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EXPERIENCE

THE CROWNING EVIDENCE OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

LECTURES

DELIVERED BEFORE THE BIBLICAL DEPARTMENT OF
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY.

BY

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One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

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CONTENTS.

LECTURE I.

	PAGE
EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EVIDENCE.....	3

LECTURE II.

COMPARISON OF HEATHEN AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.....	37
---	----

LECTURE III.

COMPARISON OF ISRAELITE AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.....	69
---	----

LECTURE IV.

THE CRISIS OF CONVERSION, AND RELIGION AS A CONTINUOUS STATE.....	99
---	----

LECTURE V.

CONFLICT AND GROWTH.	131
---------------------------	-----

LECTURE VI.

THE TRANSCENDENT VALUE OF THIS EVIDENCE.....	163
--	-----

LECTURE I.

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EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

(1)

I.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

IS it worth while in our day, in this place, to discuss the evidences of Christianity? I think so. One may claim to be rooted and grounded in the faith so firmly that to him argument in its favor and refutation of objections are superfluous. Happy is he who has the full assurance, if it be supported by the realization in his heart of the benediction so familiar to the ear, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." For to know this grace, love, and communion is to know the gospel; and to experience the blessing is to attain the end for which Christ Jesus came into the world. It shall be the aim of these lectures to set forth such experience not only as one of the evidences, but as their crown. It carries faith into knowledge: we know him whom we have believed. The scholar, the theologian, cannot affirm this; the Christian can. He does not stand on the outside, and strain his eyes to see what is within; he has entered into the holy of holies, where the glory shines.

Yet, as none of us liveth to himself, and freedom from doubt and from even temptation to doubt, does not discharge from the debt of love to serve one another, but augments obligation, the assured believer should seek, as far as he has opportunity, to be freshly and thoroughly conversant with the evidences, so that he may be ready to strengthen brethren who are weak in the faith and to rescue those whose feet are slipping near the edge of the abyss of infidelity. Moreover, it is a dangerous security which puts us off our guard, and supposes that the enemy, because beaten and withdrawn, will never rally for another attack. Skepticism, though substantially the same as of old, changes form and voice, weapons and tactics. It employs the facts, theories, and terms of modern science and history. It transforms itself into an angel of light, and is very friendly in its tones. It eulogizes Christ for the wisdom, purity, and self-sacrifice in which he stands preëminent among men, while denying his supernatural birth and Messianic claims. It compliments Christianity, having first taken away the bony framework of miraculous facts and divinely revealed doctrines, and the life breathed into it by the Holy Ghost. It uses every charm of style, and not only bulky books and elaborate controversies which may suit the

learned, but also piquant essays and fascinating fiction, the monthly magazine and the weekly and daily papers. The air is full of unchristian and antichristian sentiments—seeds which are wafted from many fields, and drop quietly down into all minds. Subtle and plausible objections to the gospel as taught by the evangelists and apostles may be lodged in the mind of a Christian who was too well satisfied to examine the foundations of his belief; and, being to him novel and specious, they may refuse to be dismissed by a mere decree of the will, but continue to annoy him until he find a reasonable answer. Or it may be that a change of health or outward condition will open the door to doubts that have been barred out. He has new associates, charming in culture and speech, who introduce their skeptical ideas not rudely and offensively, but in an incidental way and with a courtesy of manner, yet with persistence, perhaps in the form of questions, perhaps as conclusions on which the educated world has now agreed as fully proved. Or the quiet and content which no doubt disturbed while he enjoyed vigor of body and worldly prosperity, and promised himself that he would die in his nest at a good old age, may be displaced by painful questionings and misgivings, in the thickening gloom of sickness

and calamity. It is well that you be “ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear,” not with pride and presumption: “having a good conscience; that, wherein ye are spoken against, they may be put to shame who revile your good manner of life in Christ.”¹ Of first importance are the good conscience and the good manner of life; the inner consciousness and its manifestation in conduct; the religion which is not speculative, but experimental, vital, and practical. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, must be handled by a soldier who is protected by the shield of a personal faith and the breastplate of a personal righteousness.

The great body of laymen may justly say that in their scant time for religious reading they can find more pleasing and edifying matter than dry and thorny disputes over the thousand and one difficulties in the way of accepting Christ at which some people stumble. They have my sympathy if they turn away with a measure of impatience from such discussions, and prefer the rich pastures on which the dews of heaven distill, and through which

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

flow living streams—pastures which abound in the Holy Scriptures and their exposition, in the biographies of saints, in devotional books, and in treatises on the higher and larger life which is provided for us in Christ. Nevertheless, apologetics has its place and value, both in its positive proofs and in its refutation of objections; and it will be wise and wholesome for any man to inform himself, as far as he may, of the general lines of evidence and defense. The new heart, holy, trustful, full of the Spirit, is the inmost and safest citadel in which true religion is kept and guarded; but it is not necessary, not wise, to abandon outer walls of fortification. I would not deprecate other evidences; my special business, however, calls me not to detain you on the outskirts, or in comparatively obscure and unimportant corners, of the kingdom of God, but to lead you straight into its heart and center; to present those evidences which are not apart from the substance of the gospel, from its fundamental facts, its spiritual lessons, its holy law, and its exceeding great and precious promises, but which are contained in them, and in the vital godliness produced and fostered by them in the believing soul. I would hold before you Christianity self-luminous, Christianity its own demonstration. The challenge is: Look on Chris-

tianity, and see that it is of God; put it to the test of experience, and prove that it is both true and divine.

While one man considers the truth of the Christian religion too clear to require discussion, his neighbor may stumble at the fact that there is any room for doubt and debate. He reasons thus: The sun in heaven compels belief in itself by its simple shining. No person of sound eyes and brain can doubt its existence, or that it is the fountain of our seeing. Argument for it is needless, argument against it absurd. If the gospel is the sun of the moral firmament, why does it not command like instantaneous and irresistible belief? Why is there reason for investigation and polemics to determine whether Christ is the light of the world? He may as reasonably press other questions: Why is there possibility of mistake or doubt in the interpretation of the Bible? Why is not its meaning plain beyond power of missing or misunderstanding? or why does not everybody possess such clearness, correctness, and strength of intellectual vision, such soundness of judgment, that he will see into the reality and heart of things, so as neither to be confused by mysteries nor duped by appearances and sophistries? Questions outside the sphere of revelation may follow:

Why is the flesh subject to disease and decay? Why is so much of the globe frozen, or torrid, or waterless, or malarial? Why do earthquakes, cyclones, floods, tidal waves, plagues, destroy life and property? Why are there enticements to sin and difficulties in the practice of virtue? It is easy to multiply such questions; to answer them surpasses human wisdom. Humility and reverence, thankfulness and trust, submission and obedience, before the great God and Father, become us. Facts whose reason we do not understand must be acknowledged and accepted as features of our probationary state, as God's actual method of testing, exercising, correcting, developing men, that they, coworkers with him, may be meet for a better and perfect state hereafter. Let us not put our eyes out because they are defective, nor shut them against the light because it is dim; but let us clarify and strengthen our sight, and walk in the light which God gives. Study the written word, pray for the illumining and sanctifying Spirit, and submit yourselves to the commands and direction of God in all things, that in the renewing of your minds, in the transformation of your characters, and in holy worship and obedience, you may prove, not theoretically, but in personal experience, what is the good and ac-

ceptable and perfect will of God. What would God have me to be and to do? That is the question of questions. It is not chiefly a question of curiosity, to satisfy the desire of knowledge, to complete a creed or a philosophy. It is of far deeper moment. It is to be learned in experience of the work of grace. This experience is a light waxing brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

The distinction between external and internal evidence is old, real, and important. You may have heard on what you considered good authority that a notable article in a magazine was from the pen of a man whom you know intimately: that is external proof of the authorship. You read the article; the sentiments, style, allusion to certain local incidents, and a number of peculiar phrases and turns of thought convince you beyond doubt that he is the writer: this is internal proof, proof contained in the writing itself. The titles and testimonials of a professor prepared you to expect from him a series of scholarly and able lectures: that is evidence from without. He comes; you hear him from start to finish; you depend henceforth on no witness; learning, depth and breadth of thought, humor, lucidity and grace of expression, power to thrill and uplift the hearer,

are proved to be gifts of the speaker. You know for yourself his worth.

Two incidents in the ministry of Jesus may illustrate this distinction. While he was in the upper room of a house in Capernaum a crowd gathered to see and hear him. Four men, carrying a paralytic on a litter, and not being able to reach the door on account of the press, ascended to the flat roof, made an opening, and let down the bed. Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the invalid, "Son, thy sins are forgiven." Certain scribes silently reasoned in their hearts, "Why doth this man so speak? he blasphemeth: who can forgive sins but one, even God?" He answered their thought: "That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. And he arose, and straightway took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion." It may be that the man had brought paralysis on himself by sensual sin, and that the healing was meant to be a visible mark of pardon by the removal of the physical penalty. However this may have been, there was no necessary connection between the outward cure and absolution from guilt: he might

have been forgiven without restoration to health, or have been healed in body without receiving the remission of sins. The miracle was, however, a decisive vindication of Christ's claim that he had authority to forgive sins. The paralytic was conscious of the change wrought in his body, and the people saw the evidence of the cure in the free movement of the man who had been impotent. This cure was performed immediately, by a word, in attestation of his power to pronounce the pardon; and the lesson could not be resisted that God was with this teacher, and had endowed him with supernatural might. But let us suppose what perhaps did happen, though not recorded—namely, that as the absolution was spoken, there came into the heart of the sick man a sweet, strange peace, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, the peace of reconciliation, the joy of God's favor, the assurance that there was on him no burden of condemnation, that no barrier of uncanceled guilt remained between his soul and his holy Sovereign. This was to him, if he had the experience, an inner and direct evidence of divine grace, of actual acceptance, of the authority of Jesus to grant remission of sins. Others could know this spiritual change only through his testimony and through the life he

from that day lived among them. But to him it was a fact of consciousness.

The second incident occurred in Sychar, a town of Samaria.¹ Jesus sat at noon by the well, weary with his journey and athirst: his disciples had gone into the city to buy food. A woman came with a waterpot to be filled; and he asked her to give him to drink. She was surprised that a Jew asked drink of her, a Samaritan. He seized this opportunity to speak to her of a deeper need and a richer blessing. If she had known God's great gift and who Jesus was, she would have asked of him living water, water springing up continually in the heart to satisfy its thirst unto eternal life; and he would have freely, gladly given her. To excite more strongly her interest and help her faith, he spoke of her five husbands and her present paramour; and she said: "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." Only a meager outline of the conversation is given; but we have sufficient reason to infer that a fountain of pure and noble affections and aims then sprang up in her soul, which made her a different woman, and sent her home with a happiness beyond all she had ever conceived. This

¹John iv.

experience of a changed heart, of an inner and abiding satisfaction of her deepest and best yearnings, was a stronger evidence that Jesus was the Messiah than his knowledge of her past life; it was, indeed, the realization in herself of the salvation which the Messiah should bring. She knew the personal blessing, and that its source must be God.

Hasting to the city, she spread the news: "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?" So far as we are informed, he told her only a few facts, but they were pivotal points of her history. "Many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman who testified, He told me all things that ever I did. So when the Samaritans came unto him, they besought him to abide with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his word; and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world." They had not less faith in her testimony, but they no longer needed it. They had a stronger assurance. Belief became knowledge. The words of Jesus carried conviction of their truth and of his divine office. The

heart responded to his teaching as the eye responds to the light.

Miracles and prophecies are the two great branches of the external evidence of Christianity. Miracles are supernatural manifestations of power, prophecies are supernatural manifestations of wisdom, by which God bears witness to his messengers. The validity of such testimony is clearly taught in these words: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will."¹ The two great branches of internal evidence are the wisdom, purity, loftiness, and spiritual power of the gospel which commend it to the conscience and the reason as both true and divine, God's revelation of himself to man; and the change in heart and life which it works when received by faith, out of darkness into light, out of bondage into liberty, out of sin into holiness, out of alienation from God into adoption as his children, participation of his nature, the indwelling of his Spirit, and daily fellowship with him.

¹ Heb ii. 3, 4.

Both kinds of evidence are valid and valuable. Both kinds should be presented and pressed through all the ages. They are not, however, of equal dignity and worth. The internal evidence has more of directness, less of inference. It rests not on what is incidental, but on the substance of the revelation. It depends not on the credibility or authority of human witnesses, but on the appeal of Christianity to each man's mind and heart, and on the verification of its truth and promises in the experience of every believer. It is of a higher order in that not the outer man, not the five senses, but the inner man, the spiritual discernment and susceptibility, is addressed and affected. The order of excellence is not the order of time. "Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual."¹ The child is taught by individual, concrete, sensible objects: later he can deal with abstract and general truths. As Jesus was entering the dark shadow of his sacrificial suffering and death, he said: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. There came therefore a voice out of

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 46.

heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The multitude therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it had thundered: others said, An angel hath spoken to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice hath not come for my sake, but for your sakes.”¹ The anguish was his, a real and sore anguish, uttering itself in earnest prayer. But the miraculous voice he did not need; his trust in the Father required no such support; the multitude, or his disciples, were helped by a sign. To Thomas, the disciple of an honest heart but feeble faith, longing to learn with certainty that his Lord had risen from the dead, but determined to accept no proof except his own eyesight and hand-grasp, Jesus graciously granted the evidence he desired; but he gently reproved him for needing that sort of evidence after years of intimate intercourse with Christ who had shown himself, and been confessed, as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, the light and life of men. It should have been easy for him to believe that Jesus could not be holden of death, but had resumed the life surrendered of his own accord out of love to the world. “Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen me, thou

¹John xii. 27-30.

hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”¹ Elisha asked for the frightened young man who ministered to him, what he did not ask for himself, that his eyes might be opened to see the horses and chariots of fire which encircled the prophet. Elisha’s faith needed not the prop of sense, but reposed in perfect peace on the faithfulness and love of God. Yet, that the legitimacy and force of outside evidence may not be underestimated, hear what the evangelist wrote immediately after his record of Christ’s lesson to Thomas: “Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.”

Miracles were specially useful at the introduction of a new epoch or stage of revelation. They served to arrest attention, produce conviction, and win a favorable hearing. Such an epoch was the exodus from Egypt of the Israelites and their settlement in Canaan as an independent people. Coleridge aptly compared miracles to the church bell which calls the people together that they may

¹John xx. 29.

hear the sermon to follow. The sermon and the service are the object; but they will not avail without the congregation. Miracles may also be an alarm bell to arouse the sleepers and warn them of danger. Jehovah descended on Sinai to proclaim the law. The summit was covered with a thick cloud, and smoke as from a furnace, and flame; there were lightnings and thunders, the tones of a trumpet sounding long and waxing louder and louder. Awe fell on the whole people. Then God spoke out of the cloud and of the fire, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and all the ten words or commandments. The grand and terrific phenomena prepared Israel to hear: the giving of the law was the truly sublime and significant event; and it was a gift to all subsequent ages and to all nations. It is the basis of the moral law among Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians. It is written on many tables of stone, repeated week after week by many congregations, committed to memory by countless children. It has sounded clear and loud in the inner ear of a multitude a million times greater than the tribes encamped at the foot of Sinai; it has shone into as many hearts with more than electric splendor. It quickens conscience, revives memory of past transgressions, uncovers the deep-seated enmity

of the carnal mind against God, and excites fear and remorse exceeding the effect of its first promulgation. It has moved untold numbers to godly sorrow and struggles after righteousness.

The nineteenth Psalm consists of two parts: the first, a description of the celestial firmament as a revelation of God; the second, a eulogy of the divine law. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." Familiarity should not dull, but deepen, the lesson and impression of this sermon, which each day, each night repeats, "There is no speech nor language; their voice cannot be heard." Noises abound on earth; absolute, unbroken silence reigns in the starry heights. Yet "their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." Creation is not dumb, but men are deaf. The sun rises and sets with perfect precision of time and orbit, pouring forth floods of splendor with never-lessening fullness, fostering life with light and heat, a constant witness to the presence and goodness of the one Maker and Lord. Yet there are men who refuse to see aught except the ball of fire, the uniform order, and the beneficent effects: they say, "No First Cause, no design, no God!"

The Singer passes from the material heavens to the moral law. "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are wise, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned: in keeping of them there is great reward." The firmament and the law display the same origin, the same Author. Both are of God in the sense that they are his work. But the revelation of God in the law transcends the revelation in sun and stars, and is divine in a higher meaning, because moral: it is godlike in quality. Gravitating, luminous, burning, are epithets which belong to matter, not to the Infinite Spirit. True, righteous, pure, belong to God, and are ascribed to his law. Law, however, is not personal, is not living. Its end, its worth, is found in its effect on rational men. The spoken and written law becomes experience in the believing, obedient soul. It is converted into wisdom, holiness, and joy. The divine qualities which in

a sense are affirmed to mark the law inhere not in spoken words, but in enlightened minds, in cleansed and restored souls, in devout and trustful hearts. The sunlit and starlit heavens are a revelation of God only to men who have eyes to see and reason to interpret: the decalogue is a revelation only to men who possess a moral nature; they alone can admire its beauty, radiance, and grandeur, and taste its sweetness. The twin internal evidences are the word and the sanctified heart. “But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror,” or, “beholding as in a mirror,” “the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.”¹

Jesus was, like Moses, a prophet, but far greater than all other teachers and prophets: for “the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” His hearers testified, “Never man spake like this man.” He also wrought miracles on a great scale: they drew and fastened the attention of multitudes, and often procured a favorable hearing of his words. Would they have followed him, and listened to the Sermon on the Mount, if miracles of healing had not preceded?

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

That exposition of the law of the kingdom of heaven, of a righteousness far surpassing the boastful righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, without which no man can enter into the kingdom, has wrought, and continues to work, wonders more stupendous, more beneficent, of a higher rank, than ten thousand cures of paralysis, leprosy, deafness, blindness, and other bodily defects and maladies; than feeding the multitude, stilling the storm, and raising the dead. It approves itself to the universal reason, conscience, and heart. To Christians it is the rule of life, the standard of judgment, the ideal of aspiration. But to be understood, and to exert its illumining and purifying power, the sermon must be heard or read, and pondered. Wonders and signs attracted the people, and opened their ears.

Bible miracles were more than marvels and displays of supernatural power. The daily manna was a wise and merciful providence, a lesson on the continual presence and care of the God of Israel. Jesus went about doing good. Homeless, penniless, often weary from travel and teaching, he showed himself the friend of man, of all classes and conditions, full of compassion for the poor, the suffering, the despised, the outcast. The outgoing of his power was in accord with his

doctrine and mission, manifested his spirit, and enforced the lessons he taught. Works of mercy, they were also symbols of his spiritual offices for sinful and sorrow-laden humanity.

