accent of the Holy Ghost, and, above all, a heart that dare go with

Christ whithersoever He goeth. Alas! how rare are these in any age, in any society.

But while we all limit Christianity at some point or on some side, sacerdotalism, priestism, ritualism, or whatever other name it goes by, limits Christ's work at the very outset, minimises the significance of His manifestation, and even tends to change His religion into something altogether different.

The priest to-day, whether in the Greek, Roman, or Anglican Churches, fails to see the unique greatness of Christianity, and, lacking this vision, he practically effaces the dividing line between the Old and the New Testaments, puts back the world's clock from A.D. to B.C., brings in again days and seasons, fasts and festivals, orders and ranks—in fact, all the weak and beggarly elements that belonged to the elementary stage of Jewish religious education, and which the appearance of Christ, marking as it did the majority of

the human race, should have banished for ever to the lumber-room of ancient history.

But in St. Paul Christ found an instrument to His hand—a man in whom the three essentials of a great Christian met together—eye, ear, heart. Enlightened and led by the Holy Ghost, this man saw that Jesus Christ had made all things new, that His religion was a new creation, and amid the confusion and consternation incident upon the passing of the old order and the advent of the new, there was one human soul that saw the hand of God in it, and said of the strange new world as it rose on his vision, Behold, it is very good!

He ranked Christianity with nothing else, for it was unique. He added nothing to it, for it was perfect. He had no fears on its account, for it was the power of God. He scrupled not to apply its precepts to every case, for it was the wisdom and love of God. Everything paled before it—the temple at Jerusalem as well

as the altars and idols of Athens, for it was the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God. And in the long passage which we have before us to-day, the Apostle having concluded his argument, expatiates on the unique greatness of Christ's work, so that, if possible, his readers may again behold the glory of the Lord, and, beholding it, may bow down quickly and worship before it.

For this purpose he puts before them three things:—

I.—THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM.

II.—THE RENUNCIATION OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM.

III.—THE PROSPECTS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM.

I.

The Nature of Christian Freedom.

For freedom did Christ set us free. He uses two figures to set forth the difference

between the world as Christ found it and the world as He left it.

(a) The first is that of a prisoner. Before the faith came we were kept in ward under the law—shut up under sin.

Under whatever law men lived they were condemned by it. It brought home to them a sense of failure. It emphasized the fact of sin. It imprisoned, convicted, and sentenced men. It kept them in ward.

Then *the faith came*. The Love of God appeared among men, and God said, "Let there be forgiveness!" And there was forgiveness. The prisoners came forth, "for there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Henceforth, the central word of religion is not Law, but Love. From the ends of the earth men will look, not to the Temple on Moriah, where man strove to propitiate God with the gifts he placed upon the altar, but to the Cross on Calvary, where God in Christ is reconciling the world to

Himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses.

Believe and be free! There is power with God to *forgive* sin.

(b) But the figure of the prisoner, though it covers a great deal of the ground, does not extend over the whole area, and so St. Paul brings forward another and more pleasing one—that of an heir under age. Dismissing the figure of the prison, he calls up before our minds the idea of a noble mansion in which dwell a rich man and his son. A will is being made by the father in favour of his son. He bequeaths all his substance to him, but because he is as yet too young to manage affairs for himself, he is put under trustees and tutors until he shall reach a certain age named in the will. The father, having thus set his house in order, dies, and the son, though in one sense he is lord of all, passes into the care of guardians and stewards, who look after both him and his, so that in point

of actual power he differs little from a slave. But time flows on, and at length the term appointed of the father is reached. The heir is no longer a minor, but a full-grown man, and now the very will that hitherto kept him under sets him free; the will that had put authority into the hands of guardians and stewards now take it all from them and hands it all to him. By the provisions of his father's will he now takes his property for good or for evil into his own hands, and is free for ever from the jurisdiction of guardians and tutors.

