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The great change

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THE
GREAT CHANGE:

A

TREATISE ON CONVERSION

BY

GEORGE REDFORD, D.D., LL.D.

WITH

An Introduction,

BY THE REV. JOHN ANGELL JAMES, D.D.

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It is a plain, solemn, scriptural illustration of one of the most important truths of the Christian faith, and will be found eminently calculated to dissipate false hopes, to guard the inquirer after salvation against fatal mistakes, and to guide him into the strait and narrow way that leads to life everlasting.]

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INTRODUCTION.

READER, whoever you are whose eye shall read these pages, you have, indeed, just cause for anxiety, whether you feel it or not. Did you ever, in serious moments, and in a serious manner, ask such questions as these: "*What am I? Whence came I? Who sent me here? What is my business in this world? What is to become of me when I go hence?*" If not, why not? To say nothing of religion, does not reason press such inquiries on your attention? You find yourself in existence, possessing a rational soul. You know you cannot remain here long, and must soon lie down in the grave with your forefathers; but does your history end there? Is there no world beyond the tomb? There is: reason suggests it; revelation proves it. Yes; you are not only mortal, but immortal. IMMORTALITY! What a word! What a thing! Did you ever revolve it? A deathless creature, an everlasting existence! Such is your soul. You are ever walking on the precipice of eternity, and any moment—the next, for aught you can tell—you may fall over it. Eternal duration alone, apart from the consideration whether it is to be spent in torment or in bliss, is an awful idea. You are to live somewhere FOREVER. Should this matter be allowed to lie forgotten among the thousand unconsidered subjects? Should it be treated with indifference, excite no reflection, produce no anxiety? How can you help being anxious? Ought you not to be anxious? Going on, step by step, to eternity, should you not pause, ponder, and say, "Whither am I tending?" The rational course is, either to disprove your immortality, or seriously to reflect upon it: either to persuade yourself that, though you live as a man, you shall die as a brute, or else to act as an immortal being: either to pro-

fess the gloomy negation of atheism, or else prepare for everlasting existence. The careless infidel is more consistent than the unanxious nominal believer in revelation. For a man to express his belief that he is immortal, and yet to care nothing about immortality, is the most monstrous inconsistency. Ought you not to be anxious?

But this is not all. *Consider your history*; look back upon your past life; pry into your heart; examine yourself. Would not reason, even if there were no Bible, discover to you much in your conduct that you must condemn. Admitting there is a God—and you believe there is—does not conscience tell you of many duties omitted, and many sins committed? This is discerned by the dim taper of your own reason; but let in the broad daylight, the bright sunshine of divine revelation, and then what alarming defects, what appalling transgressions are seen! Think of a God so holy that the heavens are unclean before him, and his angels charged with folly; a law so perfect that a sinful feeling violates its precept and incurs its penalty: what, then, must be your sinfulness in the sight of God! Try yourself, not by your own self-love, nor by man's erring judgment, nor by the opinions of flattering companions, but by the infallible standard of God's holy word; and from such an ordeal you must return with the awful declaration sounding in your ears, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." It is not hyperbole, but sober truth, to say that your sins are more in number than the hairs of your head. If there had been but *one* sin in all your life, there would have been just cause for solicitude. That one sin should break your peace, disturb your sleep, and embitter your enjoyments, by the solicitude it awakened, till there was reason to hope it was forgiven. That one sin would bring upon you the condemnation of God's righteous law, and would be a cause of more just anxiety than the discovery of the most fearful diseases in your body, or the greatest losses of your property. What, then, should be the solicitude awakened by sins innumerable, committed in childhood, youth, and manhood, against God and man, in opposition to reason and conscience, in despite of the Holy Scrip-

tures, and the remonstrances of ministers and friends? What! going on to eternity with all this load of sin upon the conscience, and yet without solicitude?

Consider your mortality! Your breath is in your nostrils. You are not certain of another moment. The concerns of your immortal soul, the means of grace, the opportunities of salvation, the interests of eternity, ever hang on the passing instant, are all suspended upon the brittle thread of human life, and are dependent upon the frail tenure of a beating pulse. You know not that your term of existence is long enough to enable you to read through this book. Now, if death, which is ever following after you, were the end of your existence, there would be no room for anxiety: at any rate none for the anxiety which prompts to preparation; whatever reason there would be for dread and dismay. But death is not the end, it is but the gate into eternity. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Annihilation would be fearful enough: to plunge into the gulf of oblivion, to cease to be forever, how horrible! But how much more horrible eternal consciousness, attended with eternal torment! Did you ever weigh the import of that most awful of all words, HELL! Death is a terrific monosyllable: from the cold touch of this last enemy all sentient beings recoil with horror. But death is only as the dark, heavy, iron-covered door of the prison, which opens to, while it conceals, the sights and sounds of the dungeon. O, that first moment after death! What disclosures, what scenes, what feelings come with that moment! And that moment must come, —may come soon. Should you not be anxious?

Your want of anxiety, if you are really without it, is a proof of your want of religion, and of all meetness for eternity. A religion without anxiety is no religion at all. It is impossible to be saved without being *anxious* to be saved: solicitude to be saved is the first step towards salvation. It might as soon be conceived that a man could be saved in his sins, as in his carelessness and indifference. The first and most natural inquiry of every one who is really in earnest about his soul, is, "WHAT SHALL I DO TO BE SAVED?" What intense

solicitude is breathed in that most solemn inquiry! Can any man know how holy God is, how strict the law is, how evil a thing sin is, how great a blessing salvation is, how glorious heaven is, how dreadful hell is, and how awful eternity is, and not, if his mind is really and seriously directed to these subjects, be anxious? It were more rational to imagine a man could have his property, his liberty, his life hanging in suspense, and yet feel no solicitude, than to be truly religious, and yet have no anxiety about his soul. The concern of some, who have been awakened to serious reflection, has been so great, that it has for a while disordered their intellect. This is excessive, and has arisen from want of clear knowledge of what can relieve their solicitude. But there never yet was one who was truly saved, who did not bear with him along the road to glory the burden, though not an unrelieved one, of a deep solicitude about his eternal welfare.

The anxiety of others on your behalf ought to make you anxious for yourself. It would be improper, except in the same figurative sense as pity and other emotions are ascribed to God in the Scripture, to ascribe anxiety to him; but in this sense we may. God is solicitous about you; he has looked upon your soul, and its fallen state, with deep and infinite concern; his divine compassion has yearned over you; he has felt such anxiety for you, as to send his Son to die upon the cross for you, his Spirit to renew and sanctify you, his Bible to instruct you, and his ministers to warn you. Jesus Christ has been so anxious for you, that he has actually died for you upon the cross, and commissioned his servants to make known to you his love. The Spirit is anxious for you, and is ever striving with you in the Bible, and your conscience. Angels are anxious for you, and are waiting to become ministering spirits to your salvation. Devils are anxious to prevent your eternal happiness; which shows the greatness of your danger, and the just ground you have for alarm. Ministers are anxious for you, and labour and pray and preach for your conversion. Your parents, if pious, are anxious for you, and are supplicating, amidst tears and waiting and watching, for your

salvation. Friends are anxious for you, and are writing and talking to you about your soul's concerns. The church of God is anxious for you, and is interceding for you with the God of all grace;—and you, you only, are without anxiety. Is not this surprising and affecting, that you alone should be indifferent to your salvation; that *you* should remain torpid and careless at the centre of this universal and deep solicitude.

Your very want of solicitude should be a cause of anxiety to you. You must be convinced that there is ground for it. You cannot be so utterly ignorant of the nature, importance, and claims of religion, as not to know that there is much in it both calculated and designed to produce a serious thoughtfulness. There have been moments, one would think, when the subject would force itself upon your attention, as one pre-eminently deserving the consideration of a rational and immortal creature; when, by some alarming sermon, or by some impressive event, or by some faithful warning, it would speak to you as a messenger from heaven, and with the voice of God; when an incipient pensiveness was stealing over the soul, and filling the whole field of vision with the realities of eternity. But your earthly-mindedness soon suppressed all this; the transient thoughtfulness subsided, and the current of your volatility, arrested for a short season, flowed onward in its course with its usual impetuosity, and you are now as far from any thing serious as ever. Astounding spectacle! A rational creature, anxious about a thousand things, yet not anxious about the soul! Agitated, perplexed, inquisitive about little matters of a mere passing interest, which the next day will be forgotten; and yet neglecting that great subject, which swallows them all up, as the ocean does the drops of rain that fall upon it. Your health, your property, your prospects, your friends, any thing, every thing, but your soul, and your soul's salvation, seizes and carries you away! So that you see you *can* be serious. You cannot plead in excuse for yourself any natural inability, any paralysis of the powers of the mind, any utter incompetency for being occupied with such matters. Nor can you offer in defence of yourself the

excuse, that anxiety would be unavailing, that it would be only a useless self-torture, a tantalizing effort, that would be forever reaching after an object, which as regularly receded from you. No. You can think, and reason, and desire, and hope, in reference to religion, as in reference to any other subject; nor is there any subject in which enlightened, well-directed, persevering solicitude would be so sure of gaining its end, as in reference to this. None shall seek in vain here, who seek aright. God has pledged his promise, his oath, for the salvation of all who truly repent and believe. Where, in temporal matters, there is only hope, in spiritual ones there is absolute certainty.

And now, to bring these remarks towards a conclusion, and to make way for the author, whom they are intended to introduce, I would speak to you for a few moments on the subject of his valuable and most impressive treatise—and which is just the subject, indeed, about which it concerns you to be anxious—I mean, *your conversion to God*. This is the most momentous change—the greatest which man can undergo. In some respects, it is greater than that which takes place when the redeemed, emancipated spirit drops the fetters of corruption, and soars away in happy freedom from earth to heaven; for heaven is but the perfection and perpetuation of the change which is wrought in conversion. How impressively does the apostle James speak of this, where he says, “He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins!”* Shall save *a soul from death!* A dead body is a fearful object, but how much more so a dead soul! Dead, not as to rationality, but to spirituality: dead to God, to holiness, to salvation. Perhaps you never reflected upon this. How eloquently, how impressively has it been touched upon by a great writer! “What, my brethren, if it be lawful to indulge such a thought, would be the funeral obsequies of a lost soul? Where shall we find the tears fit to be wept at such a spectacle? Or, could we realize the calamity in all its extent, what tokens of commiseration and concern would be deemed equal to the occasion?”

* James v. 20.

Would it suffice for the sun to veil his light, and the moon her brightness; to cover the ocean with mourning, and the heavens with sackcloth? Or, were the whole fabric of nature to become animated and vocal, would it be possible for her to utter a groan too deep, or a cry too piercing, to express the magnitude and extent of such a catastrophe?"

This is not too strongly put, nor is the solemnity of the figure out of proportion to the magnitude of the awful truth to be illustrated. Now, conversion means the resurrection of the soul, instead of its continued death. It is the rising into a new, glorious, and immortal life of the moral principle, compared with which, even the resurrection of the body, when it shall forsake the darkness, decay, and imprisonment of the sepulchre, and, in obedience to the call of God, put on incorruption and immortality, is but a dim manifestation of the power and glory of the Redeemer. This is the blessed change set forth in the present volume; and it is a change which *must* occur in *you*, or the obsequies above alluded to, and not the resurrection, will take place with regard to your soul. Oh that I could excite a hope and awaken an expectation in your mind of the felicities of this new, divine, heavenly and eternal existence. Would that I could send on your attention to the following pages, with the kindling ambition to be a partaker of this sublime transformation; with something of an anticipation that you are about to hear and obey the voice which saith, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."* Yes, the day-spring from on high may be about to visit the grave in which your soul lies dead in trespasses and sins. A new existence, unknown and unthought of till now, with all its energies and activities, a career of eternal holiness and happiness, may be opening before you.

What an impressive view of the consequences of conversion does the declaration of our divine Lord present to you, when he says, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!"†

* Eph. v. 14.

† Luke xv. 10.

Repentance is conversion. Now, the conversion, not merely of a nation, or a multitude, but of a single individual, is of such importance as to be known in heaven, and is a source of such joy as to fill the mansions of the blessed with new interest and fresh rapture. *Your* conversion would do this. *Your* conversion would draw upon you the congratulations of the innumerable company of angels. Think of this. It is not the joy of ministers and friends upon earth, but of the angels in heaven, who, from their position, capacity, and experience, can better appreciate the immensity of the consequences of conversion; can penetrate far deeper than saints on earth can do, into the heights, and depths, and breadths, and lengths of that eternity, which is the seal and crown of the felicity promised to every real penitent; and can more accurately comprehend "the mysterious and undefinable value of the soul, its intense susceptibility as a rational, moral, accountable substance, incapable alike of extinction or unconsciousness through infinite duration." Surely, surely, such a consideration alone is sufficient to awaken and sustain the most intense anxiety, that you might be the subject of a change with which are connected, as an inevitable result, the joyful sympathies of the celestial hierarchy over a felicity at once immense and eternal.

Such, then, is the design of this valuable work, to explain the nature, and enforce the necessity, of conversion to God. It comes with a message from God to you; and it is a messenger of mercy and not of wrath. It comes to lead you to the fountain of life, the way of salvation, the path to glory, honour and immortality. A special providence may have placed it in your hands. Receive it not with indifference, treat it not with carelessness. A seraph from the throne of the Eternal, a herald from the world of light, could not present to you a subject in which you are more deeply or more directly interested.

Read these pages with the deepest seriousness of mind. Choose a season of retirement. Command all worldly subjects away. Collect and concentrate your thoughts on that one word—CONVERSION. Read as with paradise opening above you, the bottomless pit yawning beneath you, eternity spreading out before you, and

the eye of God fixed upon you. Read with docility, attention, and earnestness. Read with recollection that, after you have perused the book, you will never be again as you have been, since, if you are not converted, you will acquire new light and new responsibility, by which an unconverted state will involve a deeper guilt, and a more dreadful punishment. Read, especially, with sincere, fervent, and believing prayer for the help of God's Holy Spirit. And may the Lord render the perusal the means of your conversion!

J. A. JAMES.

THE
GREAT CHANGE.

PART I.
ON CONVERSION.

PRELIMINARY ADDRESS

TO THE READER.

A MINISTER of the gospel was once summoned to visit a young lady in deep affliction. She was an entire stranger, but had been occasionally one of his hearers. The case was represented as urgent, and no time was lost in complying with the invitation. But though it required not more than half an hour to reach the house, yet he arrived *too late*. Although not dead, she was not in a state to be spoken to, and the medical attendant decidedly forbade any attempt to converse with her. Upon inquiry of her mother, it was stated that she had been ill for several weeks, and had frequently expressed the strongest desire to see that minister; but her friends put it off till it was too late, and shortly after she died without the

opportunity of an interview. Reader, pause and reflect upon these words—*too late!* They seem to suggest this lesson—*Think in time.* No one was ever injured by thinking in time; but multitudes have had to deplore, in reference to all sorts of subjects and interests, that they began to think when it was too late. If persons are about to take any important step in life, upon which their future comfort or success depends, they usually think intensely, and always will do so, if they are wise. Take the following illustration:—A man has a cause to be tried before a judge and jury, which involves his property, his character, or his life: will he wait till the day and hour of trial, before he inquires what may be necessary to his defence? Will he not endeavour to anticipate every argument or proof that may be brought against him, and every circumstance that may be in his favour? The answer is, he certainly will, if he is wise.

Let us conceive another case. You are about to embark on board a ship for a long and perilous voyage. Not only yourself, but those dearest to your affections are to be your companions, to be bound with you to the same destination. Would you not use every precaution to ascertain the trustworthiness of the vessel, the captain, and the crew? Would you not sit down, and both calmly and carefully think, what would be desirable for your comfort, or required for your necessities during the voyage?

All this, you admit, is perfectly reasonable and prudent. To neglect *thinking in time* in any of these instances, and many similar ones, would justly expose any person to the charge of rashness, folly, or thoughtlessness; and if, by such neglect,

he should at last become involved in difficulties and sufferings, he would have little claim upon the sympathy of his fellow-men. He might have avoided all these inconveniences by the exercise of only ordinary prudence. He did not employ forethought, and so he has become inextricably perplexed. To induce you to think, to direct you how to think efficiently, and to prompt you to think in time, upon the most important of all concerns, is the object of the present volume. If you are right and safe in your hopes and prospects for futurity, the reading of these pages will confirm you in them; but if you are mistaken, deceived, or have hitherto been thoughtless and careless, not now to think, may be to inflict upon yourself irreparable injury. You must think at some time, and if that should not be till it is *too late*, your thoughts will then only prove tormentors. They will certainly issue in remorse, agony, and terror.

But some of my readers may here say, "It is yet time enough; it is not too late: we will think hereafter, when we have more leisure, or a better inclination." If you will examine this reason for delay, you will at once perceive its fallacy. The precise period when it may be *too late* to think of your soul and its salvation, no human wisdom can determine. It is impossible for yourself, or any one else, to foresee and fix the day, the month, or the year. It is the uncertainty of the period when consideration may be too late, that should induce you to think without delay. Can you say that the awful meaning of the expression *too late* may not be felt by you this week, to-morrow, or this night? It may even now, with all its infinite and endless consequences, be hanging over you.

By the Sovereign Author of your being you are allowed no time for delay, and if you take it, you take it upon a fearful venture. If you should repent too late, what is the doom that awaits you? Then you will be a lost soul! Many are lost because they did not think of repenting till it was too late. Think in time. Your immortal soul may be saved or lost, as you *now* think, or refuse to think; yea, it must ere long be either saved or lost for eternity. Read this little treatise, therefore, under the impression that, by the divine blessing, it may lead to your conversion.

CHAPTER I.

CONVERSION EXPLAINED.

OUR first business, in presenting to you a treatise upon conversion, must be to explain what, according to our judgment, the word of God intends by conversion. When you are in possession of the true notion, that is, the scriptural and divine idea of this important subject, you will labour under no uncertainty or obscurity as to the change you are required to undergo before you can hope to escape perdition and enjoy everlasting life. We observe, therefore, that it is a change, or a turning about of our mind or heart, and signifies a reversing of our moral and religious state, a complete transformation of the character—from irreligion to piety, from sin to holiness, from unbelief to faith, from impenitence to contrition and confession, from the service of the world to the service of God, from uneasiness to peace, from fear to hope, from death to life. It is important you should observe that this is mainly, though not exclusively, an *inward* change. It must begin in the heart and extend to the whole character. You must become, in a moral and religious sense, a new creature. You must not limit your notion to that which is merely external and visible, or imagine that any mere change of conduct or profession is conversion. There are frequently considerable changes wrought in external behaviour,

and these even much for the better, when there is no real change of heart, no conversion. A man may change from being a drunkard, become strictly sober, and yet not be converted. He may turn from any vicious course to the observance of the strictest rules of virtue, and not be converted. He may relinquish irreligious habits, and observe the sabbath, be regular at public worship, and attend to all the rites of religion, and not be converted. He may turn from infidelity to a firm belief in the divine authority of the Bible, and not be converted. He may turn from one sort of religion to another, and yet not be converted. A Papist may become a Protestant, or a Protestant a Papist, and yet be, in God's sight, unconverted. Although that lying church tells all that embrace its creed and practice its superstitions, that it will answer for their salvation, yet it can offer no guarantee but its own impious presumption; and that will be detected when it will be too late for those who have heedlessly trusted it, either to reject its delusions, or demand, what they ought first to have demanded, *divine authority* for their faith, and not the bare assertions of frail and fallible men.

Conversion is something more inward, spiritual, and peculiar; more closely in contact with the inmost soul, more thoroughly and deeply seated in the heart, than any of the changes already named. It may indeed involve and require a turning from some of these states, from some of these practices and habits, to others quite opposite; but, in itself, it consists in none of them. It is a change of the natural and carnal mind, wrought by the Spirit of God, and raising it from the degradation of things seen and temporal, to the desire and pursuit of those

that are divine and spiritual. It begins in the heart and mind, in serious and sorrowful reflection upon our sinful state, as destitute of the supreme love of God, alienated in desire and in practice from his holiness, with the heart devoted to sin or worldly trifles, and in consequence under divine displeasure, and condemned by the terms of God's perfect law. When such convictions are deeply lodged in the mind by the Spirit of God, it is made anxious for the pardon of sin, and it searches the Scriptures with this view. Then Christ appears as the one Mediator, the one Sacrifice, through which "whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."* Conversion is effected when, on account of the burden of our sins, we feel our need of Him, and, through his grace given unto us, we believe the precious promise, which says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,"† and, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."‡ Man by nature loves sin in some of its degrees and forms, or so loves and pursues innocent and lawful things as to exclude the supreme love of God. But, in conversion, he turns with disgust from all direct iniquity, and looks with comparative indifference upon natural joys, under the sense of possessing, in the promise of the gospel, a far higher good. Hence the Scripture represents conversion as a *new birth*, a *new life*, a *new nature*, a *new creation*, effected by the Spirit of God. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."§

We must observe again; conversion does not

* John iii. 16.

‡ Rev. xxii. 17.

† Rom. x. 13.

§ 2 Cor. v. 17.

consist in a mere feeling of alarm, nor of hope; it is not mere conviction of sin, nor mere knowledge of the gospel. Neither is it a mere desire to be converted: but it is a real, conscious turning unto God; a clear, and decided, and entire belief of his testimony, accompanied, as all sincere belief must be, with a permanent change of heart. The sinner, if converted, perceives that he is a lost and helpless rebel against God; that his guilt requires pardon, his pollution needs cleansing. He becomes sensible that he is dead in sins, and needs quickening grace; he even then feels that grace effectually working in his heart. In fact, conversion expresses the entire change which a vivid and practical belief of the gospel produces in the soul.

But, perhaps, you have not a clear notion of what the Scripture requires, when it demands faith in Christ for salvation, saying, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."* What is it then *to believe*? The idea conveyed by that term requires only to be presented in its proper simplicity. Persons have very vague, confused, and mystified notions of believing. Yet the term is one of the plainest that can be used. We all know perfectly well what it signifies when it is used in common life. Its meaning is the same when it is used in religion. It does not express any act of the mind different from that which is intended when we fully confide in the testimony of a fellow-creature of known and tried veracity. It is the confidence the mind places in the truth of the words spoken, whether those words convey a statement of some past fact, or a promise of something to be done. If a friend, of whose

* Rom. ix. 33.

veracity you not only have no reason to entertain a doubt, but of whose integrity you have proof sufficient to warrant an unwavering confidence, imparts any piece of intelligence, and says he knows its certainty, and can vouch for its accuracy, you then feel warranted in placing entire reliance upon his word; and if it is a matter that requires you to act, you do not hesitate to give practical proof of your faith in the word of your friend. And yet in all such cases there is a possibility that this friend may deceive you; he may be deceived himself. There is a possibility, and however bare that possibility, yet the admission of it is all that I require for my present purpose.

Suppose a friend to proceed beyond the mere announcement of some fact, and makes us a promise of some future, important benefit he means to confer; we should then admit some other considerations before we entirely confided in his promise. For instance, we should inquire, Is he a man of benevolence? Has he any particular friendship for us? Is he in the habit of performing generous actions? Can he fulfil this promise without serious sacrifice or loss? If we found every inquiry of this kind could be satisfactorily answered, we should then have valid ground for believing his promise, and we should feel no hesitation in anticipating its fulfilment. We should be especially encouraged in such an anticipation, if we knew that he was in the habit of conferring such favours. In proportion to the magnitude of the promise, would be our anxiety to weigh well every consideration that could contribute to the ascertainment of his sincerity, ability, veracity, benevolent habits, and such like. But if all these points are satisfactorily settled, then

we should fully anticipate, at the appointed time, the fulfilment of the promise. Now, this is faith. This is just that exercise of mind that God requires towards himself and his promises. There are, however, some important observations which must not be overlooked. Faith in God derives all its virtue and efficacy from *that which is believed*. It is the faithfulness of God that makes a true faith in him so important, so precious, so efficient. There are certain contingencies and possibilities, which, after all, must be admitted to attach to the promises of a fellow-mortal, as in the case lately supposed. For instance, that person may, after all, fail us, and, though the fullest confidence is reposed in his word, we may never receive what he has promised. He may change his mind; he may die before the time appointed arrives; he may lose his property, and not be able to fulfil his word; we may offend him in the interval: and, therefore, we never can be quite sure of receiving the desired good. Hence, faith in man, in the best, in the sincerest, in the most trustworthy, must always be qualified, and exercised with certain limitations. We never can be infallibly sure that we shall not be disappointed. But none of these contingencies apply to the faith of a sinner in God. He will never retract his promise, can never alter his word, will never lose his ability, will never reject a believing sinner. Hence the power of that faith in him to save the soul. When we thus believe in God, it is his word received into the soul which converts it, that is, brings it to confide, to hope, to rejoice, to obey. Thus faith is the cardinal virtue of the Christian, the root and stem of all graces. Till we believe, we are not converted: as soon as we do believe,

according to his word, we are converted. Hence the grace and promise of the gospel must be known and understood before they can be cordially believed. This is the kind of conversion which the Scriptures enforce. When once the happy change has passed,—and pass it must on all who would enjoy eternal life,—the converted man feels like one translated out of darkness into marvellous light; a new world opens before him; a new object and end of life seem to have taken possession of him; a new and opposite direction is given to the energies of his soul; and now all his desire, all his anxiety seems to be after that salvation which before he neither sought, nor apprehended, nor valued.

Reader, if the foregoing brief sketch of true conversion be scriptural, if it approve itself to your conscience, as borne out and sustained by the requirements of the divine word, if you know it to be that very conversion, without which no man shall see the kingdom of God, then it is for you to judge whether or not you have thus been converted. It is the earnest desire of the writer that you should feel constrained to answer this question, and that you should answer it now, calmly and solemnly, as before your own conscience, and in the sight of that God who seeth in secret, and who will judge you at the last day. Let me entreat you to answer this question *now* remembering that this is conversion, the conversion Jesus Christ requires, that without which none can be saved—without which you will be lost.

CHAPTER II.

THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF CONVERSION ENFORCED.

I. SIN has made it necessary that, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* This is revealed by Christ in the discourse with Nicodemus, as well as in numerous other places; and it would be unnecessary to quote further evidence on what is so plainly and uniformly expressed in the New Testament. You must, therefore, realize the fact, that the nature of God makes it necessary that every sinner should undergo this change. He has declared that no sinner, in his sinful, unrenewed and unconverted state, shall see his face; and you can no more evade this law than that which says, "All flesh shall see corruption." It is declared in that revelation which is stamped with Heaven's high authority, that a man must be converted, and become as a little child, or he cannot see God's kingdom; that every one must repent, must believe in Christ and become a new man. Now, Jesus Christ repeated this constantly, and enforced it upon all, with his own authority and that of his Father who sent him. Throughout the whole of his preaching, this doctrine appears. He sent out his apostles and many chosen disciples to call men everywhere to receive his testimony; and they went forth, preaching to sinners that they should repent of sin and turn to Christ, as the Lamb of

* John iii. 3.

God that had come to take away the sin of the world.