Certain miracles are not only credentials of the Christ, but an integral portion of the revelation. This is eminently true of his resurrection. As a fact, it was attested by many competent and trustworthy witnesses; as an evidence of the authority of Jesus it cannot be refuted. The same may be affirmed, though not in an equal degree, of the resurrection of Lazarus. "He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead."¹ But his resurrection is a truth as well as a fact. It is an essential feature in the system of redemption. It fills a place in the gospel like that of the crucifixion. "It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."² "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification."³ "I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead: and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death."⁴ His resurrection not only proves

¹ Rom. i. 4. ² Rom. viii. 34. ³ Rom. iv. 25. ⁴ Rev. i. 17, 18.

the gospel, but it is of the substance of the gospel. You cannot cut out of Christianity the cross and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus without destroying its life, as you cannot cut out the heart of a man without killing the body. As a simple fact, the resurrection rests on abundant testimony of the most convincing power. As an essential constituent in the divine plan of salvation by grace through faith, it has self-evidencing power.

A like distinction applies to prophecy. Specific predictions of matters of fact were made: their fulfillment belongs to the external evidences. But prophecy was wider and grander than the foretelling of events. It was the preaching beforehand of the gospel, in its fundamental principles, in its essential facts and truths. It was full of the evangelical spirit, of promise of the brighter day of the coming kingdom of the Messiah. Christians read with edification and delight the Psalms and the Prophets, not solely, not chiefly, for the striking predictions they contain of what now is history, but for their sublime and holy expression of reverence, contrition, trust, peace and joy in God, and longings after God; and for the foreshadowing of the reign of truth, righteousness, and mercy in Christ, which shall include all nations. Prophecy in this broad sense is the

strongest outer evidence, because the foresight of the mightiest and most blessed event in the history of the race, the advent of the Christ and Saviour, and of its ever developing fruit; and at the same time it is inner evidence, self-evidence, because independently of the times of its publication and of its coincidence with later occurrences, it is music to the ear and effulgence to the eye, the inspired song, the intense outbeaming, of divine wisdom, holiness, and grace.

We should not overlook the moral receptiveness which was the condition of reading aright those object lessons. On the mind, the heart, the will, depended the measure of benefit to be derived. The miracles of Jesus excited in many a shallow and transient interest. "Many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man."¹ Trifling, carnal, and selfish men cared only to gratify curiosity, or to obtain worldly good. Of ten lepers who were cleansed, only one returned to give thanks and to glorify God: the nine had gotten all they wanted.

¹John ii. 23-25.

The five thousand who were filled said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." They would have made him king; but the satisfying of hunger and the hope of like favors to follow were their whole motive. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." If they had penetrated into the significance of the miracle, they would have cried out, "Master, feed our famished souls on the bread of eternal life!" Haughty Pharisees who hated his teaching gave this explanation of the miracles they could not deny: "This man doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils."¹ How opposite was the effect on Simon of the miraculous draught of fishes! "But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."² The miracles, besides signifying the authority and grace of Jesus, developed signal humility, faith, gratitude, and love, in the centurion, the woman of Canaan, the sisters of Lazarus, and other persons.

It may be interesting to consider the relation of miracles to the faith of John the Baptist and Saul

¹ Matt. xii. 24.

² Luke v. 8.

of Tarsus. When Jesus abode for a time in the place beyond Jordan where John was at the first baptizing, "many resorted unto him; and said, John indeed did no sign: but all things whatsoever John spake of this man were true."¹ John's mission did not need any miracle. He was a herald of the Christ and a preacher of repentance. He did not say of himself: "Before Abraham was, I am: My Father and I are one: Come unto me, and I will give you rest." "Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go your way and tell John the things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me."² John was a cousin of Jesus, and by six months his senior. From childhood he was taught by his parents that he should be a forerunner to prepare the way of Jesus. He confessed: "I am not the Christ. I baptize with

¹ John x. 41. ² Matt. xi. 2-6.

water: in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.”¹ His less orbit and the larger orbit of our Lord intersected at the baptism of Jesus, and on two successive days when he said of him, “Behold the Lamb of God!” In prison he did not lose faith; but he did not fully understand what was implicit in his own inspired testimony. His mission had been performed apart from the presence of Jesus. He had not enjoyed the privilege of his company, of hearing his private and public talks, and of witnessing his works. He acknowledged the superior office of Jesus by sending to him for a settlement of the question which perplexed his own mind. Prophecy in advance of fulfillment was obscure to him as to others. The point of his inquiry was whether this great and holy teacher was the one who should free and exalt Israel, or whether this office should be performed by another at a later day. He desired an answer to satisfy himself and his disciples. In like manner the disciples of our Lord never doubted his truth, authority, and grace above all other men; their hearts clung loyally to him even while

¹John i. 20, 26, 27.

he hung on the cross; yet when no rescue came, they were confused and benighted in regard to their hope that he should redeem Israel.

None can question that Saul of Tarsus possessed strength and keenness of intellect, culture, and knowledge of the letter of Scripture. Why did a miracle precede his conversion to the faith? Why did he not recognize in Jesus the fulfillment of prophecy, the light of the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel? He did not need a series of miracles to convince him; but why did he need even one? "Suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven, and he heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" What need was there of that light surpassing the sun, of that voice sounding in his ear, when he had Moses and the prophets. He had a cataract of the eye. Pride blinded him, pride of his blood, religious knowledge, legal blamelessness, and Jewish zeal: pride, and its fruit of prejudice, bigotry, scorn, and hate. He could not listen to a word in favor of Jesus: blasphemy and accursed folly, to be cured by chains and death, he called it. The cataract ripened in the conviction that to put Christians to death was to serve God. The sudden supernatural splendor and voice stilled his frenzy and

abased his self-assertion. There came back to him somewhat of the child-heart, candid, humble, teachable. With the purging of the eye, there poured into his mind light from the Scriptures, from what he had heard at the lips of the martyred Stephen, from what his own people had reported of the words and acts of Jesus, from what he had witnessed of the spirit of the men and women he had so fiercely hated and wronged. He was in a new world. Hebrew story, worship, and prophecy were now illumined. Jesus was seen as the image and revealer of the Father, the Lord and Saviour not of a single people, but of the whole world; Saviour not from the yoke of Cæsar, but from the more galling yoke of Satan; not as a temporal ruler, but in the power of an endless life.

The uniformity of nature is a beneficent ordinance of the Creator, who is immanent in the universe, the ever-present and active cause of its stability and orderly movement. But it is only a means; it cannot be exalted into an eternal or necessary principle. The sole immutability is the Lawgiver and the essential principles of righteousness. Truth, justice, and goodness are changeless in excellence and obligation. This cannot be affirmed of the laws of gases, liquids, and solids.

Whether we say, according to the old formula, that the ax-head swam because God suspended in that instance the law of gravity, or, according to the modern explanation, that by an act of divine will the force of gravity was overcome, as when a man's hand upholds iron, no violence is done to reason. He who established the order for wise ends can vary it in his wisdom and power. God was before nature, and is in and above nature. This is the crucial question: What shall we trust as supreme and changeless, as the source and explanation of all things—nature, or the living God?

Miracles and prophecy have ceased. We affirm this as a fact of observation. We have not satisfactory proof of miracles and inspired predictions in modern times. They are not incredible, but they are without sufficient evidence. Why have they ceased? I suppose because they are unnecessary, and would not be profitable. We live in the dispensation, not of types and shadows, but of truth, grace, and sonship. The Mediator sits upon the throne; the Spirit abides in the Church. Christianity is the creed of the most enlightened nations. Our people are born in a Christian atmosphere, and brought up in Christian nurture. The volume of revelation is completed and closed; copies abound. Schools, pulpits, and the press

expound the true faith. Living examples of the beauty and power of divine grace move among us, bright and shining lights in an evil world. All eyes are attracted to Christianity. Its blessed effects are conspicuous. Outsiders and unbelievers speak its praise. Christian missionaries, as teachers, physicians, and pastors, are commended to pagans by the renown of Christendom, by personal superiority in wisdom, character, and happiness, and by disinterested service and sacrifice for the good of aliens and persecutors. We have strong external evidence in well-attested miracles before our era and in its first century, and in the fulfillment of prophecy in familiar history and before our eyes. The internal evidence is full in the completed word, and to believers in the experience of saving grace. What more is needed?

LECTURE II.

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COMPARISON OF HEATHEN AND
CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

(35)

II.

COMPARISON OF HEATHEN AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

WOULD it be overbold to claim that Christian experience is only another name for Christianity itself? What fitter definition of our religion can we give than that it is faith, hope, and charity; loving God with all the heart, and our neighbor as ourself; trusting and following Christ; having the mind which was in him, consecration to our Lord, and the constraining power of his love on our spirit and conduct? If we accept this definition, to every one who has the experience consciousness is a direct and full evidence of the truth of Christianity.

To show that this is true in a substantial and important sense will be the aim of these lectures. But the identifying of Christianity and Christian experience must be qualified. Christianity is too vast and many-sided to be embraced in a single act of the mind, or in a single sentence. We need to view it from a number of standpoints, and thus catch sides or phases which differ, but do not conflict. From one point we observe doctrinal Chris-

tianity: we may compare its teachings with Buddhism and other religions. It claims to be a body of facts, truths, and statutes, revealed from God through the tongues and pens of men whom he selected and inspired. It may be briefly designated as the word of God, the gospel, or the Bible. "The Bible, the Bible, the religion of Protestants," is Chillingworth's terse, striking, and celebrated saying, much criticised to-day even by some Protestants. I admire it. Not that any book is literally religion; nor that Christianity did not exist until the New Testament, in whole or in part, had been written; nor that the burning to ashes of all the Bibles in the world would be the destruction of our religion; nor that all parts of the Bible are of equal sacredness and value—the genealogies, for example, and the parables of our Lord. But that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."¹ The Bible is the infallible and authoritative standard of faith

¹Articles of Religion: "V. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation."

and practice: it declares what we should be and do in order to please God.

A second point of view presents organic, institutional Christianity. It is a system of forces, agents, and means, to preserve and extend the knowledge, acceptance, and practice of the Christian religion. This phase may be denoted by the term, the Church; that is, the body of Christians, with their ministry, worship, obedience to the faith, schools, press, missions, and other institutions and activities. The view is essentially defective, if we see merely outward organization, measures, and methods, and take no account of "the powers of the world to come," supernatural, invisible, divine energies, which ever work for, in, and through the visible Church: God the Father, the watchful and gracious Providence that guards, guides, and prospers his people; God the Son, Head over all things to the Church which is his body, our Propitiation and High Priest in heaven, and with us always unto the end of the world; God the Holy Spirit, who gives edge and power to the word which is his sword, shaped and wielded by his hand, and who dwells in the hearts of believers, a constant light, fire, and unction.

A third standpoint is the historical. Christianity is a mighty movement, a world-era which had

its birth at Pentecost, and is now closing its nineteenth century. We see the Christian army, mobilized, equipped, marching, battling, not only on the defensive, but vigorously aggressive, victorious. We study the rise, progress, hindrances, achievements of the Church. The near border of the twentieth century is a point of vantage from which to review the work and results of the gospel; how wide, deep, and strong has been its influence; whether it has been for good or ill; whether it waxes, or wanes; to measure Christendom, and compare it with the rest of the world; to estimate the roll, resources, obstacles, and prospects of the Church. There have been checks, defeats, and retreats, as well as advances and triumphs. There have been defects, blemishes, blots, matter for sorrow and shame. But the brightest pages of history record its deeds and success. Christianity is the best gift of God to men and the only hope of the world. There is abundant reason for thanksgiving, joy, courage, cheerful endurance, and exultant faith. The good of the race is the ever-increasing effect of the gospel, and the perfection and universal spread of that good is the goal toward which, in sure hope, we press on.

There is a fourth aspect of Christianity. It cannot be gotten from without, but only from within.

What we read is written on the heart, not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the Lord; it is learned, not from the testimony of others, but by individual consciousness; and yet this heart-written epistle may be known and read of all men. There is a knowledge from observation of saintly lives: there is a surer and better knowledge from personal experience. Vital, experimental, practical Christianity is now under consideration. It is a divine spark kindled in the soul by the Spirit of holiness. It is a seed of life, and this life is hid with Christ in God. The source, the inner springs of this life are concealed from this world, but known to its happy possessor. The life is a unit in its essence, manifold in its manifestation, capable of great development, ripening into eternal life. The purpose for which Christ came into the world, the Spirit was poured forth, and the word is preached, is the communication of this spiritual life, and its continual growth and unfolding, that all who will may be presented perfect in Christ Jesus.

These four meanings of Christianity are neither inconsistent nor independent of one another. Severally they are partial and interdependent: together they constitute the integer, the entity. The faith once delivered to the saints, the truth as it is

in Jesus, the gospel which neither apostle nor angel can substitute by another, is a necessity to all Christian life, growth, and fruitfulness: but all the Bibles and all the preachers on earth can neither constitute nor produce Christianity without receptive souls, fit soil for the seed. Christianity as a system of evangelizing agencies includes the inspired word; but the word can neither print nor preach itself: other parts of the system are required for its circulation. The Christianity of today implies the Christianity of the first and succeeding centuries from which it has come down to us. Historic Christianity, with all the prestige it has gained by its achievements through the ages, and with all its present strength in membership, organization, culture, and zeal, cannot make you a true Christian, unless you receive Christ by a personal exercise of repentance and faith, and experience the inner baptism of the Spirit and the renewing of your mind by his almighty power. Nevertheless, this experience is closely connected with the use of the means of grace and with the communion of saints. We distinguish in thought constituent elements of Christianity which are inseparable in fact, and detach now one, then another, for particular consideration, though we recognize their mutual relations and necessary coexistence

as a unity. Each part or phase implies the other parts, as do breath, pulse, and digestion in physical life; thought, sensibility, and volition in rational life; legislative, executive, and judicial functions in political life.

The experimental side of religion is our study. What the flower is to the plant, what the fruit is to the tree, what the harvest is to the seed, experience is to the Christian system. The glory of the gospel consists in this, that it is the power of God unto salvation. The word of God is truth, and the office of this truth is to sanctify, therein excelling all other kinds of truth. One plants, another waters, God gives the increase; and the increase is saved souls. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy."¹

This is the end and reward not only of human ministry, but likewise of the mission of the Lord Jesus and of the Holy Spirit. In the long sentence which I will now quote, note three central words, "He saved us." They are the key to the understanding of the whole plan of Christianity, as contained in the mind and purpose of God

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

from eternity, and revealed and made effective in the work of the Son and of the Spirit. "But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared [the reality belonged to the eternal order, the manifestation to a temporal], not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."¹ The fountain, or first cause, was the love and mercy in the heart of God; the exhibition and means were the incarnate Son of God and the rich outpouring of the Holy Ghost through Christ; the purpose and effect were the gracious, unmerited justification of believers, their spiritual renewal, and their heirship of eternal life. "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man should glory."² Salvation is a blessing bestowed, a work inwrought, an experience present, but not yet perfect except in promise and hope. In itself it is a fact of the deepest interest and importance which deserves

¹ Titus iii. 4-7.

² Eph. ii. 8.

our thought; but my theme is limited to its place among the evidences of Christianity. To whom is it an evidence? Primarily, and in full force, to every one who possesses the experience, and to him only. Of what is it an evidence? Directly, with all the immediateness and certainty of consciousness, it is the evidence of itself; that is, of present salvation, of a new, spiritual, and divine life which he lives, a life in and unto Christ, a life of faith, love, fellowship with God, and hope of a heavenly inheritance. Questions arise which cannot be treated at this point. Admitting the reality of a certain experience, can we trust our interpretation of the data of consciousness? How can we pass from subjective experience to the objective truth of the gospel? How can the knowledge of our own inward state give us the knowledge of Christ the Saviour? What weight should the testimony of men to their own experience have as proof to others?

There is a distinctive Christian experience, with definite marks by which it may be recognized. The child of God contrasts his present and his former states, the spiritual mind he now has and the carnal mind he once had. He discriminates between his religious life and the secular life, animal, rational, and social, which is com-

mon to the regenerate and the unregenerate. These two lives are not separate and independent like streams which flow side by side without connection; they mingle and affect each other without confusion, as light is interfused with all nature, and reflected from its many substances in a variety of hues. To instance, the taste of food and the satisfaction of hunger differ from the thankfulness and temperance with which he eats and drinks, and from the spirit of consecration which does everything to the glory of God. This experience is not a mere emotional excitement: it does stir more or less the emotions, but it consists of desires, affections, and aims which reach far below the surface, and remain steadfast amid fluctuations of feeling, like a sheet of water which may lie quiet and smooth as a polished mirror, or ripple in the breeze, or break into great billows in the gale, and yet is the same in substance, bed, and contour. There are variants, types of character, idiosyncrasies, in the Church; in the same individual, there are changes affected by age and other circumstances. But there are also constants; qualities which characterize the children of God everywhere and always, the same in prosperous and adverse conditions, in the young convert and in the gray-haired veteran.

Is religious experience confined to Christians? That we do not claim. Religion is a generic term; it is a world-wide feature of humanity. As far back as the light of history, however faint, can lead us, as far as the habitable globe has been explored, we discover religious beliefs and customs. Corresponding to these faiths and forms are devout feelings. There is a common acknowledgment of supernaturalism, of occult superhuman powers that should be propitiated. There are common devotions, such as prayer, praise, and offerings. There are common emotions: awe, fear, hope, joy, desire to please their god or gods, gratitude for their favor, love and gladness, sometimes displeasure and rebuke when those divinities have withheld their protection and blessing.

There have been, and are, many religions. The ethnic or heathen religions are alike: scriptural religion is alone, and its full development is Christianity. There is a specific Christian experience which in many points does not agree, but contrasts, with all other kinds of religious experience, and, in those points which resemble, far transcends them in purity and degree.

What are the factors of evangelical experience? The Bible teaches, and the Church testifies, that God himself, dwelling in man, and working in him

to will and to do, is the efficient cause of the experience. God in us, Christ in us, the Holy Spirit in us, is the Source, the Creator of the new nature, not only at the crisis we call conversion, or the new birth, or the new creation, or the spiritual resurrection, but at every instant of its preservation and development. Especially is this office ascribed to the Holy Spirit. We are born of God; we are born of the Spirit. The Spirit convicts, enlightens, quickens, sanctifies, strengthens, seals. Every virtue is the fruit of the Spirit.