Well, popularly speaking—and you must bear in mind that the epistle *is* a popular pamphlet, not a scientific treatise—just such a child was human nature. It was the child of God and the heir of God. In Abraham the Heavenly Father had made a declaration of His will to enrich His earthly child with the inheritance of a great blessing; but because the child was not yet prepared to receive the in-

heritance it was put under guardians—we were in bondage under the rudiments of the world—tied down to strict rules, taught spiritual truth through material symbols, kept at the scales of first principles. Not Jews only, but all the nations of the earth were in this stage. Palestine formed but one small class-room in the great world-school, and the law of Moses was but one of many similar lessons in the divine education of the human race.

“*But when the fulness of the time came,*” the term appointed of the Father, the time of man’s ripeness, “God sent forth from Himself His Son,” born, like all men, of a woman; born like the Jew, under law, “that He might redeem them which were under law,” that we *all* might receive the adoption of *sons*; literally *the placing as sons*.

The term “adoption” has a cold, strange, repellent look, for after all an *adopted* son is not a son. But every illus-

tration breaks down at some point, and St. Paul takes care to use only such illustrations as shall break down at the right point. To illustrate the effect of Christ's death he uses deliberately a harsh, mercantile word, so that every one ought to see that it is not a *definition* of the atonement, but a metaphor, that is, a word *thrown out* to designate what cannot be explained.

So here he speaks of the adoption, not of one man's child by some other man, but of the action of a father who adopts his own child—takes means to place one who always was his child in the rank and status of full-grown sonship and heirship. The word does not imply, as some think, that St. Paul did not hold fast to Christ's central doctrine of the Universal Fatherhood of God. St. Paul did hold that doctrine. He made it the theme of his sermon on Mar's Hill, and his idea of adoption is based upon the truth "that we are His offspring."

Adoption does not mark the contrast between sonship and non-sonship, but between sonship and pupillage, between the minority and the majority of one who ever was God's child, but who in course of time attained, through the terms of the Father's will, to the status of a full-grown Son, and all the privileges of heirship.

Adoption relates not so much to the individual as to the race as a whole. It does not so much designate any period in the process of personal conversion, as the great dispensational change by which Christ lifted the human race from bondage into freedom, from pupillage into manhood; or, to quote Professor Bruce, adoption marks the "epoch-making significance of the advent of Jesus in the general religious history of the world."

As we were prisoners, Christ redeemed us by the forgiveness of our sins. As we were children, He set us free from subjection to the rudiments of the world and promoted us to the rank of the "sons of God,"

and “*because we are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father.*” The fact of our sonship revealed objectively by Christ is accompanied by the spirit of sonship awakened subjectively by the Spirit of Christ. Faith in the Son of God brings with it a *feeling* that we are all sons of God, and impels us to think of and to speak to Him as “Father.”

“*For now that the faith has come we are no longer under a tutor, for ye are all Sons of God, as many as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ,*” you assumed Christ as the robe of spiritual manhood. “*And there can be neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free ; there can be no male nor female, for you are all one man in Christ Jesus.*” In putting on Christ you have assumed the rank of Anointed ones. You have, as Meyer says, appropriated the same peculiar state of life, that is, the very same specific relation to God in which Christ stands. You are Sons even as He is a

Son. Ye are joint-heirs with the First-born of God. *So that thou art no longer a bondservant—able to act only through others—but a Son, and if a Son, then an heir through God.*”

Yes! THROUGH GOD. Guardians, stewards, and old-time tutors may not relish the day that dismisses them from place and power, but who can withstand the father’s will? The self-same power that made the heir subject to them now makes him independent of them for ever. Guardians and stewards would to-day fain recover their old power over men, but the “will” is against them. Be it known to all who desire to lord it over the souls of men that we of the Free Churches are not schismatics nor heretics, but heirs through God, *through God!* We hold our spiritual freedom by the self-same tenure that we hold our forgiveness of sin, viz., by the act and grace of God. The charter of Christian liberty has affixed to it the threefold seal of the Triune God. Christ hath set us

free. The Spirit sent into our hearts cries Father! We are heirs through *God*. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost we are free!