It is a law as certain, as infallible, as universal, as any laid upon the material universe, upon human bodies or human minds:—"Ye must be born again."* It is, moreover, a law that never has been, that never can be, dispensed with. Do you think, or can you think, that there will be any exception in your case to that law, "Except ye be converted—ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven?"† Can you imagine that there can exist any reason so weighty as to induce God to alter this law for your sake, and to receive you to heaven without a compliance with it? Impossible! Eternally impossible! If you reflect upon the nature of God, you will perceive that his will does and must prevail. It must be supreme and final, because he is God. It cannot bend, it will not bow to yours. Yours must bow to it, whatever pain and humiliation it may cost you. It is a divine obligation laid upon you by your relation to God; and until you feel its force and necessity, you are an active and open rebel against Him. You may think it a very hard thing, but that will not alter the case; or you may think it a very light thing, and talk of it in very light terms, but this will not change your position. There is no salvation—God has said it—there can be none—Christ declares that there can be none—without conversion. You may think, as many have done, that this law does not apply to your case, because you are free from great sins, and have always endeavoured to do your duty.

2. The necessity of conversion may be still

* John iii. 7.

† Matt. xviii. 3.

further illustrated, by a comparison of the nature of sinners and the nature of God. A sinner in his rebellious state cannot be received as an affectionate and obedient child of God. Think of it yourself. No absurdity could be greater or more glaring than to suppose the enjoyment of such a state as that of acceptance before God without conversion; because that were to suppose a guilty, impenitent, rebellious sinner in heaven, with a nature utterly opposed to heaven and its righteous Sovereign. It were to suppose vice dwelling in the region of perfect purity; hostility to God raised to the honour of immortal fellowship with him; and deep, unsubdued, hateful depravity reaping the reward of faith and love, and in association with all that is pure, glorious and blessed. Such incongruities could not, in the nature of things, be tolerated by Him who has the power of preventing them. A sinner in an impenitent and unconverted state would but suffer torment in the presence of heavenly purity. That which most hates God, is most opposed to his nature, could find no delight in dwelling forever with him; and that which now shrinks instinctively from the sight of his eye, from the sound of his word, and the conviction of his Spirit, would quail and tremble and be full of torment, in the presence of God and his holy angels. Then, you must be converted if you desire to dwell with God; or, if you refuse to be converted, abandon altogether the hope of being saved from hell. Sin and punishment, impenitence and destruction, are united together by an eternal, infallible law, which you never can annul, never evade, never overcome; and which God will never abrogate. Then, we say again, repent and be converted, or you are lost.

3. Consider the consequences as to your own state and feelings through life, in the prospect of death, and through your immortal existence, which the word of God represents as naturally and necessarily attendant upon conversion on the one hand, or impenitence and unbelief, on the other. The contrast between these two classes of consequences is immense, awful and beyond the power of description. You will scarcely attempt to deny that the question, Am I converted or unconverted? surpasses every other that can engage your attention; that is to say, it is infinitely more important than any question relating to your temporal condition in this life. For, whether you are rich or poor, still you must die; and then it will be of no moment whether you have fed upon delicacies, or obtained your bread, and that a scanty portion, by the sweat of your brow; whether you have lived to old age, or been cut off in youth; and to spend a few more years in a mortal body, is, after all, not so great a matter as either to make you very anxious for its enjoyment, or very sad if it should be denied. Whether you are honoured, admired and remembered among mortal men like yourself, or whether you live unknown and die unnoticed and neglected, is comparatively a trifling matter. And whether your life, be it long or short, is passed in the possession of unbroken health, or in sickness, debility and dependence, is, comparatively, a trivial matter. Or whether you have seen and tasted all the good there is for the sons of men in this life, or have been born to trouble and to toil, is also of little importance. But whether at death you shall be lost forever, or be forever saved and made happy, is a matter of infinite concern. You must admit that it is so.

All is trifling in comparison with it. The very thought of the solemn issue awaiting your death, must inevitably have an influence upon your present feelings. Think, I beseech you, of the infinite difference in the hour of death, between the two states of faith and unbelief; the two emotions of hope and fear. It is all the difference between heaven and hell! Think, then, of the vast, the astounding contrast between the peaceful departure of a real Christian, a truly converted person, having in his soul the hope of glory, and saying, as many have done, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;"* "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly;"† "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ;"‡ and the guilty recollections of an impenitent and unconverted sinner, who has all his life long served Satan and the world, and given no attention to the interests of his soul, and of that world to which he goes. Think of him, as encompassed on all sides with fear; bowed down by the insupportable burden of guilt; a conscience but a canker, or worse—a burning brand within the soul, set on fire by the anticipation of hell torments; dreading to depart, yet feeling that he must depart in a few moments more to the bar of Divine justice, and thence to the abyss of unutterable torments. This appalling contrast may readily be illustrated by a few well-known facts, which will show that I have not presented an imaginary picture, but what has been frequently, and is still constantly, realized.

Hobbes, the infidel philosopher, referring to his death, and anticipating it as near, said he "should be glad then to find a hole at which to creep out

* Luke ii. 29, 30.

† Rev. xxii. 20.

‡ Phil. i. 23.

of the world." And when he drew near to the moment, he confessed that he was "about to take a leap in the dark." The Hon. F. Newport, who had received a religious education, but turned infidel, said in his last sickness, looking at the fire in his chamber, "O that I was to lie and broil upon that fire for a hundred thousand years, to purchase the favour of God, and be reconciled to him again! But it is a fruitless, vain wish, Millions of millions of years will bring me no nearer the end of my tortures than one poor hour. O eternity! eternity! Who can properly paraphrase upon the words *for ever and ever?*" Voltaire said to Dr. Tronchin, "I am abandoned by God and man. I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months' life." The doctor said, "Sir, you cannot live six weeks." Voltaire replied, "Then I shall go to hell, and you will go with me;" and soon after expired. Would any one say, Let me die the death of Voltaire, of Newport, or of Hobbes? Take an instance or two of dying Christians. Dr. Leland, departing from life, said, "I give my dying testimony to the truth of Christianity. The promises of the gospel are my support and consolation. They alone yield me satisfaction in a dying hour. I am not afraid to die. The gospel of Christ has raised me above the fear of death; for I know that my Redeemer liveth." Mr. Walker, of Truro, said, "I have been upon the wings of the cherubim! Heaven has, in a manner, been opened to me! I shall soon be there!" To another friend, soon after, he said, "O my friend, had I strength to speak, I could tell you such news as would rejoice your very soul! I have had such views of heaven! But I am not able to say more." "O my

friends," said Mr. Janeway, "stand and wonder; come, look upon a dying man, and wonder! Was there ever greater kindness? Was there ever more sensible manifestations of rich grace? O, why me, Lord? why me? Sure this is akin to heaven. If this be dying, dying is sweet. Let no Christian ever be afraid of dying! O, death is sweet to me! This bed is soft. Christ's arms, his smiles and visits, sure they would turn hell into heaven! O that you did but see and feel what I do! Come and behold a dying man, more cheerful than ever you saw any healthful man in the midst of his sweetest enjoyments. O sirs, worldly pleasures are pitiful, poor, sorry things, compared with one glimpse of His glory which shines so strongly into my soul. O! why should any of you be so sad, when I am so glad? This, this is the hour that I have waited for!" Again, some hours after, he said, "Methinks I stand, as it were, one foot in heaven, and the other on earth. Methinks I hear the melody of heaven, and by faith I see the angels waiting to carry my soul to the bosom of Jesus: and I shall be forever with the Lord in glory. And who can choose but rejoice in all this?" In such strains he continued, till, at length, full of faith and joy, he cried aloud, "Amen! amen!" and soon after expired. A pious youth, dying in extreme bodily anguish, once said to the writer of these pages, "I would not exchange my place with a prince."*

These contrasted cases, it is admitted, are strong ones, and you may never sink to the misery of the

* See this contrast further illustrated in "THE ANCHOR," and "THE TREE AND ITS FRUITS," both published by the American Sunday-School Union. *Com. of Pub*

one class, nor rise to the exultation and seraphic joy of the other. Yet, if we admit that none of these strong characteristics may ever attach to you, still the reality, the main substance will be yours, because your state after death will be happy or miserable forever, according as you are, or are not, a converted person. Think of this: either angels will wait for your departing spirit, to convey it to the bosom of Jesus, where it will enjoy fullness of pleasure for evermore; or devils, with malign satisfaction, will watch for the fatal moment of its expulsion from the frail body, to seize upon it as their prey, to chase or drag it down to the regions of eternal despair. There is a hell, and there is a heaven. Of this the Bible assures us. The one is for the unconverted and unbelieving, the other for those who have submitted to the divine mandate, "Be converted."* The question, then, Shall I be lost, or shall I be saved? is clearly shown to be of infinite importance to each reader; and the point upon which it turns is this, Am I, or am I not, converted?

CHAPTER III.

THE STATE OF THE UNCONVERTED.

IF I may suppose that you are at the present moment unconverted, and if you candidly admit it yourself, then there are but two questions which have to be answered before we proceed with the great subject of this little treatise.

* Acts iii. 19.

The first is, Can any unconverted person really assure himself that *he* shall not be finally lost? Or, secondly, Can he really imagine that he is able to disprove the authority of that volume which asserts, that every unconverted and impenitent sinner shall really at death be lost forever?

As to the latter of these questions, I might almost take it for granted that you will not at once presume to say that the Bible is all false, and that you can prove it so. And yet, if you say so, if you only think so, or hope so, you ought to be well fortified, not with mere doubts and questions, not with quibbles and difficulties, but with positive, direct, and indubitable evidence of the most complete and satisfactory kind; else you will be inexcusable before God and your own conscience for disregarding its authority. But I am quite certain that you are not possessed of such evidence; that you cannot be prepared to set aside the authority of the Bible even to your own satisfaction, however much an alarmed and an evil heart might incline you to wish it. Yet, if you should think you are, then I must refer the consideration of your case to that part of this work where your unbelief, and the nature of your objections, will be more fully noticed. I shall here reason with you as one convinced, and powerfully feeling, that the authority of the Bible cannot be set aside.

Admitting, then, the authority of that divine and wonderful book, it is quite certain, that the unconverted will be excluded from the bliss of the heavenly state. The Bible cannot be mistaken, nor perverted in its testimony, upon this matter. It asserts, in numerous places, that will be presently noticed, the lost state of impenitent and unconverted men. It represents them as even

now in a lost state. It says that they are at this moment condemned; that it is not a question to be decided hereafter, but one that is already settled; the sentence is passed, and nothing is wanting but its execution.

Is your heart suitably impressed, is it alarmed, is it deeply affected even to agony, in the consideration of this word—**LOST**? It means, in reference to you, under divine condemnation, and in immediate and most imminent danger of eternal destruction! There is really nothing that keeps you back from everlasting perdition but the forbearance and patience of God. Is it not said, “Their foot shall slide in due time?”* Is not your peril represented in those words of the psalmist, “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!”† It is a consideration which ought to affect the heart of every unconverted person, that he fully deserves the condemnation which the divine word pronounces upon him, whether he himself thinks so or not. Divine justice calls aloud for his punishment, saying, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”‡ If you are unconverted, then you may imagine the divine sword to be brandished over your head, and prevented from smiting you only by sovereign forbearance, such as none but God could or would exercise, under the provocations of which you have been guilty, and the aggravations with which your sins are chargeable. Even the patient, gentle, tender-hearted Jesus has said concerning you, “He that believeth not is condemned already.”§ To the

* Deut. xxxii. 35.

† Luke xiii. 7.

‡ Ps. lxxiii. 18, 19.

§ John iii. 18.

place of punishment, therefore, you are already doomed. The sentence is fixed, and will be inflicted unless you repent and are converted. You are even now bound to that awful place, and on your way thither as fast as the flight of time can bear you. It is determined by the divine purpose, that nothing shall stay the process or arrest the execution of that tremendous sentence but your conversion.

You could not be thus under the divine condemnation unless you were an object of God's anger; and, surely, the persuasion of this is enough to make you, or any other sinner, weep and tremble! If you realized the anger of the Almighty, it might make you, it ought to make you, shudder, to think that you have deserved it, and anxious above all things to have it immediately averted. Do not, therefore, imagine, nor suffer any sophistry of sin, Satan, or wicked men to persuade you, that God is not angry with you, or that he will not in due time proceed to express his anger by punishment. He neither wants the right, nor the power, nor the will to destroy those who are his enemies; to destroy them individually and severally: but he suspends the execution of his wrath for their sake, and to make them monuments of his mercy. He waits to see if they will come to their right mind, repent of the evil they have done, and return, like contrite children, to their offended, but affectionate Parent.

It is further to be observed, that there is evil enough in the wicked principles which reign in the hearts of all unconverted persons, to kindle in them, even in this life, the fire that never can be quenched. If conscience were but roused in you, as it has been in many others not more guilty, to

sting and torment, and to anticipate what is coming upon you and may not be far off, you might feel even now horrors which would soon convince you that hell is a reality. Thousands of sinners have confessed that they needed no other proof of eternal torments than what they bore in their own bosoms. What is it, then, that keeps you from feeling this beginning of eternal punishment? Undoubtedly you might be made to feel it, as well as others. But you have not now in your heart the sense of his consuming wrath, because he is long-suffering, and has not yet allowed your sin to bring upon you all its consequences: but he will thus prevent its fatal issue only for a limited space. When that is expired, if the desirable end be not answered, if you be not converted, nor led to repentance by the goodness and forbearance of God,* then he will take off all restraint from the power both of sin and of conscience. You, perhaps, do not at present perceive nor feel the mysterious and mighty power there is in sin, in conscience, and in the law of God, to turn your soul into a fiery oven, or to produce within you indescribable terrors. Hence that indifference, insensibility, and unconcern, which you may have long manifested, and over which you are now called to mourn.

Sinners in general are apt to presume upon impunity, because there are no visible means of punishment and destruction close at hand. But, like the sea under the influence of a storm, how soon may their souls be lashed into a fearful tempest of terror and anguish! It affords no security to a sinner, that he is at present in health, at present resolute, at present quite calm, at pre-

* Rom. ii. 4.

sent, as he deems, safe and secure. He may not see the means by which he might be brought speedily to judgment. He may not be able to detect the agency by which the threatened vengeance may be executed. But there is a destruction that walketh in darkness; there are innumerable ways, all unseen by us, and by impenitent sinners seldom suspected, which may in an instant open before them a passage to perdition, and bring them, most unexpectedly, to their end. Unconverted persons, in every rank of life, walk heedless on the brink of the pit, or over a thin and rotten covering which conceals its mouth. How easily is he hurled over a precipice, who stands close to its verge! If he stands blindfold, or in the night, and move but one step forward, he may plunge himself into destruction. Can any wicked person, any unconverted sinner, then, really feel himself secure for one moment, when he is reminded of that which he dares not dispute, that God possesses inexhaustible means of bringing his enemies to their end whenever it pleases him to do so; that is, whenever he decides that their probation shall terminate? His quiver is full of arrows; they fly unseen at noon-day. The keenest sight cannot discern or anticipate them. The strongest shield affords no defence against them. Of these things you can scarcely be unconscious, and assuredly you will not attempt to dispute them.

Know, then, unconverted sinner, that God has bent his bow, and made ready his arrow upon the strings. It is directed against your heart. See! it points with deadly aim, with unerring certainty! Mark how justice strains the bow! The arrow trembles upon the string, and is ready to fly forth! It is all but gone! Yet justice looks

for the last assent, the divine signal, waiting till the sovereign arbiter says, Strike now, and once for all.—An impenitent sinner, smitten by “the pestilence that walketh in darkness,” once said, “I will not die!” “No,” said the miserable comforters that stood around, “you shall not.” But convulsions came on, and the awful scene was soon ended, without the sigh of repentance, or the slightest symptom of contrition. Take another instance. A few years ago, a gentleman of wealth in London, on his dying bed, felt so strong an aversion to dying then and leaving his wealth behind him, that he hastily rose from his sick-bed, went out, and walked in his yard, exclaiming “he would not die!” But the unhappy man’s strength being speedily exhausted, his affrighted friends carried him back to his bed, where he soon after expired, and probably the sooner for his mad effort to resist the summons. Alas! he knew nothing of conversion, and was destitute of faith in Him who promises eternal life to repenting sinners.

Reader, then, let me press upon your attention, let me affectionately urge home upon your heart, the most serious consideration of this sentiment—I will even call it this fact—that all those who have never passed through a divine change of heart, a true repentance and an unfeigned conversion of the soul by the mighty power of the Spirit of God—all who were never born again, and raised from a death in sin to newness of life in Christ Jesus, are in the hands of a righteous God, and are held back from the destruction they have deserved only by his sovereign pleasure. The sole reason why you, if still unconverted, are kept from the place of punishment, is because God “is long-suffering

to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*

Let us now return again to the question with which we set out. Can any unconverted person assure himself that *he* shall not be eternally lost? Can you? It is difficult to imagine that any can entertain the slightest hope that he shall escape, especially when he feels that he cannot annul the authority which says, “He that believeth not shall be damned.† “Except ye repent, ye shall all perish.”‡ The unquestionable truth of Christ’s words being admitted, it seems impossible for any unconverted person to find a single ray of hope or shadow of a reason for expecting that his eternal state should be otherwise than desperate. Whether he may entertain any vague notion of impunity for his sin, of mercy uncovenanted, of the improbability of God’s fulfilling such threatenings as the Bible contains, of punishment hereafter being only temporary, or of forgiveness at the eleventh hour; whether he entertains such notions or not, it seems quite sufficient to say that he has no authority for any of them; and even in his own view, the very best or most probable supposition of final impunity or escape from punishment, can afford but a forlorn hope. All these suppositions are mere spider’s webs, and can supply no solid ground of confidence. The sooner they are abandoned, the better for his soul’s safety and peace. If he prefers substance to shadow, divine authority to the quicksands of human opinion and speculation, he will admit at once that nothing is more clear from the Bible than that no unconverted man can escape the wrath to come; and therefore he, while such, can possess no evidence, no, not even

* 2 Pet. iii. 9.

† Mark xvi. 16.

‡ Luke xiii. 5

the shadow of evidence, against the statement that he himself is in a lost state, and, continuing in that state, will be lost, wholly lost, irretrievably and forever *lost!*

All that has been hitherto pressed upon the reader's attention in this chapter relates entirely to the unconverted. Their guilt, misery and danger have been briefly pointed out. The writer cannot, however, pass from these observations without expressing the deep anxiety he feels, lest any one should avoid the application of this most solemn part of the subject, through a mistaken opinion that, though just in itself, it is wholly inapplicable to him. Some reader may, perhaps, be induced to entertain such a thought. The very representation already given of the situation in which an unconverted sinner stands, may possibly prove so startling and alarming, that some readers may perhaps seek refuge from it in the thought, that they may possibly be already converted, and that, consequently, what has been said may, after all, not be applicable to their case. If such a thought should arise in the mind of any reader, he will allow me affectionately, but earnestly, to entreat him not to come to that conclusion lightly or hastily. Perhaps you are not quite sure: you may be mistaken. You surely are mistaken if you are resting on the pleasant thought of your religious education, your speculative belief of the gospel, your habits of attention to religious ordinances, your early discipleship, your freedom from gross vice, or your blameless life. All these, or any one of them, as a ground of hope that you are already converted, will supply me with a sufficient reason for entreating you to read on. Do not, I beseech you, shut the book at this part, and say,

“It is for a different class of persons, it does not belong to me.” Perhaps you may find that it is expressly for you. If you should be really converted, the re-examination of your state can do you no injury whatever, but may do you much good. You will be confirmed by examining your conversion to the bottom: you will then only be established in your happy state. But if there should be any room to doubt its reality, if you should not be able to show that you have undergone that conversion which Christ requires, then to dismiss the subject at this point, to refuse now to proceed in the perusal of this book, may be to thrust, or even scornfully to dash, “the cup of salvation” from you, just as God was putting it into your hands. O, be entreated not to act thus! It may prove a subject of bitter, unavailing, everlasting regret. A disinclination to read a treatise which proposes to discuss a subject so interesting and important to every human being, under the supposition that it is needless or inapplicable, is a strong presumptive evidence of your being in an unconverted state, and renders it the more necessary that you should be warned of your danger. The very disinclination to proceed would prove an awful insensibility, and ought to excite in you a fear that you deeply need the instruction that is here offered you. I entreat you, therefore, now to resolve to go on, and read through this whole treatise: or if you are still indisposed to do this, then, at least, as my only hope of doing you good, let me entreat you to turn to those short parts which are addressed to the mistaken and the self-sufficient; for in these you may find something to convince you that there is the most urgent reason, in your present state of mind, why you should read the whole.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEANS WHICH GOD HAS APPOINTED, AND ORDINARILY EMPLOYS, IN THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS.

1. "THUS saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways."* No direct means of conversion can be of any avail, until you are brought to serious and deep reflection upon your present state. If it is true that you are yet an unconverted person, this is a condition which calls for immediate consideration, and that of the most solemn and serious kind, for it is a state of condemnation. You are under a sentence of exclusion from God, from heaven and eternal happiness. If you were in a situation of temporal danger, danger to your person, or to your worldly interests, you would reflect much upon it. If you were threatened with bodily injury, with alarming disease, with distress in your circumstances, you know perfectly well that these things would make you very uneasy, deprive you of your rest, and prompt you to reflections and efforts by which the evil might be avoided or remedied. You would not be careless or indifferent, if you were told that an assassin waited to destroy you in the road you had to travel. You would not be at ease, if you felt that you had contracted the infection of some dreadful disease. You could not enjoy either pleasure or food, if you had reason to fear that some fatal catastrophe was about to befall you in your temporal affairs. And shall the greatest of all evils be threatened, threatened by an authority not to be

* Haggai i. 7.

disputed, and yet no serious reflections be produced? Will you not begin to think thus: I am a sinner, a great sinner, and I have never yet thought how I am to escape that perdition which God says awaits impenitent sinners!" O, think on your state! Seriously reflect upon the misery of being an unpardoned sinner! Think deeply of the inflexible justice which you can neither resist nor escape. Think often, and meditate deeply, on the fact, that if you should die in an unconverted state, you will be lost, forever lost! Look before you; anticipate consequences, and ask, "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? What am I, that I can hope to escape with impunity, or that I should brave the terrors of eternal wrath and infinite power?" See how clearly the divine indignation is revealed; and assure your heart how certain and destructive will be its visitation, how utterly hopeless the condition of those who shall finally become its victims. Set before your mind this gloomy prospect, and then fathom to the very bottom your sinful heart, that you may fully know how vile and wretched and helpless it is. Well would it be, if you could not merely entertain such reflections now and then, but resolutely take some suitable season, and that without delay, to investigate your case, and faithfully write down your opinion of yourself; only taking heed to form your opinion not under the influence of pride, self-complacency, or worldly notions of the goodness of your nature, but by the searching light of Holy Scripture, and with its denunciations and threatenings against all impenitent sinners clearly and fully in view. Apply no comfort to your soul on account of redeeming qualities, good intentions, alms-deeds, abstinences, or pious observances.

But remember your very nature is entirely corrupted, and your heart dead in sin; that you are a child of wrath, and without any ability either to atone for sin, or appease the wrath of God. That, besides, you are a mortal creature, and, because you may die soon and suddenly, you need an immediate salvation, and cannot wait for it till you might merit it by your works, even if a certain amount of them could deserve it; that, therefore, you can never be happy or safe till you find a complete salvation ready to be enjoyed, and adapted to an unworthy, helpless, guilty soul, that must find all its salvation at once, and in one almighty Deliverer. If you would take pains to review your case in some such way as this, you would find it tend greatly to deepen the sense of your real condition as lost, and thereby to enforce upon you an immediate and an earnest application to Him who is able to save, and who is willing and waiting to become to you all that you need.

Moreover, I might enforce the great importance of such self-examination, by reminding you of the disastrous effects of inconsideration. It is possible, if you so resolve, to abstain from all such thoughts. You may, no doubt, if such be your determination, shake off or suppress all such reflections. But would it be rational? Would it be wise? Would it be for your happiness? If you have had so much serious thought already, as to have read the volume thus far, how can you, without being wilfully guilty of destroying your own soul, resolve now, at this very point—"I will go no further, I will reflect no more. It only makes me uneasy and wretched. I will try to forget it. I will not perplex myself with these dis-

troubling considerations ; for if I do, I foresee I shall get worse, become melancholy, or sink into despair. I will try to rid myself of such thoughts, by mingling in worldly amusements." But gay amusements will not heal a wounded heart, nor effectually quiet an accusing conscience. A French physician was once consulted by a person who represented himself as subject to the most gloomy fits of melancholy. The physician advised his patient to mix in scenes of gayety, and particularly to frequent the Italian theatre ; and added, "If Carlini (a most famous comic performer) does not dispel your gloomy complaint, your case must be desperate indeed." The reply of the patient is worthy the attention of those who frequent such places in search of happiness, as it shows the utter emptiness and insufficiency of their amusements. "Alas ! sir," said the patient, "I am Carlini ; and while I divert all Paris with mirth, and make them almost die with laughter, I myself am dying with melancholy and chagrin." The utter folly of resorting to such amusements to dissipate serious thought has been proved by thousands. Cardinal Richelieu, after he had given law to all Europe for many years, acknowledged the unhappy state of his mind to a friend. When he was asked why he was so sad, he replied, "The soul is a serious thing ; it must either be sad here, or be sad forever." Now I forewarn you particularly as to this matter, and at this point. You *may* succeed, if you try to escape from these troublesome reflections, but it will only be for a time ; or if that time should be all the rest of your life, you will find that you have effected nothing for your own welfare and happiness, but, on the contrary, been the greatest enemy to your own real interest. You would not

admire the mariner who, on the first appearance of a storm, should make no preparation to meet it. You would not commend that person who, on being awakened in the night by the cry of fire, should still close his eyes and recline again for sleep, without an effort to escape! But you are called to awake from your sleep of sin, to "arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."* You may perhaps just hear the warning, and resign yourself again to fatal lethargy and carelessness; and what will be the result? I tremble to write it! O, may you shudder and tremble to read it! You may perish, and perish forever, because you here resolve to think, or read, or reflect no more upon this subject. It may give you pain; but better that it should, if it may lead to your conversion and salvation, than that you should go on till you perish, and find, in the pangs of eternal perdition, the consequences of not considering your danger, when you might have escaped it; the consequences of not inquiring into your own real case, when you might have found a divine physician waiting to effect a cure.

Be entreated then to consider your case. Unused as you may be to reflection and meditation, especially of this kind, yet your case urgently demands them; and without them there is no hope. All other means will be unavailing, if you will not reflect upon the present state of your soul. Till you are brought to examine and think seriously and deeply, there is no hope for you; there can be nothing done; you cannot be saved.

