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BOOKS BY
SAMUEL McCOMB, D.D.

PRAYER—What It Is and What It Does

FAITH—The Greatest Power in the World

THE NEW LIFE—The Secret of Happiness and Power

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The New Life

The Secret of Happiness and Power

by

The Rev. Samuel McComb, D.D.

AUTHOR OF

"FAITH" "PRAYER" ETC.



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THE NEW LIFE

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B-R

TO MY BROTHER
JOHN WARREN McCOMB

AND TO MY FRIEND

FREDERICK JOHN HAZLEDINE

BOTH SERVING AS GOOD SOLDIERS OF JESUS CHRIST

"SOMEWHERE IN THE WAR ZONE"

I OFFER THIS LITTLE BOOK

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FOREWORD

“Christianity is not a theory nor a speculation, but a Life. Not a philosophy of life, but a life and a living process.”

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

“This experience conversion has been repeated and testified to by countless millions of civilized men and women in all nations and of all degrees of culture. It signifies not whether the conversion be sudden or gradual, though as a psychological phenomenon it is more remarkable when sudden, and there is no symptom of mental aberration otherwise. But even as a gradual growth in mature age its evidential value is no less. . . . That it may all be due to so-called natural causes is no evidence against its so-called supernatural source unless we beg the whole question of the Divine in Nature.”

GEORGE JOHN ROMANES.

“The attitude of man is essentially changed when the greatness and the success of life depend on a participation in a superhuman Spiritual Life. We are accustomed to view man as the meeting-point of a divergence of worlds, and to attribute to him on account of his characteristic nature an incomparable worth: this can no longer be asserted of him, for the New and the Higher lie in the Spiritual Life as openings of an independent inner world and not in man as man.”

RUDOLF EUCKEN.

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I

THE NEED OF A NEW LIFE

ANY one who dispassionately considers life, as we know it to-day, must be conscious that at its heart there reigns a profound unrest. The signs of this disquietude are everywhere present. Modern civilization has indeed been created by man, and yet the creator stands in fear of his creation. For, as in the story of the inventor who made a machine of marvelous complexity only to find himself eventually its helpless slave, so modern man is in danger of becoming a victim of the very system which he has slowly and with infinite labor built up.

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¶ What avails all this feverish activity, this struggling and striving, if at its center there are no spiritual values, nothing to give permanent satisfaction? Civilization has done great things and offers us many gifts, triumphs of scientific skill. Automobiles, airships, wireless telegraphy, radium, submarine vessels, and a thousand other miracles of genius have transformed the world and stirred hopes of still greater marvels yet to be achieved. The elimination of suffering, an increase of comfort, the spread of a self-centered culture—these things constitute the modern man's gospel. More and still more of these is the panacea for his spiritual ills. Is it any wonder that many to-day are awakening to the emptiness of it all and are crying out for redemption from the dullness, the conventional pettiness, the intolerable tedium of life?

¶ But where is to be found the redeemer? The clear-cut and positive faith of an earlier time is no longer theirs. With some the substitute is a morality of good form, a worldly prudence which turns ethics into the hand-

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maid of secular success; with others of a more thoughtful type the mind is directed to some form of social service, the redemption of the community, as worthy of our highest devotion. Sociology has taken the place of mysticism. Work for the uplift of the unprivileged classes leaves but little room for meditation and prayer, whereby alone men of an earlier time believed that the ideal life could be won and enjoyed. These expedients sooner or later fail to meet the demands of the soul; they break down at those critical moments of moral stress or trial when they are most needed.

¶ Many of the psychic miseries which to-day defy the resources of medical and psychical skill have their origin here. Alcohol, cocaine, morphine—these are the pretended redeemers from sorrow, remorse, ennui, and world-weariness to which so many betake themselves. Promising the riches and freedom of a larger universe, they sell the soul into a degrading and well-nigh inescapable bondage. Men and women pent in their prison-houses are groping for a way out. They

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crave some "sweet oblivious antidote" which will

Cleanse the stuffed bosom from the perilous stuff
That weighs upon the heart.

¶ Were it not for the relief which the newer mystical cults of our time give their adherents, existence for many would become still more frightful than it is.

¶ What, then, is the deepest need of the modern man? What is the only cure that really cures, the only remedy that can compass his ills by leading him back from the circumference of experience, where he is spending his substance for that which satisfieth not, to the center where spiritual values are enthroned and he knows himself to be at rest? The answer is—a new life, a life fuller, richer, more abundant, sweeping before it ancient hindrances, releasing imprisoned possibilities, and flooding the consciousness with unsuspected power and undreamed-of joy. Nothing less than this will suffice. Much precious time, given us for the realization of our vocation, is spent in finding out that

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apart from a new life discontent and despair must be our lot.

¶ What do we mean by the new life? We mean the life which ceases to concentrate itself on a part and which broadens out until it takes in the whole. Or, to put it in religious language, the life which begins in a new attitude to God, harmony with His will, trust in and love to Him, leading to an enthusiastic co-operation with Him in the redemption of the world. When man has entered on this new life, and the habitual center of his personal energy is the desire so to live that Christ would approve his life, the thought of a sudden or gradual realization of this experience is entirely indifferent. Emotion, or the lack of it, psycho-physical states, however abnormal, are absolutely of no significance. The only adequate test of the life is ethical in character. To what has the experience led? What does it mean for the individual and for the world?

II

SHOULD A MAN WORRY ABOUT HIS SINS?

AT the threshold of the spiritual life stands the dark and sinister figure of Sin. Here, as elsewhere, the average man to-day is sadly perplexed. Old traditions of this matter no longer interest him. He hears in church that he is a "miserable offender," and that "there is no health in him," but the words convey no intelligent thought and, therefore, excite no painful emotion. The attitude of the man, active in the affairs of the world, toward this question has been described by Sir Oliver Lodge in terms which a few years ago excited much controversy in British religious circles.

¶ "As a matter of fact," he says, "the higher man of to-day is not worrying about his sins, still less about their punishment;

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his mission, if he is good for anything, is to be up and doing.”¹ And it has been said more recently by the author of *Father Payne*: “It is a mistake, I think, to dwell long on one’s deficiencies. What one has got to do is to fill one’s life of positive, active, beautiful things until there is no room for the ugly intruders. . . . Turn your back on it all, look at the beautiful things; leave a thief to catch a thief, and the dead to bury the dead; do not sniff at the evil thing, go and get a breath of fresh air.”

¶ This is the doctrine of the healthy-minded philosophers and cults. If you stumble and fall, do not waste time in speculating as to the why and wherefore of your mishap, but rise at once and resume your journey. The business of life must be carried on and it is folly to waste time in brooding and curious introspection. As Matthew Arnold says, “Sin is not a monster to be mused on, but a weakness to be got rid of.”

¶ To the man who has been confronted by his moral blunders is given the advice of

¹ *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1904, p. 266.

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Virgil to Dante, who was too much attracted by certain shadows that crossed his path in the Inferno: "One glance at them and then pass on." Such teaching contains a healthy corrective to the one-sidedness of traditional religion. Such a mere lamentation over sin, which leads to no systematic effort to become better and to lead a good life, is a barren waste of emotional energy. It weakens the soul and, by concentrated attention on the evil, arms sin with new strength and virulence.

¶ And yet a little reflection will show that the Christian emphasis on sin, which is often deplored, while contrasting it with the pagan emphasis on virtue, has something to say for itself. Can we drift into goodness without thought and without effort? Analogies taken from nature are liable to mislead us here. The flower grows by natural necessity; the insect passes through its various steps of development without any thought on its part; but we are spiritual beings, and our growth is achieved by *decisions of the will*. But how can we decide without self-reflection? And how can we reflect on what

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might have been without bitter regret, regret which may well bring tears that scald the heart?

¶ It is a fundamental law that all moral progress is possible only through a breach with the past. But does not this imply a condemnation of the past as something that need not have been? The truth is that when we speak of sin as a *stumble* or a *fall* we unconsciously regard it as an accident for which we are hardly, if at all, responsible. Why worry over such a slight misfortune? How foolish to cry over spilt milk! Forget it, ignore it—and all will be well. The theory is most seductive and alluring, if only it would work. But does it work? Can we go on indefinitely without reflecting on our own nature and the causes of our blunders, on the best means to be employed for the destruction of undesirable habits and for the acquirement of good ones? And if we could, would it be wise or safe for us to do so? Obviously there is some misunderstanding here, and we need to have our minds cleared up on the point.