The Spirit works through means: through the written and spoken word, the sacraments, worship, the fellowship of believers. Most prominent is the word. It is the most comprehensive. The sacraments, songs, and supplications of the Church conform substantially and largely in language to the written word. In the parable of the sower and the seed, the word is the seed which brings forth the fruit, thirty, sixty, or a hundred fold. God and the word are often associated in Bible descriptions of Christian experience—God as the power, the word as the instrument. “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth.”¹ “And now I commend you to God, and to the

¹ James i. 18.

word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified.”¹ If we are said to be born of the Spirit, we are also said to be born through the word. “Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth.”² The dependence of the word on the Spirit to give it efficiency is taught. “How that our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”³ The gospel “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

The peculiarity and excellence of Christian consciousness are due to the Holy Spirit, who inspired and applies the word. The experience is unaccountable and impossible without the revelation. It could not be what it is, if the revelation were lacking or different. I do not affirm that God has not revealed himself in any manner to the heathen, or that he has withheld from them altogether his Spirit. Paul indeed declared at Lystra that God “in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways”;⁴ and at Athens, the center of the wisdom of man,

¹Acts xx. 32. ²1 Pet. i. 23. ³1 Thess. i. 5. ⁴Acts xiv. 16.

yet full of idols and idolaters, "The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked."¹ We have very strong statements in Scripture of the abyss of folly, foulness, and fiendishness into which men sank, and having sunk hopelessly floundered, not only in savage lands, but also where power, philosophy, rhetoric, poetry, literature in prose, and art most flourished. History abundantly proves the truth of this accusation. Heathendom to-day presents the same revolting scenes. Let us not, however, overlook other statements of Holy Writ and of secular history, which relieve in a measure the dark and repulsive picture. The heathen are not now, and never were, outside the mercy and care of God; are not, and were not, universally or absolutely, stones, beasts, demons. No part of the world was forsaken of the Creator and Father, and left without a spark of divine light or a breath of the Holy Spirit. Total darkness and death did not entomb mankind. Man is, in a real and important sense, a religious being. He is made for religion; his nature needs and craves it; his reason, conscience, and heart combine to require truth, righteousness, and communion with God as their satisfaction. The religions of the world, so

¹Acts xvii. 30.

very defective, so very corrupt, have not been wholly a lie and a curse. I invite your attention to four quotations from the speeches and letters of Paul, which bear on this point.

My first citation is from the fearful arraignment of the heathen world in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. The object of the apostle is to prove from the condition of the whole race, first of the Gentiles, then of the Jews, that they needed the gospel of salvation in Christ. The gravamen of the guilt of the idolatrous, vile, unjust, and cruel nations lies in the fact that "they hold," as the Authorized Version translates, or "hold down," as the Revision prefers, "the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse: because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened." He closes the description of their image worship, debauchery, wickedness, and malice with this aggravating item: "Who, knowing the ordinance of

God, that they which practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same thing, but also consent with them that practice them.”

The second extract is from the apostle’s address to the men of Lystra who would have offered sacrifices to Barnabas as Jupiter and to Paul as Mercury. Immediately after stating that God had hitherto suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways, he added: “And yet he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness.”¹

The third passage is from the second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Paul is arguing that light measures responsibility; that not knowledge of the law, but obedience, justifies; that a Jew is approved or condemned as he follows, or violates, the law of God which was written on tables of stone; that a Gentile is innocent or guilty as he obeys, or transgresses, the law of God written on his heart. “For when Gentiles which have no law do by nature the things of the law, these, having no law, are a law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness therewith,

¹Acts xiv. 17.

and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ.”¹

The fourth quotation is from the speech on Mars’ Hill, or unto the Areopagus. He reasons with those men of Athens on the basis of what they know of the Creator of all things, Lord of heaven and earth, that they ought not to think of him as dwelling in temples made with hands, or as needing anything, “seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”²

Paul, therefore, mentions four revelations of God to all men. First, as Creator. This visible world and overhanging heaven, their stability and order, grace and beauty, majesty and grandeur, splendor and immensity, declare the uncreated, eternal glory of God, their Maker, Preserver, and Lord. Nature is a mirror in which he may be seen, an oracle by which he is continually proclaimed. Next, as Providence. The light and warmth of the sun, the refreshing dews and show-

¹Rom. ii. 14-16. ²Acts xvii. 28.

ers, the fertile soil, the rich mines, the seas for a highway and bond of the nations, the succession of day and night and of the seasons, display the ceaseless presence and goodness of God. Nature is more than a magnificent spectacle, more than a psalm of praise to the All-wise and All-mighty: it is a storehouse of food, drink, clothing, shelter, fuel, and medicine, a supply for human needs, varied, bountiful, ever renewing itself; means not only to preserve and please the animal man, but also to stimulate, exercise, and gratify the rational and æsthetic powers. We sit down in God's house, walk forth in his gardens, eat at his table, warm ourselves at his fire, are refreshed by his breezes, inhale the perfumes of his shrubs and flowers, get healing at his pharmacy, rejoice in the bright and many-colored robe of light which is his flowing garment, lie down on the couch he spreads, and lose and yet restore ourselves in the balmy sleep with which he closes our eyes, while he stays near, and keeps watch over us. How then do we fail to discern God? Yet further, he reveals himself as Righteousness: in conscience, an inner ethical light and susceptibility; a law of right and duty not cut into stone, nor written on papyrus, nor uttered by priest or prophet, nor decreed by emperors, nor codified by senates; a law written

by God's own finger on each man's heart, witnessed by each man's consciousness, the standard by which he judges himself and others, and passes sentence of approval or condemnation on character and conduct as right or wrong, good or evil, praiseworthy or blameworthy. Men should recognize in conscience a witness for God, and learn his holy and binding will, who is Most High, our Sovereign and our Judge. God has revealed himself as the great Spirit and our Father: in that spirit which he breathed into man, thus distinguishing him from involuntary, necessitated nature, contrasting him in his higher faculties with nature, exalting him above nature; in the great gifts of reason, will, conscience, and immortality; in the craving and capability for a grander good than the material universe can offer, or animal life can receive. This spirit in man, a divine spark, an image of God, should bow in worship before nothing of brightness, loftiness, or power, in earth beneath, or in all the expanse and magnificence of heaven above, and of the heaven of heavens, except the God who has life in himself, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who created all things, and upholds and guides them by his power, as signs of his boundless, perfect, and unchanging wisdom, might, and love. Men who carry within

them evidence of their high descent as sons of the living God, a truth which some of their own poets had sung, ought not to think so meanly of their Supreme Father, God over all, blessed forever, as to liken him to images of gold, or silver, or stone, whether grotesque, or as shapely and stately as art of man can make them; ought not to think that he needed service of human hands, or presents of human wealth, who is the fountain of all being and of all life.

There is in every man a ray, it may be slender and dim, of the true Light; there are whispers, they may be low and faint, of the Voice which spake out of the fire on Sinai, and later on the mount of Palestine and the cross of Calvary. We can discover in fallen man, amid much rubbish and baseness, disorderly fragments of the divine likeness which he received at creation. There are hints of immortality in the persistence with which he lingers at the grave, straining his eyes to pierce the dense darkness, listening with bated breath to catch response to his questions out of the deep silence, refusing to be satisfied with time and to surrender the future to despair, waiting, ever waiting, for a vision and a message from the beyond. There are stirrings of conscience, utterances of a more sacred and authoritative oracle than any

code of earthly wisdom or prerogative, a law firmer than the foundations of the world and the pillars of heaven. There is an inner discord and war, the lusts of the flesh, the passions of the heart, and the proud stubbornness of the will, striking against a divine imperative which they cannot shake, breaking and foaming like billows that beat upon the shore. There are vague shadowings in his mind of an ideal goodness and greatness, better than the best and greater than the greatest he has ever seen among his fellows; shadows that do not stay fixed and defined for his study, but flit and vanish, yet return again and again, keeping alive discontent with his own heart and aspiration after change into a purer, nobler, worthier self. There are blind, restless, disappointed gropings after God, if possibly the outstretched hands, the unsatisfied yearnings, may find him. And shall I not add that not wholly vain are these longings and struggles after wisdom, holiness, peace, and God?

This may be thought a rose-tinted picture of heathenism. We should beware, indeed, of confounding possible with actual pagan experience. Israel did not live up to their light and calling; Christendom has not lived up to the light and grace of the glorious gospel; Paul tells us that

the Gentiles did not live up to their light and privileges. The life often contradicts the creed. The nations to whom God did not send a written revelation, nor a line of prophets, served their own lusts and passions, instead of heeding the law of righteousness written in their hearts and cherishing the better feelings which the good Spirit stirred within them. This was their guilt. They suffered the penalty in condemning conscience, and also in the blinding of their minds and the hardening of their hearts. "And even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting." Neglect and violation of known duty impair the moral sense, and fasten more tightly the chains of sin. They deified and worshiped men, birds, beasts, reptiles, stocks, stones. Their chosen gods were even examples and patrons of lying, theft, injustice, drunkenness, unchastity, and cruelty. Their religious feasts and rites were oft-times orgies of sensuality and malignant passions, foul and frantic. This is matter of history. Full responsibility for this deep-seated, widespread corruption did not rest upon them as individuals. The great law of heredity and solidarity must be added to the law of personal freedom and

accountability, in explaining the moral state of any nation and age. Men were born into darkness, defilement, and barbarism, the consequence of the wickedness of preceding generations; as we were born into the light and blessed influence of Christian civilization in this America and nineteenth century. God is wise, just, and merciful; he requires of each man according to what has been given him. I would not exaggerate the virtues of our people, much less boast of them. Sin abounds in this land—vice, crime, meanness, deadly hate, impiety; sin disguised and hypocritical, and sin open and flagrant and blasphemous; sin in high places and low places; sin in its nakedness among the rude, and sin in its pomp and glitter amid the circles of wealth and fashion. There is guilt in the measure of enlightenment and religious advantages; there is, in addition, a hardness, as of flint or steel, from habitual resistance to the truth and to the Spirit, a willful overcoming of the most sacred and powerful motives to a good life, such as is not found in less favored countries. Burns tells us as a plea for mercy in our judgment of the sinner,

What's done we partly may compute,
But never what's resisted.

Alas! what faithful instruction, warning, and

entreaty, what wealth of divine love and promises, what godly examples and pleadings of affection, what clear and strong convictions of duty, are resisted and overcome by multitudes of our people in their self-will and wantonness—all this exceeds computation. Nevertheless, we have cause to rejoice and give thanks continually for the evident work which the gospel of the grace of God has wrought among us; for a sound public sentiment and the wide prevalence of good morals and kind feeling; for the lessons in favor of righteousness and virtue which are taught in our homes, schools, press, literature, and popular addresses, and the respect which is paid to the institutions and operations of Christianity by non-professors; for the large number of men and women who endeavor to walk by the rule of the gospel, and the smaller, and yet considerable, number in every part of these states who are patterns of piety and good works, wholly consecrated to the glory of God and the uplifting of humanity, shining illustrations of the practical religion which corresponds to the experimental religion that is their real life.

Heathenism in ancient times and in our own day differs far from this Christian culture so familiar to us. Paul proves by the corruption of the Gentile world the necessity that the gospel

should be sent to them in its saving power. Yet his own language shows that light was not utterly quenched, that conscience was not utterly destroyed, that the heathen were not utterly dehumanized, bestialized, demonized. Some nations, by inquiry after truth, and effort after virtue, advanced much farther than others in religious sentiment, ideals, and practices. Some individuals rose far above their fellow-citizens. Not all of those who surpassed their own generation in moral wisdom and character are named in history. Doubtless there were in humble life, and in ages and lands whose annals have not come down to us, instances of men and women who feared God according to their light, controlled their appetites by the law of temperance, dealt justly and kindly with their neighbors, and were gentle and affectionate in their families. As instances of religious knowledge and experience outside the line of Abraham, I will mention from the Scriptures Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God; the two Abimelechs, kings who were frank, just, and generous in their dealings with Abraham and Isaac; Jethro, priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moses; Balaam, a prophet, covetous, self-seeking, prostituting great gifts to mean ends, who

nevertheless spoke the word of Jehovah; Hiram, king of Tyre, a magnanimous friend to Solomon, who gave great aid to the building of the temple; the widow of Sarepta, a city of Zidon, who shared her scant store of meal and oil in the famine with Elijah; and Cyrus, king of Persia. From the New Testament I instance the woman of Canaan and the Roman centurion, each of whom was praised by Jesus for great faith; the other centurion, Cornelius, "a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway"; and Lydia, the seller of purple in Ephesus. Outside the Bible, I will mention Zoroaster the Persian, Confucius of China, Gautama of India, Socrates and Plato of Greece, the Phrygian slave Epictetus, and the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius; of religions, Parseeism and Buddhism; of moral philosophies, Stoicism.

The peculiarity which I claim for Christian consciousness does not deny, nor despise, therefore, other forms of religious experience. The world outside of Christendom has not been left in total darkness, nor untouched by the Holy Spirit. The race has its unity not only in the first Adam, but much more in the one Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. "He made of one every nation of

men to dwell on all the face of the earth, that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”¹ The worship which the heathen observe and their inner responsive sentiments are of interest as evidence of their capacity to embrace the gospel, and as a preparation for its reception. Missionaries have not the impossible task of creating moral and devout faculties and susceptibilities. They soon detect in what seemed a spiritual corpse a tremor, a pulse of life; they are encouraged by hearing from a few, at least, heart-cries after God. They rejoice to find that the common humanity which is a tie between the teacher and the taught includes a common sonship of God. But I do mean to affirm that their light, even if faithfully cherished and followed, can never lead them into an experience worthy to be compared with what may be realized, and in countless cases has been realized, under the gospel. In nonchristian countries religion, as an inner, conscious life, has always been, and must always be, shallow, meager, and low, in comparison with Christian attainments. This follows of necessity from the transcendent

¹ Acts xvii. 26, 27.

clearness, certainty, purity, fullness, grace, and glory of the Christian revelation, with all that it implies. The truth as it is in Jesus, and it alone, furnishes a basis for the rich, holy, joyous, triumphant experience which the word of the Lord describes, and believers enjoy. The inspired volume determines the quality and range of evangelical experience.

Let me illustrate by a secular virtue, patriotism. Love of country is natural and universal. It exists in the least favored lands and among the rudest people. There have been pathetic, thrilling, and heroic manifestations of it in depths of poverty and ages of barbarism. But rational and wholehearted patriotism flourishes best, has widest scope and strongest motive, in a land of grand mountain ranges, lovely valleys, and fertile plains, whose shores are washed by great seas, whose fields are watered by noble streams, which is rich in mines and woods; a land with a long, eventful, and glorious history of the achievements of war and peace, and a lustrous line of soldiers and sailors, of statesmen, sages, scholars, and saints, and of writers of prose and song; a land of liberty and order, of stability and progress; a land, above all, of a brave, intelligent, virtuous, enterprising, and generous people. In like manner, religion is an in-

instinctive and universal sentiment and impulse. It touches the heart of the besotted savage; it is manifested in the lowest fetich worship; it arouses pagans to bravery and endurance by jealousy for the honor of their gods and confidence in their protecting care; it sometimes shows devotion by feasting to gluttony, drinking to drunkenness, wallowing in shameless licentiousness, and yelling in frenzy, until so crazed by excitement, and carried away from all reason and right feeling, that they inflict wounds, each man upon himself, or upon his companions and friends. There was plainly lacking in such worshipers the knowledge of God, or the righteousness and goodness which he demands and in which alone he delights, of the dignity and worth of the human soul, and of spiritual and eternal life, which is necessary to quicken conscience, restrain carnal lusts and fiendish tempers, mellow, purify, and ennoble heart and conduct, and inspire lofty motives and aims. Their thoughts were low, poor, and dull, and furnished no support, no background, for a rich and high experience.

To pass from such scenes into a Christian land resembles the transition from the Arctic zone, with its few stunted and colorless forms of life, into temperate and tropical climes, with their luxuriance of vegetable life—forests, fruit trees, vines,

grasses, grains, and flowers of every hue, from a delicate blue to purple and scarlet. What makes the difference? The gospel of the Son of God. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The Dayspring from on high has visited us, to shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace. The revelation of God in Christ is sufficient warrant for the holiest and happiest experience.

LECTURE III.



COMPARISON OF ISRAELITE AND
CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

(67)

III.

COMPARISON OF ISRAELITE AND CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

RELIGION, in its twofold form as faith and experience, is a fact as old and wide as the race, having its roots in the constitution of the soul and in the presence and working of God in the material universe and in the human soul. If this be so, “what advantage then hath the Jew? or what is the profit of circumcision? Much every way: first of all, that they were intrusted with the oracles of God.” It pleased God in his infinite wisdom to commit to the Hebrew people, in addition to his self-revelation in nature and in conscience which they shared with other nations, his Holy Word, the revelation of himself by the mouths and pens of prophets whom he chose, called, and inspired. The Hebrew Scriptures sustain a relation to the gospel radically different from that of the Vedas of Brahmanism and all other writings which Gentiles have held sacred. The Old Testament, or Covenant, was, in an important sense hereafter to be qualified, the kernel out of which the New Testament developed. There exists between the two revela-

tions far more than resemblance; it is rather identity in essence, with diversity in form and measure.

A distinction should here be noted. The Old Testament contains luminous and explicit statements of fundamental truths of revealed religion. These portions do not need to be supplemented or interpreted; they shine by their own light. First and all-embracing is the teaching concerning God. From the opening chapter of Genesis to the closing of Malachi, the book is strictly and consistently monotheistic. "The world by its wisdom knew not God." Greek philosophy and Roman law continue to this day the study and admiration of all thinkers. Yet Paul found Athens full of idols. Rome had shrines and images of many gods and goddesses, and in addition a Pantheon, that the imperial city might be known as the patron and favorite of all the deities, a countless number, that were worshiped in the world over which she ruled, and by the various peoples represented in her population. Clear and strong rang forth at the base of Sinai these simple, sublime words: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." Hezekiah said: "O Lord, the God of Israel, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms

of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.” Jehovah, the I Am, was alone in his sovereignty and glory; there was none to equal, rival, or share. The first “word” of the decalogue set forth his unity, the second his spirituality in opposition to all matter and form: “Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them.” All idols are pronounced vanity and lies, the work of men’s hands and fancy. All excellences, without limit or stain, are ascribed to God. From everlasting to everlasting he is God. There is no flight or hiding from his presence: he fills heaven and earth, and the darkness and the light are alike to him. He is God Almighty. He searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.

The moral perfections of God are stressed. “Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”¹ “The Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of faithfulness, and without iniquity, just and right is he.”² “The Lord, the Lord, a God full

¹ Ex. xv. 11.

² Deut. xxxii. 4.

of compassion, and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth.”¹

God is proclaimed as Creator, Preserver, and King over all nature, all nations, all worlds. “Thou art the Lord, even thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is in them, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshipeth thee.”² “Which stilleth the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the tumult of the people. Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and of the evening to rejoice. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.”³ “Thou turnest man to destruction.”⁴ “But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight.”⁵

The breadth and height of the divine law are noteworthy. Psalm xv. describes the man who shall dwell with God: he that walketh uprightly, worketh righteousness, speaketh the truth in his heart; slandereth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his friend, nor taketh up a reproach against

¹ Ex. xxxiv. 6. ² Neh. ix. 6. ³ Ps. lxxv. 7, 8, 11. ⁴ Ps. xc. 3. ⁵ Jer. ix. 24.

his neighbor; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but he honoreth them that fear the Lord; he that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not; he that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved. Personal purity, and positive goodness, such as considering the poor and the fatherless, are also required.

Not less holy and elevated is the worship which the Old Testament prescribed. Ceremonies did not rank with righteousness. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."¹ "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"²

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 22.