2. The word of God is the great means of conversion. "The law of the Lord is perfect, convert-

* Eph. v. 14.

ing the soul."* "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."† "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"‡ Before I proceed to point out to you the testimony of God concerning the way of salvation, and to press upon you the invitations and promises of the Divine word, it seems important to remind you of the necessity of concentrating your attention upon the one subject, and that the most momentous which can engage your thoughts. You are directed to the book of God, to seek instruction upon this one subject—how you are to be saved. It is to afford you the means of possessing exact knowledge upon this point, that the Bible has been written; and if you search not the Scriptures with a desire to attain this knowledge, if you seek not this pearl of great price, this treasure hid in a field, whatever else you may have learned from Holy Scripture, you will have read in vain, as to your soul's real advantage. Think, therefore, what it is you now wish to find; what is essential to your peace of mind, to your preparation for death, judgment, and eternity. Let nothing divert your attention from the one great and absorbing subject—your salvation. You come to the word of God for *that*, and therefore, in reading it, you must not be satisfied with curious information of ancient times; with the discovery of things deep and high, beautiful and entertaining, wonderful and gratifying—things that may enlarge your understanding, augment your stock of knowledge, delight your imagination, improve your practical wisdom; but you must read it as the law of the Lord, perfect, and

* Ps. xix. 7.

† Rom. x. 17.

‡ Jer. i. xiii. 23.

converting the soul; the proclamation of divine mercy, addressed to you as a rebel; the charter of all your hopes. You must read it, till you find its light penetrating the dark chamber of your heart—revealing the mystery of iniquity that works there; read it, till it makes you feel that you are both guilty and condemned; read it, till it makes you despair of escaping the wrath of God, or satisfying his justice for your past sins; read it, till you are penetrated with holy awe, under a sense of the divine purity and righteousness—until you tremble before its resistless truth and high authority, as you would before the presence of the eternal Judge. In short, you will have read the word of God to no purpose, unless it has made you shudder and shrink at the view of your sinful and lost condition. It is designed for your conviction and conversion: if you have not found these there, you have read it in vain; and if ever you are converted, remember it must be by this word of God. But you are to read it not only for conviction; you must search there for those views of the Saviour which will suit your case, and inspire a hope of mercy. Jesus Christ, in his divine character, his infinite ability, his perfect atonement for sin, the efficacy of his mediation, his readiness to save repenting sinners, must be sought for by you in the sacred book. The object for which it has been written and preserved in the world, is to proclaim salvation unto sinners; and you must find salvation in those sacred pages, salvation through the divine Saviour there set forth, or you will remain in an unconverted and lost state. Whatever you hear from Christian ministers, or read in good books, concerning your salvation; or whatever alarms, convictions, and inquiries may be excited in your mind

by these ; nothing short of the authority of God in the Bible must be laid as the basis of your faith and hope. Let all other helps, all other prompters, all other voices, point you to this sufficient and infallible guide. If they are rendered serviceable to you in the matter of your conversion, it must be through the medium of that safe and salutary advice, "Search the Scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me."* Every other book or tract, friend or minister, must be as a finger-post pointing to the Scripture, and saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."† There you *must* find, and there you *will* find, if you search for him, a divine deliverer from the wrath of God, an atoning sacrifice for all your sins, and a Mediator whose intercession you must engage on your behalf. This is the discovery essential to your conversion and peace of mind. This is the Rock on which you must build your hope, and against which no storms or tempests will be able to prevail.

Further, as to the frame of mind with which you are to employ this means of your conversion. You must be deeply impressed with the duty of implicitly believing in the grace of that Saviour whom the Bible presents to you. The divine ability, the atoning blood, and perfect righteousness of Christ are fully set forth in the Scriptures, that you may cordially receive them, and make them the sole foundation of your hope. If you have any doubts of the authority of God's word, then these must first be removed. For you cannot come to the Bible, to discover your salvation in

* John v. 39.

† John i. 29.

the Saviour it exhibits, unless you are thoroughly convinced that it is the word of God, and that the Saviour it exhibits is able to save your soul. But supposing, as I have yet supposed all along, that you are no infidel, no denier of this divine book, no speculator nor quibbler, then I simply urge upon you here the duty of opening the Bible with the firm conviction upon your mind—"This is the word of God; salvation is here; my Saviour is here set forth; and I must proceed to search in this book for those truths which are to reach my case, those promises that are to relieve my fears, and become the basis of all my hope of salvation. Here is divine light to instruct my mind, divine love to cheer my heart, divine mercy to forgive my sin, divine grace to renew my soul. If I can but find and appropriate these to myself, I shall be converted, I shall be blessed, and become eternally happy in defiance of all my sin and guilt, weakness and misery. I will, therefore, come to this divine volume, as many sick, or blind, or lame, came to the Saviour, saying, 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;'* 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me;'+ 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'"+ To quicken your faith in his ability, it will be of importance to impress upon your mind, how wicked and ungrateful it would be in you to harbour one unbelieving thought of his power or his willingness to save, not men in general, but you in particular. Since his promise of salvation refers to all who both need it and are willing to accept it, and contains no exception against any but the unbeliever and the impenitent, you can have no pretence for sup-

* Matt. viii. 2.

† Mark x. 47.

‡ Mark ix. 24.

posing yourself excluded from that general proclamation of mercy, which is ratified by the oath of God, and sealed by the blood of Christ. It were an impious reflection upon the wisdom and mercy of God, to suppose that he could have promised forgiveness to all who repent, and yet have intended to reject any one that might thus apply unto him. The following passages may satisfy you upon this matter. They ought to remove all hesitation, and they will, if you are in earnest, and read them aright, that is, with a just view of their design; for undoubtedly they were intended for you, and such as you. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”* “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”† “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”‡ “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”§ “Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”|| “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”¶ “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he

* Isa. i. 18.

§ Matt. xi. 28.

† Isa. lv. 1.

|| John vii. 37.

‡ Isa. lv. 7.

¶ Rev. xxii. 17.

ever liveth to make intercession for them.”*
 “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”† “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.”‡ “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”§ “Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.”|| “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”¶ “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.”**

These passages may suffice as specimens; but if you have an earnest desire to find more, you have only to open the book, and gather them in abundance for yourself.

3. Prayer is a means which God has appointed, and which you can employ. It is the direct application of your soul to the God of mercy and salvation. This is a privilege which he allows, though you are a rebellious and sinful creature; but it is a privilege accompanied with two absolute and universal conditions. The first is, that you shall pray as a guilty sinner; as one who has utterly forfeited all claim and right, and who

* Heb. vii. 25.

† 1 John i. 7—9.

‡ Matt. xii. 31.

§ Ps. cxxx. 4.

|| Acts xiii. 38.

¶ Col. i. 14.

** 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

casts himself wholly upon the sovereign mercy of the offended Creator. The principal topics of prayer, in connection with the present important subject, should be, (1.) The confession of your sorrow on account of sins, so many and aggravated that you can never fully express them. (2.) You ought to desire of God a still deeper and more just sense of the evil of sin, as committed against the purity, majesty, justice and goodness of God. (3.) Your most earnest entreaties should be put up for strength in your soul to forsake all sin, and to render it increasingly hateful and loathsome to your heart.

Another condition essential to the acceptance of your prayer, is, that you should come to God in the name, and only in the name, of Jesus Christ his beloved Son. It is certain, for it is revealed to us, that no man cometh to God but by Christ Jesus;* and that no prayer of ours can ever be heard with acceptance, that is not offered to God through this medium. In the name of Jesus Christ you may ask for the divine gift of faith, by which you will be enabled to lay hold upon the atoning sacrifice; for hope, as the anchor of your soul; for humility, submission, peace of mind, and joy in the Holy Ghost. "I am the way," said our divine Teacher and Saviour. And the apostle Paul declares, "There is one mediator," intending to imply that there is no other, "between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."†

These being the essential conditions on which you are to avail yourself of the privilege of prayer, I will now proceed to point out more fully what should be the special characteristics of such

* John xiv. 6.

† 1 Tim. ii. 5.

prayer as should be offered by one wishing for converting grace. It must, then, be particularly directed to a full and frank confession of your sin. Your own reason will convince you, that God is perfectly acquainted with your numerous and aggravated transgressions, that his eye has watched and marked all the depraved workings of your heart and actions of your life. It is, therefore, but reasonable that you should confess your sins fully to him, who knows them, and who requires the confession of them, not to inform him, but to prove your own true conviction of your guilt, and to affect your own heart with a deeper sense of its pollution and misery. Any other kind of confession but this will be unavailing. You will but defeat your own object in praying at all, if you do not make the fullest, frankest, and most humble acknowledgment of sin. It will serve no purpose but the aggravation of your guilt, to conceal or palliate any thing. There must be no extenuation, no concealment; but all must be fully confessed, and truly, sincerely, and penitently deplored by you. Be neither ashamed nor afraid to confess your sins by name to him that seeth in secret: let their multitude, as the sands on the sea shore, be told; let their aggravation be felt; let their enormity be deplored—all, all will fall short of the reality. You never can enough consider, enough regret, enough confess and repent of your sins. They are, and they ought to be felt as crimes against God and your own soul; crimes which no tears, no repentance, no sufferings of yours can ever wash away.

Remember, also, that you have no plea, no argument, no name to mention, why God should forgive your sins, but that name, that plea, which

God has himself furnished. The merit of Christ is to be your only plea, and by this alone can you urge your suit before God. Therefore, this must become the foundation of your hope, the great consideration which you are allowed to mention, because God, for Christ's sake only, forgives sin. His precious blood is everywhere in the Bible set forth as affording hope to the guilty, that they shall be forgiven and accepted. He says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved:" "Behold the Lamb of God:" "Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust:" "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* It is not so much my object, in this place, to explain the great doctrine of the Christian atonement, as to impress upon your mind the important fact, that you will find true peace with God by pleading it, and only by pleading it; for all other efforts of your desire, or hope, or faith, or repentance, will be unavailing for your acceptance, till you say, with the fervour of true penitence, "Behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed."†

"Consider all the dying pains
That my Redeemer felt;
And let his blood wash out my stains,
And answer for my guilt."

In connection with your Saviour's atonement for sin, it is necessary you should devoutly confide in the efficacy of his mediation. The doctrine is taught you in the Bible, that "he ever liveth to make intercession."‡ That he pleads for those who come to God in his name, and condescendingly takes up their suit, and says, "Father, forgive them."§ He has "entered into heaven, now

* Isa. xlv. 22; John i. 29; 1 Pet. iii. 18; 1 John i. 7.

† Ps. lxxxiv. 9. ‡ Heb. vii. 25. § Luke xxiii. 34.

to appear in the presence of God for us,"* as a great High Priest, who has entered into the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood. Upon this subject, if you are not already well-informed, you should read what is recorded in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. ii. 10—18; iv. 14—16; the whole of chap. v. and viii. Until you realize the great doctrine of Christ's mediation, set forth in these chapters, and implore the mercy of Christ, and his gracious, all-prevailing intercession, your prayers cannot come up with acceptance. We wish you to feel that there is no one beside Christ to intercede for you; and that this office he has willingly undertaken, and will faithfully perform. Beseech him to raise your mind to a full assurance of his successful interposition. If you come to God only by him, making mention of his name, and of his only, then you will be accepted in the Beloved.

“Give him, my soul, thy cause to plead,
Nor doubt the Father's grace.”

Address him in language like this:—“O blessed Saviour, by thy tender love, and by the riches of thy mercy to sinners, I beseech thee, give me thy grace, that I may grieve for my sins, and trust in thy atonement for their pardon. Soften this stony heart; enlighten this dark mind; subdue my flesh to the dictates of thy Spirit; subject my reason to the authority of thy word; and let my joy be found in thy forgiving love. Pour into my heart the precious streams of thy grace; speak peace and pardon to my guilty conscience, and leave me not to my unbelief, my guilt, my darkness. Let thy precious blood cleanse me from all my sin and heal all my wounds. Then will I rejoice and bless thy name for evermore.”

* Heb. ix. 24.

There is one more important consideration, and but one more, in reference to prayer, which I will here lay before you. This, however, it is essential to press upon your attention. Your prayers must contain the earnest expression of your dependence upon the influence of God's Holy Spirit, to work in your mind all the requisite dispositions. For you will probably feel, even in the duty of prayer, considerable distrust and uncertainty, whether you possess any right dispositions, or whether you have at all experienced divine grace. Suspicions of your own heart will arise; and Satan will endeavour either to prevent you from feeling aright, or to persuade you, that whatever your feelings have been, they are of no importance, because they are not gracious; or that they are merely the effect of fear, and not of love and true penitence; and will, therefore, prove unacceptable to God. Let me entreat you, therefore, to depend upon, and to implore, the aid of God's Spirit, both to excite right feelings, to give them power and strength in your heart, and to render them permanent. For it is the doctrine of the divine word, that you can do nothing effectually of yourself; that no saving change can take place without God's assistance; and that every good purpose, good feeling, and right prayer, must be wrought in you by the operation of the divine Spirit. You will, perhaps, distressingly feel the weakness of your own heart, and will be left to experience the inefficiency of all purposes made in your own strength, unless He strengthens you with his strength in your soul, and enables you both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. Therefore, let this truth be ever present to your mind in all your prayers,

that you need his Spirit, and can do nothing right without his aid. This is to be sought fervently and constantly. With a believing, importunate spirit, you are to implore this precious gift, this fruit of Christ's mediation, that the Spirit may help your infirmities, and work in you all holy, pious, and devout dispositions, and the work of faith with power. Your prayers upon this subject are especially to be prompted by the "exceeding great and precious promises" of the Spirit's aid: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."* "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"† Is this precious, all-important gift to be obtained by asking? How, then, can one in your circumstances abstain from asking, or forget to ask, or refuse to ask? since, without it, your heart cannot be thoroughly and savingly turned to God.

4. Another means which you are to employ, if you desire to be converted, is, hearing the gospel preached. This is a divine appointment for the express purpose of converting sinners. God has sent his ministers to preach his gospel to every creature: and if it is their duty to preach, it is a corresponding duty on your part to hear; to hear it constantly, seriously, attentively, and with devout prayer that it may convince and convert you. But how should you either believe or be saved, if you do not hear the gospel with immediate self-application? "Faith cometh by hearing."‡ Christ has commanded his ministers to preach

* Luke xi. 9.

† Luke xi. 13.

‡ Rom x. 17.

the gospel to every creature. This is the public announcement of God's mercy, of Christ's love, of the fulness, freeness, and sufficiency of the promised pardon. Can you neglect it now without neglecting your own interests, without injuring your own souls? You have abundant opportunities of hearing God's testimony of Christ by the gospel. You can scarcely be placed in any part of the land but it is within your reach. Perhaps you have even a superabundance; you have a choice out of many faithful preachers. Take heed, then, both of hearing with an unbelieving heart, and with a reserve for a future day of salvation. Listen to that minister who most faithfully reproves sin, most affectionately warns you of the danger of continuing in impenitence, and most scripturally sets forth the Saviour, in his divine ability, his full redemption, his love to souls, and his grace sufficient for all. I conceive that I need not enlarge further upon this topic. Surely, if you are desirous of being converted, you will readily find a minister to direct you to Christ. Only hear for salvation, and, looking up to God for his blessing, you will not hear in vain.

5. And, lastly, I notice under one general observation here, there are miscellaneous means which you may use, and which, though important, can receive only a short notice in this brief treatise. They are such as these: Next to your Bible, consult such books as are appropriate to your state of mind, and in which you may find the truth of the gospel enforced in a manner appropriate to your case. At the same time, avoid opening any book that might divert your mind from the great subject of your salvation. Even though such works might be innocent, in-

structive, and proper enough at another time : yet, if you feel concern for your soul, you must pursue the subject with an ardour not to be quenched ; with a daily thirst to find the water of life. You must make this the great business, which is to be pursued with the utmost avidity, with the deepest anxiety ; and till you find Christ formed in your heart the hope of glory, you ought not to rest, nor allow any thing to divert your mind from the one great object.

Let me add, God has placed within your reach another important means of assisting you, in the advice and encouragement of Christian friends, or ministers. Some such, I am to suppose, you may find near you ; and I think I may venture to say, you will find them glad to advise you on your soul's concerns.

Moreover, it is important to avoid all company of an opposite kind, especially that of the thoughtless, the gay, or the wicked. Flee from such, as from your worst foes. Their levity may be infectious ; their examples may betray your soul into perdition. Avoid, too, whatever engagements, or amusements, or recreations might divert your mind from the one subject which you ought to have ever before you. The salvation of your soul should be your earnest, supreme, and constant pursuit.

Remember, too, how important are fortitude and resolution under the frown or scorn of frivolous and gay associates. You must brace up your purpose to withstand all such assaults, for you may be exposed to severe trials in these respects. Your former worldly friends will not part with you without making you feel their contempt for your new and strange notions. But you have to

consider and determine in your conscience, which is easiest to be borne, the scorn of your fellow-men, or the just and everlasting displeasure of God. Consider, I entreat you, who has said, "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."* "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."† "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."‡ Some have not been steady in their resolution, nor firm against worldly snares. Two young men, deeply impressed with the importance of salvation and the value of their souls, commenced a religious course together. For some time they kept their vows, and steadily pursued the great object both professed to have in view. But all at once a change took place in the conduct of one of them. He began to neglect public worship, and became shy of his pious companion. Shortly after, the backslider was invited to attend a fashionable ball, and assented to the proposal. His companion was greatly distressed at the intelligence, but still felt firmly resolved, for his own part, to seek the salvation of his soul, or perish with the publican's prayer upon his lips. Upon receiving the intelligence that his friend was going to the ball, he waited upon him, and, with tears in his eyes, endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose, inviting him to go that same evening to a meeting that was to be held for prayer. But he pleaded in vain. On parting, he said to his pious companion,

* James iv. 4.

† Matt. x. 37.

‡ Mark viii. 38.

that he must not give him up as lost, for that after he had attended that ball, he intended to make it his business to seek religion. The evening arrived. One went to the prayer-meeting, the other to the amusements of the ball-room. Soon after the opening of the religious meeting, the heart of the young inquirer was set at liberty, and his soul was made to rejoice in the Saviour's love. Soon after the ball opened, the other was standing at the head of the ball-room, holding the hand of a young lady whom he was to lead down the dance. The music was just commencing, when this young man fell backward a lifeless corpse upon the floor. The other was immediately sent for to assist in conveying him to his father's house. These two young men were brothers. Reader, learn the peril of trifling with convictions, the danger of yielding to worldly friends, the ruin that may lurk in a return to worldly pleasures, the judgment that may impend upon a looking back to the Sodom from which you have once escaped. "Remember Lot's wife."*

CHAPTER V.

THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUR CONVERSION.

DEAR reader, if you are convinced that you are yet unconverted, let me entreat you now to attend to a few remarks, which may serve to show that the important and happy change signified by that word may take place; that it is a thing quite possible, and not the less so, though you should think it impossible. Unconverted persons, when they are brought to think at all seriously upon this

* Luke xvii. 32.

change, are very apt to view it as something so difficult as to be next to impossible. Their ignorance of its nature, and their entire inattention to what the New Testament teaches upon the subject, may explain how it is that they deem it impossible. As soon as they begin to think, their difficulties and discouragements seem to multiply and strengthen, till sometimes they feel disposed to abandon all hope of ever undergoing it. Perhaps they have heard the subject described as involving mystery, or in terms which appeared to them unintelligible.

It is, therefore, highly desirable that you should feel convinced that there is nothing in the nature of conversion to render it impossible in your case.

1. You are fully capable, as far as your natural powers are concerned, of understanding all the doctrines and facts of the gospel, which are made the means of producing a change. So that you can plead no natural incapacity for understanding "the truth as it is in Jesus." You can understand what it is to be a sinner in the sight of God, to be under the curse of his law, to be in danger of eternal punishment. You can understand what is meant by Christ's atonement for sin; what, by a gracious forgiveness, a full pardon, and a promise of eternal life. You can, further, understand what is meant by an entire change of character. In so far as these things can be expressed by words, you can understand them, though to feel them may require a more intimate and perfect knowledge. Yet, in this respect, these subjects stand in no worse situation than any other matters of experience. We can understand by words and sentences what it is to think, to move, to live, to reason, to be pained, and to be pleased; though

the actual experience of the things expressed by these terms gives us a more clear and complete conception of them. Hence, you ought to be impressed with the conviction, that there is nothing impossible, especially if you will pay adequate attention, in your apprehending those great truths of the gospel which must be received before conversion can be effected. It is not intended here to intimate that there are no difficulties in the way both of your apprehending and feeling these subjects; but, simply, that there is no impossibility. You may not only understand them all, and perceive their authority and intimate connection, but, by the blessing of God, which you may expect, and are encouraged to ask, you may also feel them in all their force. You can imagine no insurmountable obstacle in this quarter; for the truths in question are so simple and plain, that the humblest capacity may apprehend them: they are so plain, that even a child may understand them; and it is quite certain that many children, and persons of very inferior capacity, have understood them.

2. I observe, your heart, though sinful, is yet as susceptible of that change, called conversion, as the hearts of others who have experienced it. You possess that very nature for which the means of conversion are provided. You can think, and reason, and are susceptible of hope and fear. You, probably, feel that you possess a heart that needs conversion; for you can hardly deem it fit in its present state to be admitted into God's immediate presence. And you have, doubtless, seen or known some who have undergone this change. You knew them before their conversion, and you have seen them since, and have perceived a great alteration. Even if you have not approved of it,

you must have observed it. Then consider this fact: before their conversion they were just in the same state as you now are; that is, they had not been quickened to a due sense of their sinfulness, but they are now quickened; they had not felt the fearful consequence of dying in impenitency, but they were made to feel it: they had no aspirations of heart after the holiness of the Christian character, or happiness of the Christian hope; but they have cherished these aspirations, and do now feel them as living principles in their heart. These, then, are evidences that human nature, *your nature*, is susceptible of the great change, called conversion. Those who have undergone it were in no way different from yourselves, as to their powers of mind, as to their moral state, as to their natural endowments, or as to their sinful condition; and yet these facts show that they have changed their views, have cherished other feelings, and have become new creatures. The change, therefore, which has passed upon thousands of them, may pass upon you, in so far as this, which is all I am at present concerned to establish, that your nature presents no greater obstacles than theirs; and whatever the divine word, fitly received, has taught them, it is able to teach you, if you will attend to it seriously; and whatever the Spirit of God did in their case, in disposing their minds rightly to feel the word of truth, he is ready to do for you, and you are just as susceptible of his influence as they were. I have no wish to infuse into your mind any self-confidence; I would not, on any account, induce you to think that you can effect this change unaided or unblessed by God's Holy Spirit. But I would have you view your own nature, however bad it may be, as in no worse condition than that

of multitudes who have already been made subjects of converting grace.

3. It is quite certain, that many have been converted, and become eminent and happy Christians, who were once as averse from conversion as you are, as ignorant of what it is, and as unwilling to renounce a carnal and worldly state for the sake of the pleasures of religion. Of this you may be quite sure, for many such have testified to these facts, and stated that no hearts could be more fortified by prejudice, or disinclined by evil habits to submit to the divine authority of Christ, or obey him as their Lord and King; and yet their opposition was subdued, and their hearts inclined, and at last they submitted, and found peace and joy in believing. Now, from these general facts it may be inferred that there is nothing in your case that can place you beyond the reach of that effectual grace which has been granted unto so many others. I know it is a part of an unbeliever's disposition to indulge doubts, and to place imaginary difficulties in the way, for the very sake of seeming to throw responsibility from the sinner. He would gladly find reason to lay his destruction at God's door, and prove that, if he is lost, it is not his own fault, because there are, as he pretends, insurmountable obstacles in his way. Something of this may be discovered in the case of almost every sinner. He will find himself looking about for excuses by which he may escape from the charge of having destroyed himself; and a sinful heart is always prone to cleave to the idea, that there is an awful fatality, a dire necessity, or impossibility in his case, which prevents him from being saved, though *willing*, as he would pretend. Hence, many solace themselves, if I may use such

a term, with the idea, that if they remain unconverted, and are lost, they shall be able to prove that it was not their fault. Satan will, with unceasing effort, labour to maintain such a notion; and as long as it is maintained, there is an effectual barrier placed in the mind against believing, because the sense of responsibility in this particular case is destroyed, or the heart is deceived into a careless state.

Now, there can be little hope of bringing you to a right view of your duty, as to repentance, and faith in God's appointed medium of salvation, as long as any idea of this sort remains. If you apprehend there is any barrier to your conversion, placed by nature, or Providence, or the Saviour, you are not likely to make any effort. He who believes any result to be impossible, is not likely to use the means of effecting it, even though he may see those very means accompanied with success in many similar cases. So the alarmed, but yet unbelieving sinner, is apt to imagine his own case to be a solitary exception, and to indulge this fancy against all fact and reasoning, as well as against the general assertion of Scripture, rather than give up his unbelieving thought of the insurmountable nature of the barrier which he fancies is placed in his way. But all such discouraging and desperate notions ought to be relinquished. It is impossible that you can have any foundation for them. The gospel is intended for all, without a single exception. Its Author says, he "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."* If your vague suspicion, that you are excluded by some insurmountable obstacle, were true, then the testimony

* 1 Tim. ii. 4.

of God, and of Jesus Christ, would be false. Besides, multitudes who have had the same suspicions, and laboured under them for long periods, have at length discovered them to be false, and have cordially believed God's testimony, and found the joy of acceptance and reconciliation. And why should not you? Moreover, you cannot know certainly that any such difficulty really lies in your way. You must admit that it is mere suspicion, and that you have never resolutely tried to overcome the supposed difficulty, nor earnestly sought divine assistance to remove it. "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain."* Be entreated, then, by one who is earnestly desirous of your salvation, who has seen many such suspicions melt away before the truth, to try the effect of fervent, continued prayer. But let your prayer be prompted by a conviction of the ability and willingness of your Saviour to remove this and every obstacle. Select out of the Scripture, and use in prayer, and in faith, some passages which freely promise salvation to all, even the chief of sinners; such as exhibit the abounding of grace above sin; † such as display the infinite power of God to remove every difficulty, and gather out all the stumbling-stones; ‡ such as challenge the doubting to produce any ground for their fears; § such as encourage you to disclose all your heart to God; "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord."|| Then would your difficulties vanish, your doubts be relieved, and divine succour be afforded, to work in you both to will and to do according to God's good pleasure. ¶

* Zech. iv. 7.

† Rom. v. 20, 21.

‡ Isa. lxii. 10.

§ Jer. viii. 22.

|| Isa. i. 18.

¶ Phil. ii. 13.

4. It is very common for the unconverted, when they become a little acquainted with their miserable and guilty condition, and are somewhat alarmed on account of it, to imagine that there exists a positive decree of the Almighty against them, which absolutely excludes them from forgiveness, and seals them up to despair and final ruin. Sometimes they even plead this as an excuse for their total neglect of religion, and abandonment of themselves to a careless and dissolute life. But if any reader has entertained such a notion, let me entreat him to consider and examine the foundation upon which it rests, or rather, its want of all foundation. He will nowhere find in Scripture any such decree. He would not, surely, pretend that there is any special determination of God against himself. He would not pretend that any such exists in the Bible; he would not allege that he has had any special revelation of it made to him. The only ground, therefore, which he can state for such an opinion, must be some strong impression upon his mind, or some general denunciation of Scripture, in which, by inference, he supposes himself to be included.