II.

The Renunciation of this Freedom.

St. Paul to his inexpressible surprise and sorrow, saw in Galatia the beginnings of that sad process which more or less has continued until now, viz., the return of the New Israel to the land of Egypt and the house of bondage. The Galatians were renouncing their liberty and allowing themselves to be bound again with the chains of the ancient slavery.

As he contemplates this sad sight he makes three comments upon it.

1.—*The Strangeness of it.*

All idolatry is strange. That a man should bow down to the wood his own

hand had felled, or the stone his art fashioned—that he should represent God by grotesque and hideous idols of his own making is a very marvellous fact in human history. It goes far to justify St. Paul's metaphor of the child. Idolatry marks the childhood of the race. Man's ignorance of God explains, and to some extent excuses, the creeds and customs of heathendom.

The Galatians were idolators when St. Paul first found them. He was not surprised at *that*, for they did not then know God; but their present conduct astonishes him. “*Now that ye have come to know God, or, rather, to be known of God,*” to be the conscious objects of His love, “*how now turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments*”—“*weak*” because ineffectual, devoid of any power to help you in your spiritual life; “*beggarly*” because poor, having nothing to give you, devoid of spiritual nutriment.

This new idolatry was a stranger thing than the old.

In heathen lands idolatry is not without its excuses. It even fulfils certain functions in a poor, imperfect way. Its ritual helps to keep corruption in check, and to keep alive in men's minds the thought of things eternal.

But idolatry in a Christian land is an unnatural and monstrous thing, an anachronism and a strong delusion that filled the mind of St. Paul with pained surprise.

2.—*The Symptoms of it.*

“*Ye observe (scrupulously, zealously) days and months, and seasons and years.*” Of course, they were free to observe days if they chose to do so. He that keepeth a day keepeth it unto the Lord. Rites and festivals are not wrong. Whatever we may think of them we must not interfere with the liberty of others. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?

The Puritan has no more right to suppress the Prayer Book than the Cavalier to enforce it. Nay, of the two the Puritan is the greater sinner.

But this *scrupulous and zealous* observance of things in themselves indifferent, this growing devotion to ritual, was a sign that they were not standing fast in liberty, but gliding back again to bondage.

And these symptoms signify the same tendency to-day. For these things have a history. The altar and the mass, the priest and the confessional do not now appear before us for the first time. Their record fills many a sad and shameful page in "our long island story." Professing to reveal Christ they have always ended by obscuring Him. As the god became lost in the idol, so the Lord's Table has been lost in the altar, His Supper in the mass, His truth in the intricacies of creeds, and His simple though infinite religion of love in the elaborate ceremonials and mummeries of priests and their minions.

It is, of course, impossible to draw a line and fix the limit where Christian simplicity ends and Jewish ritualism begins; but this, at least, is certain, that when men place much emphasis on any external thing they are not moving in the true line of Christian progress, but exhibiting rather those symptoms that in every age have accompanied spiritual reaction, and there is grave reason to fear that, instead of growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, they are throwing away their liberty, and marching back to the land of Egypt and the house of bondage.

3.—*The Extreme Danger of it.*

“*I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labour in vain upon you.*” That is the danger; that by means of these observances on which they were placing such emphasis, their Christianity might come to nought, and life in Galatia

be practically the same as if Paul had never preached, as if Christ had never died.

The fear of this accounts for the warmth and tenderness of his appeal to them: "I beseech you be as I am, for I am as ye are." I, a Jew by nature, have become a Gentile; what things were gain to me I counted loss for Christ. Be as I am in this. "Ye did *me* no wrong." He is not moved by any feeling of personal pique or jealousy. He is not angry because they honour their new teachers, but he is grieved because these seek them in no good way, because their teaching tends to hide Christ from view, and to enslave the souls of men.

And then, in a great burst of uncontrollable feeling, he breaks out into the strange, motherlike cry, "O my little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you, . . . I am perplexed about you!"