² Micah vi. 6-8.

These and many like passages are so familiar that to repeat them may seem superfluous and tiresome. I seek to remind you that they are in substance the same teaching which we find in the Gospels and Epistles, and that they are sunbright. Wonderful it is that one small country enjoyed this splendor of revelation through centuries of religious ignorance, superstition, and idolatry which covered the great world, near and far off, with a night of blackness. The direct argument from this surpassing manifestation of truth, truth which commends itself to the reason and conscience, does not belong to the scope of my theme. But it appears to me proper to present this meager outline of Hebrew doctrine as a preface to the consideration of Hebrew experience, which is more than akin to Christian experience, and excels the best ethnic experience, for the reason and in the proportion that their Scriptures excel the writings of heathenism.

But running through the Old Testament from its first pages to the end is another element, large and prominent, which, though rich in hope and comfort, was comparatively obscure and vague. It increased, however, in clearness and definiteness, as the fullness of time for the incarnation of the Son of God approached. It was the anticipa-

tion of the gospel. Its symbols have become reality, its predictions history, its promise fulfillment. Abraham said, "My son, God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering." John the Baptist saw Jesus coming unto him, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Noah, when he went forth from the ark upon the dried earth, "builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled the sweet savor."¹ "Even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell."² The lamb and burnt offerings were not images, but only shadows, of the one true sacrifice. "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel," was a mysterious hint of final deliverance from the power of Satan through the victorious Son of man, that awakened hope at the moment of despair. Many prophecies followed, singly or in clusters, until the firmament glowed with stars of various size from horizon to zenith. The Psalms and the Prophets are largely Messianic. Along with the promise of Christ there were foretold the call of

¹ Gen. viii. 20, 21. ² Eph. v. 2.

the Gentiles, and the establishment, progress, and triumph of the Church. The eyes of Israel were turned to the future, how distant they knew not, when the Messiah, the Redeemer, should come, and reign; as our eyes turn to his second advent at the end of the ages. Their experience was in large measure a longing and a hope which are realized in believers. The Christ rebuked the Jews of his day for not heeding the testimony of their own Scriptures to him. "Ye have not his word abiding in you." They had the written roll; it was their boast; it was on their tongues: but it was not in their hearts; they did not pierce into its meaning nor catch its spirit. "Ye search the Scripture," or, Search the Scriptures, "because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and ye will not come to me, that ye may have life"; as though a thirsty man should cling to a signpost, instead of hastening to the living spring to which the hand pointed. "For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me."¹ The rejection of Jesus was virtually the rejection of Moses, David, and Isaiah, his witnesses.

I would show those great and lofty truths as

¹John v. 38-40, 46.

they were written on the hearts of genuine Israelites, as they were translated into living experience; as the thoughts, feelings, and purposes which filled their souls were woven into uniform habit and fixed character; and as rules and motives which shaped their conduct. The Old Testament is largely biographical. But the inmost life comes forth more fully and vividly in the Psalms and prophetic books than in the historical. Holy men poured out their souls in confessions, thanksgivings, praises, vows, and prayers to God, and in admonitions, pleadings, and encouragements to the elect, but often sinful and stricken, people. Some salient features of their godly experience I will note. Their sincerity and depth of feeling cannot be questioned: out of the heart the words burst forth. I would not have you read into their language sentiments which you really draw from the evangelists and apostles. Not what the words mean to us who live in the larger and intenser light of Christianity, but what they meant to the men by whom they were uttered, is the matter to be considered. Take the natural, unforced sense. The quotations I shall make are not exceptional, rare jewels that sparkle in a vast bed of common earth and gravel, but selections from a profuse wealth of like passages. Your ac-

quaintance with the Scriptures will verify this statement.

Depth and thoroughness of repentance have never had stronger expression than in Psalm li. Notice these points: 1. The psalmist's confession of sin against and before God. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." 2. His profound and abiding sense of guilt. "My sin is ever before me." 3. His sole plea was the boundless mercy of God. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." 4. He makes no allusion to outward penalties, but deprecates the withdrawal of God's manifest presence and gracious influence. "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." The Revised Version prints holy spirit without capital letters to indicate that the psalmist meant simply the working of God on the heart, not referring, as we should in such language, to the Holy Ghost, the third person of the Godhead. 5. He prayed not less earnestly for a changed, sanctified heart than for the forgiveness of sins. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." "And uphold me with a free spirit." 6. He brought to

God no animal sacrifices, but contrition and longing to experience the joy of salvation, that he might out of a glad and thankful heart praise divine righteousness and grace. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." "Thou God of my salvation." "My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

Psalm xxxii. is a companion song to li. It describes the blessedness of pardon as a realized good. For a time the psalmist had kept silence. Then his bones waxed old; day and night God's hand was heavy upon him; his soul withered like a plant during a summer drought. Afterwards his sullen silence was broken by a frank confession of his transgressions unto the Lord: "And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." "Thou art my hiding place." "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."

Those two songs have a Hebrew coloring, but an evangelical spirit. The sinner bowed before God in deep humiliation, convicted of sin and of its exceeding sinfulness, crushed under the load of guilt, filled with self-loathing, stripped of all

excuses, pouring out confession without guile or concealment, though in shame and sorrow, seeking refuge in the measureless mercies of the God he had offended; then the penitent assured of pardon and acceptance, telling the story to the praise of divine grace and to the comfort of all who groan under sin, and would find deliverance, and calling on all the upright in heart to join in joyous songs and shouts because of the riches of the divine goodness. How often this experience has been repeated in the home and in the congregation down to the present day! The twin Psalms are not doctrinal, though in accord with the theology of both Testaments; they are the outgushing of a full heart, full first of the bitterness, unrest, and agony of repentance, and then of the sweet peace and rapturous joy of the knowledge that God had blotted out all his iniquities, and washed his soul whiter than snow.

Observe the attitude of the genuine Israelite toward the law of God. That long and peculiar Psalm, cxix., dwells with loving variation and repetition on the excellence of the law and the heart's response to all its commandments. "Blessed are they that are perfect in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." Where did he keep this priceless treasure which he loved above gold? "Thy

word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." It was a lamp unto his feet, his delight and his counselor. "O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day." "How sweet are thy words unto my taste!" He prayed for what we would call the office of the Holy Spirit in illumining his mind to understand and inclining his heart to keep the law. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies."

Not to all Israel at any time did the words of our Lord and of Isaiah apply: "Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men."¹ There were devout men who delighted in spiritual worship. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."² Instead of gladness, there was intense craving when cut off from the sanctuary. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is. So have I looked upon thee in the sanctuary, to see

¹ Matt. xv. 7-9.

² Ps. cxxii. 1.

thy power and thy glory. For thy loving-kindness is better than life; my lips shall praise thee.”¹ Was worship limited by place, time, the ministry of a priesthood, the presence of a congregation, and external rites? The same Psalm proves that it was often the secret and solitary communion of the heart with God: “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. For thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.”²

Thanksgiving and praise, public and private, were features of their worship as of ours. Psalm ciii. is a favorite with all Christians. “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” There follows a comprehensive enumeration of his benefits, and praise of their source, the fullness of his compassion and graciousness, who is slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath

¹ Ps. lxiii. 1-3. ² Ps. lxiii. 5-8.

he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.”

Trust in God, peace and joy as the fruit of faith, and actual experience of guidance, protection, and abundant provision from God, were marked characteristics of the saints of the Old Testament. I need only to remind you of Psalm xxiii.: “The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.”

The religion which rose on buoyant wings of gratitude and adoration to the Fount of all good, bowed in humble and reverent submission under calamity. With rent mantle and shaved head, Job fell down upon the ground and worshiped, saying, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”¹ Jeremiah was the weeping prophet; he wrote the Lamentations. From that sad strain let me quote: “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.”² Overwhelmed by waves of wrath, sorely perplexed by the mystery of the wicked who prospered and of the godly who were oppressed,

¹ Job i. 21.

² Lam. iii. 22-24.

the servant of the Lord found refuge and triumph in faith, resignation, and hope in God. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”¹ “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.”²

Love for the people of God, grief over their afflictions, and longing for their salvation and spiritual glory, were conspicuous marks of pious Hebrews. “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth.”³

God himself was the center of desire and delight. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.”⁴ They looked to him for temporal good, but also for grace to resist sin and lead holy lives. “Teach

¹ Ps. xlii. 11.

² Ps. lxxiii. 24-26.

³ Isa. lxii. i.

⁴ Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

me to do thy will.”¹ “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”² Not only was love to God the chief command, but likewise the chief inward trait and motive. “I love thee, O Lord, my strength.”³ “O love the Lord, all ye his saints.”⁴ “I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.”⁵

These passages witness to heartfelt religion; to a reality and a consciousness sound, wholesome, purifying, exalting. Those men were men of God. Religion was not to them an incident, a fashion, an occasional wave of feeling, nor a compliance with custom: it was the core of character, the constraining force of conduct. It was ethical: right, not rites, was the main thing. It was sincere and spiritual; not outward show, but life in the felt presence and under the eyes of God who tries the thoughts. It was drawn from God, sustained by God, directed to the glory of God. They knew the truth and strength of their own devotedness to God, his service, and his people; and they knew that God was with and in

¹ Ps. cxliii. 10.

³ Ps. xviii. 1.

² Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

⁴ Ps. xxxi. 23.

⁵ Ps. cxvi. 1.

them. His mercies compassed them, his hand led them, his eyes were on them, his ears were open to their cry, he was afflicted in their affliction, his spirit taught and hallowed them.

Am I claiming for them Christian experience? In no other sense than that in which Paul affirmed that God preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham: the patriarch heard from the mouth of Jehovah the pregnant promise, "In thee shall all the nations be blessed," before the shepherds heard the angels' song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased." The primitive Christians were encircled by a great cloud of witnesses to the faith. The objective faith was the same, the truth which is Christ the Saviour. The subjective faith was the same, the self-surrender and trust of the heart. The fruit was the same, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Lord. Abel was the prototype of Stephen: martyrs to the one faith, they received their crowns from the hand of the same Lord.

I am not contending that this high experience was possessed by the whole body of Israelites. "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." A godly seed never ceased, but often it was a very small minority. Nor did all sincere Israel-

ites attain unto the vision and elevation of Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah; as in our favored era few believers equal John and Paul in wisdom and zeal. We may err, however, by underrating the number of the faithful under the old dispensation, as Elijah erred in supposing that he stood alone for Jehovah in his idolatrous generation: Jehovah who knows all that are his marked seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal. The flame of faith and devotion oftentimes burns in the breasts of obscure men and women. In the dark age of unbelieving Sadducees and haughty, formal Pharisees, when Jesus was born, the priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Simeon was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; Anna, a prophetess, gave thanks unto God, and spake of the infant Jesus to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Our Lord, who knew what was in man, characterized Nathanael, as he came to him on the invitation of Philip, in these strong words: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Paul unfolds the signifi-*ance* of the qualifying word *indeed*: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in

the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”¹ Was this distinction between the sign and the thing signified, between carnal and spiritual circumcision, reserved until the gospel? Listen to Moses: “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.”² There were sons of Abraham under the old covenant whose distinction was not the blood of the patriarch which flowed in their veins, nor the sign and seal of circumcision, but the righteousness of faith for which Abraham was called the friend of God. “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old.”³ The Articles of Confederation served a valuable purpose in holding together the thirteen American colonies for a time, but would not suffice for the great republic of to-day: they were superseded by the Constitution of the United States in order to form a more perfect union. “There is a disannulling of a foregoing commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness.”⁴ Weakness and unprofitableness

¹ Rom. ii. 28, 29. ² Deut. xxx. 6. ³ Heb. viii. 13. ⁴ Heb. vii. 18.

can be construed here only in a comparative sense: "the law made nothing perfect." At night the borrowed light of the silver moon is welcome; but when the sun has risen, we hold the moon weak and profitless, and it vanishes from sight.

Two things follow: we inherit all the benefits of the Old Testament, including the truth revealed and the spiritual experience attainable under its provisions; and we are now offered larger knowledge and grace than were possible before our era. Let us not slight the Scriptures. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."¹ "From a babe," Paul reminded Timothy, "thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."² These writings are richer food to our children than they were to the Hebrew children. "Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham."³ "And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."⁴ The Gentiles are a

¹ Rom. xv. 4.

² 2 Tim. iii. 15.

³ Gal. iii. 7.

⁴ Gal. vi. 16.

late graft, but they through faith partake of the fatness of the root of the olive tree.

Into pastures of greenness and beside rivers of rest our good Shepherd leads us in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The saints of that dispensation stimulate and support us by their noble examples and words. In our homes and churches we not only read, but with devout, penitent, and rapturous hearts sing, their psalms and prophetic utterances, in many cases modified only so far as rhyme and meter demand. We need not disparage the Abrahamic covenant, Mosaic law, and voice of prophecy in order to magnify the Christ. Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet stood by Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, not in rivalry, but in homage.

Wherein consists the peculiar and transcendent glory of Christianity? In the two greatest possible gifts of God, the gift of the Son and the gift of the Spirit. The gift of the Son does not imply that his mediation was of no avail before his actual advent. In the love and purpose of God, Christ was offered for the world in all its ages and lands, and Abraham saw afar off the day which dawned upon the shepherds, and he rejoiced as did they long after. Nor does the gift of the Spirit imply that before Pentecost he had not touched the

mind, heart, and will. "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost,"¹ wrote Peter of the prophets. If the Spirit had in no measure striven with Israel, there could have been no edge to Stephen's rebuke. "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."² "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."³ In John we read: "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified."⁴

Though there was a preparation of the world through long ages for Christ's coming, Christianity is not an evolution by a process of moral inquiry, practice, and discipline, with the aid of a succession of teachers and leaders, without special, supernatural action of God. Jesus was not the last, wisest, best of Hebrew prophets, but the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, who became the Son of man, and is the one Light, Lord, and Saviour of the world. New events,

¹ 2 Pet. i. 21.

² Acts vii. 51.

³ Gal. iv. 4, 5.

⁴ John vii. 39.

new forces, new conditions, were introduced. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father) full of grace and truth."¹ The life he lived, the words he spake, the death he died, the glorious body with which he arose, his ascension into heaven, are facts which created a new era, and are creating a new world. He now sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high, "having obtained eternal redemption" for us "through his own blood."² He "abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel."³ The Father in his name sent another Comforter (Paraclete, Advocate, Helper), the Holy Spirit, to abide with and in the disciples forever; not to come and go, not to inspire merely a few select believers, not to walk in visible presence with them on the road and sit with them in the house, not to teach them with an audible voice and respond to their questions, but to be in the heart of each believer, to quicken the understanding, conscience, and spiritual affections, to give comfort, strength, and wisdom in

¹John i. 1, 14.

²Heb. ix. 12.

³2 Tim. i. 10.

prayer and service, in resisting temptation and doing duty, to be an inner fountain of light and life. Not to establish a throne of David in Jerusalem, not to free and bless Palestine, but to found and extend the kingdom of heaven, overthrow evil in all its forms and forces, among all kindred, lands, and languages, is the significance of the mission of the Christ and of the Spirit.

I have suggested the difference between the two covenants: what is the difference between the two experiences? Wherein did Nathanael, an Israelite indeed before he met Jesus, differ from Nathanael a Christian indeed? At each stage he was sincere and faithful to the grace given him. In the lectures to follow I will attempt to delineate Christian experience with some detail; but it may be useful now to point out certain features of its superiority to the experience of devout and upright Israelites. To the Christian, God has come nearer in the incarnation of his Son, Immanuel, God with us. That was a depth of condescension in the Son of God; to us it is a height of exaltation. He himself partook of the same flesh and blood with us. The Christian takes hold of the infinite love of God in delivering up his own Son for our sins, as it could not be grasped before the crucifixion. He sees in Christ a perfect living ideal of holiness and

love under human conditions and the severest tests. He has freedom of access to God at all times, the fullest boldness associated with the fullest reverence and humility, because he understands the ground of justification and salvation in the mercy of God through the propitiation and intercession of Jesus Christ: he draws nigh in the name and through the mediation of his Lord and Redeemer. He is conscious of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit in his heart, and of the witness that he is a child of God. Love to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is a restraint against sin and a constraint to all obedience and goodness which makes the yoke easy and the burden light, and transforms self-denial and service into a continual feast. Narrowness and bigotry are excluded by the revelation that the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him, and is able and ready to save men of every nation and class, and of all depths of iniquity. He is begotten again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, of an incorruptible inheritance, and looks up into an open heaven, where Christ stands on the right hand of God to receive his spirit, so soon as it shall be released from the body.

What date shall we assign to the birth of Chris-

tian experience? The question is twofold: historical, At what period in the world's history did it begin? individual, When does it begin in the life of a man?

The century plant remains for many years without bloom, a dry root encircled by large, fleshy leaves. Suddenly, with surprising swiftness, it thrusts up a tall stalk. At this signal the proprietor invites a number of friends to wait and watch with eager eyes until it shall burst into a wealth of flowers. Such a root was Israel; such a stem was Jesus of Nazareth; such a company were the apostles, the mother and brothers of the Lord, and other disciples, who in an upper room in the city of Jerusalem continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, waiting for the promise of the Father, until the day of Pentecost was come; then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and there bloomed forth in rich bounty the consummate flower, Christian experience.



LECTURE IV.

THE CRISIS OF CONVERSION, AND RELIGION AS A CONTINUOUS STATE.

IV.

THE CRISIS OF CONVERSION, AND RELIGION AS A CONTINUOUS STATE.

I OCCUPY familiar ground. I speak at the present time. My witnesses are before me. "For lo, the kingdom of God is within you."¹ The authority to which I appeal is your consciousness: "because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth."² Christian experience is a personal conscious reality.

My argument is not a vicious circle, first proving experience by the Bible, and then proving the Bible by experience. The New Testament is, however, the norm, the standard, of the experience. The very name, Christian experience, signifies that it is the product of the gospel, and that it conforms to the gospel. But the word "experience" shows that it is a fact of consciousness, not of testimony, and therefore does not depend on outside proof.

The New Testament is not only the rule by which experience is approved as evangelical, but also a record of actual experience. We need not

¹ Luke xvii. 21. ² 1 John ii. 8.

assume its inspiration in affirming its historical credibility. Men accept it as testimony who deny it as authority. The Acts and the Epistles reveal much of the spirit and lives of the apostles and other primitive Christians. The story of what Christ had done for Paul, and was to him, comes out in his letters to churches and individuals, not merely in direct statement, but incidentally, yet distinctly and with convincing power, in exhortation, entreaty, and words of good cheer. Whether he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, or simply under the impulses of a great heart, he is a competent witness, of undoubted sincerity, zeal, and intelligence. Moreover, he declared or assumed that the men to whom he was writing had a like experience with himself.