As to any impression upon his own mind, however strong it may be, he has far more reason to think that it is a mere vain imagination, suggested by a guilty conscience and a despairing heart, or a direct insinuation of the enemy of his soul, than any portion of revealed truth, or any impression wrought by the Spirit of God. It is quite certain that God's Spirit calls upon him, in common with all sinners, to repent; and this He would not do, if his case were absolutely sealed. There cannot be admitted to exist any disagreement between the dictates of the Spirit in the written word, and

the impressions produced by the same Spirit on our hearts. If the Spirit by the word commands and urges the sinner to repent and believe the gospel, the same Spirit cannot suggest to his mind that repentance and faith would be useless, because of a divine determination against his salvation. Hence, he ought to give up and abandon his own imagination, as idle, false, tending to his misery and ruin; and abide by the language of the written word, as clear and infallible, and not to be contradicted by any vague notions or imaginations of his own sinful and prejudiced heart. Let God be true to his word, but every imagination of our mind that is opposed to that word, false.

Some who entertain the opinion now under consideration, would, perhaps, plead that very word of God as the authority for it; and would even endeavour to prove, that there are express declarations of God in his word, from which they infer their final condemnation. I have met with many who have long entertained such an opinion. But I have always found, when they have been required to point out the specific passages of Scripture from which they have drawn their inference, that they are merely sentences of condemnation against sinners in general, some particular class of sinners, or such as have apostatized from the faith they once professed. All such threatenings are, however, *conditional*. They bind God to inflict final punishment if the characters so threatened do not repent. But the possibility of repentance is supposed in every case, as is evident by the fact, that many such characters, on hearing the threatening, have repented and found mercy. Even some of those clearly defined and awfully threatened by Scripture, have turned from their evil ways, and,

through divine mercy, found forgiveness for all their sins, however great and aggravated. This is true, even of such as have been notorious apostates from their first profession. Thus, Peter denied Christ, and yet was restored. Your case is, however, not like his. You have never yet professed to be converted, and therefore cannot be an apostate from the faith of Christ. Passages of Scripture, therefore, which relate to such persons, can have nothing to do with you. You cannot find any sentence of exclusion from forgiveness, in passages which relate alone to those who have denied the Saviour, or renounced the faith of a Christian. I will suppose, therefore, that you derive your notion of a final sentence having already passed against you, from some of those comprehensive and awful denunciations which are directed against sinners in general, or some particular class of sinners, as blasphemers, drunkards, unbelievers, and such like.

Here, then, I wish you to observe, that all such threatenings, throughout the whole Bible, are *conditional*, that is to say, the execution of them is dependent upon their effect. They leave room for repentance. They are employed for the purpose of producing it; and their very announcement presupposes that God will wait to see their effect, whether they produce repentance; and that, wherever such repentance is produced, he can no more proceed to execute the threatening, than fail to execute it where it has produced no effect. A clearer illustration of this cannot be presented, than in the case of the Ninevites. A positive threatening was uttered; a time solemnly fixed for its execution, without any reserve; no condition was even expressed; no offer of mercy

ever made to them ; and yet the threatening, because it was regarded, because it wrought repentance, could not be enforced. The very fact, that forty days were allowed as a reprieve, seemed to imply that there was room for repentance on their part, and mercy on God's. Though the prophet received no commission to say so ; yet the fact proved, that however severe the threatening of God, and however brief the time allowed, yet, if repentance were wrought, he would accept it, and withhold the threatened evil. This is the principle applicable to all the threatenings of God in Scripture against sinners. Although there may be no express offer of mercy in the immediate connection of the threatening, yet there are, elsewhere in the book, sufficient testimonies to the readiness of God to exercise such mercy towards repenting sinners of every class and degree. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."* Hence it will follow, that there is no decree of God revealed in the Bible that can warrant any unconverted person in concluding that, because he is a sinner, or the greatest of sinners, or because he belongs to a special class of sinners, therefore there is no mercy for him, or no possibility of deliverance from the destruction which is equally threatened against all transgressors of God's law.

5. We may now proceed somewhat further, and observe—neither is there any evidence of an unwillingness on God's part to forgive your sins. It is no unusual thing for the guilty mind to ima-

* Isa. lv. 7.

gine and fear this ; but then it must be when that mind loses sight altogether of the revelation of mercy in the gospel, by Christ Jesus. If that be examined, and if its authority be regarded, instead of its being possible for any sinner to discover in it a single trace of unwillingness in God to save him, the very reverse appears in almost every page ; and, indeed, the whole scheme of the gospel is the most clear, unequivocal, and emphatic declaration of God's willingness to pardon sin, and receive repenting rebels again into his favour. Let me set before you here a few passages as specimens of the general tenor of the divine testimony upon this point—the willingness of God to forgive. “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die ?”* “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”† “Ready to forgive.”‡ “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”§ “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”|| “Your heart shall live that seek God.”¶ “Seek ye me, and ye shall live.”** “Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”†† Now, against these general and comprehensive expressions of God's mercy and grace, no exception ought to be taken, unless there can be shown to be equally explicit ground for it, and unless an authority equally valid and clear can be pleaded. But we are quite sure no sinner, of any

* Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

† John vi. 37.

‡ Ps. lxxxvi. 5.

§ Isa. xliii. 25.

|| Luke xix. 10.

¶ Ps. lxix. 32.

** Amos v. 4.

†† Jer. xxix. 13.

description or class, can produce any exception to these testimonies from the book of God ; but, on the contrary, we could show that they have been applied to individual cases of all kinds of sinners, who have found in this a sufficient warrant for repentance, and sufficient comfort in repentance. They have believed, and found forgiveness and acceptance through the appointed medium of a Saviour's blood.

6. It is still further incumbent upon me to observe, that all the grace expressed in and by the gospel presents the same aspect towards you as towards all other sinners. We find no exceptions in the divine word, which could be possibly construed into any exclusion of particular persons. The apostles of Christ do not present the general and comprehensive offer of mercy in the gospel, and then qualify or restrict it by mentioning that any particular class, or even any individuals, are excepted ; but they represent it as looking towards all, and presenting a divine pledge or engagement to every one who truly repents and unfeignedly believes the holy gospel. It is perfectly vain and futile, then, for any man to make exceptions which are not in the word ; or to plead that such can exist, when he has no intimation of them, and can by no fair means infer any from Scripture language, so as to include himself. The only exceptions that can exist are such as involve a neglect or rejection of the very matters commanded, without a compliance with which there can, of course, be no salvation ; but then these things are repentance and faith, and nothing in the sinner's natural condition. Hence, it is clear, that the gospel has the same external aspect towards you as towards all, without any exception or qualifica-

tion. It views all as lost and corrupt, and it impartially requires of all repentance of sin, and belief in the grace of Christ for pardon and acceptance. It represents the blood of Christ as equally efficient towards one as towards another. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* It is represented under the figure of "a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness."† It is nowhere said that sinners only of a certain class shall enjoy the benefit of his atoning blood, or that sinners of another class will be excluded; but, on the contrary, it is said, "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."‡ His intercession is represented as continued in heaven, and as exercised on behalf of all that come unto God by him: "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."§

7. I may complete this part of the subject by observing that you are not cut off from any means of grace which are essential to your salvation, or which others enjoy. You may observe, that the principal means which others have enjoyed and used, and through which they have attained to conversion, are, the word of God read and preached, with access by prayer to the throne of God in the name of the divine Mediator. If you could inquire minutely of these what means they found lessed to their salvation, you would find that the same are enjoyed by yourself. You can read the Bible as well as any other book; you can hear the gospel explained as well as any other subject: you can as readily devote an hour to prayer and medi-

* 1 John i. 7. † Zech. xiii. 1. ‡ 1 John ii. 2. § Heb. vii. 25.

tation as to any other engagement. It is of no avail for any one to say, "But there is something beyond all these which cannot be commanded, and which I have not in my own power." Of course, for what is not in his power he is not to be held accountable, any further than as it may be necessary for him to depend upon the bestowment of it, to implore it fervently, and to rely upon the faithful promises which are made relative to its bestowment. But as to those matters for which he is held responsible, and which are fully within his reach, he may be sure that he has not yet faithfully employed these. Till he has done so, and done it in dependence upon the divine blessing, he cannot, even to his own conscience, release himself from his responsibility. Only let the unconverted sinner search the Scripture for salvation, and pray in earnest, with perseverance, and in dependence upon the promised and all-sufficient grace of God: and if he is disappointed of the blessing, he will be the first sinner so left to perish without grace and without hope. Try, sinner! Let me urge you to put God to the test of his fidelity to his own promise, and you shall soon find Him both a prayer-hearing and answering God. You can have no right to complain, or demur, till you have fully complied with the commands of Scripture. Be entreated, then, not to deceive yourself with the fatal mistake, that you have any vindication for your unbelief and impenitency in the fact that grace is God's gift, since your destitution of that is clearly traceable to your own indisposition to seek it. "Ye have not, because ye ask not;"* or, you have asked amiss—

* James iv. 2.

coldly, without sincerity, without faith, and without perseverance. Would you but resolve never to cease asking till you had received, or never to leave the cross of Christ till you either perished or were saved, you would soon enjoy "the blessing, even life for evermore."*

CHAPTER VI.

REASONS WHY YOU HAVE NEVER YET BEEN CONVERTED.

My intention in this chapter is, to examine the principal reasons which may be assigned for your continuance in a state of unconversion, with the view of impressing your mind more deeply and thoroughly with the conviction of the sinfulness of that state. It is, and it ever will be, quite impossible for any unconverted sinner to shift from himself the responsibility of being still, by his own free choice, an unconverted man, as long as Christ can say to all such, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."† He must know and feel that he has never yet been willing to become a new creature; has never set himself heartily to pray for it; has never used the means of coming to a full knowledge of the guilt of sin; and has never anxiously and steadily pursued the inquiry into God's method of salvation. He has not, therefore, acquitted himself of his responsibility, and he can in no way escape from the guilt of remaining to the present hour in an unconverted state. While it is clear he has not

* Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

† John v. 40.

done his part, he can have no excuse for endeavouring to rid himself of the charge of neglecting his salvation. The reasons, therefore, of his continuing so long unconverted, ought to be placed before him, and pressed upon him with all the force that properly belongs to them.

Here we observe, 1. That the free and resolute choice he has made of a sinful life, proves that he has never really desired to be converted. He has delighted in evil things, has given a decided preference to a carnal state, and has entered heartily into the vain and sinful pleasures of this life, considering only how he might gratify his body, or please his carnal and sensual mind. He can scarcely have done this without a distinct knowledge of the better way; and if with such a knowledge, then his sin is the greater, the more aggravated, because his preference is the more clear and resolute. He knew there was a strait gate and a narrow way, leading unto life; but he preferred to walk in the broad way, that leadeth to destruction, in which the many go.*

The unconverted reader cannot but be conscious that he has given his entire heart to the vanities of the world, and to his temporal interests; and that he has done so even to the conscious disregard of his higher interests; frequently against convictions of his sinful state, and of his need of an entire change. He cannot but have experienced many admonitions and calls, many inward warnings, which have been utterly disregarded, and in defiance of which he has continued to live, and to pursue worldly and temporal good. This obstinate adherence to his own sinful ways

* Matt. vii. 13, 14.

ought now to appear to him as a positive and direct resistance to the will of God. Herein he has shown the depraved tendency of his affections, the perversion of his will to the choice of sin, and the guilty neglect of his eternal interests, with which he cannot but perceive himself to be chargeable.

2. It may be further alleged, that he has been guilty both of inattention to the truth of God, and of disbelief of its most sacred and important principles; and this is another reason why he has not been converted. He has not applied his mind to the humble and candid examination of the gospel; he has not allowed it to operate upon his heart; he has both directly resisted it, and, by indulging dispositions opposed to the truth, has disqualified himself for understanding and feeling it; has raised clouds of evil passions, which have darkened the mind and prejudiced the heart against the dictates of the divine word. At times that word may have been powerfully urged, its authority presented to the mind, and its light and power in part perceived, so as to convince the judgment and leave the conscience without excuse. But even all this has been resisted by a corrupt heart and determined will, still urging him forward in the way of disobedience. Probably he has laboured to fortify his mind by sophistical arguments, and by the reading of books designed to prejudice men against the Holy Scriptures. How many have been constrained to confess on a dying bed, that they were kept from an attention to the Bible by the wicked writings of infidels! The following might be a salutary warning. "I was lately called," said the Rev. W. A. Gunn, in a sermon at Lothbury church, "to attend a young man at Hoxton. On entering his room, I found him in

the greatest horror of mind. Thinking it perhaps arose from the deep remorse of a penitent sinner, I began to point to Jesus, the sinner's only friend. With an agonizing look of despair, he said, 'Ah! sir, but I have rejected the gospel. Some years since, I, unhappily, read Paine's Age of Reason. It suited my corrupt taste. I embraced its principles. After this, wherever I went, I did all in my power to hold up the Scriptures to contempt. By this means I led others into the fatal snare, and made converts to infidelity. Thus I rejected God, and now he rejects me, and will have no mercy on me.' I offered to pray for him. But he replied, 'Oh! now it is all in vain to pray for me.' Then, with a dismal groan, he cried out, 'Paine's Age of Reason has ruined my soul,' and instantly expired." Reader, you may not have gone quite so far. But you have, probably, never carefully and seriously read your Bible; never opened it with this impression, "Here I must seek, for here alone I can find, the salvation of my soul." This, then, is culpable indifference, practical infidelity.

3. This has, no doubt, been accompanied with a real dislike of God's service. The unconverted sinner may be conscious that he has all along disapproved the ways of God. It has appeared to him a very undesirable thing to become a real Christian. He has thought it less pleasant to obey God than to follow the corrupt inclinations of his own heart, which he ought to have resisted; because it is an essential and natural property of a man, to have the power of controlling his propensities by a sense of duty and the dictates of conscience. Is it any wonder that a person should remain unconverted, who has been cherishing a

dislike of the service of God, who has been doing every thing in his power to alienate his heart from His service by a contrary practice, and who has never contemplated seriously either the honour and happiness of serving God, or the guilt and misery of continuing in a state of rebellion? Is it any wonder that he should be still unconverted, to whom the very state of subjection to God, implied in the term conversion, has appeared odious bondage; and its opposite state, the only true liberty and the highest delight? Assuredly, there is in these considerations a sufficient explanation of the fact that he is still in an unconverted state.

4. Another reason may be pointed out, in the ungrateful inattention which unconverted persons show towards the Saviour. "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light."* Many such persons profess, indeed, to acknowledge Christ as their Saviour; but how far they are either from cherishing any sincere and supreme respect for him, or any ardent love, may be inferred from their habitual neglect of him, his teaching, his ordinances, his admonitions and his promises. If he is the divine Saviour, the only Saviour by whom we can be delivered from the guilt and dominion of sin, then, the neglect of him must prevent the enjoyment of the blessings he alone can impart; then, to disregard him is, in fact, to turn away from the only means which could effect our conversion and salvation. Hence it is obvious, that every unconverted person, in a land where the character and gospel of Christ are known, stands chargeable with rejecting the counsel of God against himself, and so of resisting the

* John iii. 19.

means appointed for his salvation. Who can say that, if he had attended gratefully to the truth as it is in Jesus, and especially to the claims and instructions of the Saviour of sinners, he might not long since have found the word made the power of God to his salvation? But though the Saviour has appealed to him, and though the word has been in his hand, and though God's ministers have, in his name, besought the unconverted to be reconciled to Him, yet such persons have not attended to the word and character of their Saviour: they have turned a deaf ear to "the voice of the charmer, charming never so wisely." Is it, then, any wonder that they should yet be in an unconverted state? Here, alone, is reason sufficient to account for the deplorable fact. Deplorable, because they may have lost many invaluable opportunities, and much time, which can never be recovered.

5. They may be conscious of the fact, that they have never yet seriously and devoutly chosen to be converted. That very change which they ought to have desired, because it was both reasonable in itself, and essential to their happiness and salvation; that change which is enforced upon them, and upon all, by the high authority of God, they have never really wished to experience, and never chosen, as a change which they felt to be necessary. Here, then, they may clearly detect the real cause of their continuance in their present unconverted state. While it is thus obvious that they have never wished to undergo it, they have no need to look for any other reason. Their want of this state of mind is their sin; just as it is the sin of a thief, that he did not choose to be honest, or of a drunkard, that he did not choose to be sober; and the want of a right will, in a case of

clear duty, instead of extenuating the crime, proves that it is crime; and it is on account of that bad and immoral state of mind that the unconverted stand guilty before both God and man. Had the sinner chosen to be converted, that is, had his will been inclined or determined to the change, it would have taken place long ago; yea, the very moment his will had been turned effectually, he would have found the power of God working within his soul. But he would not come unto Christ; and he knows it. He knows that he never has yet felt his heart determinately fixed upon that conversion which God requires. This is what, I think, you will be conscious you have never felt. You cannot but know that you never did calmly and fully resign and commit yourself to the hand of Christ. Although you are conscious that you have often heard his command to repent and believe the gospel; although you have often felt convinced that you were a sinner, and in danger of eternal perdition; although you have all along known, and perhaps secretly confessed, that you are bound to repent and seek the salvation of your soul; yet this very act of choosing to do so, and proceeding to put your choice into execution, you have never done. But, on the contrary, you have trifled with the great business, delayed it, and excused yourself, perhaps in some very subtle and sophistical manner, for this hesitation and reluctance. Now, this is the very state of mind which the Scripture represents, as proving those who are in it guilty of that sin of sins—*unbelief*. The Saviour says, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”* When he mourned over the people of Jerusalem, just before his death, he reproached them with this:

* John v. 40.

“How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and *ye would not!*”* Now, could he or would he have laid this at their door, if there had been no sin in it, or if it admitted of any reasonable and valid excuse? Assuredly he would not. He could not have reproached them if they had not been, in this respect, highly culpable. And is it possible you can deem it any other than a very grave and awful matter, never yet to have solemnly willed to be changed in heart and character, when called to it by so high an authority, when urged to it by a clear sense of your sin and danger? Surely you must not merely admit the fact that it has been so, but that it involves very deep guilt, so to have neglected your soul’s salvation, or so to have persisted in a course that you knew was opposed to the will of Jesus Christ. When there ought to have been a perfect agreement, an absolute identity, between your will and his on the matter, there has been the most direct opposition. He *would*, but you *would not*. Yea, when he expressed his will in the plainest language, and enforced it in the most commanding manner; when he even condescended to add entreaty the most affectionate and urgent, to admonition the most solemn and awakening; still you did not coalesce, nor feel at all more inclined to comply, but resolutely held out, or drew back, to the indulgence of your sinful heart, under cover of some excuses as vain as they were delusive.

Unconverted reader, let me entreat you to look back, and consider how very often you have distinctly detected this opposition of your will to the Saviour’s, and always maintained your resolution, always retained the secret decision of your will

* Matt. xxiii. 37.

still to continue as you were. It is grievous to think that this has been the case every time God has made a direct and distinct appeal to your conscience, every time you have been sensible of the authority of his word in any powerful command to repent, every time a light has been inwardly granted, either to show the way to the cross by repentance, or the way to perdition by disobedience. So that if you have been a hearer of the gospel, or religiously educated, you must, many hundreds and thousands of times, have felt the divine authority and love of your Saviour weighing in your mind against the fascinations of a sinful state; and just so many times you have, by distinct acts of your will, chosen to go on in your unconverted state. Your present condition, then, is one of much guilt. There is a vast aggravation of criminality in those acts of your will which have decided against the light of truth, against the plain commands of your Saviour, against the powerful attractions of his love. It is said, "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."* Can you deny that a clear case has been made out against you of a resolute and fixed purpose of will to remain opposed to the command of your Saviour? He says, "Repent." You have virtually said, "I will not." He says, "Be converted." You say, "I will not be converted." And on this ground, therefore, you stand clearly and fully convicted before God.

6. I am well aware that many of the unconverted, and especially such as have enjoyed Christian instruction, are disposed to plead in extenuation of their unwillingness, that they cannot give

* Luke xii. 47.

themselves grace ; and that such is the nature of their sinful state, that they cannot change for the better, and that they cannot will otherwise than they do. I believe this is a very prevalent excuse with the unconverted of a certain class, and that it is an indication of a state of mind greatly hardened and alienated from the *fear* of God. This is an attempt to throw off the responsibility from themselves, and to insinuate that their being unconverted is rather their misfortune than their sin. If this is the view or feeling of any reader of this treatise, I hope he will patiently allow me to expostulate with him upon the extreme improbability of the issue of his case proving as he may expect : and for this reason, that the Scripture nowhere admits that the unwillingness of the sinner is to be palliated or excused in any degree, or charged upon any one but himself. So that, supposing his plea even appeared plausible, and did not admit of any satisfactory reply on the ground of reason, still Scripture is so much, so universally against the plea, that he might, on that ground alone, be sure there was a fallacy in it ; and that if it were acted upon, and looked to for a valid defence at last, it would utterly fail. But the very fact of God's threatening those that refuse ; of his having severely punished many who have done so ; his assurance that they will at last be without excuse ; and the further fact, that we often see a fearful retribution inflicted upon those who have refused, through the power of a guilty conscience, and in their own agonizing sense of the moral wrong that they have perpetrated in refusing ; these considerations alone would form a strong presumptive evidence, amounting to a sufficient proof, that there must be a delusion some-

where in that man's mind, who feels disposed to throw the responsibility of continuing in impenitence from himself, either upon the laws of his nature, or the sovereignty of God. Such considerations might be sufficient to induce him to abandon so insecure a refuge for his conscience, and lead him to the conclusion, that God will assuredly be justified when he speaketh, and be clear when he judgeth.*

But may not the unconverted himself perceive the very essence of the fallacy he indulges? Is there not room for a direct appeal to his own consciousness? He knows that he cannot sincerely plead any constraint upon his will. That which arises from the evil habits he has indulged, is properly no constraint, but a cherished desire; no violence done to his will, but a distinct preference the will itself gives to that of which he affects to complain as a grievance and a necessity. Is he not conscious of the very same freedom of choice in rejecting the command of God, as in complying with any sinful propensity? Is he not just as much at liberty when he prefers to continue in his unconverted state, swayed as he is by the motives which incline to a life of sin, as when he resolves to eat his food, to attend to his business, or to pursue his pleasures? Surely he must admit, that he is conscious of acting in all these cases under the impulse of the same free-will. What right, then, can he have to select one case, and endeavour in that to rid himself of all responsibility, by pleading the weakness of his will to do what is right, and its strength to do what is wrong? If he is a free agent in one of these acts, so he is in all. The bad inclination or the

* Ps. li. 4.

bad habit is no extenuation of the deed ; because still it is a deed of choice, and not of constraint against choice ; and of this he is and must be conscious. He cannot but be convinced, in defiance of all sophistry and all palliation, that he really has chosen, hitherto, the course he has pursued ; he has wilfully resisted God's command and Christ's entreaty, and just as wilfully preferred an unconverted state.

The extreme absurdity of expecting that he will be able to justify himself by the plea supposed, may be still further evinced, by just taking up any other case in which the depravity of the will has been displayed by the breach of moral obligations. How absurd it would appear, even to the party with whom I am now reasoning, to hear a disobedient servant, or an undutiful child, reply, when charged with the violation of duty, "Very true ; I do not deny the charge, but my will was indisposed to comply ; and, you know, I could not help my will being opposed to yours !" Suppose a criminal, arraigned for robbery or murder, arguing in his defence upon the same principle—"I did not choose to be honest ;" or, "I know I willed to commit that murder, and I could not help doing according to my will." Now, all these cases would appear the more aggravated by the distinct acknowledgment of the will having deliberately chosen so to act ; and every impartial man, instead of admitting that such a plea removed responsibility, would say, that the criminality was hereby made the more obvious, that the guilt was placed precisely at that very point, and that this *wilfulness* was the very thing which constituted the guilt, for without that there could have been none.

The unconverted person, who pleads his in-

ability, or impotency of will, to choose God's commands, or to submit his heart to the authority of the Saviour in the business of repentance and faith, should remember, that he is pleading nothing to the point; nothing that God either will or can admit, or ought to admit. He ought to be aware, that he is not pleading that he had no will of his own in this business; if he could do that justly, it might avail; but his whole plea is, that, with the natural power to will, he had an inclination to will what his conscience and judgment told him was evil. This is, therefore, no excuse in the sight of God, but the very highest proof of guilt. He labours under a grievous fallacy, therefore, who imagines that he can make out a valid extenuation of his impenitence and unbelief, by referring to this subtle question of his will. He would do much better by humbly acknowledging that all the guilt lies upon his own head; and that, when he shall appear in the judgment, he will undoubtedly be speechless before that righteous Judge, who now "commandeth all men everywhere to repent;"* and who will then say, "These mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."†

Let me faithfully forewarn the reader, that all his excuses will be found a refuge of lies. All his metaphysical sophistry is opposed to the plain, common-sense view of the case. Facts are before reasoning, and more weighty than opinion; and he may rest assured, that the repose he seeks for, in these false refuges of a corrupt and perverted reasoning, will be disturbed at last by the stern reality of his condemnation. "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it:

* Acts xvii. 30.

† Luke xix. 27.

and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it."*

7. It is, however, necessary to observe and point out here an opposite error, into which others fall; an error of presumption, no less fatal, and, perhaps, even more prevalent, than the one just combated. It consists in supposing that, because they feel they have a will of their own, they can direct it to the discharge of this spiritual duty of repentance and faith at any time; and so they defer the duty under the false notion, that when they choose, the great work can be done. But this notion is just as perilous as that which would release the will from all responsibility. This would represent the will of man as alone efficient, while the other would reduce it to a cipher. In the one case the unconverted would sink the idea of the will altogether, as if they had none; in the other, they would make it omnipotent. How perverse are the thoughts of transgressors!

It is evident from the Scriptures, that the real truth lies in neither of these extremes. And so our experience proves it to be. For, after every attempt, on the one side, to escape from the guilt of impenitency, it still cleaves to the conscience; and, on the other, many who have been self-sufficient and presumptuous, and depended upon their own strength of purpose, and future good intentions, have been constrained in anguish to confess their hardness of heart, and to acknowledge that, as they had refused the call of God, he had left them to be filled with the fruit of their doings. It is certain, that he who presumes upon his future ability to perform spiritual duties, does not understand the real weakness of his soul towards all that

* Isa. xxviii. 20.

is morally and spiritually good; does not know, nor feel, the corruption of his whole nature, nor the perverting influence which evil affections exercise over his will. The promise of pardon and grace is to those who repent when the testimony is addressed to them; not to those who promise to repent and believe at some future period. This would be to parley and bargain with God for a continuance in sin. His nature, as well as his word, forbids it. He who thus presumes to defer obedience to the divine testimony, is a stranger to the dependence of sinful man upon the grace of God for so important an act as that of repentance. Does he know or believe the word of Christ, "Without me ye can do nothing;"* "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him;"† and does he presume, that of his own unassisted free-will—a will altogether under the influence of corrupt motives hitherto—he can choose at any time to return to God, and change his own nature? A mortal, sinful man ought to tremble at the thought of such temerity. Or does he imagine that, after suffering the accepted time, now, to pass; the time in which compliance on his part would have placed him in a happy conjunction with sovereign power; after treating the supreme command with indifference and delay; after resolving to continue unconverted, *willing* to reject the present offer, that he may continue in sin—he shall be able to obtain, and God will be obliged to impart, those gracious influences, without which he can neither be converted nor saved?