The danger of their present attitude

was a terrible one—nothing less than the dying of the Christ-life within them.

Well, *we* are openly charged to-day with personal malice, with envy and jealousy towards other communions, with sacrilege and robbery of God.

Of course, such feelings and desires may exist in some minds. They may animate some who look at established churches from a political standpoint only, and whose real object is not the liberation of some, but the annihilation of all churches and the uprooting of all religion.

But this I feel free to assert, that these are not the motives that govern and guide the Free Churches of our land. It is not jealousy, nor malice, nor cupidity that have impelled men to break with life-long associations, to face the odium that clings to Dissent, to bear bitter persecution in pocket and in person; but reverence for a great ideal—an intense conviction that

the multiplication of ceremonies, the creation of orders, and the connection of the Church with the State are not in the true line of the Christian progress; a deep-rooted fear lest these things should do again for England what they have done for England before, viz., well-nigh destroy the Christian life within her; and, finally, the ardent desire to see Christ exalted in our land, and through us proclaimed with power to all other nations.

III.

The Prospects of Freedom.

So far as men could read the weather-signs the immediate future of spiritual religion was not a bright one. Already disintegration had set in, and men were journeying back to Egypt. But St. Paul, like all wise men, was a hopeful one. He had no doubt as to the issue of the conflict. He read the future in the past. Abraham,

he says, had *two* sons, one by the handmaid born after the flesh, and the other born of Sarah by the grace of God. "Which things contain an allegory."

Hagar stands for Sinai in Arabia, and for the old literal Jerusalem that is in bondage with all her children to the law of the Arabian mount.

Sarah the princess stands "for the Jerusalem that is above, that is free, and which is the mother of us" who live by trust in God. Of this eternal city of the free it is written, "Rejoice thou barren that bearest not, for more are the children of the desolate than of her which hath the husband! Spiritual religion may seem desolate and forsaken compared with the popular religion of superstition and fear, but the promise of God is with her. Yea, though in the future as in the past, "he that is born after the flesh" shall persecute "him that is born after the Spirit," howbeit "what saith the scripture? Cast out the handmaid and her son, for the son of the

handmaid shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”

“Numbers, fortune, rank, power are with us,” said the Jew. “The promise of God is with us,” was Paul’s answer. The meek shall inherit the earth. The religion of love shall outnumber the religion of fear. Her children shall be like the stars for glory and like the sands for multitude. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

What is the outlook to-day? In one sense sad enough. Rome and her imitators seem destined to triumph. “They have on their side,” as Frederick Myers said, “the indefinitely large forces of fear and of interest, of error and of prescription to work with, and all the superstition of mankind to work upon.” But after all “their cause is hopeless, their fall is certain.” The ritualistic conception of religion has “even now the greater part of modern life and modern thought against it. Science,

scholarship, the New Testament, and the providence of God are against it.”

It must fall. A tremendous struggle may await us in which we shall have to fight for all that we hold dear, and victory may not come in our day. But it will come. Stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in any yoke of bondage.

Be citizens of the Jerusalem without walls. Fight the good fight.

On! to the bound of the waste;

On! to the city of God.



LECTURE V.

THE GREATEST IS LOVE.

“This world is a world of men, and these men are our brothers. We must not banish from us the Divine breath—we must love. Who knows if love and its beatitudes, clear manifestation as it is of the universal harmony of things, is not the best demonstration of a fatherly and understanding God, just as it is the shortest road by which to reach Him? Love is a faith, and one faith leads to another. Believe then in a fatherly Providence and dare to love!”

AMIEL.

THE GREATEST IS LOVE.

GAL. v., vi.