I am defining my use of the New Testament in this discussion. My purpose is to describe Christian experience. I might draw the description from uninspired sources, from the testimonies of men of different times, countries, and conditions. You need only to call up into memory what you have read in Christian history, biography, letters, treatises, hymns, and other kinds of literature, and what you have heard from the lips of preachers and laymen, in order to recognize what I shall say as a true representation of the experience

which Christians claim. Some of those witnesses may have with you little weight. But others, whom you have known long and intimately, whose characters have been tried before your eyes by various and severe tests, and have come out of the furnace as pure gold, command your full confidence in their honesty and consistency. Their lives correspond with their professions. Many of you, perhaps all, have an experience which makes you independent of hearsay, though you rejoice that your personal knowledge is shared and supported by a vast number of brethren.

Now this experience does verify the word, inasmuch as it is a fulfillment of its promise to all who receive it in faith. You may say: "Jesus invited me to him, with the pledge that he would give me rest, life, salvation. I came, and have found him faithful. Jesus promised the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to abide in his disciples; and he is in my heart day after day." The transcendent worth of this experience proves its source. It is too pure, noble, and blessed not to be both true and divine. The hand of God is shown nowhere more evidently than in the creation of such a character and such a life. Even the observer may discern the marks of God's workmanship; but the renewed man knows that his spiritual desires, affections, aims,

aspirations, and power are not of himself, but of the Holy Ghost: “yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

The Pentecost of the Church, the birthday of the Christian religion, has already been considered. The Pentecost of the individual believer, the day on which he receives the Holy Spirit and is born into the kingdom of God, now claims attention. There is a crisis, a change, an ending, and a beginning, in which “the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.”¹ It is called a creation, a birth, a resurrection. These figures agree in one thing, the imparting of a new life which is spiritual and divine. “For we are his [God’s] workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.”² “Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.”³ “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.”⁴

Most of the conversions recorded in the New Testament were sudden: to instance, the “about three thousand souls” on the day of Pentecost.

¹ 2 Cor. v. 17. ² Eph. ii. 10. ³ 1 John iii. 9. ⁴ John v. 24.

Peter preached. The multitude, "Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven," heard. They were pricked in their heart, and said, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." "Then they that received his word were baptized."

There were three remarkable days between Paul's first conviction of sin in his blasphemy of Christ and wasting of the Church, and his receiving the remission of sins and being filled with the Holy Ghost. Those three days he was without sight, and did neither eat nor drink. What were his thoughts, his feelings, his resolutions, his prayers (for the Lord told Ananias that Saul was praying), during that time of solitude, silence, and darkness? They are not written in the Acts. But we can get light from his Epistles, especially from the graphic seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. It may not be strictly autobiographical. He may use the first person singular not to designate Saul of Tarsus, but to represent the believer, especially the convert from Judaism. Certainly he expresses himself in terms drawn from his own experience. Elsewhere he tells us that he was a Hebrew of the

Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the Church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. His Abrahamic descent, knowledge of the law, zeal against Christians, and strict righteousness after the straitest sect of the Jews, were his pride and trust. I must believe that he was not a happy, satisfied man; that there lurked in the deep places of his heart a thought, a feeling, which he never whispered to any man, which he smothered in his own consciousness, that he was not living a high and worthy life, that his spirit was not the spirit of the noblest fathers and prophets. Did not some things he had heard of Jesus stagger him—some of his sayings, some of his acts? Was there no admiration of the way in which Stephen met martyrdom? of the cheerful faith and forgiving charity with which Christian households endured his cruel persecutions? I cannot say. But the crisis came when Jesus revealed himself. Then his soul was tossed and torn in a terrible struggle. He knew that the law was holy, and righteous, and good; he found no flaw in it: but his own heart was exceedingly sinful. The law was spiritual; but he was carnal, sold under sin. His obedience was to the letter, on the outside, not in the spirit, not in the inner

man. Sin was enthroned within, and ruled him. Sin was an inward sickness, which turned into poison the nourishment of the divine law. The law shone upon his guilt, perversity, and slavery in chains of sin; the law uttered its condemnation and anathema: but it did not speak peace; it did not reveal a cure of the sin-sick soul. It drew out of his anguish the cry of despair: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death?" An answer came, but not from Sinai. You and I cannot hear the words which Jesus whom he had persecuted spoke to him, "when," as he wrote, "it pleased God to reveal his Son in me."

Each penitent must have his own sight of Jesus, and hear in his own heart the voice that brings assurance. We must accept the answer to Paul's question from his own lips: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death." Life was breathed into Paul by the Holy Spirit; and that life was peace, freedom, power, sonship, holiness, delight in the perfect law of liberty. The law of God was love, and love in his own heart was his law.

Now this is not the precise path traveled by

every one who comes to Christ. It was not in this way that Nathanael, the Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile, and other followers of Jesus in the days of his flesh, passed through the fainter light of faith into its meridian splendor. Lydia, one that worshiped God—that is, a Gentile proselyte, “whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul”¹—the first time she heard the gospel, did not suffer his agony. The jailer of Philippi had a midnight hour of fear and trembling before he “rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God.”² But he had no struggle to renounce self-righteousness; for righteousness by any standard had been foreign to his thoughts; he had lived, we may reasonably infer, in violation of his own feeble and obscure sense of right, with scarcely any compunction or desire after God. His was the joy of stumbling suddenly on a treasure beyond all price, of which he had never heard or dreamed until that hour. Yet there was something common to all those persons, the essential thing in every one who becomes a Christian, whatever may have been his previous life and condition. What is that feature which does not vary? Repent-

¹ Acts xvi. 14.

² Acts xvi. 34.

ance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; salvation by grace through faith; conviction of guilt, of defilement, and of need, and laying hold of Christ as the only and sufficient Saviour; and consequent thereon, realization of pardon and inward renewal through his merit by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Centuries have passed since the apostolic age. Christianity has largely leavened those countries with which we are best acquainted. Christendom means that in a sense we are Christians by natural birth. In the home, school, and Church we have had Christian teaching and training. We have all our days been familiar with Christian examples, conversation, and literature. Christianity has, by multiform methods and in various measures, molded the sentiments and customs of our people. They are not abruptly aroused by the blast of the gospel trumpet, threatening judgment, summoning to repentance, and offering reconciliation. They have often heard the voice of God in their hearts, and felt the gentle touch and drawing of the Spirit. Even outside the circle of the saved, we witness in many persons a high sense of honor, repugnance to vice, gentle manners, kindness of heart, and readiness to assist in moral and benevolent en-

terprises, and even in distinctively religious work, which are the fruit and praise of the gospel.

This widespread culture has not lessened the necessity of conversion and spiritual regeneration; but it has modified in a degree their manifestation, and especially the emotional excitement attendant upon them. Sudden and astonishing conversions do occur among us. Drunkards, gamblers, rakes, rioters, thieves, and other criminals, are arrested, brought to repentance, and changed in heart and life. Not less wonderful is the effect of the gospel on skeptics, and on slaves of mammon, ambition, pride, and fashion. Cries of remorse, shame, and terror are succeeded by shouts of gratitude and rapture. But in many cases there is little agitation in those who seek, little ecstasy in those who find. They come to Christ in early life; or, if later, after a long state of being almost persuaded, they yield to the grace of God, and, understanding the plan of salvation, they easily embrace the promises in Christ, and enter peace and assurance. A difference of the same sort is seen in Lydia and the jailer. She, virtuous, devout, acquainted with the Hebrew Scriptures, accustomed to the private and public worship of the true and living God, received the gospel from the mouth of Paul as the thirsty land receives the

dew from heaven. He, roused from moral stupor by the strange spirit of the two Jews who, with bodies cut by the cruel scourge and feet fastened in stocks, had spent the hours before midnight in holy and joyous songs, and calm amid the throes of the earthquake, instead of escaping from the open jail, had saved their keeper from suicide, called for lights, sprang in, and, trembling for fear, fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" As a bud opens to the early rays of the sun, so opened her soul to the truth. Like an ice-gorge breaking with thunderous crash under a hot sun, so broke the hard heart of the heathen jailer under the might of the gospel. He rejoiced greatly: no mention is made of her joy. But they acted in the same way. "And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us." "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and set meat before them."

Still waters need not be shallow. The white heat of fused iron may be intenser than the red, roaring flames of seasoned timber. Quiet pres-

sure may be as effective as ringing blows. Cries and sobs, convulsive movements and prostration, songs and shouts, hand-clapping and leaping, do not gauge strength of feeling, much less of purpose. A gentlewoman, shrinking from curious eyes and ears, may carry heaven in her heart, and dare martyrdom for Christ's sake, or, what perhaps is greater, spend a long life of joyous self-sacrifice in his service.

What immediately follows the act of faith? Peace, never known before; the peace which Christ gives, not as the world gives; the peace of God which passeth all understanding. A heavy burden falls off the shoulders, a galling yoke is lifted from the neck, ease and rest enter the soul. There is release from condemnation and bondage, from anxiety and fear. The good he craved is not his own. That God is gracious and merciful was ever an article of his creed. He believed it as a doctrine of the Bible, as an essential perfection of the Godhead, as a truth proved by abundant outgoings of divine goodness. But now he is assured by his inward experience. God for Christ's sake has forgiven his sins. The love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit, as though his heart were a vessel filled with the light and comfort of the divine presence and benediction.

This is not expectation, but attainment, fruition. He is not afraid of God: God is his Father. Responsive to this divine manifestation is love to God. The love of the Father, the love of Christ, the love of the Spirit, and the beauty and glory of the Triune God, are not words, but a reality; and he says, with confidence, delight, and devotion, My God! my Saviour! my Comforter! Another new feeling is love to God's people. He has entered a new family; he is bound to Christians by a new tie. Humanity he never lacked: but all men are more and dearer to him now than hitherto; his soul goes out to them as Christ's redeemed, and he longs that they may taste and see with him the goodness of God. Hope springs up within him, heavenly hope: his present happiness is an earnest of an eternal inheritance.

Notice certain features of this experience which make it vivid and memorable. 1. It is to him a novel experience. He never had the like before. 2. It is not merely different from what he has heretofore felt and been, but contrary to it. 3. The change is accentuated by the conflict through which he has just passed. For first there is awakening, conviction, contrition, struggle. Repentance is preliminary to saving faith, but it quickens the sense of guilt and danger, of inward

corruption and impotence to obey the law of God; as a man on waking discovers his peril, and is filled with alarm, though sleep would have made escape impossible; or as lack of sensibility is a symptom of approaching death, and yet to recover feeling is to suffer acute pain. The reckless man comes to reflection, the frivolous to seriousness, the hardened to concern. His sins stand before him in all their aggravation; their source in the carnal mind which is enmity against God appears in its depth and foulness; his efforts after righteousness prove his bondage to fleshly lusts and evil passions. In many instances there is a sudden deliverance out of an agony of grief and fear into freedom and exultation: in all there is more or less of the wormwood and gall, of the pressure and tightness of the bonds of iniquity, to enhance the sweetness of the cup of salvation, the joy of adoption and of a clean spirit. 4. This is not merely or mainly an emotional experience, a change from gloom to radiance, from depression to exaltation, from sorrow to gladness. It is a change of the inner man of the heart, of the rules and motives of life, of the principles which he holds dearest and mightiest. 5. It is the most momentous event in the lives of a vast number of persons of all classes and conditions; in childhood, maturity, and old

age; of the illiterate and the learned, the rude and the cultured, the feeble-minded and the philosophic, the phlegmatic and the mercurial, the mild and the stern. 6. Usually it is a distinct, definite experience, not only as to its substantial nature, but likewise as to time and circumstances. It has frequently been written down on or near the day of its occurrence; it has been fixed in the memory; after the lapse of many years it has continued fresh and vivid, in details of spot and hour, and of the exercises of mind, heart, and will that preceded and accompanied it, and may be regarded either as of its essence, or else as its important accidents. I reach this conclusion: The change from a state of nature to a state of grace is a fact which the Christian knows, and to which he can testify.

We have stood at the source of Christian experience; we have seen it rise. Now let us study it as a continuous state, or as a steady onward flow. My method will be to consider the leading features according to several grounds of classification. This will involve substantial repetition; but by viewing the component parts or elements of personal piety from different points, we may be better prepared to recognize them as answering to the scriptural description and as capable of verification in consciousness.

The simplest and most usual division is into facts which imply change of relation and those which imply change of nature: to wit, justification, regeneration, and adoption. Justification, the remission of sins, reconciliation, non-imputation of sin, faith reckoned for righteousness, changes the attitude toward God. We cease to be criminals before the Judge of all the earth, rebels before our Sovereign; we are acquitted of every charge, and accepted as friends of God, loyal subjects, fellow-citizens with the saints. Regeneration changes the nature: born again, born from above, born of God, we have a new heart, a new life; we become partakers of the divine nature. New relations result: we enter into the kingdom of God; we belong to another world. But this is a change in ourselves, in our faculties and susceptibilities, by which we are adapted to the spiritual sphere. "Giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins."¹

These two experiences, pardon and renewal,

¹ Col. i. 12-14.

are inseparably conjoined, and should be equally stressed. There is a strong tendency in this day to slight the grace of absolution and lay all the emphasis on changed tastes and affections. If forgiveness be mentioned, it is explained not as an act of sovereign mercy through the atonement of Christ, but as one of the effects of the inward change; it is said that as the man is no longer sinful, but holy, his former transgressions cannot be reckoned against him. In keeping with this view, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ are made to perform the office which the Gospels and Epistles ascribe to his passion and death, wherein he "offered one sacrifice for sins forever." We believe, they affirm, not in a dead but in a living Saviour. True; but we believe in him who died to save us; that "now once in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."¹ Let us not overlook the prominence and emphasis which the New Testament gives to the humiliation, suffering, and death of the Lord Jesus, as the price of our redemption—to the "blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."² The facts of his propitiation and of for-

¹ Heb. ix. 26.

² Matt. xxvi. 28.

givenness through his blood are as marked in Christian thought and experience as in the inspired word. The believer with his whole heart cries out, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"¹ His doxology is, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion forever, Amen."² Our hymns, our prayers, our testimonies resemble the worship of the vast multitude before the throne of God, "which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,"³ "saying, with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing."⁴

The resurrection of Jesus was not less essential to his office as our Saviour than his death; and the rising of the soul out of the death in sin into the life of holiness is not less essential than absolution from guilt. Forgiveness is ascribed specially to the death of Christ as its ground; purification is ascribed specially to the Holy Spirit as

¹ Gal. vi. 14. ² Rev. i. 5, 6. ³ Rev. vii. 14. ⁴ Rev. v. 12.

its source. Peter, reporting to the brethren the call of the Gentiles by his mouth, said: "And God, which knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith."¹

Sonship involves change both in relation and in nature. The change in relation is called adoption, and is closely connected with justification. The convict is more than released, the enemy is more than reconciled: God in the riches of his grace takes him into his household, not as a servant, but as a son and heir. "Ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God."² The act of adoption does not, however, cover the whole fact: for sonship means likeness to God, sharing his nature; and this is given in the change of heart, the birth of the Spirit.

Here are three new and abiding facts of consciousness; great, amazing facts, peculiar to the man of faith. They are not only gracious purposes of God which he has revealed in his word, but purposes which he has accomplished by his

¹ Acts xv. 8, 9.

² Rom. viii. 15, 16.

Spirit in human experience—the removal of condemnation; the taking away of the heart that toward divine things was a stone, but toward earthly and sinful things a burning desire, and the gift of a new heart which hates sin and loves holiness; and the assurance of sonship, with the spirit of confidence and filial delight in the heavenly Father.

Another grouping is based on the several departments of the soul which the grace of God affects and transforms. The quickening power of religion on the intellect is well known. Conversion is often the starting point of mental development. But I speak of a more direct and peculiar effect, of spiritual insight and knowledge. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”¹ Unconverted men have been great Bible scholars. They have read and reread the whole book in the original tongues, and subjected it to a searching criticism. But they do not know the voice of the good Shepherd. There have been able teachers of the science of optics who were blind from birth; but the humblest peasant

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

with good eyes has a better knowledge of light and color than they. There is a Teacher who “enlightens the eyes of your heart, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe.”¹ The gospel is a wonderful revelation of God in Christ: it is the moral sun to the world. But there is an inner, personal revelation by the Spirit, the gift from God of the seeing eye. “Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”²

Grace sanctifies the wide range of sensibility. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. We serve the God of peace, of hope, and of all comfort. The habit of the believer is serene, cheerful, hopeful. Yet it is true that though the principles be fixed, the emotions fluctuate. There are special accesses of joy. Even of our Lord we read, “In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father.”³ There are feelings, however, that do not come and go; that do not depend on cir-

¹ Eph. i. 18, 19.² 2 Cor. iv. 6.³ Luke x. 21.

cumstances and occasional stimulus; with which we lie down at night, and rise in the morning; which continue with us in solitude and in company, at home and abroad, in hours of worship and hours of business; which are not the accidents, but the substance of experience, and the springs of conduct. Such are the desires; appetites of the soul, which do not, like carnal appetites, become sated and after an interval crave again, but they seek and obtain continuous satisfaction; hunger and thirst after righteousness, after God. The affections are constant: love to God, to the brotherhood, to all men. Love excludes hate and revenge; but the pure in heart feel abhorrence of sin, indignation against wrong, disgust at all villainess.

Grace hallows the will. It becomes subject and loyal to God. Pliable to every touch and breath of the Spirit, it is flint against all threats, persuasions, and bribes that tempt to wickedness. "I come to do thy will, O God"; "Not my will, but thine be done": such is its language. Religion is not only thought and sensibility; it is aim, purpose, determination; on evil tendencies, a restraint; for lawful desires, a guide and regulator; in seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness, a constant and glad constraint.

He who possesses this religion, inspiring high and holy thoughts, desires, and aims, to which all things are subordinated, and which dominates his whole life, knows that he has it, and that it is of God.

The phases of Christian experience may be classified by their relation to God, the Church, and the world.

The Christian is preëminently a man of God. His highest title is a child of God. He values human character by the degree of its likeness to God. He believes that the searching yet loving eye of God is on him, and he fixes his eye on God in trust and obedience. He casts all his care on God, and rests. The will of God is his law, the riches of God his portion, the wisdom of God his guide, the glory of God his end.

We read much in the Old Testament of the fear of God; we read also, but not so much, of love to him. We read much in the New Testament of loving God; we read something, but far less, of fearing him. It must not be thought that the fear of godly Israelites antagonized or excluded love. It was not dread, but reverence. I am not denying that the fear of his wrath is a legitimate feeling and motive. Listen to the gracious Teacher: "But I will warn you whom ye

shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”¹ This kind of fear may indeed sink below consciousness in a Christian, as the fear of the penitentiary sinks below consciousness in a good citizen; but it remains true that the penitentiary is a dreadful place, and hell more dreadful. Devout fear means awe, homage, adoration, before the great and holy God. Self-abasement accompanied the acknowledgment of his majesty and of the dazzling glory of his infinite perfections. How small, unworthy, guilty, they felt in his presence! Yet they did not forget, nor fail to plead, his compassions, ceaseless love, precious promises, and invitations to find shelter beneath his wings. Their own littleness and guilt magnified his mercy, and raised higher their gratitude and devotion.