In true conversion, there is required a right affection of the heart: this is what he cannot give

* John xv. 5.

† John vi. 44.

to himself. For it he is dependent upon the grace of God; and this he can have no scriptural warrant to expect, if he neglect the present call, and reject the Lord's accepted time. For that grace he is dependent now. His entire hope of receiving it is involved in an immediate and humble casting of himself in faith upon the promise, which is implied in the exhortation, "TO-DAY if ye will hear his voice."*

8. I must not omit to notice, among the reasons why some have never yet been converted, the predominant love of an easily besetting sin, which holds the soul fast after it has felt itself willing to give up all other sins. This is a cause which extensively operates in the minds of persons awakened to a sense of their danger. Sin, in some of its forms, perhaps in all but *one* form, may appear exceedingly sinful; but if it retain its dominion in only one particular, the soul is still its slave. This may be an easily besetting sin, a sin which you excuse to yourself, which you extenuate and diminish; but it is a true saying of Scripture, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."† A little leak will admit water enough to sink a ship. A little spark will kindle a fire that may burn a house, or a city. So, what men call a little sin, and which they would have spared, because it is little, and alluring, will corrupt and subjugate the whole soul. Let sin but possess the affections of the heart, and it will run like poison through the blood. How can the salvation of the soul be pursued, if even a single sin is cherished? The very thought of making provision for it, proves that the heart is not right in God's sight: the attempt to conceal it is vain, and can be attended only

* Heb. iii. 7.

† Gal. v. 9.

with disappointment and disgrace. Be assured that, in the indulgence of any sin, or sinful affection, there is evil enough to counteract all your anxiety after salvation. Now, it may be the case, that you have long had your thoughts directed towards the desirableness of securing by faith an interest in Christ; but, at the same time, you have had a secret inclination to some forbidden iniquity, or you have been living in some sinful gratification; and if so, here you may discover the reason why you have never found peace or hope. If sin reigns, it is directly hostile to grace. You may have been in the habit of reading the Scriptures, and of attending to other means whereby religious impressions are produced, and religious habits maintained. But these do not constitute conversion. That, as already shown, is the entire surrender of the heart to Jesus Christ. It necessarily implies the sacrifice of every sinful habit, every corrupt affection. Jesus Christ came to save his people from their sins; and that man cannot be a partaker of converting grace, who would desire any one of those sins to be excepted from the destruction to which all are alike doomed. If, then, you feel that you are yet unconverted, though you may have attended to some of the means of conversion, be entreated to consider, whether there is not yet an easily besetting sin, which forms the great obstacle, the counteracting influence, which keeps you from an entire surrender of your heart to Christ.

9. Another reason why you have not been converted before, may be found in the fact, that you have often neglected impressions made upon your mind, and disregarded convictions which, on many occasions, have been brought home to you. This is frequently the case with those who have

attended upon the faithful ministry of the word, and observed some religious duties. Perhaps you have had your sinful state clearly set before you; you have felt anxious for your salvation; you would gladly have attained to the same peace and hope of which you have heard Christians speak. But you have suffered some difficulties to deter you, or some seductions of the world to draw you aside, and so your impressions have subsided and your convictions have been effaced. The Spirit of God may have spoken to you in the still small voice of conscience, or in the solemn warnings of the Holy Scriptures; but to all these you have turned a deaf ear, or you have endeavoured to forget them. There was, perhaps, a time when you were near the happy decision; but some delay was suggested, or some difficulty arose to view, and all the previous convictions were overcome. The sin and danger of trifling with these convictions is illustrated in other parts of this volume, and need not be enlarged upon here; they are mentioned now, only to remind you how clearly it is your own fault that you have not been converted before.

10. Finally, it may be proper to observe, that the conversion of some is delayed because they labour under mistaken views of what should be done in order to conversion. A mind that is powerfully impressed with the importance of salvation may be impelled, and frequently is, to set about amendment, and commence a new course of life, without exactly knowing what is the direct method of obtaining forgiveness of sins, and, frequently, without employing suitable means for gaining instruction. Those sources of information are not consulted, from which alone it might be at once and clearly learned, that every convinced

sinner must first come to Christ, and immediately receive his promise of salvation. The inevitable consequence is, a vain and fruitless labouring for life by means of a reformation begun in human strength. If a mistake of this kind is committed, it leads to disappointment, and places conversion at a greater distance than ever. The general mistake is, to place duties before faith, reformation before coming to Christ. And wherever this is the case, there is a manifest neglect of the divine admonition, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."* A sinner may say he is using the means of salvation, while yet he has no other idea than that an external reformation is all he needs. In such a case, he is rather using the means to work out a righteousness for himself, than following the directions of the divine word, to repent of sin, and believe in the blood of Christ for its pardon; and while so doing, he is not converted, nor in the way to conversion. This reason alone, without any previously mentioned, may be sufficient to explain why you have not been converted before.

Repent, therefore, now, and come to Jesus with a grateful, believing heart, and this will be conversion: then will follow submission to his yoke, obedience to his commands and delight in doing his will. Herein consists the difference between the true gospel of the grace of God, and much that passes under the name of religion. Some place duties and reformation first, and Christ afterwards; the word of God places Christ first, and duties as the fruit of union to him. If you wish to see this matter more fully explained, you are referred to those chapters which treat of the *Mistaken*, and the *Self-sufficient*.

* Acts xvi. 31.

CHAPTER VII.

REASONS WHY YOUR CONVERSION SHOULD TAKE PLACE NOW.

IF conversion be a real blessing, and most essential to your happiness; if it be a change from a bad state to a good one, from a state of danger to one of safety; then, assuredly, the sooner it takes place, the better. There can be no reason offered—none, at least, that can be valid—for continuing in a state of sin and danger, while a change is possible, and while every thing invites you to it. But this is not the only view which ought to be taken of the subject; there are others, which will enforce still more emphatically and directly the urgency of this change. These I will now proceed to lay before you with all fidelity and earnestness, hoping and praying that the force of the reasons may constrain you to an immediate acquiescence in the divine call, “**BE CONVERTED.**”*

1. Your conversion should take place now, because you enjoy at this moment sufficient means. I am to suppose that you possess the word of God, that you hear the gospel preached, and have access to the throne of the heavenly grace through the divine Mediator. I am to suppose you are aware of the great facts which are included in the gospel; that you are not ignorant of the invitation of Jesus Christ, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;”† and that you are no stranger to the important and glorious doctrine of his atonement. You already know, that he gave himself to be a ransom for sinners;

* Acts iii. 19.

† Matt. xi. 28.

and that he has sent the proclamation forth to all, that whosoever believeth on him shall be saved. All that is necessary, so far as a knowledge of the gospel is concerned, you enjoy at this moment; then, why not close now with the divine call, and receive Jesus Christ into your hearts? "What are you afraid of, that you dare not venture your soul upon Christ? Are you afraid that he cannot save you; that he is not strong enough to conquer the enemies of your soul? But how can you desire one stronger than 'The mighty God,' as Christ is called?*" Is there need of greater than infinite strength? Are you afraid that he will not stoop so low as to be willing to take any gracious notice of you? But, then, look on him as he stood in the ring of soldiers, exposing his blessed face to be buffeted and spit upon by them! Behold him bound, with his back uncovered to those that smote him! And behold him hanging on the cross! Do you think that he who had condescension enough to stoop to these things, and that for his crucifiers, will be unwilling to accept of you, if you come to him? Or are you afraid, that if he does accept of you, God, the Father, will not accept of him for you? But consider, will God reject his own Son, in whom his infinite delight is and has been, from all eternity; and who is so united to him, that, if he should reject Him, he would reject Himself? There is nothing further to be looked for, in the way of any other Saviour, no new revelation of truth, nor any further means of grace. If you indulge an idea that you need any other, you do but deceive yourselves; for God has already granted you the gospel, and that points out to you the free access which is afforded to all through Christ Jesus,

* Isa. ix. 6.

that they may come to God in prayer, and plead the efficacy of that blood which was shed for the remission of sins. Think of this, then: the price of true wisdom is placed in your hands; if you use it now, you will obtain the gift; if you neglect it, you do virtually refuse it, or unreasonably continue in a state of hostility against God, which is itself exceedingly sinful, and, if persisted in, must draw upon you a sentence of exclusion from his favour forever. What a culpable delay would he be guilty of, who, while labouring under disease, with a physician standing before him and offering a remedy known to be effectual, should show reluctance, and, from some trifling excuse, defer the use of the means prescribed! I am well aware, that many sinners imagine they may safely defer this important step; and that they often delude themselves with the fancy, that there will come a more favourable opportunity, or some more effectual means; and thus they cheat themselves out of the proper use of those they now possess, under the false notion, that they are to wait for something further, or to expect a more favourable conjuncture. But the present is, in fact, the only time allowed; and those who neglect it may find that the golden opportunity has been lost, lost forever. "Now is the accepted time."* If this is the acceptable time, what more could be desired by any one? It is the divine authority which declares this; and it is equally certain, that this is said of no other period. He, therefore, who rejects this, or who still pleads for delay, loses the only time to which God himself has attached this important epithet, *accepted*, which surely means that you may, and indeed shall, be accept-

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

ed. Would any man wish for any other? Could he fix upon a period which should afford a brighter hope? Or what, beyond such a pledge of divine acceptance, could be desired? If conversion includes acceptance with God, as well as a change of your mind, and both these must concur at some time, if you are ever saved; if, further, you cannot command God's favourable acceptance of you, but must receive it as an act of his free grace; then, his accepted time should be yours—gratefully, fervently embraced, lest that which *you* may deem a time more acceptable to yourself, should prove not to be so with Him. Your time, therefore, should be His. The very fact, that His acceptance of you is an act of grace, ought to enforce this upon you. For he who needs an act of grace, and at the same time desires it, must receive it when the conceding party offers to grant it, or it may pass away and never return. This, then, is just the situation of every unconverted man. He cannot become converted without the grace of God; that grace announces the present to be the favourable time, pledges itself to the bestowment of it *now*, if there be a true faith, but makes no reserve for a *better* season, or for *any other*—no pledge for a future day. The sinner, therefore, who knows his true situation, and feels the risk he would run by delay, will surely not think of waiting for a more convenient season, seeing this is the most favourable, the only time *sure* to him, and the only one to which the high and sovereign Being, on whom he absolutely depends for his salvation, has annexed the term "*accepted*," saying, "TO-DAY if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart."* TO-DAY Jesus

* Heb. iv. 7.

is set before you as both an able and a willing Saviour. To-DAY he says, "Come unto me:" To-DAY he opens his arms for your reception: To-DAY he admits you to the throne of grace: but remember, if it should appear to you not an accepted time, not yet convenient, or not yet desirable to forsake your sin and flee to the Saviour you have, literally, no promise whatever of an other opportunity, no authority to attach the term *accepted* to any future time.

2. But let me distinctly press upon you the consideration, that God expressly calls upon you to be converted *now*. He does not say, Take the subject into consideration, and when you have seen the propriety of it, then obey. But at once, and on the spot, and in the same moment in which He announces the Creator's will, He requires the compliance of the guilty creature; and, by allowing no space for delay or dispute, He forbids you to hesitate even for an hour, but obliges you to an immediate compliance. And do not think this either strange or hard. For herein God does but assert his proper prerogative, and place you in your proper situation, as a rebel against his authority, and a guilty offender, dependent altogether upon his free mercy for salvation. In no other way, certainly, could an offended God treat with rebellious creatures. Submission, instant submission to his authority, and instant reliance upon his free and sovereign mercy in Christ Jesus, is the only method which it becomes him to adopt. This is conversion; this is immediate conversion; this is what we intend by your conversion taking place *now*. Here, then, we say, is a reason—a reason paramount to all others—a reason from which you cannot appeal, and the force of which,

it is hoped, you both admit and feel, why you should at once be converted to God. "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace."† "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."‡ Our Saviour says, "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him."§

These views might be further confirmed, by showing how God has expressed his anger against those who have refused and delayed, and by referring to those Scriptures which express his displeasure generally against all who do so. As in the book of Proverbs, he says, "Because I have called, and ye refused,"|| &c. The parable of the ten virgins, in the 25th chapter of Matthew, shows what shall be the treatment of those who neglect the accepted time. The shutting of the door against the foolish virgins teaches us, that delayers may apply too late, and that if they refuse God's appointed time, he may, in anger, swear, "They shall not enter into my rest."¶

3. It is proper here distinctly to remind you, that you do not know that you shall enjoy any other time besides the present. You cannot look forward and say, I shall live till next year, or till I find more leisure, or till I have settled affairs that now engross my time and attention. You cannot say, I shall live till to-morrow, and will then give my best attention to my soul's affairs. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."** Even while you think to enjoy some future period, the fatal sentence may have passed

* Acts xvii. 30. † Job xxii. 21. ‡ Isa. lv. 6. § Matt. v. 25.
|| Prov. i. 24. ¶ Heb. iii. 11. ** James iv. 14.

the lips of your patient and long-suffering Lord, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground!"* Do you not constantly hear of sickness and death invading persons at all ages and under all circumstances? Even those that felt most secure, and seemed, according to human judgment, most likely to live, have been cut off in a moment, or so severely affected by disease as to be incapable of attending to this most important concern. And I may say, not only have these things been, but they are constantly occurring around you on every hand; so that no man can say, "I am safe; I have made a covenant with death." God grants you the present time for the discharge of this imperative duty, the first, the highest, and the most essential, an immediate turning of your heart from the love and practice of sin, a full and unaffected confession of guilt, and the earnest entreaty of the divine forgiveness through the blood of the great atoning Sacrifice.

4. Your conversion ought not to be delayed longer, because you may effectually and forever exclude yourself from that grace which is now offered. This may take place in two ways, from either of which the utmost damage may result to your immortal soul. (1.) By the hardening effect of that state of impenitence in which I suppose you to continue, and to continue by a direct purpose of your mind. You resolve not yet to seek, not yet to receive the grace of God for your conversion. The very effect of that resolve upon your mind and heart, is to produce an increased degree of insensibility to your sin and danger, a greater degree of hardihood against God, and a more reckless spirit in reference to the threatened

* Luke xiii. 7.

issue of sin. The more your conscience is inured to the possible consequences of transgression, while yet those consequences are at a distance, the less does conscience feel or fear; the longer you practise evil, the less does conscience feel it to be evil, the more familiar does it become with the evil, and the less moved by the dread of its termination. These are facts observable in the history of sin and sinners, and they ought to make you afraid of continuing any longer under the dominion of sin, lest you should grow insensible, even past recovery. No sinner can tell when that time may be passed, or at what period he may become so callous that no future means may be powerful enough to quicken him to an alarming sense of his danger, and of the evil of his sin. As all sin tends to lull the conscience and the moral feelings, just as any sleepy drugs tend to overpower the senses; so, in both cases, there may be a point beyond which no powers of alarm that can be used will be of any avail. (2.) But there is another view which you ought to consider here. The unconverted very often delay conversion, under the idea that something in providence will arise, some event occur, or some impression be made upon their minds, which will suggest to them, that "Now is the set time come:" for these extraordinary signs they wait, instead of going at once to confess their sins and seek divine forgiveness. We have shown already, that God's time for your repentance is, when he calls you to it. That time, therefore, has arrived. Improve it now. If you delay past the present moment, in which God employs his summons to arouse you, it is possible that he may be so offended by this additional act of inattention, as to afford neither

means nor grace any longer, but in anger withdraw both, and proceed to judgment, by giving you over entirely to yourself. There is such a fearful thing sometimes occurring; and though we cannot say in what cases it has really taken place, yet we may suspect it, when it becomes evident that God, in anger, leaves men entirely to themselves. He said of some, "So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels."* "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone."† This abandonment of the sinner by God, must, indeed, be a most fearful thing; for, in it, the case of the unhappy transgressor becomes as hopeless as if he had already passed into the place of punishment, and the eternal state of suffering. Suppose it perfectly true, that we do not know, and cannot fix the period in any particular case, when this has taken place, and, therefore, cannot, and dare not say of any individual, he is absolutely abandoned of God; yet, this very fact, of the difficulty of saying when and where a man has arrived at this crisis, should make us shrink from risking it, and earnestly endeavour to prevent it, as an evil of the most fearful and stupendous nature.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROMISE OF CONVERTING GRACE.

Most who will take the trouble to read this book, will have had some previous exercise of mind concerning their conversion, and, perhaps, will

* Ps. lxxxi. 12.

† Hos. iv. 17.

be conscious of having made some ineffectual efforts towards it. Perhaps some will read it, who have been long convinced of the necessity of conversion, and have been desiring it, as they may think, very earnestly; but they have found hitherto little encouragement, and, perhaps, no ground at all to conclude that they have undergone the great and momentous change. There must have been some serious error, or deficiency, in all these states of mind; there must be some radical principle wanting, or else, just views already gained, and right feeling already experienced, might have led on to the full enjoyment of the blessing. Perhaps there has been an oversight, or even a criminal neglect, of the divine promise of the Holy Spirit's influence. Many, who hear conversion explained and enforced from the pulpit, as essential to salvation, do entertain occasional wishes that they may be converted; but with how inadequate a notion of its nature, or of the means by which it is to be effected, is evinced in the failure of their good purposes, the subsidence of their anxiety, and their continuance in a state of uneasiness and unregeneracy. May not such persons discover an obvious neglect of which they have been guilty, in disregarding the promise of God's assistance?

1. We may take occasion here to enforce upon you the necessity, the absolute necessity, of such divine assistance, from the failure of the many attempts which you have already made.

You have made such endeavours, but it has been without any adequate sense, perhaps without any sense at all, of your dependence upon divine aid. There has not been, at such times, a distinct recognition of your own insufficiency, nor of

your need of divine grace to help you ; hence, all such attempts have failed, and you have been left to feel your own weakness, that you may not trust in yourself, but in the living God. If you look back, therefore, upon your own past experience, you may find the most humbling and emphatic proof of your need of divine help ; and may, hence, derive a valuable lesson, to urge you now to seek that help which is so freely and fully offered to you. If you have found all your resolutions fail, and all your convictions subside, you may be sure you have not believed God's word, nor complied with the divine testimony, concerning conversion. You may look back and see, in your own disappointment the folly of which you have been guilty, in not casting your helpless soul upon the promised grace. Your sins, so often triumphant, and the snares of temptation, so constantly successful, all witness to the weakness of that nature which has been so long and so vainly aiming at a change of heart, in utter neglect and disregard of the inspired intimation, that you must experience divine power in your soul, and accept divine assistance. Surely, you will now begin to see that you have only been deceiving yourselves with vain hopes, and expecting, or seeking to accomplish that by your own unassisted efforts, which, you have been forewarned, requires the Holy Spirit's grace and assistance.

2. Let me then remind you of the high authority on which such promises of divine help rest. It is God himself who has granted these promises, and sealed them to you in the most solemn manner, as sure and unfailing. It is impossible for any of God's promises to fail, and that class of them which particularly relates to sinners

finding mercy and grace upon turning to him, are as full and clear, as sure and unfailing as any others. The infinite compassion and kindness of God, in recording them for your encouragement, ought to incline you to an instant renunciation of sin, and an entire reliance upon the grace which is exerted whenever the soul is made willing to turn to God. "Look unto me, and be ye saved."* "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities."† "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things (or, as it reads in Luke xi. 13, the Holy Spirit) to them that ask him?"‡ "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth."§ "And when he is come, he will reprove" (or convince) "the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."|| The very fact that such promises are recorded, shows the helplessness of a sinner, and points out his resource. Their proper effect upon you should be, to awaken a firm reliance upon God for their accomplishment, and to convince you that you cannot take a single step of any importance without his effectual grace. If you neglect, or even if you do not cordially receive and rely upon these promises of divine help, you can expect nothing but failure and disappointment. You may lay it down as an infallible truth, that all your efforts will be unavailing to secure your salvation, unless you are brought fervently to plead the promises of God in prayer, and confidently to look for their fulfilment. Think of the Supreme authority, which declares your nature to be as

* Isa. xlv. 22.

† Rom. viii. 26.

‡ Matt vii. 11.

§ John xiv. 16, 17.

¶ John xvi. 8.

morally helpless as it is guilty, and as much in need of grace to help as of mercy to pardon. The representation of these great first principles is made in the holy word, for the purpose of removing every false ground of hope, of inducing you to despair of your own sufficiency, and of inspiring you with the hope that all your sufficiency shall be of God. Thus emptied of yourself, you will be both prepared and concerned to be filled with God; his power shall then be exerted to work all your works in you. It may appear to some of you not unlike a paradox, to say, that when you are reduced to a state of desperation, as to yourself, you will then be nearest to hope, as it regards God; for you will find this the only proper state of mind for the reception of his promised and all-sufficient aid.

3. We may also call you to observe, that the blessed and happy result of salvation is pledged, by these infallible promises of God, to all who rest in them, and derive their entire support from them. Here is the object to which faith must direct its eye, the foundation on which faith is to build. It is exhibited so fully, clearly and graciously, for the purpose of inspiring your mind with confidence; and the very contemplation of it in a right spirit, as it is simply a matter of gracious revelation, will work faith in your heart; that faith will bring you into the enjoyment of the blessing; power shall be given you from God, and cause you to feel your heart warmed with the love which he displays in the gift of his Son, and in all his gracious influence upon your soul, to enable you to receive Christ as yours. You may not be able to perceive beforehand how these things should be; but in submitting your soul to them, in endeavouring to meditate humbly and

devoutly upon them, you will become conscious of their wonderful power, and feel the divine energy they possess, in that only way by which they can be effectually known, even by experience. If, indeed, you are in earnest to enjoy that sound and saving conversion to God, to which it is the humble object of this treatise to direct you, then you will at once abandon all specious objections, and all idle notions of your own, and just go to the divine directory to be taught and formed, submitting your heart in all things to be guided by its dictates, and resolved to follow out the path it sets before you, and to pray for that divine influence which it teaches to be indispensable: and, in all, resting upon the many gracious promises you will there find suited to every stage of your experience, and to every exigence of your soul. If you can indeed humble yourself to receive all as the free gift of grace, and if, in receiving the gift rightly, you can be content to be wrought upon by Him that “worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure,”* then the joy of salvation shall be yours; “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus;”† and you shall feel yourselves the subjects of that transforming power of the Spirit, which will work mightily within, to the pulling down of the strong-holds of sin and Satan. You desire to know the momentous secret of “joy and peace in believing.”‡ Is not this the great object you profess to seek? Is it not to be brought into this state of heart that you have long been labouring and striving? Is it not to attain this joyful and happy liberty that you have so often been asking, “What must I do to be

* Phil. ii. 13.

† Phil. iv. 7.

‡ Rom. xv. 13.

saved?" Is it the great, commanding object of your desire; that which really appears to you the most desirable and the most important of all blessings? Is it indeed that, for the possession of which you have sometimes thought you could gladly give up all, and in preference to which you know of nothing you could either esteem or value? O, then, this is the very blessing which God is willing to bestow; this is the very boon his promises hold forth to you; this is the gift, and the blessing, which he reproves you for not seeking, for not even accepting when offered: and if but once you are brought to an entire reliance upon his promise of grace, the blessing shall be yours. Nothing can prevent your possession and enjoyment of it, for it is sealed to each, to all that lay hold on the promise of eternal life. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ to show them unto you.*

Let me, therefore, entreat you once more to think what inexpressible excellences meet in Him who is recommended to you as the only Saviour. "What is there you could desire in a Saviour, that is not in Christ? Or, wherein should you desire a Saviour to be otherwise than Christ is? What excellency is there wanting? What is there that is great or good; what is there that is venerable or winning; what is there that is adorable or endearing; or what could you think of that would be encouraging, which is not to be found in the person of Christ? Would you have your Saviour to be great and honourable, because you are not willing to be beholden to a mean person? And is not Christ a person honourable enough to be worthy that you should be dependent upon him? Is he not a person high enough to be ap-

* John xvi. 14.

pointed to so honourable a work as your salvation? Would you not only have a Saviour of high degree, but would you have him, notwithstanding his exaltation and dignity, to be made also of low degree, that he might have experience of afflictions and trials, that he might learn, by the things that he had suffered, to pity them that suffer and are tempted? And has not Christ been made low enough for you? And has he not suffered enough? Would you not only have him possess experience of the afflictions you now suffer, but also of that amazing wrath that you fear hereafter, that he may know how to pity those that are in danger and afraid of it? This, Christ has had experience of; which experience gave him a greater sense of it a thousand times than you have, or than any man living has. Would you have a Saviour to be one who is near to God, so that his mediation might be prevalent with him? And can you desire him to be nearer to God than Christ is, who is his only begotten Son, of the same essence with the Father? And would you not only have him near to God, but also near to you, that you may have free access to him? And would you have him nearer to you than to be of the same nature, united to you by a spiritual union, so close as to be fitly represented by the union of the wife to the husband, of the branch to the vine, of the member to the head; yea, so as to be one spirit? For so he will be united to you, if you accept of him. Would you have a Saviour who has given some extraordinary testimony of mercy and love to sinners, by something that he has done as well as by what he says? And can you think or conceive of greater things than Christ has done? Was it not a great thing for him, who was God, to

take upon him human nature? To be not only God, but man, thenceforward to all eternity? But would you look upon suffering for sinners to be a greater testimony of love to sinners, than merely doing, though it be ever so extraordinary a thing that he has done? And would you desire that a Saviour should suffer more than Christ has suffered for sinners? What is there wanting, or what would you add if you could, to make him more fit to be your Saviour?"

Then let me call you to reflect upon the happiness and peace which you will experience in feeling the Spirit bearing witness that Christ is yours and that you are his. There is one method, and but one, whereby these joys can ever be experienced by sinners. That is the way of faith. Other ways you have tried in vain. Now try this. Store up the word of promise in your heart; direct your desires to the Spirit of grace; contemplate his gracious work with confidence and satisfaction, and cry unto Him, and say "Come, O divine Spirit, take away the heart of stone, and give me one of flesh!" And if you are still conscious, deeply conscious, that you do not yet feel his quickening influence, let your supplications be unceasingly and fervently renewed, wrestle in prayer till Christ be formed in your heart the hope of eternal glory. Faint not at delay; yield not to discouragement. The cause of such delay, and of such discouragement, is yet in yourself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARKS OF CONVERSION.

It is only intended in this chapter, very briefly to state the principal marks which indicate the reality of conversion. Those which we shall name, may not all appear at once. The reader is, therefore, cautioned not to be discouraged if he cannot find every mark in the early stage of his experience. They may all appear in due course. Let him observe, that there are some signs which will speedily become apparent, when the Spirit of God has commenced his work in the soul. Other signs may exist in principle, but it may require time to call them into exercise, and to bring them to that strength and maturity which can alone make their existence obvious and satisfactory. A seed, as soon as its first germ appears, proves its vitality, and begins to show its own peculiar properties, just as certainly as when it has reached its perfection. Some of its peculiar properties appear immediately; all the others are there vitally and in embryo, and, in due time, the entire development of all the essential properties of the plant will take place. The same is true of human nature. It would be impossible to discover, and absurd to seek, all the properties of the perfect man in the new-born babe; yet they are there, and will display themselves in the order of nature. We make these remarks to guard those who, in the commencement of the work of grace in the soul, are anxious to perceive evidences of conversion, against being discouraged if they cannot discover at once all the signs that may be here named, or which they may find de-

tailed in treatises written expressly upon the evidences of a state of grace.