IN the consultation which St. Paul had with the pillar-apostles at Jerusalem respecting what in all Christian circles was the burning question of the day, viz., the conformity of Gentile converts to the ritual of the Jewish Church, it was decided that no Jewish burden of any sort be imposed on the Gentiles, but because "Moses, from generations of old, hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath," the converts from heathenism were *enjoined*, in order not to wound the feelings nor slight the convictions of Jews, to abstain from the pollutions of idols, from what is strangled, from blood, and above all from impurity of life. In a word, the

council, while sanctioning their nonconformity, urged them to follow after peace with all men and the sanctification, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Now, in this Epistle, St. Paul, up to this point, has laid the chief stress on the first part of the council's decision, viz., on the right which in this day of the Son of Man the Gentiles possessed to dissent from the Jewish Church.

Over and over again, with much wealth of illustration, he has sought to impress his readers with the fact that the law of Moses was for the Jews and for a time, but that Jesus Christ was for all mankind and for ever. Nay, more. Now that faith has come legalism, dependence on works of law, is not only superfluous, it is *dangerous*, and may, by obscuring the true nature of the Gospel, prove fatal to spiritual life. He testifies that if the Galatian Christians receive circumcision Christ will profit them nothing. "There is only one essen-

tial thing, a heart which is sincerely seeking God," says Freeman Clarke, "if you make anything else essential and primary, *you make this* secondary. That which is innocent in itself becomes a superstition when it is made essential." It is, in effect, St. Paul tells his readers what he told St. Peter at Antioch. If the law of Moses be still necessary to salvation, the grace of God is void of meaning and of value, Christ died for nought, and Christianity as a whole amounts to nothing whatever unless it sets men free to worship God in spirit and truth.

Without this liberty Christianity ceases to be Christianity, and becomes another gospel which is *no gospel*. Therefore it is that St. Paul so passionately adjures his readers to contend earnestly for the free untrammelled faith once delivered to the saints. He was in no sense a fanatic or bigot, a stickler for trifles and forms. He was a man of the world, a statesman as well as an apostle.

He believed in expediency, he practised opportunism, and made compromises. He often sacrificed many little things in order to secure one great thing. He was willing to abjure his personal liberty in the matter of meat and wine in order to conciliate weak brethren. "Compromise" is a good fly, and St. Paul often fished with it and landed some notable captures. But it is not a fly for all waters or all weathers. It did well in Corinth and Rome, when little things were in dispute, but it would not serve in Galatia, when, under the cover of a ritualistic controversy, the very existence of Christianity was imperilled. This was no case for half-measures. Compromise here would be treachery to Christ. St. Paul therefore calls on his readers to yield nothing, to *stand fast* in liberty. This was a thing to divide upon, to fight for, to die for. And would God that the Apostle's clarion call to the defence of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, could again be sounded till the whole of England waked

to its summons, and the young amongst us realised the nature of the contest that is now being waged between religion and superstition, together with the greatness of the issues that hang upon it, until, like Spartan youths aroused by the talk of their veteran heroes, they cried, "Give us arms that we may fight the foe."

2.

But if such an arousal were to take the place of the prevailing lethargy, what then? What are the arms for such a contest? The appeal to the combative instincts of men is always fraught with danger. In nothing have men blundered so badly, sinned so deeply, or shown themselves to such general disadvantage as in their defence of the Christian faith. The wars of religion, that ought to have been holy wars waged with holy weapons, whose march should have been the most glorious pages in all the voluminous annals of

humanity, have, on the contrary, been the cruellest and worst that have ever disgraced and afflicted this poor, blood-stained battle-field world of ours.

Therefore, the Apostle having sounded his call to arms, having dealt fully with the *substance* of the decision at Jerusalem, now, in these closing passages, dwells on the *spirit* of it, and instructs those who would be good soldiers of Christ Jesus, both as to the weapons they are to use and the way they are to handle them.

He tells them that what they have to fight *for*, determines what they have to fight *with*. Love—the love of God for all mankind revealed in Christ Jesus, is what they have to defend, and it can only be defended by *love*.