Reverence has not lessened under the fuller revelation. God’s glory shines brighter, and yet remains past all finding out. We are but dust and worms before him. He is lifted up above us by a measureless height. Yet he comes very near to us, and we get very near to him. We do not call him the God of Israel, but, with personal appro-

¹ Luke xii. 5.

priation, our God. The name oftenest in our thoughts and lips is not Jehovah, but Father. We trust, give thanks, praise, rejoice, because of his unstained and unbounded perfections. For the great King is our Father.

The greatest possible thought, the greatest possible truth, is God. There is no going beyond that, no piercing deeper, no rising higher. The mind cannot rest until it find God, neither can the heart; but having found, they rest in him. No other knowledge can quiet, inspire, enlarge, elevate, and satisfy the soul, like this.

Modern ethical philosophy harmonizes with the gospel in teaching that love is the chief duty, the central virtue, the sum of moral excellence. But its altruism, or regard for others, too frequently leaves God out, and confines itself to men. Christianity has as its first commandment, the love of God with all the mind, soul, heart, and strength; and as its second, that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This is the basal and the supreme good and obligation, whole-hearted love to the Fountain and Perfection of all that is true, pure, and lovely. God himself is love: not that there is defect in any of his attributes, for each is perfect and infinite; but that we are compelled to conceive of love as the perfection of perfections,

the all-including good. And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. This is the uncreated, eternal light by which he is encircled, and which enters and fills his own being.

The Christian knows and worships God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of one substance, of one glory. There is, however, a speciality of relation and experience, in regard to each. He loves the Father who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; and he goes to the Father in the name of the Son to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Son of God became the Son of man; became to us a brother, an example. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because tempted and tried in all points like us, though ever sinless, ever faithful. We are bid to be holy as God is holy; in particular, to love our enemies, and do them good, that we may be the children of our Father; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Yet our righteousness, as weak, needy, dependent, suffering, and dying creatures, differs in more than degree from the righteousness of the great Creator and King. Jesus grew from a babe to manhood. He was weak and weary; he hungered and thirsted, slept and woke; he suffered

in body, and had exceeding sorrow of heart; he was persecuted unto death. He lived among men, the servant of God, the servant of all. He showed what goodness and mercy mean in human relations and limitations. The believer studies his earthly life, and seeks to walk in his steps. Besides, he trusts his infinite propitiation for sin and his intercessions as our merciful and faithful High Priest.

The Holy Spirit is the Teacher, Guide, and Comforter, who came after Jesus had departed, and stays until the end of the ages. He helps our infirmities, not as a companion by our side, but as an inspiration in our hearts. What had been mysterious and perplexing in Christ's words and life, even to Peter and John, became clear and cheering when the Spirit shone upon it. The Spirit puts on us his seal, and witnesses in us, that we are sons of God and heirs of the inheritance. The Spirit stirs us up, and infuses activity, courage, wisdom, strength, so that we are able to do God's work and fight God's battles in the world. The Spirit is God working in us to will and to do.

I called patriotism a secular virtue. It is, of course, sanctified and uplifted by grace. His country, like his family, is dearer to the believer because of his faith. Yet patriotism flourishes in

nonchristian soil. To the Israelite it was a part of religion in a peculiar sense. His people were the people of God. The State and the Church were one. As a son of Abraham, he claimed God for his Father. Different is the bond which unites the Christian to the Church. The New Jerusalem, the holy city, is a spiritual body. Like precious faith, like love to Christ, like devotion to holiness and good works—these are the tie between him and the saints. “And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”¹ This was the mark which Jesus valued, not the Jewish face, not any natural kinship; the mark of birth not of man, but of God. The purity, honor, and prosperity of the Church are dear to the Christian heart; because the Church is the bride of Christ, and his representative on earth; and each member of the Church is to him a brother.

How large is that household of faith, that family of God? No kindred, no language, no condition, is shut out. All are sought by Christ. God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the

¹ Matt. xii. 49, 50.

knowledge of the truth. Every man is bidden, is welcome. The Christian takes this view of mankind. They are not animals soon to perish, but souls to live forever, souls dear to his Father and their Father, to his Saviour and their Saviour. Under all diversities of color, speech, nationality, and social class, he sees the one common fact of humanity redeemed in Christ; and he longs that they may become one in Christ, now and forever.

This godliness, which excels mere morality, as God, its center and life, excels all other authority, this brotherly affection to all of whatever land who compose the family of our Father in heaven, this love to men everywhere, and of every creed and class, because they are one in the love which brought hope into the world—is not this an experience so distinctive, so deep and strong, so high and holy, as to be a matter of knowledge to him who possesses it, and an evidence that it came not from earth, but from heaven?

LECTURE V.

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CONFLICT AND GROWTH.

V.

CONFLICT AND GROWTH.

IMAGINE a man who walks the earth compact of purity and righteousness, of faith, hope, and love. I am not speaking of the Son of man, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary; but of a man born like you and me, and later born of God. Is he henceforth an impersonation and a manifestation of truth, honesty, justice, kindness, devotion to God, and joy in God—all this, and nothing else? Is he unmixed and unvarying candor, holiness, and charity, from every point of view, and by every test?

What was said in my last lecture of Christian experience as a continuous state needs to be supplemented. It is true, but not the whole truth. Christian life, as described in Scripture and verified in consciousness, abounds in paradox. Solomon declares that all the paths of wisdom are pleasantness and peace; and Isaiah, that no lion, or ravenous beast, shall be found in the way of holiness, a highway, but the ransomed of the Lord shall walk there, with songs on their lips and everlasting joy on their heads. Yet Jesus warns us

that narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it; Peter, that our adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; and Paul and Barnabas, that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. These seeming contraries met in Paul's experience, "as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing."

Is the religion of Christ a haven of safety and quiet? or is it a storm-swept sea, and shall we gain the port only at the end of life's voyage? "Peace on earth," sang the angels at the birth of Christ. Yet the Master said, "Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."¹ The convert in the first hour of his new life testifies, "Peace, peace: all is peace in my soul." His eye descries no cloud in the sky; his ear catches no threat of tempest in the air; his heart throbs with no fear. There seems one long stretch of beauty and sunshine between him and paradise. But John Bunyan, in the "Pilgrim's Progress" and the "Holy War," presents a different picture. The realization of these apparent inconsistencies is suggested in these words of our Lord, closing his long and loving

¹ Matt. x. 34.

discourse to the disciples on the night of Gethsemane and before Calvary: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world."¹

A changeful life is the believer's: and the two great laws of change are conflict and growth. He is a soldier; his life is a constant warfare. What is the strife? We cannot improve on the old formula, which sums up Bible doctrine and Christian consciousness: His enemies are a trio—the world, the flesh, and the devil.

He is in the world. The secular and the spiritual life go on together; diverse, yet connected. To subdue and use the earth is still his duty. There are claims on him as an inhabitant of the world, a citizen of his country, a member of his community, a neighbor, friend, kinsman, and one of a family. He must provide for daily life, and meet civic and social obligations. He must converse, read, and think of a thousand things which belong to the present, passing age. These matters concern him for the sake of others as well as of himself. They demand not only time and toil, but interest, and even enthusiasm. Hence arises

¹John xvi. 33.

the temptation to slight and starve the higher nature in engrossment of mind, heart, and hands by the world, even in its most innocent sense.

This is a disordered world. The wicked are the majority. False views and bad customs prevail. The godly man dwells among a multitude who do not care for divine things, or who oppose them. To some of these he comes close by ties of blood, friendship, or business. They are attractive in person, culture, intellectual gifts, and genial manners. They may be loose in morals; they are, at least, worldly in their thoughts, tastes, desires, and aims.

Society is awry. Falsehood, fraud, impurity, selfishness, and feuds are not rare. There are short cuts to fortune and honor. Sharp competitions abound; and scruples of conscience expose a man to the arts of the greedy, ambitious, and malicious. He is left behind in the race, shut out of shining society, cut off from many pleasures, and robbed of money and reputation. He is tempted to relax his principles, to go with the crowd, or to resent and hate.

Religion requires him not to be of the world, though he is in the world; to mingle with men, to coöperate with them in many things, and yet not

to be of their spirit; to live as one whose citizenship and treasure are in heaven.

He is in the flesh. "And that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."¹ The flesh has needs, appetites, senses, excitements, dullness, weakness, pleasures, pains. How keen, strong, imperious its appetites; setting aside, overbearing reason, conscience, and whatever is noble and good, that they may be satisfied! And to what excesses they lead! Men are carried captive by their lusts, and plunged into sensuality.

The body is an imperfect vehicle, or instrument, for the higher life. A single incident may illustrate this. I knew a man who professed faith one night at a camp meeting, and was so filled with joy that his face shone, and he shouted praise to God amid the congratulations of his friends. After some hours the transport ceased, and silence followed. He was surprised and perplexed; he tried in vain to revive his happy emotions; they seemed to have vanished forever. He said to himself, "I am a fool, a hypocrite. I have made a great ado in public over my conversion, but it

¹Gal. ii. 20.

must have been a delusion, for my gladness has ended like a dream." What was the true explanation? The musician had not lost his skill, but the violin was unstrung. The body could no longer bear the tension of thought and feeling. The collapse was not spiritual, but physical, the stupor which follows a severe and protracted strain on mind and sensibility. Sleep restored the equilibrium, and with the morning came back into his soul the peace of God.

You will recall the words of Jesus to his disciples in Gethsemane, a gentle rebuke and gracious apology for their weakness: "What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."¹ Weariness, drowsiness, sluggishness, dullness to respond to the truths of the gospel, distraction of mind, inability to rise on the wings of faith or to stay on heights which have been attained—how often these experiences are due to the infirmity of the flesh! Pain and disease aggravate the evil. There is temptation in the flow of animal spirits, and also in their depression.

Appetite and sense clamor for gratification.

¹ Matt. xxvi. 40, 41.

Earthly things thrust themselves upon us through each of the five senses. Spiritual things are unseen. We tend to doubt whatever is not accompanied with sensation, or to forget it, or to give it little attention.

Flesh is not always in Scripture a synonym of the body and an antithesis of the rational nature: it is often used as antithetical to the spiritual nature received in regeneration. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."¹ "They that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you."² It is called "sinful flesh," or "the flesh of sin." "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us," "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He was immaculate in flesh and spirit. His hunger and thirst, weariness and tears, sufferings and death, not only were a voluntary humiliation for our sakes, but showed forth his perfection and triumph. What then is denoted by the flesh in antagonism to the spirit? Not sin abstractly, nor the body abstractly; but the natural man, compounded of a sinful soul and a disordered body. They are partners. This is evi-

¹John iii. 6. ²Rom. viii. 8, 9.

dent not only in gluttony, drunkenness, lewdness, and all voluptuousness, but also in covetousness and avarice, vanity and pride, ambition and envy, quarrels and fightings: for the body is the occasion and provocation of these sins, at least in the forms they assume in this world. Moreover, the soul uses the body as the instrument of sin; for instance, the tongue in slander, and the hands in robbery. Therefore the works of the flesh are set over against the fruit of the Spirit. “For 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.”¹

The Bible teaches us that we have a personal foe in Satan. He is a spirit of falsehood and murder; a subtle deceiver; the great tempter; the god and ruler of this wicked world. I will not affirm that experience absolutely proves the instigation, seduction, wiles, and power of the devil; but it at least harmonizes with the doctrine of the word.

This momentous strife, changeful in respect to fields, foes, and weapons, but constant in its principles, diversifies and complicates Christian experience. It gives rise to fear: fear of coming short

¹ Gal. v. 17.

of the promised rest; fear of being beguiled, defiled, overcome; fear of dishonoring Christ, and of being a stumbling-block; fear of sloth, cowardice, lukewarmness, worldliness, bad tempers, and hypocrisy. It arouses to sobriety, vigilance, caution, self-examination, diligence, and frequent and long waiting on God in prayer. Listen to Paul's experience; it was not of defeat and failure, but neither was it of easy victory: "I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected."¹ How did he conduct the battle, rather the campaign, better still the lifelong war? "In pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left."

Prosperity and adversity vary temptation. For all life is a trial of faith and fidelity. Prosperity tends to enervate, adversity to break down. Prosperity fosters pride, presumption, boastfulness, love of the world, and spiritual carelessness: adversity fosters distrust, murmuring, desponden-

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27.

cy, petulance, censoriousness. Grace provides strength, wisdom, and armor sufficient for every contest.

The fight is on a broader field and of a more aggressive sort. The Christian cannot be wholly a private man. His own safety and reward are not the sole ends to be sought, and indeed cannot be selfishly attained. Loyalty to his Lord, love to the Church, and compassion for the world demand that he be a defender of the right and a crusader against all evil. "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."¹ The soldier of Christ must follow that flag, and press that battle. To establish the divine order in all the earth is the positive side of the war. His weapons are not carnal, and his wisdom is not worldly. Ardent, strenuous, dauntless, and unyielding, he should meet guile with sincerity, hate with love, and persecution with patience.

Now this militant career of the true and earnest believer is known to him positively and certainly. A gentle, monotonous, undisturbed condition and the continual repetition of easy acts deaden consciousness. Days, weeks, months, and years may

¹ 1 John iii. 8.

glide away so smoothly that there shall be little to be noticed, recorded, or recalled. Shifting scenes, surprises, important events whether sad or joyous, tasks requiring strong exertion and pains, evils to be resisted and perils to be escaped, shocks of alarm and sorrow, thrills of rapture, quicken consciousness and impress memory. War experiences are not easily forgotten. Foes without and fears within keep the believer's mind on a stretch. He stands on guard, exercises himself in godliness, renews the battle, strengthens his soul in God, because he is in a hostile world and has in his own flesh a doubtful ally. His principles, his motives, are daily and in various methods tested. He has to stir himself, to stimulate and cheer his own powers, to see that there is no treachery or cowardice in the citadel. There are hopes as well as fears, hope triumphing over fear. There are songs and shouts of victory, and dividing of the spoils. There are ecstasies of rejoicing and praise beyond what is possible in days of peace.

What room is there for repentance in a child of God? When he first believed, guilt like a burden fell off; the power of sin and his impotence to serve God loosed like fetters, and he was clothed with liberty and strength; fear was lost in filial confidence and heavenly hope, bursting like sun-

shine through a black cloud; the pangs and bruises of contrition were healed and forgotten, as when health comes to the invalid. What remained and deepened, without sense of condemnation, was abhorrence and hatred of sin, humility, and longing after righteousness. Sin was more than ever before seen and felt to be loathsome and dreadful. Abiding faith yields as its fruit abiding peace and power. But omission of duty, neglect of privilege, lowering of vital warmth in piety, wrong thoughts, feelings, words, or acts, are occasions of fresh sorrow, confession, and supplications for mercy. Childlike trust and assurance of the Father's love may not be lost, for there may not have been willful transgression; but with these mingle grief and shame, deeper and sharper in view of abounding grace, so slow to anger, so ready to forgive. If the sweet peace of assured acceptance be lost, the soul, in humiliation and self-reproach, with vows to be more watchful by divine help and earnest pleadings, wrestles with God until the joy of salvation is restored. Paul gives a graphic account of the repentance of a church: "For behold, this selfsame thing, that ye were made sorry after a godly sort, what earnest care it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea,

what longing, yea, what zeal, yea, what avenging!"¹ Our word "godly" may disguise the most marked and important characteristic of this sorrow as shown in the Greek: it was a sorrow according to God. They thought of his law, his holiness, his goodness, his displeasure at sin. They were humbled and distressed that they had not been true and faithful to the God of all grace, to the Saviour who had bought them with his own blood; that they had grieved the Holy Spirit, by the allowance of sin among them. Their repentance was not lip-deep, but heart-deep. It was not a spasm of emotion, but a searching of their own hearts and ways in the light of the divine word and presence, and a solemn, deliberate, whole-souled reconsecration of themselves to God, with a profounder conviction of the subtlety and virulence of sin, and a fixed purpose to be more watchful and resolute against it. Paul rejoiced, not that they were made sorry, but that they sorrowed before God, with a sorrow that wrought a thorough clearing of themselves and a vigilant resistance against sin from that time on. They knew their own contrition, its purity, its strength, and its source in God.

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 11.

I mentioned growth as a second source of variety in Christian experience. Growth is characteristic of all life. Personal piety follows the analogies of nature. The mustard seed, least of seeds, becomes a tree; “first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear”: these are Christ’s similes of the kingdom of God. After spiritual birth, as after natural birth, there come successive stages of development—childhood, youth, maturity. The comparison extends to the means of growth. There are spiritual appetites and tastes, power to digest and assimilate food, a diet varied according to age—milk for babes, meat for adults. The great laws of exercise and of habit apply to the new life. “But solid food is for full-grown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.”¹ “And exercise thyself unto godliness: for bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for all things; having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.”² The spiritual understanding is exercised in hearing, reading, meditation, and also in teaching; knowledge increases, and insight deepens. The devotional spirit is exercised in praise and prayer,

¹ Heb. v. 14.

² 1 Tim. iv. 8.

in secret, domestic, and public worship. The godly will is exercised in resisting all tendencies and solicitations to evil, in obeying God, and in all manner of good works. The Christian becomes stronger and hardier by reason of that struggle which I have described. Opposition calls forth caution, wisdom, and strenuous effort. Patience, fortitude, and constancy are developed under trials. "Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, probation; and probation, hope; and hope putteth not to shame."¹ The most stalwart and the loveliest characters are formed and manifested amid manifold, severe, and protracted afflictions. They are a wholesome discipline. They help to reveal faults and infirmities, to correct what is wrong, and to strengthen what is weak. They prove to the man himself and to observers the genuineness of his religion. They develop and perfect humility, faith, patient endurance, joy in God, tenderness toward men, and appreciation of the power and blessedness of grace here and of the better inheritance which is reserved. He becomes a spiritual athlete, a skilled soldier, an expert workman. Habit makes duty easier and more delightful. The whole man becomes more

¹ Rom. v. 3-5.

and more adapted to the life of godliness and work of the Lord.

Our Lord used another similitude. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened."¹ A foreign substance is deposited in the soul. This leaven works secretly, silently, upon particle after particle, imparting its own properties, until the whole lump or mass is affected, changed. The leaven represents the grace of God; that is, his truth and Spirit. The man's thinking is changed. His mind dwells on new objects, or new lessons. He begins to take God's view, Christ's view, of all things. There was an old leaven which is purged out. Select one point in his change of mind. It was a maxim with him, a settled rule, that nobody should be permitted to get an advantage over him. He would not be outwitted or injured: he would have redress, revenge. Retaliation might be quick and sudden, or slow and gradual; but there must be trick for trick, reviling for reviling, blow for blow, until the enemy should be worsted. But he has been praying, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." He has been

¹ Matt. xiii. 33.

thinking of the forbearance and tender mercy of God. He has been studying the meekness and gentleness of Christ and his prayer for those who crucified him and exulted in his agony, "Father, forgive them." The obligation, beauty, and nobleness of love which is not overcome of evil, but overcomes evil with good, have so impressed him that he puts away all wrath and vengeance, and could die for his worst foe. All the teachings of Christ and all his traits of character are so pondered, admired, and accepted as his own law and pattern, that he becomes Christlike in mind, word, and deed. The process described by Paul is fulfilled in him: "But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror," or beholding as in a mirror, "the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit."¹ "He is not fashioned according to this world, but transformed by the renewing of his mind, that he may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."² The end is to be Godlike, God-pleasing, and God-serving; and this is accomplished by the transforming and new-making of his mind.