1. Perhaps the first symptom of which the converted become conscious, is a change of their feelings in reference to sin, the pleasures of the world, and the chief objects of their former pursuit and delight. These cease to please. The soul that is converted receives a new nature, to which sin is offensive, and the very thought of it alarming. The change which a converted sinner has experienced, consists essentially in a turning of the thoughts and affections, the will and the conscience, to God's commands; and by the light and authority of these he is made sensible to the great evil, great guilt and great misery of all sin. He ceases to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof; and though he may feel the law of his flesh warring against the new law of his mind, yet the very existence of that war shows that a divine principle, counteractive of sin, has entered and is in active operation among the powers of his soul. This is a sign which, if calmly considered, can hardly be mistaken. A nature that delights in sin cannot be confounded with one that hates it, feels contaminated by its approach and pained by its touch. The nature that takes no delight in holiness, and feels no anxiety to become holy and to please God, is directly opposed to that which views sin as the cause of all its misery, and purity as essential to peace and salvation. Hence, if a man is converted, he begins immediately to mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts; to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. There is to him a force and meaning which he never perceived before, in such passages of Holy Scripture as the following: "Now

being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”* “I delight in the law of God after the inward man.”† “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”‡ “Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”§ The true convert not only must not be, but he *will* not be, disinclined to forsake even his easily besetting sin, and to strive after that purity of heart which will identify him with a holy God and a holy Saviour. Say, then, reader, whether you are brought to that state of mind, that you can cheerfully renounce all that is pronounced evil by the word of God, and follow after that purity of heart and life which is pronounced blessed?|| If you find, after careful examination, that you can do this, then you have one important mark of conversion, which, with others, may determine the fact; but if this be wanting, if sin be still your element and holiness undesirable, be sure, whatever your convictions and alarms, that you have not yet experienced true conversion.

2. Conversion cannot have taken place, unless you have been humbled as a sinner under the sentence of God’s holy law; so humbled, and so convinced, as to acknowledge before God the justice of the sentence that condemns the sinner to everlasting punishment. It is possible, indeed, that one who has not experienced conversion, may be convinced of his guilt, and may acknowledge the justice of his sentence; but, in such a case, there will be no turning of the heart to Him that smiteth, no godly sorrow, or sorrow that draws the heart to Him against whom sin has been committed,

* Rom. vi. 22.

† Rom. vii. 22.

‡ Rom. vi. 2.

§ Heb. xii. 14.

|| Matt. v. 8.

who has the power and the right to punish, but who is willing to pardon. Examine your own heart upon this matter, and ask yourself such questions as these : Have I been led to see the deep and universal depravity of my nature ? Am I convinced that a righteous God might justly mark my iniquities, and proceed to execute against me the dreadful sentence I have incurred, the sentence of everlasting exclusion from his presence, and banishment to that place where despair and torment must forever reign ? Have I, under the influence of these convictions, humbled myself before God, and said, with the apostle, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. But I am carnal, sold under sin."* Since then, I deserve nothing but justice, and by my sins have forfeited every thing good, have I thus come to God, to seek all through his infinite forbearance and mercy ? Have I told him my convictions, spread my deplorable case before him, and said, Lord, save, or I perish ?

3. Another important sign of conversion will appear in the state of your affections towards the Saviour. Are you drawn to him as the one Mediator between God and man, the only Redeemer of the soul, whose blood has been received as an atonement for sin, and whose righteousness is to all and upon all those who come unto God by him ? Do you view him as the way, the truth, and the life, without whom no man cometh unto the Father ? † Are you led to place all your hope, and repose all your confidence, in his perfect atonement, his prevailing intercession, his justifying righteousness ? Are you looking to him as the divine source of gracious influence, from whose fulness alone you can receive pardon, jus-

* Romans vii. 12, 14.

† John xiv. 6.

tification and sanctification? Forsaking all other, and renouncing all confidence in your own resolution, obedience, or righteousness, are you willing, yea, anxious, to receive, as he is ready to confer, all the blessings of salvation and grace now, and of glory hereafter? Do you not only entertain these sentiments, but are your affections warmed with a sense of his excellence, and your heart melted by the contemplation of his dying love? Do you delight, and feel strengthened by looking to Jesus, in the divinity of his nature, the greatness of his condescension, the tenderness of his compassion to the chief of sinners? The soul that has felt his converting grace, has especially felt it in the view of Calvary; and, indeed, can never revert to that scene of the Saviour's suffering, without a mingled emotion of grief and joy: grief, that it should be necessary that Christ should endure such suffering; and joy, that he was willing thus to redeem a lost world. If your affections are right toward Christ Jesus, you will value him above all earthly treasure, and desire a sense of his love before every human joy. He will be the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. You will desire nothing so much as to "win Christ, and be found in him."* You will love his bright example, as well as the unspeakable blessing of redemption; and you will set him before your soul as the pattern of that humility, purity, separation from sin, and devotedness to the glory of God, which you will both earnestly desire and sincerely strive to attain. To do to others, in some measure, as he has done to you, will be your aim and your delight.

4. The true convert takes pleasure in all God's commandments. If they are hateful or grievous,

† Phil. iii. 8, 9.

there can be no evidence of conversion. This is a part of that course by which all the true sons of God are to prove the sincerity of their love. Have you such delight in God's service, that you can forego temporal interests and worldly pleasure? Are you conscious of a real hungering for the bread and thirsting for the water of life? It is written, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."* Since God has appointed the reading and hearing of the word, prayer, praise, and Christian fellowship, therefore the soul of the convert delights in them. But there is an essential difference between doing all these things mechanically, slavishly, and formally, for the mere sake of recommending ourselves, or meriting the divine favour; and doing them from a sense of love and of gratitude, of pleasure and privilege. A formalist may very zealously strive to keep God's commands; but he knows nothing of the spirit of love, of liberty, and of adoption. The real servant feels Christ's yoke to be easy and his burden light. It is his meat and drink to do the will of God. But he who has not given his heart to God, may serve him only from slavish fear. The force of this criterion depends, therefore, upon the true spirit of love, from which alone God can be acceptably served and honoured. All other service is worthless, and can never attest a state of conversion.†

5. It is stated by the apostle Paul, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."‡ His working, though not palpable to any of our bodily senses, is not imperceptible by the mind. The love which he produces to God and Christ; the sense of insufficiency for any good works in ourselves; the conscious depend-

* Isa. xl. 31. † Ps. cxix. 97, 103, 165. ‡ Rom. viii. 14.

ence of the soul upon the Redeemer's grace ; the spirit of supplication, and the spirit of filial affection felt in supplication ; the earnest longings of the soul after spiritual things, and after the graces of the Spirit in particular ; the drawing of the heart to the divine word, and to the ordinances of religion, the house, the people, and the service of God, when these are not for ostentation, nor for the gratification of a self-righteous spirit, but for the honouring of God, and the attainment of his blessing ; will all contribute to testify, that you are " led of the Spirit," and not led to " fulfil the works of the flesh." If, in your thoughts in secret, and in seasons of devotion, you are deeply conscious of the presence of God's Spirit, and of his intimate acquaintance with your heart ; if you earnestly desire and entreat him to make you his temple, and to dwell in you forever ; if you honour him, love him, wrestle in prayer for his influence, and yield yourself to his motions, which are all pure and heavenly, and may be discriminated by these characters ; then you may confidently hope that he has undertaken the regeneration of your soul ; and because you are led by him, you may humbly conclude that you are among the sons of God. But attribute none of your affections or inclinations to him, except such as lead practically to holiness, to faith in Christ, love to God, and an increase of those fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Gal. v. 22—26, as marking those that belong to Christ. Consider all these points calmly and candidly. Do not rashly or hastily conclude that you possess these signs ; and do not deny or disparage them if they really appear. Better were it, however, that you should entertain doubts of your conversion, than presume upon evidences that are not practically exhibited, or suppose signs which do

not exist. The doubt might keep you in suspense and pain; might prevent you from honouring the Spirit of God for what he has done in you; but the presumption that should take for granted an affection that never really existed in the soul, would betray you into a false hope, and make you satisfied with an imaginary state, which, after all, might prove one of unregeneracy and impenitence.

6. A state of conversion may be further evidenced by your correct apprehension of the nature of Christ's salvation, connected with your cordial reception of it, unaltered, undiminished and unadulterated. Is the fervent, fixed desire of your heart directed towards this particular salvation which you find described in the word of God! I lay stress upon this particular salvation, and upon the reception of it entirely and cordially, because it is no certain sign simply to desire salvation. Most persons will say they desire to go to heaven, and to be saved from the consequence of sin; but, at the same time, a large number of such have no adequate or scriptural conception of the salvation provided in the gospel. Thousands would be glad to be saved from the fear of hell, who have no wish to be made new creatures, to be delivered from the love of the world, the dominion of sin, and made meet for heaven by being made holy. A just apprehension of the salvation Christ has wrought out for us, and of the salvation he works in us, is essential to its right reception. Christ saves none from the guilt of sin, who are not saved from the power of sin. If, therefore, the gospel be rightly understood by you, and if, seeing it in its own light, it appears to you precisely such as you need, and such as you can, not only without hesitation, but with fervent gratitude and love,

assent to, accept and embrace; if you can give yourself up to it, to be guided, governed, and transformed by it, that thereby you may become meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; then may you hope that "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee," but your "Father which is in heaven."*

7. If you have experienced conversion, then, you have undergone, and will be able to trace, a great change in your motives, and in the ends and aims of your actions. The carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God. All its motives are either derived from worldly interests, or are self-righteous. An unconverted man may do some actions externally good, and practise some self-denial; but it is to place these as a counterbalance to sin, or as a price for future felicity. The high and pure motive of love to holiness because it is agreeable to the will of God; the hatred of sin because He hates it, and because it is in itself degrading and destructive; the commanding impulse to live to the glory of God, and to identify ourselves with his righteous cause, against sin, and Satan, and the world; all these are introduced into the heart of a sinner by the grace of God, and, wherever they appear, are signs of conversion. "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."† The soul that is truly converted is quickened to a sense of this commanding obligation. It is no burden or task to submit to it and carry it out in practice, but a real pleasure. "Ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."‡ "None of us" (that is, no Christian) "liveth to himself, and no man dieth to

* Matt. xvi. 17.

† 1 Cor. vi. 20.

‡ Rom. vi. 17.

himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."*

It must be felt by us, that Jesus Christ has a just and a first claim; and if that be not inwardly and deeply recognised, then there must be some other object that is first and supreme—that is the idol of our heart; and while that is worshipped, the love of Christ is not in us.

It may be proper to observe, in concluding this part of the work, that several other marks of conversion might have been named, which may, however, be understood as included in some of those that have been noticed. We have studied brevity, because our limits would not allow us to go more fully into the subject. At the same time we wish to admonish the reader, that his anxiety, in the first instance, should rather be directed to conversion itself than to its proper signs. The work, as a whole, is written for the unconverted; and though this chapter may more immediately concern the converted, and minister to their consolation and encouragement, yet the discovery which others may make, that they possess none of these marks, may, by the divine blessing, render this chapter equally serviceable to them, by convincing them that they are yet in an unconverted state, and urgently need that very conversion which the work, at large, is intended to explain and enforce. This chapter, therefore, is designed for both classes of readers, and happy will the writer be if they should derive benefit from the perusal.

* Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

PART II.

PARTICULAR CASES CONSIDERED OF THOSE THAT NEED CONVERSION.

CHAPTER I.

THE UNBELIEVER AND CAVILLER.

IT is but too evident, that many of those who are in an unconverted state are, literally, disbelievers of the word of God. Whether their disbelief is occasioned by what appears to them the too great strictness and severity of that word, or by the very fact of its requiring that sort of conversion which is so unacceptable to them, or whether it is upheld by what they consider insufficient evidence of divine authority, is not the point at present to be considered; but, simply, the *fact* that they do not submit to the authority of revelation, and do not admit that they are under any imperative obligation to submit to it.

That there should be such cases does not surprise us. Their occurrence confirms the truth of that volume which clearly foretells the repugnance of human nature to its truths, and predicts both the determined enmity of the heart, and the malignant sophistry to which it has recourse for the vindication of its disbelief. Why most infidels reject the Bible is sufficiently obvious, in the preference which they show for both a lawlessness of mind and a lawlessness of life. Their difficulties do not so much respect the question of the evidences as the question of its nature; they

would soon perceive the weight of evidence, if they felt no objection to the purity and spirituality of the gospel. If the Bible were not opposed to sin, no man would be opposed to the Bible. They would entertain not a moment's hostility to its claims, if it did not manifest hostility to their corruptions. I do not intend here to conceal the fact, that some unbelievers profess to have rational arguments against the Bible; but, in so far as reason is concerned in their unbelief, they are either false conclusions from inadequate and partial knowledge, or they are mere covers and subterfuges for the depravity of the heart. It is quite an impossibility that pure and unsophisticated reason should ever conclude against the authority of revelation. The eye might as soon conclude against the light of the sun, denying that it is light, that it can perceive it, or that it is pleasurable. A person who had been very much connected with unbelievers and infidels, was taken dangerously ill; and feeling that he could not recover, became alarmed for the safety of his soul. His infidel principles gave him no comfort. He began, for the first time, to examine into the Christian religion. He embraced it, and found it to be the power of God to his salvation, enabling him to triumph over the fear of death. In the mean time, his infidel friends, hearing of his sickness, and that he was not likely to recover, showed a degree of feeling and integrity, which it was hoped might prove the first step towards their conversion. They were not aware that their dying friend had become a Christian. They called to see him, and actually told him that they came on purpose to advise him now to embrace Christianity; "because," said they, "if it be

false, it can do you no harm ; but if it should prove true, you will be a great gainer." This was the united advice of a number of unbelievers to their dying friend. What a slender basis, then, must they have had for their objections ! How trifling did those objections appear when weighed against the hope of eternal felicity ! But it is not my intention to argue the question of evidence with the reason of the unbeliever. I rather wish to put it to each reader in that state, whether he is not conscious of an inward dislike to Christianity first of all ; and whether it is not that dislike which has really stimulated him to seek for or invent objections, to hail the discovery of them with satisfaction, and slight arguments in its favour ; and whether, therefore, he may not rather find the source of all his unbelief in the depravity of his own heart, than in any lack of weight in the evidences of revelation.

Let such an unbeliever, if such a one perchance reads these pages, reflect upon the moral guilt of so treating the book which claims to be of divine inspiration. Let him but suppose that such guilt may be chargeable upon him. He cannot but know that human nature is corrupt and prejudiced ; that his own may be so in this case ; and that, after all, what he has taken for a defect of evidence in revelation, may, possibly, be nothing but the repugnance of his own heart to its truth ; which, he must admit, is no reason for rejecting it, and which, indeed, becomes an additional argument why he should receive it, because this depravity of his heart is itself essentially evil, and he is conscious that it is so ; and, further, because the revelation he has rejected condemns nothing in sin but what his own mind may readily perceive to be

evil. Hence, he ought to observe the very serious position in which he is placed, if, under the influence of depravity, or prejudices excited by depravity, he rejects the authority of his Maker. If he can suppose that he is really in such a situation—and he cannot affirm that it is at all impossible, or even improbable—surely he will, then, admit that his case requires the most serious and grave consideration; since, by resisting the truth of God, and rejecting what is obviously worthy of God's purity, and sustained by divine authority, he may be incurring the awful displeasure which, he must readily admit, the supreme Being feels towards finite creatures who resist his will, and thrust from them his most precious gifts. The very thought that he *may be* thus wickedly hardening himself against God, and contending with his Maker, ought, surely, to lead him to pause, and impose upon himself the duty of a most faithful and close scrutiny of his own heart. He ought, as a rational creature, to shrink with horror from the thought of a wicked contempt or defiance of God. He would not, if a father, tolerate for a moment a parallel defiance from one of his own little children; and yet how much nearer do his children approach to an equality with himself than he does to an equality with God! He must, therefore, admit, that if he is guilty of rejecting God's commands, he stands exposed to the utmost peril of eternal misery. The very possibility of his sinking into such a fearful condemnation demands of him a serious review of the state of his heart; and to that I now call him, forewarning him that, if he shrinks from it, and absolutely declines it, he virtually admits the charge of prejudice to be true, and in his own conscience must be self-condemned;

and therefore, in such a condemnation, he may find the matter and the foundation of a far more serious and awful condemnation yet to come. As, therefore, he is a man of reason and feeling, so gifted by Providence as to foresee impending evil and guard against it, he is seriously and affectionately forewarned to use his reason and reflection in thoroughly investigating his own case, that he may not bring upon himself that final condemnation which such delinquency deserves. He cannot be insensible to the fact, that human nature does include, and frequently displays great moral pravity. He perceives it, and condemns it in many instances, in his daily intercourse with his fellow-men. He cannot suppose himself altogether exempted from the like depravity; and if it is constantly exhibited in the social intercourse of men with each other, he cannot doubt that it may display itself in his own conduct towards the supreme moral Governor: nor, indeed, can it be denied that the very wickedness which is perpetrated first against man, is virtually directed against God, because it is against his will, and from that circumstance derives a far higher character of guilt and demerit than from its being directed merely against man. Hence, every act of rebellion against the divine laws, whether laws of nature or laws of revelation, must be a matter of far more serious consequence than acts of immorality against the rights of our fellow-creatures, considered simply as done against finite beings, who are our equals, or against the laws of society.

The unbeliever must admit, further, that great numbers of those who once entertained the strongest, and, as they thought, the best-founded

objections to revelation, have, upon more close and serious thoughts, detected the true seat of their disbelief, and have confessed that they were under the influence of a prejudice, arising almost exclusively from their dislike of the gospel. They have openly condemned themselves for rejecting, under the influence of this depravity, what they subsequently found was so much for their benefit, their moral improvement and happiness. They have not been ashamed to acknowledge, that it was the wickedness of their own hearts that made them dislike and reject the gospel; and that, as soon as they were led to suspect, and by degrees to feel the depravity of their nature, they immediately began to perceive the ample evidence of divine authority in the Bible: thus showing that the only true source of their infidelity was the repugnance of a sinful and revolted nature to the authority of those precepts, which are infinitely pure and perfect, because they are of God. Now, what has taken place in hundreds and thousands of instances of this kind, corroborated as it is, moreover, by the sentiment, of which every converted person is an illustration, that, while in a state of unconversion, they felt strong propensities to disbelieve and deny the Bible altogether; and by the existence of such a bias in human nature generally, of which all the unconverted, most probably, are conscious, that they all secretly wish to find the Bible false; these, taken all together, may make it certain, and ought to convince you, if you are an unbeliever, that there does prevail, to a fearful extent, a prejudice against God's word, which has its sole root in the depravity of the human heart. The Bible is both too good for such as they are, and they themselves are too wicked to agree with it: hence the opposi-

tion; and hence, too, the urgent necessity for a change in *them*—a thorough change of their heart, which is conversion. This change must take place in us, to bring us unto harmony with the will and law of God; for we may be quite sure, neither God nor his word can ever undergo any change, much less such a one as might bring that word more into harmony with our corrupt and perverse hearts.

Is there not, then, a sufficient ground in the fact of your own depravity, which I assume you cannot before God deny; in the unquestionable moral excellence of the gospel doctrine, and in the lamentable fact of your prejudice against it; is there not in these things sufficient ground seriously to call upon you to examine into the state of your own heart? Suffer one who can have, in this appeal to you, no motive but that of your best interest, solemnly to charge you to let conscience freely and faithfully perform its office. You know that you have depraved desires and affections: that you have often violated your own conscientious convictions of right and purity—have been sensible of many sinful thoughts, words, and actions; and must know that you have treated the Bible with an indifference, a scorn, or even a hatred, which, upon the supposition of its being God's word, must be exceedingly displeasing to Him. You must, further, be conscious that you have never entered calmly, candidly, and seriously into the examination of its evidences—perhaps never read it through, nor any of the numerous volumes which have been written to display and state its evidences: whereas you have, on the other hand, read books written to revile it, and have gladly caught at any apparently formidable

or plausible objections which you have heard from unbelievers, and, without seriously examining, have taken them to be unanswerable. You have often received suggestions, or sought for them eagerly, to support you in your infidelity; but never consulted any person well qualified to resolve your doubts, explain your supposed difficulties, and lead you into a full and clear view of the arguments in favour of the Bible; and, in all this, you have displayed a heart far more inclined to fall in with the dogmas of infidelity, than to do justice to the claims of revelation.

All this shows that your heart is in a corrupt state; that you are not prepared to receive the truth in the love of it; that you have dishonestly avoided it, and shunned the change which it enforces. You have been cleaving to your infidel opinions, not because they were really more evidently true than the contrary, but because they have served to screen you from the condemnation denounced in the Bible upon sin; and because you have found it convenient to profess yourself an unbeliever in order to keep from distressing qualms of conscience. You know that you have not desired supremely, perhaps not at all, to have your will brought into accordance with the divine will. You must be conscious that you have not desired nor sought that moral purity, that love of God, without which you can neither hope to please him, nor to live forever with him; but, on the contrary, have adopted any opinions which seemed to afford license and irresponsible liberty to your corrupt nature. You know that any opinions, no matter how crude, inconsistent, and unfounded, which did but seem to release you from all ideas of responsibility to any moral rule, or any supreme

Governor, were favourably received by you. You may readily perceive that you have no foundation for your infidel opinions but the dictates of men, who can show as little foundation for their doctrines as yourself. You must know, or may know, that in receiving these opinions you have trusted men not trustworthy, men of small knowledge and rash judgments and bad characters; and that such are the great mass of professed infidels. You must know that the generality of these are men of corrupt morals, of violent passions and evil tempers; who can scarcely trust each other, and are constantly fluctuating in their views, and possessed of little that can be considered fixed and settled opinion, except their common dislike of the Bible, and their wish to be free from all moral restraints. You must know that an honourable and virtuous character is an exception among them, and that the mass of them are any thing but honourable and respectable; that they are persons whom you cannot permanently esteem or trust, and that you would not yourself seriously wish your wife or your children to embrace their opinions and follow their practices. You must have perceived that almost all pre-eminently vicious persons profess infidelity; that there is a most strong and marked affinity between infidelity and immorality; and that scarcely any one becomes systematically, openly and daringly wicked, until he has cast off the authority of the Bible, and declared himself an unbeliever. Surely this undeniable fact should make you suspicious of this harmony, this conjunction between the two.

Hence, then, you must, or, at least, ought to feel, that your association with such, your agreement with them, is a matter that calls for your

most serious examination—an examination which ought, in particular, to regard this question: whether it is not the depravity of your heart which has made them agreeable to you, and their opinions welcome?

Surely you cannot deny, that it would be for the good of your soul to embrace the glorious prospects of Christianity—that you can find nothing in infidelity to be compared with them. The system has nothing to offer you beyond a blank, an absolute and eternal blank, and a license, an impunity to your depraved nature, for this life, a mere jubilee to your animalism. Think whether this is, or can be, in any sense worthy of a rational, an intellectual nature, capable, as it undoubtedly is, of the pure and seraphic joys of true religion. Think, again, of the slender ground on which your opinions rest; and if that ground should prove false, how irreparable will be the dilemma into which you will fall! The believer in Christianity can lose nothing; for if he is wrong, he is as well off as you; and if he is right, and you wrong, then you forfeit every hope and every joy, and fall under the heavy condemnation of your Maker's displeasure. Consider what it is that Christianity would enforce upon you, and imagine what sort of a character it aims to form, what duties it calls you to discharge, and what prospects it sets before you, and judge whether there is in them any thing to which sober reason can object. You are required by it to love God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself. Is there in this any thing objectionable? Does it not, rather, commend itself to every reasonable being who admits that there is a God, and who allows that the whole human family are equally his care? Consider,

further, that the peculiarities of Christianity—the doctrines of repentance and of forgiveness of sins through the intervention of a divine Mediator—really contain nothing irrational, but seem to be perfectly adapted to the consciousness of moral imperfection which we all have; and involve neither any thing unreasonable nor unjust, but, on the contrary, meet our guilty and helpless nature with assisting grace and pardoning mercy. Further, that Christianity, in requiring conversion and a change of heart, as essential to your acceptance with your Maker and your final happiness, is in perfect accordance with the great fact, of which our own hearts, as well as the state of things around us, afford abundant evidence—that we are a race of fallen, guilty, and erring creatures. Reason itself assures us, that an agreement of our moral nature with the moral nature of God must be an essential condition of our happiness, both in this life and in that which is to come. Your own experience will afford sufficient proof, both in your sufferings of body and your afflictions and embarrassments of mind; in the contrariety between your judgment and your passions, your conscience and your inclinations; that you need a change, a radical and entire change of heart, to bring you into a state of accordance with the will and nature of your Creator. And surely you can never hope to attain to immortal life, while you continue unconscious of that harmony of will and affection; or while you labour to detach your mind and heart from the thought of submission to God and dependence upon him? Again, look at the miserable end of infidels; at the darkness and dread of their last hours; at the absence, to say the least, of any emotions, any aspirations, or any prospects

in their last hours, worthy of immortal beings about to pass into the presence of their Maker, and ascend to their final state of being. Surely there is nothing inviting, nothing exhilarating, nothing joyful in such scenes as the following, selected out of many equally appalling. A respectable writer says—"Some years ago, I occasionally met with a disciple of the late Dr. Darwin. He had drunk so deeply into the system and spirit of his master as to consider him the very first philosopher of the age. I have heard him expatiate with enthusiasm on his writings and character, and revile the Holy Scriptures with all the vaunt of vulgar blasphemy. A few months after my last interview with this gentleman, I heard that he was no more. Struck with the event, I was solicitous to know how he died. The account I received was, that, as death approached, the confidence he had before expressed in his deistical opinions forsook him, and deep horror seized his mind. A short time before his departure, supposing himself alone, he was overheard, by an unobserved attendant, giving vent to the agonies of a tortured conscience. With despair, he expostulated with Dr. Darwin, whom he now reproached as his deceiver; and after loading his name with execrations which I dare not put on paper, he closed in some such terms as the following: Monster! wretch! Is this the end of your boasted philosophy? Have you brought me to this?"—Are these the confessions of infidel philosophers? If such sayings as these have escaped them occasionally, what convulsive emotions must have been hidden in thousands of hearts! What unexpressed agonies must have been felt on the death-beds of such men! Pride, resolution, shame, and a mis-

called heroism, have no doubt constrained the greater part to conceal the festering wound, and to be silent. But quite enough has escaped some of their class to expose the unsoundness of their principles, and warn others against them. O that these heart-rending warnings, these thrilling lessons, might prove to you as a frightful barrier around the brink of that terrible abyss! You would greatly prefer to close your mortal life as Christians do, and would feel, even if there were no future reality in a Christian's hopes, that his principles impart in this life vastly more felicity, and comport better with the character of a rational and moral being, than infidelity. You cannot but perceive that the faith of a Christian saves him from an amazing amount of mental suffering, which the unbeliever cannot avoid, and never does avoid, in the immediate anticipation of death. In every view, therefore, the change included in conversion would be an advantageous one to such a being as yourself; and there is every reason why you should desire to undergo it, and not a single valid reason why you should resist and repel it. It is a change fraught with the most salutary moral effects upon the character; highly conducive to the peace and establishment of the mind; and full of the purest and sublimest joy in the prospect of quitting this life and entering upon another.