That was Christ's own way of defending the faith. Once, when some Samaritans refused to receive Him, James and John suggested a short way with these heretics: "Wilt Thou that we bid fire to come down

from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them. The fire they spoke of might consume these poor ignorant men, but it would not defend the faith, nor help to reveal the love—only love could do that. So to the last Christ fought with love alone for his sword. In the garden, in the court, on the way to Calvary, on the Cross itself he championed the cause of love with love, and through love was more than conqueror.

Therefore though you "*are* called for freedom, use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another." You have a right to dissent from the forms of the Jewish, Romish, English Churches. Christ makes you free from them all, but you have *no right* to SNEER at what you dissent from, or to wound unnecessarily the feeling or conviction of them from whom you differ. Christ conferred upon you no right to judge, to ridicule, much less to hate any one, *for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision*

availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love.

In elucidation of this great saying—one surely of the very greatest in all the round of Scripture—St. Paul, in this passage, adduces three illustrations showing the all-important nature of Love. The first shows the position occupied by love in our relation to God, the second how it affects our personal character, and the last exhibits love as the law of all our intercourse with others.

I.

LOVE AND GOD.

The Galatians thought to commend themselves to God by ritual acts and ascetic exercises. We also rely on similar things far more than we think—on Sunday observance, on almsgiving, Bible-reading, and regularity in prayer. Most of us

imagine that it is by things like these men attain the approval of God.

But over against all such assumptions the Apostle sets two great assertions. The first is that *in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision* : He mentions circumcision as the type of a class of things. It stands here for all that vast category of acts by virtue of which men think to stand high in God's favour. It represents Baptism, Confirmation, attendance at the Lord's Table, Church-going, Church-membership, and the whole tribe of religious observances. In Christ, before God, these do not avail anything. They effect nothing. They simply do not count.

“*Nor uncircumcision.*” This also is a type. It stands for a class of non-observances for which many take credit to themselves. Some men pride themselves on the number of religious things they do, others pride themselves no less on the mere fact that they do *not* do these very

things. When Plato was entertaining some friends at a banquet, Diogenes the Cynic trampled on the carpets and said, "Thus I trample on the pride of Plato." "And, with a greater pride," was the wise and witty retort. Yes! the pride of Diogenes is often greater than that of Plato. If the Roman Catholic takes pride in his stately Church, his gorgeous priests, his altars resplendent with ivory and gold, the fumes of incense, the pomp of ceremony and the charm of music, *no less proud* is many a Protestant Nonconformist of the severe bareness of his chapel, the utter absence of pomp, ceremony, order, and even beauty. The very slovenliness is thought to have a hidden virtue in it which adds to the holiness of the place and gives an increased spiritual value to the service. But the Apostle says "*nor uncircumcision.*" In Christ, before God these non-observances avail nothing. They do not count.

In Jew and in Gentile, Romanist and

Protestant, Anglican and Dissenter, the one thing that avails in Christ, that is effective in God's sight, is *faith working through love*, "for" and this is St. Paul's second word, "*the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*" It is not what you do nor how much you give that God cares for, but the *spirit* in which you do anything, the mind behind the gift. What were the great gifts of the rich folk in old Jerusalem to Him that owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and whose are the silver mines and the gold-fields of the world and all the precious stones that are locked up in the strong treasure-chambers of the nether darkness?

But the widow's mites were gifts that made God feel richer, because her faith wrought through love, and God can never have too much love. It is the one thing He asks for. The only thing He accepts. The only service He pays for. You may be a very able and valiant defender of the

faith, but unless while you seek to pull down the false and set up the true, you continue to love the men with whom you are contending, unless you are kind and fair and tender and chivalrous, fighting love's battle with truth and love for your only weapons, God will not accept you as *His* champion, nor acknowledge your triumph as His victory, nor reward you with the crown He gives to His true soldiers.

“If ye bite and devour one another”—that is not a holy war, but a vulgar brawl, a street squabble, in which whoever wins, religion loses, and love is grieved. The wrath of man filleth not the righteousness of God. The only thing that helps Him, gladdens Him, endears men to Him, is faith working through love.

II.

LOVE AND CHARACTER.