III

THE REAL MEANING OF SIN

WHAT, then, do we mean by Sin? Some will have it that the word has lost its meaning and may now be struck from the vocabulary of the spirit. This anguish under which our fathers groaned is now discovered to be a superstition born of ignorance, heredity, and environment. Henceforth life, freed from medieval gloom, can move forward contentedly and peacefully and the world become as Renan said, "a pleasant promenade." Now it goes without saying that truth must be reinterpreted from age to age, but any reinterpretation which leaves us more content with the world and ourselves may well be suspected of unreality.

¶ "Note well that it is not pleasantness, but force, that sets the mark for truth; we

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have to require of our faith not what is agreeable to the indolent spirit, but what is at once a spur and a promise. What do you think of hell? The doctrine of hell made religion at one time a matter of first-rate importance; getting your soul saved made a difference in your empirical destiny. If your idealism wipes out your fear of hell, your idealism has played you false. Truth must be transformed; but the transformation of truth must be marked by a conservation of power.”¹

¶ One extreme produces another. We are suffering to-day from a reaction against the exaggeration of an earlier time. Doctrines of “original sin,” “total depravity,” and “everlasting punishment” become intolerable and unbelievable, and straightway it is forgotten that they were not woven out of nothing, but were unhappy and overstrained expressions of a profound spiritual experience. In our rejection of the doctrine we ignore the experience that lay behind it. It cannot be too often insisted on that the experience

¹ Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. xiv,

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of sin is distinct from every theory of it. The great analysts of human nature, the novelists and dramatists of the modern world, may differ from one another and from the theologian as to the meaning of sinful experience, but they are agreed as to its tragic reality.

¶ The somber genius of Hawthorne sees its awakening in a remorse of conscience which can be relieved only by the purifying pain of public confession. George Meredith finds in wilful wrong-doing an irrevocable evil, a power which does not exhaust itself in the wrong action, but gives rise to an endless series of evils. Ibsen traces the cruelty and horror of sin in the disasters that it inflicts upon innocent posterity. Dostoyevsky finds in sin something so destructive to the sinner's own nature that redemption is possible only by atonement, by drinking to its dregs the bitter cup of penalty, that thus through the pains of purgatory he may win his way to freedom and to peace. Unless we are to reject the testimony of all the better minds of our time we must brand as the shallowest of sophisms the notion that sin is

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an illusion of our own minds, and will vanish if only we persist in denying its reality. To realize the meaning of sin in feeling and in thought is not the mark of a sick soul, but rather the sign of returning spiritual health.

¶ If our age is deficient in the mystical sense of sin, it is only fair to acknowledge that there has dawned on it a new vision of sin as a great social phenomenon. A changed feeling about sin is due in part to the passing away of the old individualism and the birth in our time of a social conscience. There are great corporate sins in which, perhaps, we have had no actual share, but of which we feel as though we were guilty. We are not ourselves saloon-keepers, yet we feel that we are responsible for all the crime and degradation which the saloon system works. We do not ourselves send children into the factories and mills where they are stunted physically, intellectually, and morally; nevertheless, we cannot be at peace until the load has been lifted from our conscience. We do not receive rents for rotten tenement-houses; though we know they were built before we

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were born, their continued existence is a scandal which at all costs we must remove. Sin is thus seen to be selfishness, and selfishness is want of love for others.

¶ The man of to-day also recognizes sin as vice, as an offense against his own character, a corruption of his own nature. Alcoholism, drug addiction, unchastity, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, avarice, gambling—these evils are seen to be evil by bitter experience of their enslaving and degrading power. The psychological history of any one vice is pretty much that of the rest. Some time ago there shambled into my study a pathetic figure; physically he was a wreck with all the signs of degeneration writ large upon him—puffy eyelids, trembling hands, twitching muscles, the whole man nerveless, ineffective, broken.

¶ Gradually I drew from him his tragic history. For twenty years he had been a slave, bound hand and foot, in the grasp of the alcoholic habit. Born into a highly respectable and religious family, he assumed great business responsibilities; when fagged

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out with a heavy morning's work it was his custom to take a little alcohol that he might have strength to hold up for the rest of the day. The habit grew until he became a confirmed drunkard; the inevitable consequence followed. His powers as a business man were undermined, disgrace and humiliation overtook his family. He himself was for a time an inmate of an inebriate's home, only, however, to come out with a pathological craving still stronger than before. Again and again during the past twenty years he had made violent efforts to break his chains, and occasionally it had looked as though he had won deliverance; but again and again his hopes were deceived. He said to me: "You need not tell me to abstain; I have no power to keep from alcohol. My will is gone; if you can put a new will in me there may be some chance, but as it is I have neither hope nor faith."

¶ This man found a way out of his prison. But the point to be emphasized is that in essence his case illustrates the history of all habits that tend to corrupt character. We

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call such a man *dissolute* because, as a matter of fact, his psychic energies are dissolved, their unity destroyed, and the man set against himself. We all know, either by experience or by observation, what sin is in this sense, and to-day we are learning, as never before, to sympathize not only with the suffering which others have brought on a man, but also with the suffering which he has brought upon himself.

IV

THE NEED OF CONVERSION

SO far we have been within the moral sphere, but now religion comes and the real gravity of sin appears, for religion lifts man out of space and time and sets him face to face with the Eternal; that is, it puts him in the constant presence of God. Black as are the treacheries we commit against others, pitiful as are the wretchednesses we inflict upon ourselves, they assume a still more tragic meaning when we trace them all back to their ultimate spiritual root. Religion tells us that the source of all our sins, so far as it is not caused by heredity and environment, is want of harmony with God or with the universe. For religion is a conception of the will of God or the order of the universe, and defines sin as the contradiction of this Will or Harmony. Now the Christian re-

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ligion, as represented by the simple teaching of its Founder, proclaims sin to be a false relation to God, lack of trust in God's fatherly love and, therefore, a refusal to yield ourselves to Him as the organs of His purpose of good to the world. It is the prodigal's claim to a spurious independence: "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." It is as though he said, "I am my own to do with as I may, and I mean to go my own way and live my own life."

¶ But man is not made for himself; he is made in and for God, the self-revealing Love that seeks to enter into communion with him. This is man's deepest life, his spiritual destiny. In the very center of his being there is a spot sacred to God where none other may intrude, and from this central spot come out inspiring and directing impulses that harmonize will and conscience, thought and feeling, desire and effort. When this is the case, the soul is a harmony, and harmony is salvation.

¶ Suppose, through indifference to or estrangement from God, this inner sanctum

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is empty, what happens? The vacuum is filled by an inrush of temptations, seductions, worldly ambitions, sensual passions, self-seeking aims, and these set up their throne and establish their anarchical power over us. All life, both in relation to ourselves and to others, gets its whole meaning and worth from the principle which governs it. Hence the vital question for every man is, what kind of a personality am I cultivating—God-centered or self-centered? If the false self rules, then all is false. A man may pass through the world for half a lifetime conscious indeed of faults, faults of temper, speech, and conduct, weary of existence, dissatisfied with his environment, and yet he may never see the root of all his malady. Only if, by the grace of Heaven, he gets a vision of the truth, does he discover by contrast the real source of his discontent. He had never dug down to the rock-bottom fact; he had never come to terms with the ultimate mystery which we call God.

¶ This does not mean that he may not have been a kind-hearted and honest man,

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but it does mean that he falls short of the vocation to which religion calls him, and to which he is pledged by his very nature as man to be a son of God and a co-worker with Him in the making of His world. Only as man lives in surrender to the Divine Life is he able to master himself and love all other men with the measure of the love God bears to all His children. If we trust God, we will reverence His image in our own souls too much to permit a defacing stain, and wilfully to hurt another soul will seem the worst sin in the dark catalogues of crime.