But, possibly, you do not rank yourself with direct infidels; you only dwell upon doubts and difficulties which make you hesitate to attach full confidence to the Bible. Now, without attempting to vindicate the doctrine of God's word, or meet the particular objections that individuals have felt or imagined, which would require a

large space, and is already ably done in many an elaborate treatise; we may endeavour briefly to show, that all the difficulties that men find or fancy, are either comparatively inconsiderable, or originate entirely in their own captious spirit, and would never be discovered if they did not wish to find fault. All ought to know that the human heart is constantly liable to prejudice, and that prejudice will go great lengths and show great ingenuity. An unwilling heart never wants an excuse; and an unbelieving heart rejoices in an occasion of stumbling at the word, being disobedient.* Many of the statements of Scripture are humiliating to our nature, mortifying to our pride of reason, and hostile to our love of sensual gratification. To borrow an allusion from the healing art, we may say, the patient shrinks from the surgeon's knife, and finds his medicine nauseous. Yet, are these things to be allowed to influence our resolution when the question relates to health or life? Who refuses to submit even to a painful operation or a disgusting dose, if he feels convinced that to do so is to throw away the last hope of life? Even the bare chance of success makes men heroes in suffering. "All that a man hath will he give for his life."† How much more, then, ought a man willingly to bear in a case that involves the life of his spirit! He that can suffer trifling objections, mere doubts, obscurities, or superficial blemishes, to prevent him from embracing the gospel promise, shows, that he has never seriously felt his need of salvation, and never realized his situation in the grasp of death, without a hope in the mercy of God. He that is rioting in luxury, or has lost his appetite by a surfeit, may loathe

* 1 Pet. ii. 8.

† Job ii. 4.

plain fare, and find a thousand faults in the way in which it is served to him. But a famishing man cavils not at the dish nor the cooking. He seizes upon the nutritious substance. It gives him life and strength. How trifling does every cavil and objection appear, when it is considered, that to refuse the gospel is to cast away the only hope of a sinful man! The case before you is not between this hope and something that promises as much, or is quite as good, or nearly as good; but between this or nothing, this or despair, this or destruction. The question, therefore, which you have to decide is too serious for trifling, too momentous for quibbles. Sincerity and candour are essential to a right determination. Treat it as a jury would a cause, where the evidence, if not all that every one could have wished, is yet conclusive, and if not quite perfect, yet leaves no room for serious doubts. Your cavilling at the doctrines or evidences of Scripture is at best but a cover for an unwillingness to admit its statements. Did they find favour in your eyes, were they altogether agreeable, your doubts would disappear. They would not weigh a feather if the case related to a temporal inheritance. You would be glad to take it upon such a title. You would laugh in the face of the man who should dare to allege such inconsiderable or imaginary defects as sufficient to invalidate your title.

Let me, then, entreat every one who feels any objections or difficulties upon this subject to remember, that the Bible requires of him nothing that is evil, calls upon him to renounce nothing that is good, asks him to believe nothing that is irrational; but, on the contrary, it secures to him the highest good at the cost of renouncing only

what is evil. Why, then, should there be felt any reluctance to admit its authority; why cavil to the detriment of your own soul? Can any man say that it is not for his real interest fully to admit the Bible? Can any man say that he is not a loser, a loser to an infinite amount, by hesitating to accept it? "There is one thing," said Mr. S. to a companion in sin and skepticism, "which mars all the pleasure of my life." "Ah," replied the other, "what is that?" "Why, I am afraid the Bible is true. If I could but certainly know that death is an eternal sleep, I should be happy; my joy would be complete. But here is the thorn that stings me! This is the sword that pierces my very soul. If the Bible *be true*, I am lost forever. Every prospect is gone, and I am lost forever!" What a confession was this! Yet it might well become every doubter. What a paltry happiness is that which depends on an animal nature! What a worthless joy is that which would be completed by the assurance of an eternal sleep, or which looks for annihilation at the end of life! "If the Bible is true, I am lost forever!" On how weak a supposition, then, does the hope of the unbeliever rest! Surely he must himself admit that the probabilities are against him? Be entreated, O doubter, to consider in what a predicament you place yourself, if you renounce the Bible for the sake of a human notion, or under the pressure of difficulties which, after all, you must admit may be rather apparent than real; and which derive their whole force from some ignorance or mistake of your own; and which a little more knowledge, or candour, or reading, might completely remove. Have you not often found it so with other subjects? Have you not observed

many times how men alter their opinions when they become better informed, when they shake off prejudices, when they perceive that their interest lies in the way of conviction? Have you done all in your power to remove difficulties and to gain more knowledge? Have you asked instruction and advice of those who are convinced of the divine authority of Scripture? Have you sought to be set right, and candidly stated your difficulties? Is it not worth while to inquire for some wise friend who might be able to remove them? Do not take it for granted that they are insurmountable. It is next to certain that there is nothing new in them, that they have occurred to others, and been thoroughly explained to the conviction of the ablest reasoners. Similar attention, research and anxiety on your part to be right, may remove all your objections and set your mind at rest. Consider the infinite importance of this matter. It is your salvation, or your everlasting destruction, which depends upon your decision. Ought that decision to be made passionately, hastily, rashly, under the influence of ignorance and prejudice? If the Bible is of God, and you reject it, upon the ground of some mere cavil at its doctrines or its evidences, you forfeit all its advantages and incur all its awful penalties. You are a lost man, and lost forever. If your objection is valid, what do you gain by it? You are not, even in this life, so happy as the Christian, since you must be perpetually tormented by the fear, that *perhaps* the Bible is true. You never can feel quite sure that you are right. It is impossible you should be certified of the truth of your principles. There may yet be evidence behind, possessed by some minds, by which even

you might be convinced. Are, then, the advantages of doubt, the pleasures of cavilling, such as to justify you, even to your own understanding, in running such a fearful risk? Let us bring the matter to the following test. It is low ground to assume, and much higher might be taken, for our appeal; but we take this, because it is most likely to be felt by you in your present state of mind. It is merely an appeal to your self-love and self-interest. Yet it will afford a test of your principles, that may convince you of the impolicy and inexpediency of maintaining them. Imagine yourself upon that dying bed which somewhere and at some day awaits you, and ask yourself, Which has most weight *now*, my cavil, or the Bible? Which should I now like to feel true, the principles of infidelity, or the promises of the Bible? Which will administer the best support in my weakness and terror, in my pangs of body, (perhaps of conscience,) the hope of immortality supplied by the Bible, or the cobweb sophistry, the human speculation, the mere imagination of an eternal sleep—the *perhaps* “I may be annihilated.” Which of these opposite prospects would you wish your wife, your child, to entertain, as they sink into the arms of death?

Colonel Allen, who had written several books setting forth objections to the Christian religion, evinced his distrust in his own arguments on an occasion that put him fairly to the test. While once reading some of his own writings to a friend who was on a visit at his house, he received information that his daughter was at the point of death. His lady was a pious woman, and had anxiously instructed her daughter in the principles of Christianity. When the colonel appeared at

the bedside of his daughter, she appealed to him thus: "I am about to die: shall I believe in the principles you have taught me, or shall I believe in what my mother has taught me?" On hearing this question he was much agitated. Well he might be. What father, though an infidel, could resist the impulses of natural affection, of conscience and of truth at such a moment? A deep and solemn conflict passed within, and, after waiting a few minutes in silence, he replied, "Believe in what your mother has taught you."

Look, then, I beseech you, O doubter, look again at the nature of your difficulties, at the means you may command to remove them, and at the blaze of evidence which shines on every side and from every page of the Bible. Consider well the liability of human reason to error, even in its vaunted philosophy; and observe carefully the subjection of the human heart to that prejudice and passion which constantly becloud the eye of reason; and finally consider, how many doubters and cavillers like yourself have at length discovered their own error and sin, have declared themselves convinced and satisfied that the book which announces salvation is the word of eternal truth, and worthy of all acceptance. Could you but be brought, in like manner, to perceive the irresistible evidence of God's truth, you would confess that all your objections were but the light dust of the balance, the mere films of your own diseased vision, which had concealed from your view the beauty and radiance of the heavenly luminary. Look with the eye of faith—a faith that is well warranted by the evidences of inspiration; look to the Sun of righteousness, and speedily he shall arise upon your benighted heart "with heal-

ing in his wings.”* Your night, dreary and fearful as it has proved to you thus far, would then be turned into day, your doubts be exchanged for hope, your cavilling turned into confidence and thanksgiving: for here, in the Scriptures of truth, in the doctrine of conversion, and here alone, you would find rest to your soul, in the hope that is full of immortality.

CHAPTER II.

THE UNDECIDED.

THERE is a large class whom I cannot better designate than by this term, because they neither profess to be unbelievers, nor do they feel themselves entirely bound by the obligations of Christianity. Their indecision may relate either to the question at issue between the infidel and the believer; or they may feel satisfied that the Bible is true and of God, but they may hesitate whether they shall become its disciples. I shall not here attempt to meet the case of those who halt in their decision about the truth of the Bible, because they are to be convinced by an examination of the evidences, which this work is not designed to discuss; but I shall principally address this chapter to those who admit the divine authority of the Scriptures but hesitate to declare themselves bound to profess Christianity, or to be openly on the Lord's side. They maintain, as they suppose, a wise neutrality, and seem to vacillate between two opinions; or, perhaps, more properly, they confess

* Mal. iv. 2.

the truth verbally, but withhold a practical conformity to its precepts. They serve it with their understandings, but withhold their hearts; or they admit the Bible to be true, but, most inconsistently, refuse to make the sacrifice it requires. Now, assuredly, the indecision of such, their hesitation to conform themselves in practice to that which they admit to be divine, incurs a high degree of criminality, and must appear to themselves obviously inconsistent, as well as involve them in manifest self-condemnation. For how can he that admits the Bible to be true and divine, justify the delay of a single hour in obeying its injunctions? Such delay or indecision is palliated by some persons, under the excuse of wishing to take time for the consideration of so important a step, because it would incur risk or actual loss; or because they feel reluctant to lay themselves under the solemn obligation which it involves. They think that to become decided Christians lays them under a sort of vow or pledge, which they fear they might be tempted to violate, and then they think they should incur a condemnation, which they avoid by remaining in their present undecided state.

But religious duty stands quite independent of all such considerations, and the very strongest of them have been met and set aside in those words of Christ, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."* "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."† It is clear from these and similar passages, that there is left to us no option as to the duty of

* Luke xiv. 33.

† Matt. xix. 29.

confessing Christ before men. And it is, therefore, a most serious question, which those ought to entertain who decline this duty, whether they have not distinctly rejected the Saviour's authority, or whether their faith can be any thing more than a mere name, when it fails to lead them to a conscientious and entire subjection of themselves to the revealed will of God. Clear it is that they do not fulfil their Saviour's command; and it seems equally clear that their hesitation arises from no reason which he will admit, from none which even their conscience, when properly informed, can deem sufficient. They must, therefore, allow me to state, that their indecision upon this point argues a total insensibility to the claims of Christ; and a sinful deficiency of that kind of faith which, if sincere and divine, would lead to action, and to a noble braving of all temporal consequences, and a calm committing of themselves to the promised divine support in carrying out their profession. I would not have such persons imagine that they really love Christ at all, if they are unwilling to obey his commands; and I would rather have them conclude that they possess no faith beyond the mere speculative assent to the Scriptures generally, than suppose that a true and saving faith could be productive of such gross and glaring inconsistency. It is, indeed, necessary that such persons should be faithfully forewarned of the self-delusion they are practising, and affectionately admonished to seek, in connection with a full consideration of what Christ requires, that divine grace which would effectually constrain and decide their heart to yield itself unto God. Reader, if this is your case, you have, indeed, deep need of his grace to bring you to a decision; for without it you can

have little hope that so weak a heart will be sufficient to overcome all your difficulties ; yet, with it, all those difficulties will vanish away, and you will find all the paths of the Lord plain and smooth to those that walk therein. But how sad a case will yours be, if, through a timid spirit, or a wavering resolution, or a want of confidence in the promise of that very word you profess to receive as divine, you should be found to be that servant who knew his Lord's will and did it not ; for to such the threatening is, that he shall be beaten with many stripes.*

There is another class of the undecided, whom it may be useful to meet. They are those who profess to see no very urgent necessity for a public profession of their adherence to Christ, beyond what is involved in an occasional, convenient attendance upon religious ordinances. They assume that they can be just as good Christians by remaining as they are : and that if they rest their faith on Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and live a moral life, nothing more can be reasonably required of them.

But all this evinces very inadequate views of Christian principle and Christian duty. The parties who maintain them must either be very ignorant or very inconsiderate ; for if they would but reflect, they might perceive that, upon their principle, the cause of Christ must be left without any systematic support or any adequate countenance. They cannot suppose that the religion of Jesus Christ admits of two principles in the profession of it, and that while some are bound openly to profess and maintain it, others may consistently stand aloof and withhold their influ-

* Luke xii. 47

ence. They must surely see and admit that there can be but one principle of adhesion for all. No duty can be imposed upon one class that is not imposed upon another. The law of the Lord must be a universal law, and by it all must stand. It must be uniform as well as universal. Therefore, if any are obliged to confess Christ openly, all must be obliged; and if but one is exempted, then all might be exempted, by a parity of reason; and if one may excuse himself, then why might not all, upon the same grounds? But the absurdity of this timid policy any mind can detect. Only let it be followed out in this manner, and it may be readily exposed. Suppose that some are exempted from the duty of confessing Christ; then, why not I? And if I, why not others? And if others, why not all? And then, if all, what is to become of that cause of truth for which the Son of God bled upon the cross, and to the support and acknowledgment of which he has called all his faithful servants? Is it not, therefore, evident from this reasoning, that you have formed wrong notions both of faith and duty? That you have erred at the very outset, and never can go on well while such notions prevail? It is important that you should review, even from its very foundation, the faith which you profess, and inquire whether you have not mistaken even those first principles which are essential to your acceptance. In so far as your profession goes, you have withheld a most material part, and a part which may well be conceived to vitiate all the rest, and to set aside, in fact, the very claim you make to a true faith. It is more likely that you have never yet been converted at all, than that a true conversion should present such an anomaly, such a palpable inconsistency.

Your heart, it is probable, is not yet given to God; and though you have received strong convictions of the truth of Christianity, and expressed some external respect for its ordinances, yet it is manifest that you have withheld from it that entire subjection which it demands, and are still halting betwixt two opinions. It must be that some worldly and temporal considerations detain you from fulfilling the claims of Christ; for you could never have derived any warrant from the gospel itself to justify so inefficient and inadequate a profession of the religion of Christ as that which you have imagined might pass for a true surrender of yourself to God.

It is high time that you should consider this matter in another light, or you may find your whole profession no better than direct, though secret, unbelief; and the infidel opposer less inconsistent than yourself. Hitherto you have been evidently thinking, rather of how little will do to secure to you an interest in Christ, and save you from the words of condemnation, than how much you owe to your divine Lord and Saviour to prove the sincerity of your love, and express your devotedness to his service. Your hesitation is a sinful hesitation; and if persisted in, after it has been exposed, will prove that you have never yet felt the love of Christ and your vast obligations. Let me, then, affectionately entreat you, as a poor, undecided and timid professor, to take upon you at once the solemn responsibility from which you shrink, and declare yourself on the Lord's side. If you have, indeed, any faith in his words of promise, or any inclination to act upon them as faithful and true, you will undoubtedly trust him for all that grace which is necessary to bring you

through whatever trials or sacrifices a practical faith may involve; and if you have not that measure of faith that enables you so to trust him with the issue of any temporal risk, how can you infer that you have that faith which is to trust him with the eternal interest of your soul? How can you trust that his atoning blood can save you from the denunciations of the divine law, if you cannot believe that his divine power can bring you through any of the adversities of this present life, which you may incur by a faithful adherence to his cause and a full profession of his name? Apply to him now at once for grace to pardon your sins, to enable you to show your faith by your obedience, and make you and keep you "faithful unto death," that you may receive "a crown of life."*

CHAPTER III.

THE MISTAKEN.

THERE is, undoubtedly, a large class of persons included among the general professors of Christianity, who are mistaken in their views of conversion. Most of these have been brought up from their infancy under some sort of religious instruction, and have been habituated to attend upon its ordinances. They profess what may be denominated an educational, or historical faith. They admire Christianity as a very pure and benevolent religion, undoubtedly the best in the world; but as to any change of heart under its

* Rev. ii. 10.

influence, or any spiritual experience of its renovating power, they deem it fanaticism.

1. Some of these consider that conversion means nothing more than simply giving their assent to Christianity, or perceiving that the gospel attests itself to be a divine religion. If they show it a decent external respect and submission, have been baptized into the name of Christ, and educated in a belief of his religion, they conceive that there is not any other kind of conversion which can be required of them. They would restrict the use of the term conversion to those who, having previously been heathens, embrace the religion of the gospel; or to such as had been infidels, or grossly vicious characters, and have renounced their evil courses.

In these instances, they would admit that there is something which amounts to an entire change, and would, therefore, account very properly for the use of the word *conversion* in reference to them. But, as to themselves, they cannot perceive any propriety in requiring conversion, or in enforcing it as essential to their salvation.

Yet, surely, if the words of Christ are correct, these persons are fearfully mistaken. For nothing can be more certain and clear from Scripture than that Jesus Christ and his apostles urged the necessity of conversion upon many individuals who were of fair religious reputation, and even esteemed among the most devout, so far as an outward observance of forms and ceremonies can go, but who gave no evidence of a change of heart. He said to the Jews, who were firm believers in the authority of revelation, and to his own disciples, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not

enter into the kingdom of heaven.”* Concerning the great body of professing persons in that day, God had before testified by the prophet Isaiah, that though they frequented his courts, and admitted his authority over them, yet they drew near to him with their mouths, and with their lips did honour him, while they had removed their hearts far from him; therefore he denounced all their services as vain and unacceptable, and their persons as abominable in his sight.† Hence, too, in calling their attention to that kingdom of Christ which was to be established among them, he expressly enforced upon them a change of heart. “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.”‡ The whole of our Saviour’s ministry among them proceeded upon this important principle, that mere forms and privileges, profession and ordinances, did neither constitute nor evince that kind of piety which he required, and for the promotion of which he enforced the doctrine of conversion.

It was manifest in the treatment he himself received from them, that, notwithstanding all their rigid observance of the law of Moses, and all their glorying in the only religion revealed from heaven, they had not the love of God in them, and, consequently, no sound claim to the character of true and spiritual believers. Their rejection of Christ, and especially the cruel and impious manner of that rejection, both show, that, with all their pretensions to godliness, they were utterly mistaken, and stood in need of an entire change of heart. The case of Paul before conversion was precisely that of a person firmly believing in the authority

* Matt. xviii. 3. † Isa. xxix. 13. ‡ Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

of revelation, zealous for the religious law of his fathers, and strictly conformed to the ceremonies of his religion, and that a divine one; and yet he was undoubtedly an unconverted, unregenerated man. Now, this case seems to make it certain, that the mere profession of Judaism was not true piety, nor a state of conversion; and that it is, therefore, just as possible for a professed Christian to be in an unconverted state as for a professed Jew; since both these forms of religion may be externally professed by those whose hearts have never experienced a change from the love of sin to the love of the divine law, or from the love of the world to the love of God.

2. There is another class of the mistaken, who are equally in danger of missing a sound conversion. They are those who admit that conversion is required, and that it is essentially a change of heart; but they conclude that it has passed upon themselves, simply because they have been the subjects of occasional and partial convictions, or even of strong ones; or, because they are still frequently agitated in a powerful manner under the preaching of the word. They have heard that a great change is included in conversion; that it is often accompanied with strong excitement and deep inward convictions of sin. They have had some such impressions wrought upon their minds, and, without looking further into the subject, they have hastily inferred that they are converted. But how superficial and inadequate their views are, may be evinced by the fact, that they have not become new creatures in Christ Jesus; and by observing what is said in Scripture concerning a class who "receive the word with joy,"*

* Luke viii. 13.

yet have no root in themselves; also by the case of Felix, who trembled while the apostle Paul reasoned of temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come;* as well as by many, both in the days of Christ and his apostles, who assented to the truth as preached, and even felt it to a certain degree in their hearts, yet, subsequently, lost their convictions and became increasingly hardened in their sinful state. So that it is clear they never experienced true and thorough conversion, though they were the subjects of temporary awakenings and convictions.

Let not the reader, therefore, suppose he has undergone the essential change for which we plead, unless he can show before the heart-searching God that he is a new creature, the opposite of what he was when sin had the dominion over him. For it is certain, whatever degree of excitement he has felt, or whatever temporary concern for the forgiveness of his sins, or whatever resolutions he may have formed to amend his life, if he is not really acting by faith, and living by faith, under the commanding influence of love to God through Christ, he is yet an unconverted person, and, as such, under all the condemnation in which the unpardoned and the guilty are involved. It behoves him to look upon all he has taken for conversion as mere alarm, or excitement of natural feeling; and however much he may think it resembles the experience of the converted and the true believer, he may rely upon it there is as essential a difference as between a shadow and a substance, a painted fire and a real one. He has yet to learn what that conversion is, without which he can possess no scriptural hope of heaven.

* Acts xxiv. 25.

3. There are some who fall into a mistake of another kind. Because they are using the means ordinarily denominated the means of grace, they quiet their consciences, and comfort themselves with the notion that *they are in the way to conversion*. They imagine themselves to be like sick persons in the hands of a skilful physician, whose cure has already begun. Or, they are like travellers, who have entered a road that will lead to a certain place. But here the unconverted is surely practising collusion with sin and unbelief. The cure is not yet begun, if you have not yet believed with the heart; the progress is not yet commenced, if you have not entered at the "strait gate." Do not compare yourself with the lame man who was waiting at the pool of Bethesda. No sinner ever really waits for Christ. All such as do not at once believe with the heart unto righteousness, are in the way to be lost instead of saved. There is no greater delusion than this of waiting for grace, or being in the way to be saved. What would you think of that person, who, after you had made him some benevolent promise of a valuable gift, should say, I am in the way to believe you; I do not believe you now, but I think I shall come to believe you by and by? Does the solemn pledge of a benevolent and truthful person deserve such treatment? How very absurd and insulting would such conduct appear! How justly might it entitle the insulted party to say—Then, if you are only in the way to believe me, but do really reject my promise now, I shall consent to no such an acceptance of my kindness. Come to a point with me. Either say at once you believe my word, or you do not; for I cannot conceive how you can be in the way to believe me at all, if I am not worthy of your

immediate confidence. The question then comes to this, Is the gospel worthy of all acceptance, or is it not? If it is admitted to be in all respects worthy, then why is it not instantly believed, in all its fulness of grace and love? If it is not worthy of instant credit, it never will be. Ah, beloved reader, beware of deluding yourself, or of being deluded by Satan, into the notion that you are in the way to believe the gospel, when you are really in a state of unbelief. The plain fact is, and we must not hesitate to announce it, if you do not at once and cordially believe the testimony God has given of his Son, you are in the direct way to be lost. You are here, then, summoned once more, in the name of the sovereign Lord, in the name of the divine Saviour, either at once to believe in Jesus, or resign that false notion of being in the way to believe; for if you cherish it, it will keep you from Christ, instead of bringing you to him. Either now say, "Lord, I believe," or resign all pretensions even to a desire to believe, and admit that you are still in the bonds of sin and unbelief. There is no medium state between believing and disbelieving. If you do not heartily believe the gospel, you must be treated as an unbeliever. See, then, that your "being in the way to believe" is all a mistake.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

THERE is another class, who are attempting seriously and earnestly to realize what they think the Scripture means by conversion, but it is in a spirit of self-sufficiency; they are labouring to heal them-

selves. It is a very common case, when persons become anxious to obtain salvation, that they seek it by efforts at personal reformation; we mean, as to their external conduct—breaking off bad habits—abstaining from sinful indulgences; and connecting with these efforts some directly religious observances, such as reading the Scriptures, prayer and attendance upon public worship. Now, upon these cases we wish to speak with caution, yet with decision and plainness. So far as these things go, they are in themselves good and commendable; but they do not necessarily include the scriptural idea of conversion. They may all take place, and do all frequently take place, without the conversion of the soul; and if they have been placed by the awakened mind as the ground of its confidence, as the realizing of its notion of conversion, and so fill it with the false persuasion that it is really and divinely converted; then this becomes an obstacle to the true conversion or change of heart, inasmuch as the mind settles down under this idea into a state of self-complacency, and thereby is made deaf to all further appeals. It says, like the congregation at Laodicea, mentioned in Rev. iii. 17, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;” while the Spirit of God says of such, “Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

Let us look carefully into such a case. You suppose that, by attention to the perfect law of God, and a watchful endeavour on your part to conform to its requirements, you may work yourself gradually into a tolerable, if not into a perfect conformity to it, so that you will be left, according to your own calculation, with only a very small

amount of transgression or deficiency; against which you place, as a last resource, the mercy of God and the grace of Jesus Christ. In this spirit most persons, under their first serious awakenings, go to work. But, let me ask, is this the full and free salvation which the gospel offers to sinners? Was this the gospel which the apostle Paul taught? He says, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace."* "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."† "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."‡ "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."§ How, then, should that law of God which was not given till after man had become a sinner, and which can impart nothing but the knowledge and conviction of sin, become the means of giving life to those who are already under its sentence of condemnation? The apostle Paul says, "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence."|| How, then, should it ever work a true and acceptable holiness in you? How should it enable you to procure forgiveness for the sins already committed? Certainly, it never can. Assuredly, then, you have been looking to the law of God for that which you should seek from the grace of the gospel; for it is the free forgiveness

* Rom. vi. 14. † Rom. viii. 1, 2. ‡ Rom. vii. 9.

§ Rom. viii. 3, 4. || Rom. vii. 8.

of sins through the precious blood of Christ which can alone make you, or any one else, free from the law of sin and death. But we may refer to the experience of those who have tried this method of procuring health and life to their soul. Has it succeeded? Has it not been often testified, that every attempt to sanctify and save ourselves "by the deeds of the law," instead of "the righteousness which is by faith," has utterly failed? Do not such attempts at self-renovation prove sources of disappointment, bondage and despair? The soul, yet without strength, finds sin unconquerable, holiness unattainable, and peace disturbed by the murmurings of an accusing conscience. And so it must be, because this is not God's method of saving and renovating sinners; so it must be, because "the law worketh wrath;"* but the word of the oath (or promise of the gracious covenant) which has come since the law, presents to the convinced, entangled and labouring soul, Christ crucified, as "made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.† This is the one object that must engage the faith of the awakened; and till this is apprehended for complete salvation, there is neither life nor grace in the soul. He that works, therefore, for life and salvation in the way of bringing himself to a perfect obedience to God's law, is working in the fire. This is a reason, a valid reason, and will forever remain such, why no self-sufficient sinner can be saved. Every such person needs conversion as much as the vilest profligate. He stands upon his own obedience. He takes the law as his foundation and rule of salvation, forgetting that if he "offends in one point, he is guilty of all;‡ or

* Rom. iv. 15.