We, says the Apostle, through the spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness, i.e., for a

character made perfect, a harmonised life, out of which all discord and clashing has passed for ever.

Well, we *all* cherish some such hope, but if we take into account the complex nature of our personality, the various and often conflicting elements that go to make up the sum of our life, we shall see that this is a very great thing to hope for, and that very great changes must take place in all of us before it is realised. The late Louis Stevenson, you will remember, once wrote a weird book called the Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in which he described a humane doctor, by means of a potent drug, changing himself into a loathsome and cruel creature, to whom all good was evil, and all evil good, and again, by means of the same drug, returning to his own better self and wonted appearance. So it went on till one day the drug fails him, the way of return is barred against him, his better self is placed beyond his reach, and Dr. Jekyll dies as Mr. Hyde.

That *is* a strange, but by no means a rare story, rather is it in its most important features, a common experience. St. Paul knew it well. He describes it at large in Roman vii., and he dwells upon it here. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary the one to the other, that ye may not do the things that ye would." There we have the germs of Stevenson's book, there we have the mystery of our own lives, the natural history of our own souls.

Have you not felt moved to do kind deeds, to say a forgiving word, to abandon some evil habit; but before you had time to carry your resolution into effect, have you not been conscious of something sinister and base within you that strove to dissuade you from the good course you had resolved upon, and very often succeeded in strangling the noble resolve in its birth? That is what Johnson meant when he said that the road to *hell*

was paved with good intentions—intentions which the Jekyll in men formed and the Hyde in them killed.

Who, again, does not recall instances in which, when he had let evil thoughts have the run of his heart and the guiding of his will, something noble and splendid and godlike awoke within him, sounded the alarm bells, aroused the conscience, called out all the reserves of self-respect, the sense of honour and of duty, and routed the black battalions, and killed the serpent in the very egg, the act in the thought? Oh, yes; the road to *heaven* is paved with *bad* intentions which the flesh formed, but which the Spirit killed ere they could pass into deeds.

Thus there are two restraining forces within us all—we may not do the evil we would because the Spirit lusteth against the flesh; nor do all the good either, because the flesh lusteth against the Spirit.

But this state of see-saw and balance

cannot continue for ever; one of these two forces must increase and the other must decrease. What can we do to prevent the awful catastrophe of Stevenson's tale taking place in us—flesh triumphant over Spirit?

There is only one way. The Apostle and the tale-writer are agreed upon *that*. It was action and practice that gave Hyde in the story his power, and St. Paul says that the power of either flesh or Spirit in our lives *will depend entirely on the amount of practice it is allowed*. Practise unlove in any sphere, in the home, in the city, in the church, separate faith from charity, and you will strengthen the evil in you till your life is leavened with its poison. "The works of the flesh are manifest which are—uncleanness . . . idolatry . . . enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions . . . drunkenness, revellings, and suchlike." The tree of death, like the tree of life, beareth all manner of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

They which practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

If you would be holy, if you would weaken the flesh and strengthen the Spirit, practise *love*. “Walk by the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Walk in love and *holiness will come of itself*. The graces of a holy character, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control, are all natural fruits of the Spirit of love. They can only be obtained through the Spirit, as apples can only be gathered from the apple-tree, and grapes from the vine.

Pray, therefore, both for yourselves and those who call us friend, as St. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, “that the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men . . . *to the end* He may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father”—for in Christ and for holiness neither circumcision

availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love.

III.

LOVE IN DAILY LIFE.

The love which fulfils the law and makes character perfect—what is it? Is it devotional, contemplative, adoring love of God? No. It is practical love of men—faith in God working through love to one another. By love St. Paul always means just *that*. *That* is what he means when in the 13th of 1st Corinthians he dons his singing robes and hymns the praise of love.

And that is what he means here. Look at the instances he gives.

The first is drawn from

1.—*The Inequalities of Fortune and Circumstance.*

In daily life it happens that one succeeds and another fails. This tends

to breed pride on the one hand and envy on the other. What is the remedy? No amount of levelling up or levelling down will serve to equalise the condition of men. You can never macadamise life. There will be hills and valleys while the world lasts.