¶ Thus the moral and social orders rest upon the spiritual order. It is my relation to God that determines my relation to the world and to myself. In sinning I strike a blow at the varied relationships of which I am the center, and still more fundamentally at the spiritual constitution of the universe on which these relations rest, at the will to love which energizes at the heart of things. If there is a God, and if His character is like that of Jesus Christ, we cannot stop short of this serious view of moral evil. It is true that in sinning

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we did not intend to bring down the very fabric of things in ruin upon our heads—that were an act of satanic proportions. But this conviction seizes us only when the ideal has been flashed on us through some appeal; it may be the argument of a noble book, or the chance word of a passer-by, or a familiar text of Scripture clothed with revealing power, or the reflection of our wrongdoing in the shame and sorrow of another. Then we turn in loathing from the foul thing, we condemn ourselves and resolve to lead a new life. The new desire is born within us and we are happy in the thought that we have done with evil and that our enemy lies dead at last.

¶ Alas for our short-lived happiness! Our new attitude of soul leads to new and disconcerting revelations. The soul's life is a unity. As Benjamin Jowett wisely remarks: "Our mental and moral nature is one. We cannot break ourselves into pieces in action any more than in thought. The whole man is in every part and in every act. This is not a mere mode of thought, but a truth

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of great practical importance. 'Easier to change many things than one' is the common saying. 'Easier,' we might add, 'in religion and morality to change the whole than the part.'"¹ While the awakened conscience is focused on this or that sinful act or habit, the light that reveals this dark spot brings into view other unnoticed perversities, and as these are illumined we are conscious that still others lie in the shadow beyond.

¶ In other words, we discover that our sin is not an accidental scar on the soul, like a wart or a wen on the body, but is a symptom of a deep-seated disorder which affects the entire spiritual organism. What the awakened soul deplors is not merely the act, but the character, the trend of the will, the personal life which made such an act or habit possible. It feels itself entangled in a network of evil tendencies; it resolves and vows and prays. It struggles with all its might, and the conflict rises in some instances, as in the case of an Augustine or a Bunyan, into a painful agony.

¹ *Interpretation of Scripture*, p. 321.

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¶ But the “enemy faints not nor faileth,” and gradually the truth is driven home that no reformation of the old way of living, no rehabilitation of the old man, will meet the spiritual situation. A radical transformation, a change penetrating to the roots of life, a regeneration of the springs of action, a renewal of the inmost self whereby the soul, which hitherto has been set on some evil, now wills the good simply because it is good—this is the supreme need of the soul. It is the feeling of this need that goes forth in that miserable cry: “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?” The ancient world had no answer to that question. It knew of no spiritual dynamic which might change the man’s desire and move the will to new issues.

¶ Aristotle, in the greatest of his ethical treatises, has written more profoundly than any of the ancients concerning the power of habit. He entertained but small hope for the generality of men. In his view the majority could never rise to a really virtuous life, and must be restrained by law and

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punishment. Only those in whom there is a predisposition to the "love of what is honorable and the hate of what is disgraceful" could hope to profit by ethical training. In order to be good a man must cease from doing evil and must acquire the habit of doing good. But neither Aristotle nor any other Greek teacher was able to point to any fount of power from which the soul could draw reinforcements which would enable it to shake off the growth of years and develop new faculties for virtue and well-doing. But this very thing which the highest thought of the ancient world could not do, the revelation of a higher spiritual good, the gift of religion, and more especially the Christian religion, is accomplishing every day.

V

IS CONVERSION POSSIBLE?

ALL around us are men and women wasting their lives in futility and inefficiency, desiring to be good and to do good, yet never achieving their desire. Their emotion is often stirred under the appeal of the preacher or the dramatist, but never issues in any permanent uplift of the life. They spend their time in sinning and repenting, and their very repenting is a source of weakness; it but weakens the will and deepens their bondage. Yet were they upbraided by some critic of their deeds they would in all likelihood use the words which Robert Louis Stevenson puts into the mouth of his imaginary sinner, Markheim: "You would judge me by my acts! But can you not look within? Can you not understand that evil is hateful

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to me; can you not see within me a clear writing of conscience never blurred by any wilful sophistry, although too often disregarded? Can you not read me for a thing that surely must be common as humanity—the unwilling sinner?” Thus do men play tricks with conscience and cover up the baseness of weak compliance with desire.

¶ What can break through the vicious circle and set them free? Only a clear vision of themselves, as responsible for their indecision, and of the truth that unity of conscience and will can be achieved only by an inner transformation whereby a man's small and pettily human self dies and a larger self is born. For sinners such as these the gateway into the new life leads through a sharp, abrupt, irrevocable decision, call it what you will—repentance, conversion, the new birth, the putting off the old man and the putting on the new, or, if you prefer psychological language, the unifying of personality.

¶ Now the word “conversion” has had unfortunate associations, and cultured per-

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sons much mistrust it. It has been mixed up with the hysteria and emotional excitement of popular revivalism, and has been made to mean at times something magical and abnormal. It has been so soiled with all ignoble use that the mighty spiritual fact which it seeks to express is often obscured, or forgotten, or bluntly denied. To-day, however, among psychologists and students of religion it is coming to its own, and a whole literature has been devoted to its study and comprehension.

¶ Unhappily the term has been narrowed not only in religious, but also in scientific circles to a sudden and dramatic religious experience, in contrast to the processes of gradual growth. Professor Starbuck, in his *Psychology of Religion*, distinguishes between the "sudden and gradual" types as "conversion" and "religious growth not involving conversion." Professor Ames, in his *Psychology of Religious Experience*, says: "Conversion designates the more sudden, intense, and extreme emotional experience. It is the result of immediate, direct control and sug-

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gestion on the part of evangelists, parents, teachers.”¹ This limitation of the word is unfortunate and is liable to give rise to wrong impressions, clouding the fact that the Kingdom of God consists of converted persons, some of whom had experienced a sudden conversion, and some of whom had not.

¶ The prejudice against the possibility of a sudden conversion springs from lack of insight into the power of religion and into the nature of the human mind. However we may account for the fact, it has been abundantly proved that there is such a thing as the “soul’s leap to God” in which time is a mere irrelevance. This experience has been shared not only by the ignorant and the outcast classes who have led wicked or careless lives, but has marked an epoch in the careers of some of the greatest and most influential men, such as Paul, Augustine, Luther, Cromwell, Savonarola, Ignatius Loyola, Wesley, Schleiermacher, Chalmers, Newman, and Tolstoi, and many another that might be named. The consideration that the experience does

¹ P. 257.

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not appeal to us, but rather awakens suspicious or hostile reflections, is no reason why we should refuse to believe that others may have trodden a spiritual path which we have not known. There are many who sympathize with the sentiment of a distinguished lawyer who once said to me, "I would prefer to trust the ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance before the one sinner that repenteth," or with the feeling of Emerson when he said, "Save me from the man that repents." But the judgment of men like the author of *Ecce Homo*, Sidgwick, and James may be accepted, and it is that conversion is a fundamental element in the Christian religion and that, as a rule, it brings with it a changed attitude to life which is fairly permanent.

VI

SUDDEN VERSUS GRADUAL CONVERSION

THE gravest objection, however, has been made on the ground that a sudden conversion is a violation of the law of spiritual continuity which runs through all life. Every effect has a cause; this holds good in the spiritual as well as in the material world. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," "Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind"—such phrases have become proverbial. We speak of the consequences of sin as if they were, in some sense, separable from it, but deeper reflection assures us that they are part and parcel of the evil act, and that the punishment of evil is more evil. It is not that sin works death; it is that sin is death. The higher thought of man in every age has borne witness to this truth; Greek

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tragedy and Jewish prophecy and Indian wisdom are at one in proclaiming the fatal continuity of wrong.

¶ There are perhaps few passages more frequently quoted in discussions like the present than that in which Omar Khayyam sounds a dirge over the irreparable past:

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: not all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

¶ Omar is right; no power in heaven or on earth can make the past not the past. What we have written in our book of life we have written. This somber truth should be allowed to sink into our minds lest we make a mock of sin, or imagine that we can with impunity despise the regularities of the spiritual universe. But it is equally vital that, having learned this lesson, we should pass on to some larger truth, otherwise the cause of goodness is seriously endangered by the paralysis of our energies which the sense of the irreparable always works. A half-truth taken by itself is negative and destruc-

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tive, whereas the larger truth is affirmative and creative. The one subtracts from, the other adds to, our psychic powers. Now the larger truth may be expressed thus: while the past cannot be obliterated from the history of the individual or of the moral universe, it can be transformed; it can be made to yield up the secret of new growths, undreamed-of advance in the development of the best self.