† 1 Cor. i. 30.

‡ James ii. 10.

that the same condemnation impends in the case of one transgression as in that of many. Consequently, if he has offended only in one point, he is a transgressor; and from the guilt of that one transgression the law could no more release him than from ten thousand. Therefore, he still needs, after all he has done or can do, a Redeemer from sin and guilt: he must still be a debtor to sovereign grace, or perish in his vain effort to obtain life by the law. It were surely, therefore, better at once to renounce self-dependence, and say,

“I quit the hopes I held before,
To trust the merits of thy Son.”

It is certain, from the whole tenor of the gospel, that the salvation of sinners must be of God's pure, undeserved mercy, and through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. If there had been any possibility of a sinner's restoring and saving himself—“if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily (justifying) righteousness should have been by the law;”^{*} but then there would have been no need for the work of Christ. But if these things are so, does not the self-sufficient need conversion? For what is he trying? It is for salvation. But if he strives till the day of death—or if that were deferred till the day of doom—if he strives to renew his heart and save his soul by the power of the law of God, he will strive in vain, and worse than in vain—it will but prove the aggravation of his guilt; because he has turned away from free grace to strict justice; has renounced Christ's righteousness for his own; and has preferred the chance of saving himself by his own efforts to the infallible certainty of the divine promise.

* Gal. iii. 21.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORLDLING.

BECAUSE all men must have to do with the world while in it, some men will have to do with nothing else. Our present business is with that numerous class whose heart is in the world, or who have the world in their heart. It is certain from Holy Scripture that all those who are seeking their portion in this life need conversion. And, alas, how vast is the multitude! What pity, what tender concern, what unwearied assiduity to convince them, should their imminent danger excite in all who understand true religion! These lines may meet the eye of some worldlings who may attempt to evade their force, or their point, by disclaiming the character of worldlings. They may not be of this class or that; but the question is, do they not love the world, that is, supremely love and prefer it, in some of its forms, before their salvation, their interest in the eternal world, their God and their Saviour? Reader, here be kind to yourself, and practise no self-deception. Did you ever take as much delight in your Bible as in some earthly object? Did you ever do as much to enjoy salvation as you have done to enjoy pleasure in worldly scenes? Did you ever sacrifice as much to obtain the knowledge of salvation as you have to please yourself and others with earthly things? Have you not manifested a stronger bias to the things that are seen and temporal than to those that are unseen and eternal? You may not be a worldling in the sense of money-getting, or in the way of

fame and ambition, or fashion or gay amusements. You may not be a frequenter of theatres, or horse-races, or card-tables. You may not seek companions at the inn parlour, nor with Sabbath-breakers, nor at the fashionable watering-place, nor at the ball-room. Yet you may be a worldling. You may frequent a place of worship, and yet be a worldling. Your friends and acquaintances may be the choicest of religious people, and yet you may be a worldling. Your life may be in the element of the world. Your chief pleasures may arise even from things innocent and lawful. Your portion may be nothing better than an earthly inheritance, or merely the hope of gaining one. And if so, you need conversion. How much more, if your conscience clearly convicts you of loving something in this world more than you love any thing or any being out of this world! You know who it is that says, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me: and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."* The same authority decides the case of all who come under the denomination of *worldly*: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."†

The glorious and gracious Being who says, in the passage quoted above from Matt. x. 37, "He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me," has a supreme right to your heart; but the world you so intensely love has none. The language which he has there

* Matt. x. 37, 38.

† 1 John ii. 15, 16.

employed exclusively befits the mouth of God, and I trust you feel involuntarily, and without any argument or illustration, that it becomes him alone, who has a right to say, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."* He alone can judge the state of your heart, whether you are not now among the unhappy class to whom he says, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you."† It must, therefore, be a situation of no common peril to fall under his displeasure, and to feel in one's own conscience that the sentence of the apostle Paul cleaves to us: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema" (*accursed*) "Maran-atha," (*the Lord cometh.*)‡

Poor votary of the world, in some or in any of its forms! what have you to say to all this? Let me suppose you summoned to appear and answer to the claim of your Saviour. What answer would you make? What answer *could* you make? Could it be that of Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee"§—Could you say that? No: your conscience testifies, your life shows, that you have loved a very different object. In the light of the divine presence, the truth must appear and be confessed. It is certain, then, that every worldly-minded person, in whatever form he has shown his love of the world, would be obliged to make this confession:—"Lord, if I must judge only by my past life, I fear I have shown no love to thee, but, on the contrary, have loved what thou hatest, and hated what thou lovest." Perhaps, some would even

* Mark xii. 30. † John v. 42. ‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 22. § John xxi. 17.

be ready to think, if not to say, that they really had no wish to love Jesus Christ; they see nothing to engage their affections either in him, or his religion. Oh that such could be persuaded to reflect upon the fearful alternative of not loving Jesus Christ, and of not being loved by him! Oh that such would pause before they proceed further to act out their dislike of Christ and his religion! Oh that they would anticipate the situation in which they will be placed when the Judge shall stand before their door; and when it is quite certain they would gladly renounce every other object, and every other pleasure, for the delight which the assurance of his favour would impart! But if such delay till conversion is impossible, they will have cause through eternal ages to deplore the folly that blinded them to the love of Christ and the love of their own souls; and induced them to prefer the love of the world, or the love of sin, or the love of some poor, frail fellow-creature, which, in the end, has left them disappointed, dissatisfied and lost.

Immortal man or woman! why will you incur this fearful, this tremendous fate? Why, for the sake of this wretched world, or any thing in it, will you incur the *anathema* of your Creator and Saviour? Does any uncertainty attach to the issue of such a life as you are leading? Is it not clear that your heart is hostile to Christ, or, at least, that it is not enraptured with his love? and if so, the issue is not doubtful; you must perish, unless you change. The decree of Heaven is before your eyes. The tender and compassionate Saviour, the greatest Lover of souls, says you are *not worthy of him*; he disclaims you; he leaves you, as you have left him, to love the world, and

perish with the world. No: he does not yet leave you, for he prompts us to love you, to admonish you, to reason with you, to entreat you to cease from pursuing the fleeting shadow of happiness, and embrace the substance; to awake from mere dreams of bliss, and enter upon the real enjoyment of that divine love which is the true life of the soul. You must be converted from the love of the world to the love of God. You must turn, if you would live in immortal felicity; or, if you persist in loving the world, you must abandon the hope of glory. Be converted, or perish.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DELAYER.

SOME, who have perused this treatise thus far, have been ready to parry all our remarks with this observation, this fatal *salvo*, this opiate of the conscience:—It is all true, scriptural, important, excellent. We mean to be converted: we are only delaying for a little, and we think we have good reason for delay. We shall become real Christians at last,—all that could be wished.

The fearful import of these words, “only delaying a little,” none of those who use them can tell. Here lies, effectually hidden from their view, one of the deepest, deadliest, most successful of all the various devices of Satan. The notion of delay in reference to your conversion may be illustrated by connecting the same idea with the presence of alarming disease in the body. There may be cases in common life, in which a little delay can

do no harm, and may do good; there may be some attacks of disease, in which a little delay might not incur danger. But there are many others in which it would prove fatal. If aid does not arrive in time, it may be of no avail. Who, then, likes to run the risk of delay, even in common attacks of disorder? But every delay in conversion involves the risk of perdition. It is positive infatuation to delay in a case where it can do no good, and may involve irretrievable destruction. Why should you delay your conversion? Have you ever tried to answer this question? Have you ever met with one good reason for it? Have you ever heard of any one who had a good reason to give? The writer could tell you of many who have delayed, and though only intentionally for a little while, yet they lived to deplore, and died to experience, the folly, the infatuation of delay.

But let us bring this matter to the test. There can be nothing gained, nothing saved, nothing made easier by delay. You cannot by delay find out any thing to save your soul better than conversion. Who could dare to say, that by delaying his salvation he is doing no wrong, or doing himself any good? Is conversion a good or an evil? If it is a good, and you wish for it, the sooner you experience it, the better. If, without it, you confess yourself in peril of damnation, then, to incur that peril any further, is a species of folly that admits no excuse. If, as you admit, salvation is your object, and an object of inexpressible importance, compared with which every thing is light as air, worthless as the dust beneath your feet, then, to delay the possession or pursuit is criminal trifling, and utterly irreconcilable with rationality. How would you judge, if an earthquake had al-

ready passed under the place of your abode, if already the fragments of your dwelling were beginning to fall. Would you think it rational and safe to delay a little longer? Would you need to be admonished from without—*Escape instantly. Another shock will bring the entire building to the ground?* Could you coolly say to the friendly monitor, *I mean to escape, but I am only delaying a little, to finish something, to bring something with me?* Shall not that last warning prevail? Another moment and you will pay dear for your delay! No sinner ever yet intended to be lost; and yet how many have been lost by delay, the last day alone will reveal. He that delays conversion is in the direct way to be lost. He is regardless of the fact, that every moment he delays he is resisting God, he is increasing his sins, he is hardening his heart, he is placing more difficulties in his own way; he is tempting God to cast him off altogether, and encouraging Satan to tempt him further into sin. It is awful to think of the anguish which is often experienced by procrastinators when they come to feel that they have delayed too long. My flesh has trembled when I have heard their piercing shrieks, and seen their frenzied looks, and experienced the difficulty of administering any word of hope, or of finding any promise strong enough to subdue their spirit.

If conversion is admitted to be indispensable for a sinner, if its nature has been truly, (that is, scripturally,) described in the foregoing pages, if every one who *only procrastinates a little* feels the unutterable importance of that conversion, how ought such to shrink from the thought of delay, though it should be never so short, since it may be, and most probably will prove to be, but

the beginning of that series of resolutions and delays which will end in final impenitence! Your resolution has, perhaps, already been formed and broken; and more than once you have said sincerely and seriously, as before the eye of God, "I will repent and be converted." But yet the resolution remains to be carried into effect, and that with a mind weakened in its purpose, more familiar with the violation of its vow, and more prepared to admit the renewed force of those feelings and reasons for delay which have already more than once mastered it and made it falter in its purpose. There is a solemn and appropriate passage of Scripture, which you will do well to weigh seriously, and impress immediately upon your mind: "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."* Many, many sinners have experienced the awful truth of this threatening, and have lived long enough in the habit of delay to feel that they were given over of God to that impenitency which they had dared to prolong, by trifling with the divine warning; and have died exclaiming, with the Hon. F. Newport, the noble Altamont, and others, *It is too late!* But did you ever know or hear of any one that had repented too soon? Can you imagine it possible that any one should ever say he had been converted too soon? Do you think you shall ever feel that? Is there not yet danger that you may have to say, *It is too late!* The only certain security you can possess, and the only safeguard against that danger, is to repent now, be converted, turn to God now; delay not another moment, lest that should be a moment too late! When

* Prov. xxix. 1.

the voice of Noah was heard preaching righteousness, and predicting the deluge, he was scorned and mocked ; but after the door was shut, and the rains began to descend, and the floods to cover the plains and surround the hills, many, who before had scorned, would fain have taken refuge in the ark, rather than flee to that only resort, the tops of the mountains, which their reason showed them would soon be covered. But it was too late ; God had shut in Noah, and in so doing, had shut out the unbelieving and delaying sinners. Think, then, reader, can you still delay ?

CHAPTER VII.

THE CARELESS.

THIS term includes all those who have not given and will not give any serious or fixed attention to their conversion. They are so engaged by their affairs, so enslaved by their pleasures, so entangled by the snare of some sin, that they will, perhaps, scarcely have patience to read these lines specially addressed to themselves. Yet it is with the most anxious concern to do them service, with the most tender pity for their immortal souls, with the most respectful and earnest entreaty, that they are now admonished. If you will take this seasonable and well-meant warning, you may yet escape the wrath of God and taste the joys of true religion. It is not, in your case, yet too late. You may be saved—saved from eternal death, which is undoubtedly at the end of your present course—and be admitted to everlasting felicity.

You are careless. You know that you are.

You feel that your heart is quite indifferent to your conversion. You will, perhaps, frankly confess it. And what a confession that is!

Well, then, you have been careless—not about your property, your health, your interests in this life, your mental improvement, your pleasures—but about your soul. The principal reason is, because you have been enamoured and enslaved by some sin. Yet it is as certain as that you are rational, and can feel and judge, hope and fear, suffer and enjoy, that you cannot continue in sin, and possess the hope which makes life happy and deprives death of its sting. You are not in the possession of true happiness, and a hope beyond death, just because you are not converted; and you are not and will not be converted, because you love sin. You may, perhaps, deny this, or attempt, by some sophistry, to evade it. I know that human minds in your state often do deny this, and try to hide it from their consciences. I know that they will pretend any reason and every reason for not becoming true Christians, rather than admit that it arises from their love of sin. But it is so, and they will find it so at last. It is one of the masterpieces of satanic deception, to induce men to believe that, if they are finally lost, it will not be their own fault. Yet this is mere empty sophistry. Many thousands have experimentally proved that it is utterly delusive, and vanishes when once conscience is roused to deal faithfully with them. They really love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil: and whatever they may say when surrounded by gay and jocular companions, yet, when serious, alone, terrified by the fear of death, or anticipating the presence of God, they feel it to be no comfort that they have lived

in sin, despised religion and laughed at conversion. They are then conscious that they have really preferred sinful pleasures to the salvation of their soul, or else they would not have turned from the one and pursued the other. They are conscious—and all such, when they think at all upon the matter, are conscious—that their own free will, without any constraint or necessity, has led them to seek their gratification in the ways of sin, rather than in the ways of God. But is not this a fact solemn enough—perilous enough to startle you from your dream of pleasure—sufficient to appal any mind with the tremendous thought of being soon consigned to endless torments? A little further progress in the same course, and you will find no possibility of retracing your steps! The die will be cast; the sentence, already gone forth, will be executed. Yet, the only true and adequate reason that can be stated, why you are not a true and happy Christian, is, confessedly, that you have been careless; careless to such a degree, as you would not have been in any other matter, important to your health, your worldly interest, or your happiness. The only cause why you have not been converted is to be attributed to the evil disposition of your own heart. You have shown by your own conduct, that you would rather continue under the leprosy of sin, the moral plague of your heart, than be made whole by the hands of the divine Physician. Do not, I entreat you, by all that is solemn in eternity, by all that is precious in the immortal soul, do not shrink from bringing home to your own conscience the charge of being wilfully in a sinful state. It is a true charge, and you will find it so when it is enforced by your Judge. You are now resigning yourself to the

fatal influence of the most deadly malady under which the soul can labour. You are folding your arms to rest, just as the storm is about to break on your frail vessel. You are sliding smoothly down to the brink of a precipice, from which your eyes are averted, while you are amused and pleased with the scenery around, from which you will soon disappear. A little more of this kind of self-delusion, and you will be irrecoverably gone; you will drop into destruction. Awake, thou that sleepest! Be willing to think of Christ, of your soul, of eternity, of that conversion without which you cannot be saved. Admit the plain truth, though it may be disagreeable. Learn the worst of your case, though it may fill you with alarm; for you may learn it when alarm cannot lead to escape. There is more hope in candour and sincerity than in self-flattery, false peace and indifference. Sin will, sin must, destroy the soul, or sin must be destroyed by the grace of God now. You may not like to make the sacrifice required in order to be saved, but you make a much greater sacrifice to retain your sins.

Careless, enslaved sinner! have you yet a desire to live a new life and taste real happiness? It is not too late, neither are the blessings placed beyond your reach. If you are in earnest for your everlasting salvation, there is One mighty to save, waiting to receive the confession of your sinfulness, willing to give eternal life to all that come unto him. Haste to his throne of mercy, believe his promise, and receive, without money and without price, the precious gift of his ineffable and everlasting love.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOPELESS.

THERE are many persons whose minds have been brought into the lamentable state indicated by the fearful word which stands at the head of this chapter, from very different causes. Some have trifled with convictions till they have become insensible and reckless. Others are, perhaps, in an equally hopeless, but a less hardened and careless state. They are conscious that they have repeatedly broken through all the dictates of their consciences and the warnings of the divine word ; and, sensible that they have no strength to carry out their good purposes, they have ceased to form any ; thinking that, at least, they will contract no more guilt by breaking their solemn vows. Others there are, who have become hopeless through an overpowering sight of their own guiltiness. Such a view has been set before them of the law of God, and of their own long-continued and aggravated transgressions of it, that they have yielded to the suggestions of the adversary, who tells them there is no possibility of their salvation. They may feel, and deeply feel, that they need conversion, but they look upon it as an impossibility. Some such have even gone so far as to say God could not save them, even if he would. They feel quite sure that he has given them up to hardness of heart and eternal wrath. Hence, they reject every word of consolation, and refuse the plainest promises of mercy, though addressed specially to the chief of sinners.

There is another class of the hopeless, who have fallen into this forlorn and wretched state through mistaken views of the divine method of reconciliation. It is no uncommon case for those to lapse into this condition, who have been trying to work out a righteousness for themselves, but have failed. The inference by which they are entangled and fast bound is this: because they have made an earnest and a long effort to work themselves up to the hope of salvation, and this has proved utterly abortive, therefore there is no hope for them; there is some divine decree of reprobation against them, and they must forever despair of escaping from that wrath they deserve. This is the issue to which the enemy of souls would urge all who have been awakened to a sense of their sin and guilt, by the application of the law to their consciences. One of this description on a sick-bed was addressed thus: "The gospel affords a balm for every wound which sin has made in the soul." "True," said he; "but that gospel, despised through life, affords me no balm in my death. There is no mercy for me now."

Some persons have had such a state of mind fixed upon them by the casual reading or hearing of some awful text of Scripture, which has come to them with such force, been so appropriate to their case, that, instead of taking it only as a salutary and merciful warning, they have construed it into a direct revelation of their inevitable doom. Yet all the hopelessness, even of such extreme cases, consists not in the greatness of the sins committed, but in rejecting the promise of forgiveness. The decision of such minds is made in direct contradiction to the fulness of divine mercy; and could they be convinced that they

neither have nor can have any such ground for believing their case hopeless as they have for believing the divine mercy sufficient for their pardon, they might then see that there is yet hope even for them in God's free mercy, though none in themselves. Nothing, therefore, must hinder us from asserting and proving the all-sufficiency of that atonement through which it is proclaimed, that "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men."*

Every soul that feels its condition to be hopeless, and rests that conviction upon the measure or the guilt of sin, does, in fact, affirm the insufficiency of divine grace, the insufficiency of the blood of Christ, and the insufficiency of his mediation in his case. If every reason alleged by such be carefully examined, it will be found to deny the truth of innumerable plain texts and promises of God, and must, therefore, be fundamentally and totally false; for, "Let God be true, but every man a liar,"† is a saying which even the most hopeless cannot resist. Even their own fears and terrors all depend upon the truth of God, and they themselves all profess to admit the veracity of God, at least *in his threatenings*. These are the sources of their despair. They dread the wrath to come, and, therefore, they believe one part of the divine word; though they do not perceive that the threatenings are designed to work repentance. They do not profess to deny or despise these threatenings; they only disbelieve the gracious promises.

For instance, one says, "I have gone too far." But what is too far? Let him but define what he conceives is *too far*, and it will be found that the

* Matt xii. 31.

† Rom. iii. 4.

divine forgiveness extends to that and has been granted to it. Another says, "I have sinned too long." But let him attach a clear idea to the expression, and still it will be found that Christ can save to the uttermost of time as well as of guilt; that a whole life of the most aggravated transgressions, though it had been the life of an antediluvian, does not carry the sinner beyond the reach of divine mercy. The hopeless of another class say, "But we have turned aside from our profession; we have been apostates, and have opened our mouth in blasphemy, in curses, in a denial of God and the Lord Jesus Christ." Still, all this does not exceed the power of divine forgiveness. Many such have been converted; and the tender pity that forgave a weeping Peter, after his repeated denial and his profane oaths, waits only for your repentance.

Still, another affirms the hopelessness of his case to arise out of the supposed fact, that he has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, of which it is said that "it hath never forgiveness."* But if such a person is asked what is the awful sin thus exempted from forgiveness, he confesses that he cannot tell, but he supposes it to be speaking evil against the Holy Ghost, or it is denying Jesus Christ; yet he has no distinct idea, and certainly cannot say that he has clearly committed it. Why, then, should he pervert the Scriptures to prove himself guilty of that which Scripture itself has not clearly defined. The most judicious expositors and most learned divines agree, that, whatever this sin is, it cannot be committed by any one in an age when the Holy Spirit does not manifest his presence by miraculous signs, for

* Mark iii. 29.

that the Scriptures most clearly testify, that every sin known in these days has the promise of forgiveness attached to it upon repentance. Every species of sinners that we can find in the world are exhorted and invited to repent; and this they could not be, if, among the vast multitude and variety of sins and sinners, there were *one* exempted from the mercy of God. Even those Jews who witnessed the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost, and said that it was the effect of intoxication—"These men are full of new wine"*—were not abandoned by the apostles as unpardonable, but were exhorted to repent, and were assured, that if they believed on the Lord Jesus, even *they* should receive the remission of sins. This exhortation of Peter was effectual with many, for "they were pricked in the heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"† And that day more than three thousand believed, and were welcomed by apostolic authority into the Christian church. If, then, those who had at first attributed divine inspiration to drunkenness were converted and saved, there can be no sufficient reason derived from Scripture for the hopelessness of any sinner, simply on the conviction that he feels of any particular sin. He may be assured that no temptation has happened to him but that which is common to men. If the guilt of apostasy, of murder, of adultery, of horrid blasphemy, of atheism and infidelity, of the most awful imprecations and denials of God and Christ, has been forgiven, it will be impossible for any one to find a sin for which divine mercy has not provided a remedy, of the forgiveness of which Holy Scripture does not afford an example. It

* Acts ii. 13.

† Acts ii. 37.

must be evident, therefore, that all those cases in which sinners are apt to become hopeless, are really not more so in the view of the divine grace than the case of any other sinner. All need repentance; to all conversion is prescribed; each is invited to believe; and again and again it is repeated, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."*

It is clear, that the only hopelessness of all these cases depends upon the adherence of the mind to a false notion—the unpardonable nature of the sin committed, or supposed to be committed. While that delusion remains, there can be no hope. But Scripture directly disproves it; and until the truth and certainty of the promises of God be admitted, there is no hope. Yet the inconsistency and self-contradiction of the despairing party are shown in this, that he rejects these promises, while he professes to feel the truth and certainty of the threatenings. If he has occasion to fear and tremble at the threatening, he has the very same authority to excite hope; for He who condemns all sin, says he will forgive all sin, on the faith and repentance of the sinner. It is absurd to believe the one and not the other.

There seems to be only one other view of all such cases, which it is important here to notice. Some readers of this section may say, that they do not place their despair upon the ground of the unpardonable nature of their sin, but upon the hardness of their heart. They are hopeless, because, after various and anxious efforts, they cannot bring their minds to the belief of the divine promise. In so far as this is hopelessness of their own ability, it is matter for congratulation, rather

* Rom. x. 11.

than of despair. The feeling of their own inability ought to urge them to ask that of God which they cannot impart to themselves. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;"* not by dwelling upon our own inability. Instead of restricting our thoughts and our fears to that, we should be looking to Him that can excite faith; we should be gathering up the promises that inspire it into despairing hearts. You look to the deep gloom of your own helplessness, and say, We are hopeless, because we cannot believe. True: and how should you be otherwise while you do not look to that quarter from whence the day-spring visits us? Christ says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved;"† but you look to yourselves, and say, We are lost! Faith cannot spring up in that heart which is engaged exclusively with its own miseries. When once these miseries are felt, they should urge you immediately to look out of and beyond yourselves for help. So you would do if you were reduced to the extreme of poverty; so you would do if violent disease had seized your frame; so you would escape hastily from the flames, if you awoke suddenly, and found yourself enveloped by the devouring element; so you would cry for help, if you felt yourself sinking in deep waters. Then why not direct your cry to Him who says, "Look unto me and be ye saved?"‡ A look, a right desire, a true glance of the eye of faith directed towards him, and you would immediately feel that you were strengthened with strength in your soul; and you would look again and again with growing desire, with declining fear and rising hope, till you felt Christ formed in your heart, the hope of glory.

* Rom. x. 17.

† Isa. xlv. 22.

‡ Isa. xlv. 22.

Mr. Whitefield, a brother of the Rev. George Whitefield, after living some time in a backsliding and careless state, was roused to a perception of his danger, but shortly after sunk into melancholy and despondency. He was drinking tea with the Countess of Huntingdon one afternoon, while her ladyship was endeavouring to raise his hopes by conversing on the infinite mercy of God through Jesus Christ. For a while it was all in vain. "My lady," he replied, "I know what you say is true. The mercy of God is infinite. I see it clearly. But, ah! my lady, there is no mercy for me. I am a wretch, entirely lost." "I am glad to hear it, Mr. W.," said Lady H. "I am glad at my heart that you are a lost man." He looked with great surprise. "What! my lady, glad! glad at your heart that I am a lost man?" "Yes, Mr. Whitefield, truly glad: for Jesus Christ came into the world to save the lost!" He laid down his cup of tea on the table—"Blessed be God for that," he said. "Glory to God for that word," he exclaimed. "Oh what unusual power is this which I feel attending it! Jesus Christ came to save the lost! then I have a ray of hope:" and so he proceeded. As he finished his last cup of tea, his hand trembled, and he complained of illness. He went out of the house for air, staggered, was brought in, and shortly after expired.

CONCLUSION.

And now, my reader, under whatever description you have ranged yourself as the work was proceeding, here we are about to part. The writer has nearly done with his book. He is about to lay down his pen, and you, the reader, are about to lay down the little volume. But we have both done with it only for time. Its thoughts and sentiments must live and recur again. They will, doubtless, in your heart. We must both realize its consequences in eternity. Whatever are your impressions of the manner in which the author has treated the subject, you cannot doubt, after reading the book, that the subject itself is of transcendent importance. If you are disposed to dismiss the book from your thoughts, yet be earnestly and affectionately entreated not to dismiss its *subject*: for this momentous reason, that He who says "*Except ye be converted, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God,*"* is now the gracious Saviour of the world, is waiting to become yours, and is appointed ere long to be your Judge. From his lips you will assuredly hear your final sentence pronounced. Matters of infinite concernment to yourself depend upon your decision of the question—Are you, or are you not, *converted*? Will you, or will you not, *now* be converted? Heaven or hell through eternal ages is in the answer you finally give! Pause—consider—pray.

* Matt. xviii. 3.



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