What then? "If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit also let us walk." "Let us not be vain-glorious, provoking one another to fight and strive, envying one another."

Has success no duties? Has failure no solace? Am I so shut up in myself that I can get no pleasure out of the joy and triumph of others? Must I, like the Narcissus of the terrible story, be ever adoring *myself*? Has not God made the chasms and the gulfs that we may bridge them over with sympathy? Has He not ordained inequalities for the very purpose of calling out and developing love in us? What is life itself "but the chance o' the prize of learning love"? That is what all

the blessed sorrow is for, that we may have human hearts and divinest love with us.

One man's trouble is another man's opportunity of helping him and learning love himself.

2.—*The Inequalities of Moral Life.*

In daily life some stand while others fall before the assault of temptation; but, "*brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual restore such a man in a spirit of meekness. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*" Christ bore our diseases. He bore the burden of men's sin. He helped the publican with his load. He said to the Magdalen sister, Let Me help you with that burden. He shared in the shame of sinners. He stood by them in the pillory. He was classed with them. He was called by their name. Men spoke of Him as a glutton, a winebibber, and bandied many a bitter jest at His expense.

But, undeterred by scoff or sneer, He bore the burden of man's sin even unto death, and dying so, He saved the world. Men, and even women, talk of the sins and sorrows of others as if, instead of real human beings falling into real sin, and incurring the danger of real damnation, they were discussing fictitious characters in a novel or actors in a play, whose sins were pretences and whose punishment was a make-believe!

Ye which are spiritual *restore*—bear the burden, and so fulfil the great law of Christ, which is nothing but faith working through love.

The last instance is drawn from

3.—*The Inequalities of the Religious Life.*

Here, again, we have many and great differences — difference of sphere, of opinion, of method and form. Perfect agreement in the sense of uniformity is clearly impossible. There is a clock in the City which shows the time in New

York, Dublin, and London, and never do the three hands agree; nor ever will, for these cities are in three different degrees of latitude. So while the world endures there will be different latitudes of religious life, differing views of religious truth, and divergent methods of religious service. The world will never dance to Laud's piping, nor mourn to Cromwell's wailing.

What, then, can be done to keep this variety from degenerating into a Babel? *Circumcision, i.e.*, creeds and rubrics, avail nothing, *nor uncircumcision, i.e.*, mere dissent and private judgment. Only one power can work the miracle, and, without infringing the freedom of any, evolve out of this chaos an ordered world of harmonious co-operation, "*faith working through love.*"

"Let him that is taught communicate," have fellowship, go shares "with him that teacheth in all good things." Let us not be weary in well-doing. "As we have opportunity, let us work that which is good

toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith," whatever be their position or rank in the great House of God.

St. Paul has said in the body of this letter hard, stern things about teachers who erred grievously; nor does he recall or soften anything he has said. But he adds this: Have fellowship with all Christians in all that is good. Don't refuse to co-operate in good even with the erring; rather seize every opportunity of going with them as *far as truth* permits. Thus shall you enrich your own soul's life and perhaps gain them.

This, as I understand it, is the law of religious controversy. Truth in love—not to carry off the honours but to win men.

"We had good talk last night," said Johnson once to Boswell. "Yes, sir," was the answer, "you tossed and gored several persons." Do not we often pride

ourselves when, by some caustic retort or perplexing question, we have silenced the guns of an opponent? As we walk home our self-love strikes up, "See the conquering hero comes." But what about the *man*? 'Tis for the man God inquires. Where is Abel thy brother? Am I my brother's keeper? Yes! YES will be the answer of the Judgment Day.

Have a care, then, of the souls of men. Good can only come from good, while only evil can come from evil.

Whatsoever you do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Fight love's battle with love's weapons. So shall ye be good soldiers of Christ, and defenders of the Faith once delivered unto the saints.

"For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

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