¶ There is another law under which we can bring our lives; it is the law of repentance. It is possible to make a new beginning, to transfigure the past, to find in it new inspiration, new warning, new incentive to fresh effort. As Phillips Brooks has said, "A man can get rid of his past by getting a future out of it." The character can be reborn out of selfishness, worldliness, and the wayward impulses of the natural man into a life of sacrifice and brotherhood, and of love strong even unto death. This ennobling possibility was not unknown to the pre-Christian world. Socrates taught that virtue is knowledge and that the way to knowledge is a convic-

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tion of one's ignorance. Seneca could say, "I regard myself not so much as a reformed as a transfigured man." But it is in the Christian religion that this possibility steps forth with a rapturous confidence, which sweeps all before it and for many a soul makes the whole world new. Nor is this the enthusiastic fancy of an overstrained optimism.

¶ The philosophical basis of conversion is found in the teaching of the brilliant Frenchman, Henri Bergson. For him the universe is not a dead machine, but a vital organic process. Life is ever pressing forward to new forms, and we must believe that for even God Himself there are always dramatic surprises in the history of the world. "That each instant is a fresh endowment, that the new is ever upspringing, that the form just come into existence (although when once produced it may be regarded as an effect determined by its cause) could never have been foreseen—because the causes here, unique in their kind, are part of the effect, have come into existence with it and are determined by

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it as much as they determine it—all this we can feel within ourselves and divine by sympathy outside ourselves, but we cannot think it in the strict sense of the word, nor express it in terms of pure understanding.”¹ The possibility of conversion springs out of greatness, the sovereignty of the soul.

¹ *Creative Evolution*, pp. 172 seq.

VII

THE REGENERATION OF CHARACTER

THERE is something in the soul which the past has been incompetent to express—something over and above the dull monotony of sin. The old mystics called it “the seed of Christ,” the theologian names it “the image of God,” the psychologist interprets it as the “ideal self.” Let the man return to this his real nature, sloughing off all that has overlaid it; and thus a new law comes into operation, modifying the action of the old; in Paul’s mystical phrase, “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” And now the old law of continuity which worked against him begins to work for him. It has come over to his side. If every effect has a cause, it is also true that every cause has an effect, and a new cause has now begun to

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operate. Henceforth sowing not to the flesh, but to the spirit, he will reap a more abundant life. "New habits can be launched," says James, "on condition of there being new stimuli and new excitements. Now life abounds in these and sometimes there are such critical and revolutionary experiences that they change a man's whole scale of values and system of ideas. With such cases, the old order of his habits will be ruptured; and, if the new motives are lasting, new habits will be formed, and build up in him a new or regenerate nature."¹ It is not that goodness creates life; it is that goodness is life.

¶ Now it does not matter whether the return to the real self is made in a moment or in the passage of years; the essential point is that it can be made. Moreover, the "sudden" conversion is not so sudden as it seems. It will be found that, in every case, it has been led up to subconsciously for years, perhaps, and the change simply marked the point where the forces which had been struggling in the subconscious realm cease their

¹ *Talks on Psychology*, p. 77.

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conflict because the ideal man has captured the entire field of consciousness. Neither Paul nor Augustine leaped into the new life from the platform of atheistic unbelief; both were men of profound religious feeling, though in Paul the ethical element was more strongly marked than in Augustine.

¶ Paul tells us his soul, before that consecrated hour on the way to Damascus, was like the world before God said, "Let there be light"; then suddenly a glory that never was on sea nor land shone into his heart, the darkness vanished, and instead of chaos there came a sweet and ordered humanity. Yet this spiritual transformation implied a preceding unconscious preparation. Paul's passion for righteousness, his determination to dig down to the foundation of the spiritual life, his enthusiasm for the right, and quite possibly the impression made upon him subconsciously by the voice and figure of Jesus, whom he may have heard on the streets of Jerusalem—all these forces were leading him to his momentous decision. Augustine was converted by a verse in the New Testament.

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Why? Because that verse appealed to something within his soul, to a system of thoughts and feelings, hopes and desires, that had been slowly organizing there and now awaited the fit word to arm them with all-conquering energy. The same fact can be observed to-day when an urgent appeal finds quick response in the heart of the hearer; the message awakens a knowledge of good long dormant, secret memories and associations of childhood submerged, it may be, under years of carelessness and folly, but now meeting the appointed hour of resurrection.

¶ On the other hand, those who enter the new life through a long, gradual development of the life of righteousness experience certain critical moments where a decision for the good stamps the character with spiritual qualities more swiftly than before. Whether a man experiences a sudden or a slow conversion depends on his temperament and psychological quality. Those in whom the emotional and the suggestible predominate, and who possess a rich, subconscious self, will enter into peace in a moment through

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relaxation and self-surrender, while those who are reflective and volitional by nature need, perhaps, years of striving and of habit-forming before they win the secret of unity and blessedness. The distinction between "once-born" and "twice-born" Christians, which James borrows from Francis Newman and which has been too readily accepted by students of religion, is true so far as it indicates the difference in the form of conversion, but no farther. As Augustine says, "We are not born Christians, but we become Christians." In other words, Christian grace is not a development of the natural man. It marks the appearance of something new, and this new element may from earliest childhood be wrought into the texture of the unconscious life.

¶ Where the environment is favorable, uplifting and spiritualizing influences may steal into the soul and build it up in beauty and harmony. It argues a serious misunderstanding to suppose that men like Origen, Zinzendorf, Dean Stanley, Horace Bushnell, and Phillips Brooks never felt a renewing grace

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of heaven.¹ It will be found that in the lives of these men, and of others like them, there are periods in which the process of growth is condensed, as it were, and a more complete unification of the inner life is experienced.

¶ If ever there was a man who did not need conversion in the popular sense, surely it was John Ruskin, the finest flower of nineteenth-century culture, yet he it is who writes as follows: "One day last week I began thinking over my past life, and what fruit I have had, and the joy of it which had passed away, and of the hard work of it, and I felt nothing but discomfort, for I saw that I had been always working for myself in one way or another. Then I thought of my investigations of the Bible, and found no comfort in that, either. This was about two o'clock in the morning. So I considered that I had now neither pleasure in looking to my past life nor any hope, such as would be my comfort on a sick-bed, of a future one,

¹ For cases of different forms of conversion see—North, *Human Documents: Lives Rewritten by the Holy Spirit*; Begbie, *Twice-Born Men*, and *Souls in Action*; Jackson, *The Fact of Conversion*.

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and I made up my mind that this would never do. So, after thinking, I resolved that at any rate I would act as if the Bible were true—that if it were not I would be, at all events, no worse off than I was before; that I should believe in Christ and take Him for my Master in whatever I did; that to disbelieve the Bible was quite as difficult as to believe it; and when I had done this I fell asleep. When I rose in the morning, though I was still unwell, I felt a peace and spirit in me that I had never known before.”

¶ It is this type of conversion, the course of which, though broken by moments of solemn consecration or resolve, is, on the whole, gradual, that requires special emphasis to-day. It makes a convincing appeal to the vast majority of educated persons, to whom the violent upheavals and convulsive agonies of the spontaneous type contain something repellent. These persons are under the influence of the time-spirit, they have some tincture of science, they have been profoundly impressed by the doctrine of evolution. Moreover, they have cherished

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moral ideas; they believe in loyalty, in honor, in honest dealing with their fellows, and they are not, for the most part, without a measure of faith in a power, personal or impersonal, that governs the world. Hence, if the new life is ever to become theirs, it will not be by a sudden overthrow of their usual ways of thinking and acting, but by a gradual appropriation of new motives which can enter into vital union with the moral and intellectual habits already existing. The precise point at which the ethical passes over into the distinctively spiritual is hidden from the utmost scrutiny, as indeed are all vital beginnings. The transition is gradual and need not be marked by any mental struggle or frenzied agony of soul. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child; now that I am become a man I have put away childish things."¹

¶ Now in this passage from childhood to manhood, the most significant that can be experienced on this earth, there is no convulsion, no abrupt wrench; on the contrary,

¹ I Cor. xiii : 11.