The normal experience is steady growth unto

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18

² Rom. xii. 2.

completeness and maturity. This is our calling, and for it full provision has been made. As a matter of fact, to our shame be it spoken, there are not only varying rates of progress, but in many cases a standstill, or backsliding. Some make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. Some follow Christ for a season, and then quietly go away, and walk no more with him: their religion is an episode. Some lose their first fervor, relax their strictness, are filled up with the cares, riches, and pleasures of the world so as to strangle the heavenly life, become negligent or formal in duty and worship: their lamps are going out. Some are Reubens, unstable as water: life is a succession of forward starts and hasty retreats, of good impulses and broken resolves, or alternate spells of heat and cold, zeal and sloth. But the Church presents in every generation examples of steady and progressive piety, of spiritual life in its essential unity and continuous unfolding.

The growth is in knowledge. The most striking cases occur in missions among rude populations of Christendom or among the heathen. But the young convert who has had the advantages of Christian nurture, though greatly helped by his knowledge of the letter, is only a beginner in the knowledge of the spirit of the gospel. He enters

a new world; he receives new powers. Gradually these powers will develop by exercise, and what was strange will become familiar by use. The things of the Spirit will become distinct, substantial, luminous. Doubt, perplexity, hesitation will give way to clearness of vision, certainty of conviction, and firmness of step. He moves on to the full assurance of faith, hope, and understanding. I cannot pause on the intermediate stages; I point to the result. It is the fulfillment of Christ's intercession: "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."¹ It was the attainment of Paul, the aged prisoner of Christ, soon to be his martyr: "For I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day."²

There is growth in self-mastery. Regeneration is deliverance from bondage to the flesh and induement with power to serve God. But the Lord's freedman finds it a difficult task to employ those members in righteousness unto holiness which he formerly yielded as servants to uncleanness and iniquity. The body needs to be restrained and also

¹John xvii. 3. ²2 Tim. i. 12.

to be goaded. The lusts of the flesh are not the sole, though a very real, trouble: the tongue would run away with him, and passion, and worldly desire, and gay spirits. He at times feels very dull and sluggish, wants ease and to be let alone, or groans under sickness and the burdens of life. But in prayer and godly practice he acquires skill and strength for self-control. He possesses and uses himself, mind and body, in temperance, duty, and submission to God.

In the development of the inner life he becomes less dependent on other persons, on circumstances, and on varying states of his own health and spirits. The child needs to be watched, nursed, and governed. The man thinks, provides, acts for himself. The believer in his growth does not fall into pride and self-sufficiency. He realizes more and more his own weakness, folly, and proneness to sin, and that he can do nothing apart from Christ. Nor does he prize less the communion of saints. He gets increasing happiness and help from his brethren. But he is conscious of a divine anointing which teaches him concerning all things necessary to salvation, of a spiritual discernment, of the light of the Spirit and of experience. If he be thrown amid ungodly society or lukewarm Christians, the fires of faith and love burn brightly in

his own heart, fed and fanned by the Holy Spirit. Even in Sardis he keeps his garments undefiled. He loves the house of God, and frequents it; but if cut off from that privilege, he still holds communion with his Father, and his own heart is the temple of God, filled with the glorious manifestation of his presence and favor. He hallows and enjoys the Lord's day; but the whole week is holy unto the Lord; every day of the calendar is consecrated by the dominance of godly and heavenly principles. He has his moods; he is sometimes buoyant, lively, overflowing with joy, and at other times heavy, despondent, sorrowful, heart-broken: but he is not swept away from his sense of reverence and responsibility by any gale of hilarity, nor does he lose his hold on God in the darkest hour.

He grows in purity and loftiness of motive. He does not lose interest in temporal affairs; in the good things which God gives him richly to enjoy; in industrial, commercial, civic, social, world-wide movements: but he prizes most highly and seeks first the kingdom of God, which is the greatest good for himself and all mankind. The strife between the secular and the spiritual life loses somewhat of its acuteness by the strict application of the principles of righteousness to all matters, the culti-

vation of a devout habit, and the end steadfastly kept in view to use time, property, and all resources to the glory of God; so that secularities are purified and hallowed. Trust in Providence does not lessen, but the riches of Christ are more valued relatively to earthly blessings. Human esteem and friendship are not less appreciated, but to be approved of God is more and more the standard and reward of conduct. Disinterested love to God and men waxes stronger in itself and in comparison with other motives. This is the simplicity that is in Christ.

There is growth in the positive, constructive, active principles of the new life. In the earlier stages attention and concern fasten more on laying aside, combating, destroying what is evil; cleaning the field of thorns and weeds; shunning sins of temper, word, and deed. This caution and warfare do not cease. But the abundant life which Christ came to give, the new man created after God in righteousness and true holiness, the Christ formed in us that displaces the old self, the fruit of the Spirit, the increase of holy and devout affections, the light that shines more and more unto the perfect day, the service of the Master, the building up God's kingdom—this positive and aggressive phase of Christianity grows in prominence. The

growing child of God sees that it is his high calling to be not merely cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, but to be adorned with all the virtues; not merely to guard against Satan's wiles and weapons, but to assail his armies and strongholds; not merely to avail himself of the help of his brethren and the means of grace, but to encourage and strengthen the brotherhood, and to save the perishing. He is to be not a mere name, but a life and a force; a part of the light and salt and leaven of the earth. He may be a layman: then he is to be a lay workman. His business, his capital, his income, must be honest and innocent indeed; but they must in addition serve the Master, and humanity in his name. His mind, and speech, and energy are not his own; he is a servant, a soldier, under orders. Every tie by which he gets close to others, every means of influence, must be used for the redemption and uplift of the world.

He grows in heavenly hope. It is an anchor that holds; the cable is fastened securely by faith; the flukes grapple the immutable counsel, word, and oath of God; the anchor does not drag. Time in its passing continually cheapens other things, but enhances hope. The increasing joy of the believer in Christ does not dull, but whets his desire

to be with his Lord. It is the perfection of God that he is from everlasting to everlasting: it is the perfection of the saint that he will dwell with God forever. Jehovah is the God not of the dead, but of the living. I have no sympathy with the sentiment that if we could only have one instant's vision of the divine beauty and glory, we might then be willing to drop out of existence: the vision would intensify the longing to behold and adore world without end. This life is a vapor; the life to come abides forever. But has he not already eternal life? Yes; not only in pledge and hope, but in possession and enjoyment. His life is heavenly in spirit, and daily acquires more of heaven. But the foretaste sharpens the desire for the full feast. He anticipates with exultation the fullness of joy, the perfection of rest and satisfaction, when present disabilities and limitations shall have ended. Yet there is not impatience to depart, nor waning of interest in the kingdom on earth. There is an instinctive love of life, a clinging to it. There is also a rational appreciation of the needs and opportunities of the world by occasion of its sin and wretchedness. As the physician is needed where pestilence rages, the missionary where ignorance and barbarism abound, so the

Christian is needed in this world. To him to live is Christ, to die is gain.

Has he passed beyond the reach of temptation? No. His only security is faith, watchfulness, and all diligence. He is not flurried and frightened like a new recruit at the front of battle; but he understands better the danger and the means of protection. He may not be tempted to carnal excesses, or to glaring sins of falsehood and dishonesty, quarreling and fighting, hate and revenge. He has subtler foes. There are secret sins, deceitful sins, sins which wear the disguise and imitate the voice of virtue and devotion. There are insidious forms of covetousness, ambition, vanity, pride, willfulness, and vindictiveness. The mature believer detects and resists sin in its most specious shapes and its slightest degrees. But he trusts not himself. He knows that apart from Christ he is a sapless, fruitless, dead branch. Satan would have caught and sifted Peter, if Jesus had not made supplication for his disciple. Paul might have been puffed up by his extraordinary honors and favors, if God had not humbled him by the thorn in the flesh. The Christian keeps himself in the love of God by constant, vigilant, yet trustful dependence on God our Saviour, who alone is able to guard him from stumbling. Along

with the watching and fighting against sin, he builds up himself on his most holy faith, and grows in the spirit of Christ. That model he keeps ever before him, and seeks to do everything to the glory of God by the indwelling Spirit of holiness and power.

There are special seasons of the baptism of the Spirit and of communion with God, hours on the mount of transfiguration. They may come to him in the house of God, in the assembly of his saints. They may be his share in a general outpouring of the Spirit and blessing on the Church. But often they are experienced when he is alone with God. The flesh then does not seem a hindrance or a burden. The world is shut out. Temporal things, the passing shows of earth, are paltry, are forgotten. There is nothing, not even the presence of a fellow-man, between this child and his Father. He sees, hears, touches God, but only in a spiritual sense; spiritual but real, the contact of spirit with spirit.

Some of the most prized and blessed experiences are not on mountain heights, but in Gethsemane, where the disciple learns in his own experience "the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ." It is an hour of darkness, struggle, suffering, and dread. Calamity impends, or has fallen. He is

tried to the last degree of severity. The heart bleeds, breaks, is crushed. But he holds fast his faith, is strengthened, gets the victory. He comes forth not in a jubilant mood, but though saddened, purer, gentler, more patient, more sympathetic, with less of earth and more of heaven, with less of self and more of Christ.

Yet most noteworthy are not seasons of extraordinary exaltation or sorrow, but the daily round, commonplace in its circumstances and incidents, but holy and divine in the moral principles which inspire and control it, the steady character, the consistent life, of the ripe believer. Let me quote the prayer of Paul for the church at Ephesus as an admirable statement of the altitudes of Christian experience, yet not of peaks occasionally climbed, but of the elevated table-land on which they abide: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know

the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God.”¹

As though he were staggered, or lest they should be staggered, by the vastness and sublimity of the attainments which he asked in their behalf, he lifts his heart in doxology to the Infinite Fountain of all grace, in whom we have sufficiency and guarantee: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations forever and ever. Amen.”²

Is there such an experience, or is it a dream, a fancy? Are there, have there ever been, such saints on earth? I do not claim the completeness of this gracious state for the majority of even sincere Christians. I do not claim for them entire consistency through a long course of years. Defects, blemishes, failures, lapses, I confess. Yet it is much that they set before them such a life, and strive to live it; and that they realize their aim in greater or less degree. Moreover, there are saintly men and women, strong and steadfast in faith, harmless and blameless in behavior, zealous and tireless in good works, victorious over all

¹ Eph. iii. 14-19.

² *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

seductions to evil, unspotted from the world, adorned with all the graces of the Spirit, fervent in devotion, and full of peace, joy, and hope in Christ. Their faces are turned heavenward, and they keep the straight and narrow path. They show sweetness of spirit in suffering and under provocation. They deny themselves, and are ready for service and sacrifice to do good to all classes of men. They are the salt of the earth and the fittest souls for heaven. These jewels of the Church are not rare.

Surely they have the witness in themselves. They have meat to eat that the world knows not. They feed on the living bread which came down out of heaven. In their hearts the water that satisfies the inner thirst springs up continually. They walk with God. They dwell in God, and God dwells in them. Their rejoicing, in all humility and gratitude, is the testimony of their conscience that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom, but by his grace, they conduct themselves in the world. Their daily life, their settled principles, their joy and hope, what they have and what they seek, contrast with their experience before they gave themselves to Christ. They know what they affirm.

LECTURE VI.

THE TRANSCENDENT VALUE OF THIS
EVIDENCE.

11

(161)

VI.

THE TRANSCENDENT VALUE OF THIS EVIDENCE.

THE peculiar and transcendent value of this evidence from experience can now be estimated.

1. This evidence is accessible to everybody. For its appreciation we need not be scientists, scholars, logicians, or philosophers. Certain proofs involve archæology, history, criticism, lower and higher, of Hebrew and Greek writings: the data must be accepted by most men on the authority of the learned and of specialists, and the argument requires considerable acumen and training in order to be understood and weighed. The discussion of other evidences is complicated and mystified with subtleties and metaphysics in the comparison of theism, pantheism, materialism, and agnosticism: if the philosophic guides do not lose themselves, many untrained minds that attempt to follow soon become confused and despairing, without clew, light, or footing, amid night, and clouds, and rarefied air, and steep climbing, and slippery rocks, and yawning abysses. The argu-

ment from experience is open to plain people. The Pharisees cross-examined and badgered the man who had been born blind, argued that Jesus could not be of God because he had violated the Sabbath in doing the work of mercy on that day; exhorted him, "Give God the praise, we know that this man is a sinner"; and at last sought to silence him by the taunt, "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" But the witness had good common sense and first-hand knowledge of the facts—weapons that have often held disputed ground against learning and logic. He would not be drawn off into questions and debates, but stood firm on facts of consciousness. "Whether I be a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." He knew that up to this day he had been sightless. He knew that he now saw. The change was marvelous, blessed, unmistakable. "Now I see" was the direct affirmation of consciousness: there was no reliance on authority, or testimony, or reasoning, but the certainty of experience. He did draw an inference, however. Reasoning, as well as intuition, marks a rational creature. The immediate data of experience, whether through sense or otherwise, would be of little advantage without the faculties of interpretation, induction and deduc-

tion. There are conclusions in which we can rest with all the certainty we need. It was a short and safe step from the conscious fact that his eyes had been opened to the confidence that Jesus who wrought this miracle was from God.

Men pass now out of darkness into day: I do not mean by instruction, as pagans who are taught the gospel by missionaries; but here, in the center of Christendom, men who had been blind all their lives to spiritual things have the scales to drop from their eyes by an act of faith in Jesus Christ, and at and after that instant they see the glory of God, the love of the Saviour, the riches of grace, and the beauty of holiness, which had been hidden from them. They had heard of those realities; but what were idle words, or something admitted on the testimony of others, of which they had only vague or shadowy notions, is henceforth matter of knowledge, enjoyment, and practical use. To gain a new sense, to be introduced into the visible world, to contrast the night unbroken from birth, unrelieved by star or lamp, and the day which reveals the forms and faces of family, friends, and neighbors, city, country, sky, all nature clad in a variegated and graceful garment of light and color—this sudden, vast change may well cause shocks, thrills, of surprise, curiosity,

delight, very vivid, very impressive. But though the sensations of the man who received his sight were fresher and more engrossing on the first day than afterwards when they had become familiar by long repetition, yet he learned gradually how to use his eyes, how to interpret the sense-impressions, how to infer manifold properties and relations of perceived objects from what was given directly in sight, and how to employ this knowledge in walking and work. The eye became more and more to him a thing of value, a power for good. So it is in the spiritual sphere. The convert is full of wonder and gladness. What means this change? Is it a fact, or a dream? As one who gains physical sight may close his eyes, and then open them, to certify himself of the difference between the former state and the new, and to realize more distinctly what the difference is; so he who has just entered into the kingdom of God recalls his past life, and compares it with his present experience in the revelation of Christ and the reception of eternal life in him. There may be only the sweetness of a peace which he fears to be disturbed. There may be a rush of joyous emotions. He may refuse to think, or speak, or hear of aught else than what God has done for his soul; he will not turn to any ordinary occupation, lest

he lose the vision of his Lord. But the essential experience abides, and deepens. He exercises his spiritual senses, and applies his spiritual knowledge as a guide and motive in daily conduct. There are alternations of sunshine and clouds; but heaven bends over him, and the sun shines on. He knows for himself, and not for another; he knows a personal fact, that whereas he was blind, he now sees; and his sight is not a past fact to be remembered, but a faculty and a fountain of happiness for all days. This is not taking heed unto any prophecies, or teachings, or testimonies, or reasonings, as unto a lamp in a dark place; for the day has dawned, and the day-star has risen, and is shining in his heart. Who can contradict that experience?

2. This evidence is not only free to all men, but is given to those most worthy to receive it. By worth I mean fitness, not merit. The blessings of the gospel are of grace, but they are not unconditional. They who ask receive, they who seek find, to those who knock the door is opened. Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. The man of single eye is full of light; the pure in heart see God.

Many unconverted persons have an intellectual

interest in Christianity. They like to hear discussion of its evidences. They read articles, and perhaps books, on this subject. They may examine without prejudice, rather with an inclination to believe: but there are difficulties, doubts; they are not satisfied. They may not, like the Jews in our Lord's time, ask for a sign, a miracle. They want a rational demonstration, an argument complete and irresistible. If there should arise a scholar conversant with all learning that bears on this problem, a logician keen to detect fallacies and to draw right inferences from complex and intricate premises, a philosopher of depth and breadth and height of mind to comprehend the whole matter, and to present it clearly and forcibly, so that any reader of fair mental ability and culture could understand and judge its merits, with what eagerness they would devour the book! But in fact there is always something plausible to be said on the other side, something which they know not how to answer. Now God did not send his Son into the world to gratify the curious, to entertain men with display of skill in dispute, to settle speculative questions. Christ came for a moral purpose of tremendous and eternal significance. His gospel is a probation, a testing of men; it separates the wheat and the chaff, the sheep and the goats; it

is, according as it is treated, a savor of life, or a savor of death. "For judgment came I into this world, that they which see not may see; and that they which see may become blind."¹ The humble, earnest soul, groping in darkness, crying out for light, that he may know the way of duty and life, and be guided therein, shall receive the gift of sight. The proud, self-sufficient, who care only for their own pleasure and reputation, not using the light of which they boast, shall lose even that, and walk in utter darkness.

That men need a moral qualification to learn of him was a prominent teaching of our Lord. To Pilate he said: "To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."² His sheep know his voice. When the seventy disciples whom he had sent out returned with their report, "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father; for so it was well pleasing in thy sight."³

¹ John ix. 39.

² John xviii. 37.

³ Luke x. 21.

Come, and see. Taste, and know. Take on you Christ's yoke and burden, and you shall find rest unto your souls. This is the challenge of Christianity. It may be objected: "This reverses the true order, which demands proof before belief. We are bid to accept Christ with the promise of a spiritual experience which will satisfy us of the truth of his claims. But we want the evidence first as the ground of faith." I reply: We do not require faith prior to all evidence, but only to the test of experienced salvation. There may be sufficient evidence that one who offers himself as a guide deserves your trust, before he has brought you to the desired place. Christ did not come without credentials. There are valid arguments in proof of the truth and divine authority of the gospel apart from personal consciousness of the indwelling Saviour. Indeed, the unconverted are not wholly without the evidence of experience. Felix, the Roman governor, moved by curiosity, heard Paul the prisoner concerning the faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned, Felix was terrified. The truth called forth a response even in that hard heart. He did not yield; he said, "Go thy way for this time." The Jews who heard Peter at Pentecost were pricked in their heart, and said, "Brethren, what shall we

do?" The jailer at Philippi, trembling for fear, said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" We offer the gospel in this land to men who already know enough of its excellence and evidence to warrant their faith. They have often felt that God was speaking to them through his servants. They have often known the gentle hand on the cords of their hearts which was drawing them from sin and ruin to the heavenly Father and the way of life, though they resisted.

The objection, if valid, would apply also to the other branch of internal evidence, the self-revealing truth and divinity of the word of God; because it presupposes for its appreciation moral insight and responsive feeling. The man who serves fleshly lusts, he whose god is mammon, he who burns incense daily to his own greatness, he who lives to hate and revenge—how shall these men see and own the beauty of holiness, the charm and obligation of disinterested and all-forgiving love, the sublimity of self-sacrifice for the good of enemies, the majesty and loveliness of Christ? There is a partial analogy in the culture of learning and art. The scholar, scientist, musician, painter, artist, poet, need no persuasion to apply themselves assiduously to letters, investigation of nature, or study of beauty, grace, and melody:

they have the passion, they feel the fascination. But how shall we move the ignorant, inexpert, stupid? If there were utterly lacking intelligence, curiosity, and susceptibility, from which to start, progress would be impossible. The first steps are most difficult, least pleasing; but with advance, the inward reward increases, and toil changes to delight.

The unregenerate man is not totally blind, so that he can see no light, no beauty and use in the light. His heart is not such a stone that he can feel no thrill at the touch of divine grace. His ear is not totally deaf, so that he cannot be aware that God is calling. He is not totally dead, so that he cannot make the least motion in response to conscience, fear, and the grace that would save him. Put together two of our Lord's sayings: "And ye will not come to me," rather "ye will not to come to me," "that ye may have life."¹ "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself."² You have knowledge, conviction, motive enough, to pause, consider, forsake sin, resolve to do your whole duty, and to pray to God for light, strength, and mercy. Follow the

¹John v. 40.

²John vii. 17.

light, and it will grow brighter, until you come to an open, safe, blessed place, with the sun overhead. Then you shall have the crowning evidence, the deep peace, the joy of the Lord. You may have been warned not to make an experiment of religion, for you would surely fail. It is true that to make an experiment to-day, or for a week or month or year, with the thought to quit trying after a time if you do not succeed, would be idle and wicked. But let your purpose and vow be, so long as you live, to seek truth and righteousness, to serve God and trust him; and the issue will be such a manifestation of himself that doubt will be swallowed up in assurance. Christ gives light to babes, to beggars, to those who feel and confess their need; and he gives it to be used for guidance, purification, and diligence in all good works to the glory of God.

3. This is a cumulative evidence. It grows in proportion to growth in grace. With advancing piety there is less mixture of earthly and carnal ingredients in the new life, which may have occasioned doubts and perplexity in the mind of the recent convert concerning his own state, such as Paul felt in respect to his spiritual children in Galatia when he wrote: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you,

yea, I could wish to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I am perplexed about you.”¹ Along with the elimination of the elements of the old nature, there is an increase of the positive virtues which are the fruit of the Spirit. The features of the old self disappear; the lineaments of Christ show clearer, more definite, rounding to completeness. “No longer I, but Christ liveth in me.”² The direct witness of consciousness becomes stronger. “Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”³ The more intensely we love God, the more surely we shall know our love. This is not reasoning, but self-knowledge. But there is at the same time an indirect witness of consciousness which gains distinctness and strength. “Try your own selves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.”⁴ We would ascertain whether ours is genuine, saving faith; whether we have the new heart, the mind which was in Christ. We consider the marks of a believer as described in the New Testament; the inward marks, his thoughts, desires, tempers, aims; the outward marks, his

¹Gal. iv. 19, 20. ²Gal. ii. 20. ³John xxi. 17. ⁴2 Cor. xiii. 5.

speech, his acts, from what he is free, what he does. We then compare our own inner and outer life, known to us by consciousness, with those marks, and infer whether we are new creatures in Christ, or still carnal and under condemnation. If we are honest, and ask for the illuminating Spirit of truth and holiness, we shall reach a positive and certain conviction of our acceptance in the sight of God and of our renewed state in the measure of our possession of those marks of the true circumcision.

If professed Christians do not find in their own experience a convincing proof of the truth of the gospel, may not the reason be either that they lack spiritual life, or that it is very feeble and languid? I do not overlook the fact that sincere believers may be so timid, diffident, despondent in disposition that they underrate their own piety, and harass themselves with groundless fears. Dyspeptic and nervous diseases, or very poignant and protracted grief, may disorder the mind, and make it incapable of a right judgment of the religious state. But these cases are exceptional. The rule is that the thoughtful, earnest, faithful child of God enjoys the assurance of his adoption and of the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. It gives him peace and gladness. He has access to God,

confidence in presenting his petitions and in claiming the promises, the persuasion that God is with and in him, the courage to meet the afflictions and temptations of life because of his trust in the loving care of his Father and in the timely and sufficient help of the Spirit, rest in the merit and intercessions of Christ, and hope of eternal life which frees him from bondage under fear of death. This happy experience may not be uninterrupted; there may be doubts, misgivings, fears, the burden of guilt, at times; at least, the brightness and certitude may vary in degree. But the ripening saint has a more even, constant, victorious frame of mind. His fixed habit is devout, sin-hating, glorying in the cross, consecrated, resigned, pressing on, rejoicing in hope. Relatively the world becomes less, heaven more. Temptations lose their power; duty becomes easier and more attractive. Love expels selfish and uncharitable thoughts and feelings. His whole spirit and life become uniform, the life of faith, the life of love, the life unto the Lord. He does not question; he knows the love of God to him, not only as manifested in providence and in the word, but as daily shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost; and he knows his love to God as the supreme passion and law of his soul. The newborn child of God rejoices in re-

ligion as a light just kindled, suddenly shining upon his long night of sin without Christ or hope; but the old saint, the father in Israel, rejoices in the sun which has long flooded with splendor earth, air, and sky, and now nears the meridian.

Other evidences remain substantially the same during the life of an individual, but the evidence of experience waxes larger and more brilliant with the pilgrim's progress to heaven, his everlasting home.

4. Beyond all else within the range of our personal knowledge, the distinctive life of the believer clearly proves the handiwork of God. The Creator is known to us through the heavens above and the earth beneath. There is little use of arguing with any one who sees in the visible universe, in the great system and course of nature, only matter and force. He ought to see that there is something greater than all the vastness and variety of matter and its changes, in the mind which observes and in a degree understands these things. The farmer is greater than the earth he tills, and the voyager is greater than the ocean he sails. Not that I sympathize with those whose chief joy in the enlargement of knowledge by the discoveries of science and in the enlargement of power by multiplied inventions springs from vanity and

pride, as though man were a god. All we learn of nature, and all the use to which we can put our learning, should lead us to adore and praise and trust the God who created all matter with its properties and laws, and all mind with its nobler faculties. I pity the savage who bows down to stock or stone; and I pity the scholar who has no higher object of worship than himself, or than some man of wider learning or more masterful intellect than himself, or than science, philosophy, and art. But he who is our Father, and not the father of land or sea, of sun or stars, has made man the lord and end of earth and sky with all their riches; and has given him this surpassing excellence that he may know, adore, and love the Lord his God, be his image, and hold with him blessed and eternal fellowship. Not including the angels, whose companions in service and happiness he is called to be, man is of all the works of God the most divine, the fullest expression of the attributes of the Maker. And that which is highest in man or angel is the moral nature, spirit, character; it is sincerity, justice, holiness, love. We believe in never-ceasing progress, but the climax is reached in goodness, which is God-likeness, for God is love: we can never go beyond that, no creature can ever go beyond that, though there may be eternal increase

therein, goodness constant in perpetual change, the change of unfolding, of growth, world without end. This is an elementary, essential, immutable truth, on earth and in heaven, in this present time and through the unrolling of the ages to come, that to be good, to be true, pure, holy, loving, is the chief thing, most needful for the creature, most pleasing to God, the real worth and blessedness.

If I could affirm complete, flawless, uniform goodness of the Christian on earth, my argument would be easy and triumphant. But I claim for him the nearest approach to the standard that can be found in the world with which we are acquainted; I claim further that there have been, and to-day are, admirable, charming, sublime examples of this moral excellence. Notice how profound, how radical Christianity is as a doctrine, as a theory, if you choose so to designate it, in reference to sin and holiness. It inculcates perfect holiness. It presents the glorious God himself as the source and the pattern of this holiness: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."¹ "But like as he which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living;

¹ Matt. v. 48.

because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.”¹ It teaches an upward look, a lofty aspiration, a supreme obligation, and hope as high as duty. The thought, the desire, fastens on the only true good, and that is perfection after the will and nature of God. This is our high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It refuses to lower its demands and promises in accommodation to our baseness and weakness, but holds before our eyes the spotless and entire and glorious righteousness of God, that we may adore, desire, and resemble him. It will not allow sin in any form, in any measure, in speech, or act, or thought, or feeling, or aim, or motive, sin in omission or half-performance of duty, or sin in positive transgression, sin in defect of the right spirit, or sin in the presence of a wrong spirit, sin against man, or sin against God only. All sin must be hated and forsaken. It traces sins to their seat within the man, to the secret fountain whence the streams flow. It tells us that “the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be: and they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”² There is no disguising of the difficulty, the impossibility, which brought the disciples to

¹ 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

² Rom. viii. 7, 8.

astonishment, so that they cried out, "Who then can be saved?" A single specification under the charge of sin against men caused that outburst of despair: "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished exceedingly, saying unto him, Who then can be saved? Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for all things are possible with God."¹ Our Lord did not speak of crimes, sins against the State, nor of vices, sins against the body, but of a sin of the heart, trust in money, as if it were the chief good and end of man, or, at least, the surest and best means unto that good. Riches which are desirable as a means, which are readily convertible into the material things that preserve life and minister to our comfort, which seem to be a safeguard against future want, which also feed vanity and pride in the direct or indirect purchase of social and civic honor and power, conferring importance and influence on the owner, which thus protect him against his fellow-men and enable him to abase and punish his enemies—how

¹ Mark x. 24-27.

hard it is to lack them without coveting, to possess them without avarice! It is a sin that does not depend on the keen appetites, vivacious spirits, and superabundant activities of youth and health, but tightens its grip with the advance of years and up to the last gasp of the aged man. This is only one form of a wider idolatry, the love of the world, of its pomp, fashion, pleasures, praise, and honor. How strongly this sin is intrenched and fortified in human nature! Yet the religion of Christ wars against it, and demands its destruction. Not a fair outside, but a pure, godly heart, is its requirement. The carnal mind, the old self, must be crucified.

The diagnosis of the disease is not more extraordinary than the remedy which the gospel provides. Instruction and training beginning in infancy, parental authority and affection, good example, public and private exhortation and entreaty, are means to be diligently used: but not one, nor all of these, is the renovating power. God himself is that power. First, God was manifested in the flesh; a divine teacher, example, and propitiation appeared on earth; the crucified, risen Lord became head over the Church he redeemed with his own life. Next, the Holy Spirit, not seen, but known by his presence and action, enters the

heart, enlightens and draws, cleanses from sin and imparts his own holy nature; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit; the Spirit of God continues in the changed man as the source of a new and developing life. Faith, not sight, guides the Christian; love to God and man, not the lust of the flesh, nor the love of the world, is his controlling principle; to please God, not to please himself nor men, is his aim; the divine will, not human opinions and customs, is his law. There is a new leaven, spiritual, holy, divine, working in the believer, working out the sinful, earthly nature, working to produce all pure and heavenly desires and affections, working through his inward transformation to hallow and elevate the whole speech and behavior, the outer expression of the true man.

Is this theory and promise only? or is it fact and power? Deduct from Church statistics hypocrites, the self-deceived, formalists, men who have a name to live and are dead. There remain millions whose deepest, strongest desire and effort is to fulfill the righteousness of the divine law in walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. They love God and all other objects. They aim so to think, feel, and act that God will approve them. They grieve over their departures from

right, their shortcomings from the fullness of duty and holiness. Their chief treasure and joy is their faith, hope, and love in Christ. This is their life, this their experience in the dying hour.

This higher life exists on earth in various stages of purity, vigor, and fullness. There are saintly men and women. The whole number now living is not small. They are exceptions to the general experience and course of mankind, not in outward conditions, not in their bodies, but in freedom from sinful practices and tempers, and in the steady exercise of the highest virtues. Theirs is not a cloistered piety, a life of mere meditation. They do spend many hours of delight in secret communion with God. But they mix with their fellows; they labor, trade, converse, participate in various enterprises and pleasures: in all these things they carry out consistently their strict principles of truth, justice, purity, and kindness. They are thoughtful and intent on doing good, relieving want and pain, teaching the ignorant, comforting the sorrowful, lifting up the degraded, converting sinners from the error of their way, advancing the kingdom of heaven; liberal with their means, active in service, ready for sacrifice. Modest, humble, seeking no praise, they are gentle, patient, cheerful, grateful, hopeful, in all trials;

diligent, untiring, in daily duty and all ways of usefulness open to them; as neighbors, friends, kindred, members of the family, members of the Church, they meet every claim, and show sweetness of spirit; their hearts go forth to all classes and to the ends of the earth in sympathy and benevolence, and they are helpful as far as their ability extends. Is there anything better, nobler, lovelier on earth than this character, this spirit? Can philanthropy desire for our world a greater blessing than that it may be peopled altogether with persons like these earnest Christians? Must they not be of all things in the universe, so far as known to us, most pleasing in the eyes of God? Do they not exhibit the fullest marks of the divine workmanship? Very happy is the saying of mystics quoted by Inge in his Bampton Lectures on Christian Mysticism: "We need not seek for his footprints in nature, when we can behold his face in ourselves, is their answer to St. Augustine's fine expression that all things bright and beautiful in the world are 'footprints of the uncreated Wisdom.'" Not that we should cease to study and admire the footprints of God's wisdom in nature, but that we should still more admire the reflection of his holiness and love, the essence and glory of God, in sanctified humanity, and long to be im-

ages of him who has so loved us as to call us sons.

To stick in sense, when we should soar in spirit, is still a sore temptation. Instead of laying stress on the ethical and spiritual, men fix their thought and desire on physical benefits, such as freedom from pain and disease. They seek a sign from heaven, a sensible demonstration of the supernatural world. Faith cure, Christian science, mysterious seances, writings and wrappings, illustrate this tendency. It is imagined that these things exalt faith. Really they would substitute sense for faith. They would have apparitions and messages from the dead. They would be told facts of no importance except as evidence that they were communicated to the medium in a supernatural way. They are not content to pray to God for bodily healing or other secular good in submission to his wise and holy will, and to receive it in the use of ordinary means, or else to believe that the withholding is a greater blessing. The specific petition must be granted, and in such shape as to prove that it is a direct intervention of Providence. Even among Christians who do not embrace those delusions we often find an intense desire for visible, tangible answers to prayer which almost or quite amount to the miraculous; and the marvel-

ous feature is what they most prize, because it will be a prop to their faith. To instance, the invalid must recover without medical treatment, and after every one has despaired, in order that the cure may be known to be of God in honor of the petitioner. “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” A few weeks ago I received a request from a lady to pray for her. She was in a hospital. A surgical operation had already been performed on one eye; the other eye would be treated after a few days; the fear, the probability, was that she would spend the remainder of her life in total darkness. For what did she desire me to pray? Not for her physical ease, not for the greater blessing of sight, but for the greater blessing of a patient spirit. “Ask your husband to pray for me, that I may have the grace of patience in this trial.” The simple trust, the perfect resignation, the tender conscience, the supreme longing for grace that patience might have in her its perfect work, to the end that she might be perfect and entire, lacking nothing—this is the evidence that she is “God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” God give us such healthy souls, however frail, tattered, and rickety the tents in which we for a time may dwell.

5. Consciousness can, yea must, be trusted. If honest and attentive, we may be sure that we love God and all men, and that our supreme aim and endeavor is to glorify him in body and soul. We can certify ourselves that we bear in our spirits and lives the marks of the Lord Jesus, as described in his word. But can we have an intuition, a consciousness, of God? Or is it only an inference from the great work wrought in us that God is the author?

That God can act directly on the soul, it would be irrational to doubt. That he does thus act is the distinct and repeated affirmation of the Scriptures. Let me add one proof text to the many already quoted in these lectures: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him. Judas (not Iscariot) saith unto him, Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered, and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."¹ Now the omnipresence of

¹John xiv. 21-23.

God embraces all men. There is no escape from it. Evidently there is a special sense in which the Father and the Son come to the believer, and make their abode with him. They dwell with him, as members of the same family dwell together. Christ adds indeed the promise of manifestation to that of presence. He will commune with the disciple; will show himself, and speak to him. The disciple, therefore, enjoys the presence of his Lord as a conscious fact.

This is what the Book says. What is the testimony of the men who love Christ and keep his commandments? The witnesses are a mighty host. They lived in different countries and centuries. They represent all classes in respect to property, education, intellectual gifts, temperament, social position. Some were converted from heathenism; others had Christian culture from their birth. Among them have been not only deceivers, but visionaries and fanatics. But multitudes were sane, sober, thoughtful, reasonable. Many were as well trained and as well endowed to judge and report their own experience as any men mentioned in history. There is general agreement in the testimony of their tongues and pens on certain main facts. These facts are not visions, not voices; not phenomena of sense. They did not

see the Lord, or hear him, or touch him, in any bodily way. But they felt that they met him again and again; that he responded to their praises and prayers in such manner as to convince them that it was the Lord; that he disclosed to them his glory and his love; that his blessing filled their hearts; that a sweet and holy calm, a reverent and unspeakable joy, a satisfaction in God as the object of trust, worship, and love, came to them, not of themselves, not from any worldly or human source, but as the immediate gift of their Father and Saviour. There were times of exalted experience, more vivid, rapturous, and strengthening than their usual state. Yet with many of them the daily habit was a sense, a persuasion, that the Holy Spirit was with them; that they walked with God, that a steady flame of devout faith, love, and joy was kept up by daily help from divine grace. One might express it in one way, and a second man in another; but the reality of the divine presence and communication was not doubted by them, and it was affirmed as a personal experience.

Seek for yourselves this best evidence. Prove Christianity by being Christians. Walk in the light; walk with God. Get rid of the earthly, of the carnal, of the selfish; of all that dims the eye,

of all that defaces spiritual symmetry and beauty. Long for God, and give him every opportunity to make himself known to you: let eye, ear, the whole soul, be open to the divine communication. Because filled with God, you shall have the certainty that your life is divine.

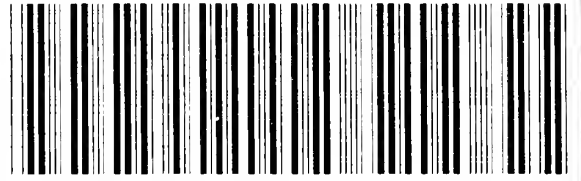
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