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all is slow, each stage gradually melting into the next, like the great organic processes of nature. Why, then, cannot a man break with his spiritual past after the same fashion? What is there to prevent him from calmly and quietly reaching out after that for which his nature craves, without which, indeed, it remains a fragment, an incomplete and, therefore, unfulfilled phenomenon? From this point of view the new life offers itself as the creation and interpretation of the higher elements in human nature. This truth is obscured very often by an irrational insistence on belief in abstruse theological doctrine as a necessary qualification for entrance into the higher experiences of the spirit.

¶ These doctrines, however, are valueless if accepted in a dead, impassive manner, but they cannot be accepted otherwise unless through an experience which is not yet present. Devotion to the highest which the soul is able at a given moment to grasp is the best preparation for advance, not a knowledge of principles and truths that as yet speak no

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clear and compelling message to the mind. Let a man begin with what measure of trust he has, let him be loyal to his convictions which he has tested and found to be solid, and he will be in a position from which he can progress to other convictions, not mechanically adding one truth or one idea to another, but *living through* all truth as he is able to apprehend it.

¶ There is still a third spiritual type which needs conversion. It is very striking that Christ addresses Himself primarily not to the vicious and outcast classes, but to the conventionally "good," the pillars of society, the champions of law and order, men who had taken to themselves the whole armor of religiosity and stood clothed in all the pomp and circumstance of a spotless reputation and a cast-iron orthodoxy. It is a hard saying, too hard for many in our day to accept, yet here as elsewhere the Master rises above our artificial categories and proclaims the necessity of conversion for men who deem themselves, and are deemed by others, profoundly religious because they ab-

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stain from the sins which the ordinary conscience condemns and have a real zeal for religion. This does not mean that these persons put on the appearance of religion in order to deceive their fellows; on the contrary, they are profound believers in their religion. But it means that their religion is hollow, for it releases no fountains of enthusiasm; it does not act as a moral dynamic constraining the will and fusing the whole man in an ethical passion. It is, therefore, not to a Zaccheus or a Magdalene, but to a Nicodemus, a member of the highest religious caste, that Christ is represented as saying, "Ye must be born again."

¶ The elder brother in the parable was as much in need of a change of heart as the wastrel who had spent his all in a far country. Why is it that the conventionally "good" need to take their place with the publican and the sinner? Because both are suffering in different ways from the same malady, both are in wrong relations with God; the one openly flouts His will, the other formally obeys it, but from wrong motives and without

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the feeling which gives obedience its moral worth. "To be a son of God," says F. W. Robertson, "is one thing, to know the fact is another—and that is regeneration." The tragedy alike of the open sinner and the conventionally "good" man is that neither knows this fact.

¶ Is man, then, wholly passive in the regeneration of character, as clay in the hands of a potter? Must he wait until a higher power is pleased to lay hold of him? These questions answer themselves. If man is responsible for his sin, he is also responsible for turning from it and seeking the new life. God, it cannot be too often repeated, is not a magician ignoring the laws that rule in the spiritual world. The work of renewing character implies the co-operation of the divine and the human. Our life is so regulated that suggestions of good are constantly offered us. These suggestions, however, if neglected, become weaker and weaker and finally cease to exercise any power over us, but if we accept them and realize them in conduct, they become the dominant motives of our

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lives. There are memories that well up from the subconscious, memories that rebuke us for our disloyalty or that urge us to a decision on the side of what is right.

¶ Faust, intent on suicide, hears the music of the Easter bells recalling the faith of his boyhood, and stays his hand. We cannot walk abroad without something striking the eye or the ear which summons us to a better mind. It is here that the law of attention operates. We can attend to the suggestion that is offered us and, if the suggestion is a good one, it will summon to its assistance all the good elements of the subconscious life and thereby capture the will and realize itself in action. Moreover, the commonplace routine of every life is broken at intervals by critical epochs involving a profound upheaval of the emotional life. The wounding of the affections, the awakening of conscience to the horror of some self-indulgence, the revelation of a majestic truth claiming the allegiance of intellect and heart, the manifest working of divine judgments in public events that fill the hearts of men with perplexity and fear—

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such are some of the incitements that urge life on to finer issues. They speak of

. . . a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.

¶ It is at such moments that we will do well to betake ourselves to some natural solitude where, undistracted by the trivialities of the hour, we can come to terms with ourselves and with God who is thus breaking silence with us. Prayer and meditation, and self-surrender, the putting forth of our will to make ourselves over in thought and action to the guidance of the Divine Will—such is our part in the creation of the new life. We cannot, indeed, command the great experience, but we can supply the conditions on which the experience will inevitably be ours. If, as all the higher thought of our time assures us, our real environment is God, what but our own indifference, or blindness, or waywardness prevents the continuous unfolding of the Divine in our lives?¹

¹ For a fuller discussion of the human factor in the new life the reader is referred to *Faith, the Greatest Power in the World*.

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¶ Whence comes the impulse to repent, the self-loathing that is sometimes intolerable? From what secret spring wells up the unexpected prayer for help? What means this releasing of sealed fountains within us, setting free an energy to which we have but to surrender our wills in order to be carried, as we say, beyond ourselves into realms of undreamed-of achievement? The psychologist replies, "These things are to be explained through the action of subconscious factors, forces waiting beneath the surface of our normal life for some stimulus from without in order to break out into consciousness." But this answer, while valuable as throwing light upon the mechanism by which the good effect is produced, does not account for the effect itself.

¶ The only satisfying and ultimate explanation must be that man is open on all sides of his being, conscious and subconscious, to the inrush of spiritual forces which, in the last analysis, resolve themselves into one Supreme Force. But not even this Force can carry our wills by storm. It can prompt

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us to cast away some cherished sin, or create the aspiration to acquire some good habit, or start the impulse to carry out a hard, distasteful duty. These uprisings within us we do not, ourselves, deliberately will; they come we know not how or whence. It is ours not to explain them away as empty dreams or utopian fancies, but to interpret them as suggestions offered us from the all-encompassing Spirit, and at once set about the work of carrying them out in action. And our interpretation will prove its truth in the only way in which it can be proved, by the experience of freedom and expansion and a more abundant life which inevitably results.

¶ Of all the divine suggestions which rise within the mind none is more fraught with spiritual consequence than that which inspires the penitent mood. For, conceived aright, repentance¹ is the root virtue of the soul; with it all things are possible, without it nothing worth doing can be attempted.

¹ For a brilliant exposition of the New Testament idea of repentance the reader is referred to T. Walden's "The Great Meaning of the Word *Metanoia*."

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The word itself has had an unhappy history. It bears on its front the marks of a Latinized theology and puts the psychological emphasis in the wrong place. It speaks of sorrow, pain, punishment, of emotional disturbance, of regret for what might have been. It is negative rather than positive; its glance is backward, not forward. But let us baptize the word into the higher spirit of Christianity and then it means a change of thought and will, or, as people persistently separate thought and will from the subject who thinks and wills, one must say it is a change absolute and complete of the living self.

¶ The man who repents is the man who feels and knows by a deep intuition that under no conceivable circumstance could he be what he once was, or do again what he once did. He renounces the false shows of his weaker self, and, asserting the reality of his better self, he identifies himself with it in the inmost spirit of his being. This act of the will, springing out of his changed thought about himself and the world, marks the greatest crisis in his life, for it contains im-

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plicity all that is afterward to be achieved and manifested. Though he has not yet brought forth "fruits fit for repentance," his victory over himself and over all the evil forces that threaten his spiritual destiny is in his grasp. The very moment that marks his deepest humiliation and despair is also by a strange and divine paradox a moment when

He stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a height that is higher.

He realizes the saying, "death is the gate of life"; in mystical phrase he has been "crucified"; but from his spiritual death he has won a new life, creative, triumphant, inspiring, having within itself the promise and potency of all good.

VIII

THE POWER OF THE NEW LIFE

WHEN a man becomes conscious that he has entered on the new life he realizes a new world. This sense of newness is especially intense in those who have made a dramatic and abrupt breach with the past. Life is now organized around a new center, and even the external world seems clad with a super-earthly beauty. The most commonplace things and persons now bear gracious messages to the soul. John Masefield's hero in his poem "The Everlasting Mercy" passes at a bound from the shame and degradation of a drunkard and a thief to a complete spiritual emancipation, and it is then that he feels as though scales had fallen from his eyes.

Oh glory of the lighted mind!

How dead I'd been, how drunk, how blind,

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The station brook, to my new eyes,
Was babbling out of Paradise,
The waters rushing from the rain
Were singing, "Christ is risen again."
I thought all earthly creatures knelt
From rapture and the joy I felt.
The narrow station-wall's brick ledge,
The wild hop withering on the ledge,
The lights in huntsman's upper story
Were parts of an eternal glory
Where God's eternal Garden flowers—
I stood in bliss in this for hours.

¶ The psychologist explains this sense of newness by the theory that the psychic turmoil experienced in conversion has a corresponding physiological commotion involving a new distribution of the nervous energy. This may partly explain the results of a conversion crisis, but the fact is that the new view of nature and man comes to some whose change has involved little or no psychic tension. The man who quickly, in some moment of reflection, makes up his mind that henceforth God's will is to be his will, that he is done with self pleasing and is now committed irrevocably to the attainment of

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personal righteousness, also feels that for him the world is a new place.

¶ The trees and flowers, the living creatures that fill the woodland with their joy, all speak to him some word of God. The world is new because the man himself is new; a life which seems to him quite apart from his preceding life rises within him; the heart is lighter; the senses are keener; the intellectual powers awake to new energy; it is as though the psychic organism had been bathed in some cleansing and renewing tide. The disquietude and the discontent of the past have vanished as by magic. In their places new emotion, new desires, new ambitions rise spontaneously. "Old things have passed away; all things have become new."

¶ Along with this sense of renovation arises, as an unvarying accompaniment, a sense of power; the whole area of consciousness is flooded with a feeling of potency and an energy that stands ready for any task. The new man understands Paul when he says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The great dif-

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ference between one man and another as an efficient factor in the world's life depends on the possession of reserve power. The man who is not in contact with any source of energy greater than himself is often afraid, and this fear causes him to shrink before a critical test. He is "a self-inhibited man." But the man, the psychical depths of whose nature are undergirded by a boundless spiritual force, at once is conscious that the energy which had been dammed up is now set free and is ready to be transformed into work. The psychic functions are harmonized and invigorated. He taps new reservoirs of power; he goes from strength to strength; he achieves a unified, a consecrated personality.

¶ Old ideas of God—the soul, sin, goodness, human life—are invested with a new "feeling-tone"; they are clothed as with a freshness and force of a revelation from some super-earthly sphere. The emotions, now deeply stirred, reinforce the will, which in turn sweeps away ancient hindrances and sets about the work of spiritual reconstruction.

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Thus a new character is generated, the man is possessed with an enthusiasm for personal righteousness. "No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic." It is, therefore, in the transformation of the feelings that one of the great sources of ethical power is to be found. For now old habits loose their grip on the mind, and new habits are acquired. There are some whose intellects are won to the service of the Ideal, but whose hearts remain untouched. This was the case for a time with the famous Scottish divine, Thomas Chalmers. Such persons live, it may be for years, in a state of unstable equilibrium, but sooner or later the divided self is fused into unity. The man is no longer an echo of other men's thoughts, but speaks out of the depths of a vital experience. His words thrill with life and produce conviction, for now the soul speaks to the soul, "deeps are calling unto deeps."

¶ It is to be remembered, however, that if the original impulses die out before the new system of ideas and motives has been thor-

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oughly organized and expressed in forms of new ways of thinking and acting, there is danger of a relapse. But when through prayer and meditation and deliberate resolve, and holding the ideal persistently before the eye of imagination, the new-born desires are kept alive until the foundations of the spiritual structure have been laid, the chances of a relapse are small, and with a passage of time grow smaller. The very fear of backsliding, which some experience at the beginning of the new life, is an unconscious reflex of defense against it.

¶ One of the saddest illusions to which men are prone is the notion that some high emotion, some mystic experience, can take the place of moral achievement. It is a famous saying of Immanuel Kant that "there is nothing absolutely good except a good will;" but a good will is not something ready-made, it is the result of long-continued efforts crystallizing in spiritual habits. Hence, the new man, if he is wise, will seek help in the creation of specific forms of conduct. He will listen to the psychologist as

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he discourses on the rules by which one acquires a habit; he will study the biographies of good men; he will take advice from those who have been longer on the upward path than himself, and in whom he sees some reflection of the Ideal; he will remember that our real life is our thought life and, therefore, he will fill the mind with thoughts which build up, strengthen, and unify; he will learn in due time that the greatest unifying forces are not ideas, but personalities. "Ideas are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot behold them; they pass athwart us in thin vapor and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh . . . then their presence is a power; they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn with them with gentle compulsion as flame is drawn to flame."¹

¹ George Eliot, *Janet's Repentance*.

IX

THE CHRIST IDEAL

AMONG the great personalities of history who is greater than Jesus of Nazareth? As it is through Him we gain our highest knowledge of God, so is it in imitation of Him that we take on new virtues and a nobler habit of life. Nor need we wait until we have solved the problem of His nature; He Himself will disclose His secret to the loyal soul. It is enough at the present stage of our experience that in Him we see in perfect form all that we wish to be. One of the great sources of weakness in the modern religious life is the tendency to rest content with the traditional picture of Christ's character. We need to visualize Him, not as He appears in tradition, but as He really lived on this earth. Of "lives of Jesus" there are many;

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of vivid, vital, and vitalizing portraiture of His spiritual personality there are few. But in any case one must visualize Him for oneself.

¶ Do you say: "How difficult, if not impossible! Time and space are insurmountable barriers"? I reply, "Time and space have nothing to do with spiritual qualities." Let me suppose that I correspond with some one at the other end of the world, some one whom I have never seen in the flesh, and a photograph of whom I have never seen. I write to him and he writes to me about the most important things of life, art, religion, love, the moral and social questions of the day. As he opens up his mind to me, is it not clear that I can visualize the main features of his character? I may be quite ignorant of his physical characteristics, whether tall or short, dark or fair; I may know little or nothing of his material surroundings, but all this does not prevent me from enjoying a clear image of my correspondent as a spiritual personality. We can visualize Christ if we sit down before the Gospel records, and, setting aside for the moment whatever in them does not

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find us, allow the rest to work its influence on our minds and hearts until its inner meaning takes hold of us, and there will rise before us a clearly outlined figure.

The idea of His life shall sweetly creep
Into the study of imagination,
And every lovely organ of His life
Shall come appareled in more precious habit,
More moving, delicate and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of the soul,
Than when He lived indeed.¹

¶ It is the harmony and balance of opposed qualities that make Christ at once the attraction and the despair of the aspiring soul. "In Christ," says Pascal, "all contradictions are reconciled." The traditional picture of Him which overemphasizes the passive virtues—gentleness, forbearance, self-sacrifice—have taken not too high, but too exclusive a place in the Christian ideal. The more deeply the Gospels are studied the more certain does it become that in Him like a twin star that shines with a single light, strength blends with gentleness, heroic courage, self-reliance in decision and action of

¹ Shakespeare, "*Much Ado About Nothing*," Act iv, sc. 1.

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ideal manhood is crowned with the grace and tenderness of ideal womanhood.

¶ A Chinese statesman coming to the Gospel history with a perfectly open mind has left on record the impressions which it makes on him. "I asked K'ang Yu Wei," writes an interviewer, "what seemed to him the most striking quality in Jesus. He answered, somewhat to my surprise, that what appealed to him most in the personality of Jesus was his courage—the manliness which could so quietly and dauntlessly face the hatred of so many of his countrymen, the fierce enmity of the proud Pharisees, and, above all, the certainty of death and of the outward failure of His mission."¹ And, strangely enough, Mr. Bernard Shaw gives a similar judgment in his recent exposition of Christianity, in which he denounces the current conception of "gentle Jesus meek and mild," and the theory that such a figure could ever have become a center of the world's attention, as "too absurd for discussion."²

¹ *Hibbert Journal*, October, 1908, p. 22.

² *Androcles and the Lion*, p. 17.

X

THE SOCIOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE NEW LIFE

TO-DAY, in the midst of a catastrophe that threatens to dissolve all European civilization, men are turning anew to the Gospels to ask, Was Jesus a pacifist? It is not unlike another question much discussed at the present time—Was Jesus a socialist? To which one must reply, “Yes, and more than a socialist.” So we may say that Jesus was a pacifist and more than a pacifist. His pacifism was as different from that of the modern sentiment which goes by the same name as was His socialism from that of Mr. G. B. Shaw and the Fabian Society. His patience with evil was rooted in His faith in the supernatural might of God. The worst ill that could befall man, in His view, is not pain, nor distress, nor even death; it is a

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state of permanent unrighteousness. And He did not hesitate to tell the men of His day that a false patriotism must inevitably end in national downfall. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." His word was fulfilled in the war that laid Jerusalem in ruins.

¶ He is courageous in the presence of the men who opposed the advance of the Divine Kingdom; but He is tender when He speaks to the weary and the heavy-laden. His self-reliance and independence go hand in hand with utter and absolute self-surrender to His God.

¶ In the critical moments in His career no man gives to Him, but out of His spiritual wealth He gives to every man according to his need. Yet His works are wrought in prayer, the language of dependence. He is as a rock against the evil passions of His enemies and the no less dangerous softness of His friends; yet in Gethsemane before His God he trembles and utters the word that has upheld many a distressed spirit since: "Not my will but Thine be done." He is serious, but He is not sad; serious because human life

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is lived overshadowed with the possibility of infinite loss, not sad because God is in His world and is working out His glorious purpose. He achieves the paradox of ceaseless activity and quiet trust, an inner calm united to a mighty forthputting of energy. To borrow an illustration from Professor Hocking's discussion of mysticism, in the life of Christ we find commingled activity and pacifity at their highest point "like the motionlessness of a rapid wheel or the ease and silence of light."

¶ We speak of a man having the defects of his qualities, but we do not so speak of Christ, for in Him there is a sweet reasonableness, a spiritual sanity which permeates all His being and endows His career with a unity, a harmony, a grace producing on the beholder an effect comparable to that made by a noble work of art. As has been well said: "it is owing to the all-pervading presence of this subtle virtue that in Christ alone among men, we have faith without dogmatism, enthusiasm without fanaticism, strength without violence, idealism without visionari-

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ness, naturalness without materialism, freedom without license, self-sacrifice without asceticism, purity without austerity, saintliness without morbidity, a light which was too strong to dazzle, a fire which was too intense to flame. The inward harmony of His nature was, in fine, perfect: the various tendencies held one another in check, and yet all energized freely, happily, and fully.”¹

¶ Jesus lived the Gospel that He preached. He did not know from the outset of His career that the cross was to be His fate; such knowledge would have made a real human development impossible. He lived from day to day in sublime trust in His Father, and left to the morrow the anxieties that belonged to it. He trusted in God and He loved men, and this trust and love formed an “indivisible unity.” But a virtue is not a virtue until it becomes a habit. Not even Christ could escape the working of this law. A New Testament writer says that He was made perfect in sympathy with suffering, by enduring the sorrows and temptations of our

¹ *The Creed of Christ*, p. 205.

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human lot. Each day brought Him new experiences of pain and disappointment, of the failure of hope and the sadness of unrequited devotion; but were not they the materials which the great Master builder had given Him out of which to shape and finish the work appointed to Him? By allowing the image of Christ to occupy the mind and fill the imagination we reap the benefit of the great psychological law which asserts that we become like that which we most admire, and are gradually conformed to the ideal in which we have set our hearts.

¶ But the new character—the putting on of Christ, to use Paul's realistic phrase—is developed, not in solitude, but amid the stress and strain of a world where evil, greed, cruelty, and injustice abound and are entrenched behind ancient customs and institutions, where men and women are the victims of organic and corporate corruption. The new man is in a state of chronic revolt against his sinful environment; hence he is pledged to the cause of social righteousness.

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¶ This, indeed, is part of the “unselfing” process which is salvation. He loses himself in the needs and miseries of others only to find himself in a new and grander guise. As he looks out upon the world of organized evil with all its physical and moral suffering, he is seized with the ambition to “shatter it to bits” and to remold it nearer to the Christ-like desires that now possess him, and this quite independently of any political or social doctrine he may espouse. His instincts may lead him to be a Tolstoian anarchist, or an uncompromising conservative, or a conventionally average person traveling the beaten path. He may be an individualist or a socialist, a friend of capital or a champion of labor, but his sympathies with this or that economic doctrine do not restrain him from protesting against organized evil, wherever he finds it, and from working with might and main for its annihilation.

¶ Nor is he content with the general denunciation of social ills. He selects concrete examples and makes them the object of his relentless antagonism. Hence the new man

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is a dangerous man—dangerous to the established order in so far as it has become the minister of evil. Should he enter political life, he unveils and holds up to public condemnation the graft, the self-seeking and materialistic aims that everywhere are manifest. Or perhaps the curse of the liquor traffic is brought home to him, and he finds no peace until the general conscience is aroused and a remedy discovered. Or it may be public amusements and recreations, which pander to the lower instincts, especially stir his moral indignation, and he goes forth to fight the battle of purity and idealism against the vested interests. Or the patience of the poor lays its spell upon him and he gives himself to grappling with the causes of poverty and to bringing relief and alleviation, while working for the coming of the new day of larger opportunity and the reign of brotherhood.

XI

THE NEW LIFE ATONING AND OPTIMISTIC

THE new man is pledged by his vision of Christ to the cause of social reform. All the great mystics were the social regenerators of their time, and to-day much of the fussiness and shallowness of social effort rises from the absence of the mystical motive. The new man is constrained to undertake some form of social service because of the nature of the new life that is welling up within him. In him God now lives and energizes through him in a way in which he did not live or energize before. But God's life is an atoning life: He bears vicariously the sins and sufferings, the wrongs and shames, of the world. "In all their affliction He is afflicted."¹ And as He bears them He is working mightily

¹ Isaiah, lxiii : 9.

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to abolish them. So, too, with the man who has become a partaker of the divine nature. He feels the degradation of the drunkard, the slavery of the morphinist, the agony of the remorseful, the misery of the outcast. The strokes that fall on them fall also on him; he goes down into any hell of pain which their sin and folly has made, and to them he brings relief at whatever sacrifice of time or money or energy.

¶ There is also a constraining motive at work. As he looks back over his past he is conscious of all the evil he has done, the souls he has hurt, the chances of doing great and noble things he has let slip past him, and, as he thinks of what might have been, a longing for atonement seizes him. He now stands ready for any task however great, for any service however distasteful. His repentance is thus transformed into a moral dynamic. It does not paralyze his energies; it inspires them. To some whom he has wronged he cannot, alas, pay the debt he owes; they have passed beyond his reach, safe with God, and no wrong can hurt them any more. But he

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is not thereby released from the burden of his obligation. No, the debt he owes the dead he must pay the living, for only by atonement can the soul win redemption. Thus the new life is at once a gift and a task, a present possession and a future achievement.

¶ The new man, face to face with unaccustomed tasks and ever-multiplying duties, does not stand alone. He is dimly conscious that around him are mysterious forces which mean him well, and these forces are made available by prayer. Prayer is not peculiar to the new life; it is a human and universal phenomenon; it is an act or a state of man as man. We may say that it is an instinct, if we remember that we are not using the word in the strictly biological sense meaning inherited, or innate psychic tendency, but loosely, as meaning an impulse deep rooted in the soul yet capable of atrophy through disuse. How often has a careless and self-indulgent soul, suddenly faced with danger or death, been stripped of all the thick layers of evil thought and base desire, the growth

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of years, as the whole man goes forth in an agonizing cry to a higher power for help. The cynic will say that the selfish man only seeks self-preservation, but a deeper insight sees here unveiled the organic links that bind the finite spirit in its inmost essence to the Infinite. Prayer, however, is more than an instinct which reveals itself only in critical moments of need or alarm; it is the sustaining principle of the new life; it is the channel through which power comes to refresh the springs of moral action. Or, to change the figure, it is the act by which we switch ourselves on to the central dynamo of the universe. Without it the new life would collapse and the man would sink back into the old naturalism.

¶ The new man does not need to be told to pray, no more than he needs to be told to eat or to take exercise or to do any of the things needful for his physical well-being. Formerly, indeed, prayer was a bore and a burden, or a remnant of traditional respectability, an empty form, a mechanical gesture that meant nothing; *now* it is the loving

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intercourse of friend with friend, the source of comfort, strength, and peace; the power that invigorates the will, calms and steadies the mind, lifts the whole personality into the region of hope and inspiration and high adventure. To-day we no longer dispute about the efficacy of prayer; that stage of the controversy is past. We may still argue about the mechanism by which prayer works, or about the ultimate origin of the spiritual energy developed in the act or state of prayer—whether it is to be accounted for by “suggestion” (whatever that may mean) or by the influx of “metathereal” influences; but no serious thinker doubts that prayer effects changes which otherwise would not have taken place.

¶ As the new man progresses he will discover that he cannot rest in the impersonal; that he must rise above it and speak with God as if He were a Person. But if just now this is impossible to him, if he prefers to think of God as a force or principle, he can pray and he may count on many of the benefits of prayer. Hence the apparently

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strange statement of Mr. W. F. H. Myers that the object of our prayers, whether personal or impersonal, is a matter of indifference, is relatively true. But prayer, in its highest form, as we see it in the life of the Master of prayer, implies the meeting of thought with thought, of will with will. And in proportion as prayer rises to the heights of personal communion its benefits will multiply and its reality and validity will become more and more an assured conviction. In two directions especially the new man will experience the value of prayer. On the one hand he will learn that prayer is a dynamic; it moves the will. It was said of a distinguished man of letters that the moment anything assumed the shape of a duty he felt himself constitutionally incapable of discharging it. And certainly for all of us, though for some more than others, a reinforcement of our native energies is a necessity.

¶ Now it is prayer that arms the will to beat down temptation, or to concentrate its forces on the accomplishment of some for-

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bidding task. This statement is supported by abundant testimony. Here is one which I quote from a private letter written by a New England physician to his nephew. He says: "I stand here in my front yard and talk with God, when I feel like it, or when I am on the road anywhere, silently or audibly. He is just over back of a leaning pine you may remember to have seen directly across the road from our door. I can't see Him, but I can feel His presence just as I feel yours, or your Dad's, or dear Tante May's presence, or my mother's presence; and the thought and feeling I have of God or of my mother or of Tante May or of your beautiful mother, Sophie Zela, is one of peace and grace and faith, of beauty, of love and of confidence. . . . Cultivate the habit of prayer. Pray to the Great Spirit every time you start out to do anything that you know will test your powers. Pray at any time and everywhere. I say to the Great Spirit, for that is the name I love best for God, whenever I feel I am up against it and weakening, or likely to prove not my best self in some

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trying situation: 'Help me out, Great Spirit, will you? I am a poor fellow; I have not cultivated my gifts as I should have done; I lack strength of character in many ways; *Help me out, dear Great Spirit.*' And just in proportion as I am in earnest and *have faith*, my prayer is answered—sometimes not at all and sometimes so fully that I feel a flood of light and beauty, of love and devotion, pouring in upon me."

¶ *Other things being equal, the praying man is more efficient physically, mentally, spiritually, than the non-praying man.* And this argument, perhaps, will in these days, when efficiency would appear to be the one thing needful, commend this spiritual grace to those who might remain cold to more transcendental considerations. But we need not only to do the divine will, we need to know what that will is. It is only in the silence that we can hear the divine Voice and distinguish it from the voices of our own weaker self and of the world without. Prayer is thus a school of spiritual education in which the new man advances from day to day in the

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knowledge of the best things of life. Inherited prejudices die out, new and higher aims are revealed, larger ideals for self and for the world are gradually formed, and thus is won a sane and enlightened conscience, the only safe guide through the rocks and shoals of the voyage of life.

¶ The new man creates for himself a new theology, or philosophy of spiritual experience. Feelings, however beautiful, are changeable and fleeting; the will, though indispensable, needs direction. Apart from intelligence, feeling and will are merely non-moral natural forces. To lift them into the sphere of the moral and spiritual they need the guidance of thought—that is, faith in some idea which the mind accepts as good and true. The man who has tasted in any degree the experiences already described cannot rest there, but must go on to ask what their meaning is and what the truths are which they imply. He will, therefore, gradually form a simple elastic framework of vital convictions on which the mind can rest with satisfaction while ever seeking to comprehend

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them more and more fully, and to advance to other truths that have not as yet come within his ken. He is compelled by a psychological necessity to do this.

¶ The late Professor Paulsen of Berlin has said that every man is a philosopher, the difference between one man and another being not that one has a philosophy and the other goes through life without it, but that the one tries to bring unity and coherence into his thinking about the problems of existence, whereas the other is content to carpenter together stray fragments, off bits and scraps gathered from the floating traditions of school and home and church, and from the newspapers or books which happen to come his way. But the new life is comparatively weak and inefficient, especially in an age of science like our own, unless it is based on truth which can be vindicated to the intelligence by being shown to be based on experience. Therefore, the new man will throw into the background ideas and doctrines which cannot be submitted to practical tests. He will select those great ideas without which

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the new life cannot be realized in all its fullness.

¶ Beginning, it may be, with some vague traditional ideas about God and the future life, he will earnestly set himself, so far as opportunity offers, to clear up his mind on these two primary convictions. He will ponder the divine self-revelation in nature, in the human soul, and in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth; he will work free of the inherited ideas about death, and the life beyond death, and he will constrain his mind to formulate a spiritual theory of immortality. Around these central principles other truths will gradually organize themselves, and the test to which the whole will be constantly brought is the test of life. Whatever enhances personality, whatever gives more significance to life, whatever impels to ethical achievements, must correspond to some ultimate reality. This conviction of the ultimate unity of the good and the true is a postulate of the higher life, an imperative without which we can make nothing of this world, or of man's existence in it.

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¶ Finally, the new man is an optimist. Neither men nor demons daunt him. He is conscious that all the higher forces of the universe are ranged on his side; all things are working together for his good; new accessions of strength and self-confidence fill him with boundless hope for himself and for others. The vices and follies which he laments receive a new interpretation; they are transformed into a ladder whereby he climbs to unexpected heights of goodness; the moral blunders of the past become stepping-stones to higher things. Even the consciousness that the power of evil still lurks within, which is probably the worst enemy of the new life, is eventually overcome. The man breathes a new and stimulating air; he is lifted above his ordinary and empirical self. Evil has lost its prestige. Under the old order of things he thought that he had to go on sinning and repenting; now he is possessed with such a love of righteousness that as he looks back over the years he wonders how it was ever possible for him to have fallen under the power of such cheap and

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tawdry seductions. Like Dante on the Mount of Transfiguration, he hears a voice proclaiming him "master of his fate and captain of his soul."

Free, upright, healthy is thine own will now,
And not to do as it commands were weak;
So, crowned and mitered, o'er thyself rule thou.¹

¶ His optimism is all-embracing. He despairs of no man however sinful, however lost to all that is good. For in his own case life had to be built up afresh from the very foundations. And what this spiritual reconstruction has done for him it can do for everybody. He is prepared, indeed, for disappointment, but he knows the triumph of the good is certain. His optimism springs out of his spiritual experience and is, therefore, not open to the charge of shallowness or sentimentalism. Spurious optimism is easy-going acquiescence in things as they are, or it is a mood born of a good digestion and a solid account in the bank. Genuine optimism knows that there is a good time coming, for

¹ *Purgatory*, Canto xxvii. (Plumptre's trans.)

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it knows that God is at work in the world, that His purpose will triumph in the end, that "what began best can't end worst." In the strength of this assurance he faces the sin and pain and disorder of the world, and reads them aright as purely provisional in character, a spiritual education the end and aim of which is to lead men to make the right choice and to walk in the right way. He finds God everywhere, and in the ultimate analysis nothing but God. And God is the self-revealing Love, intent on the good of every creature He has made.

THE END

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