

Nicodemus

with Jesus

J. M. P. OTTS.

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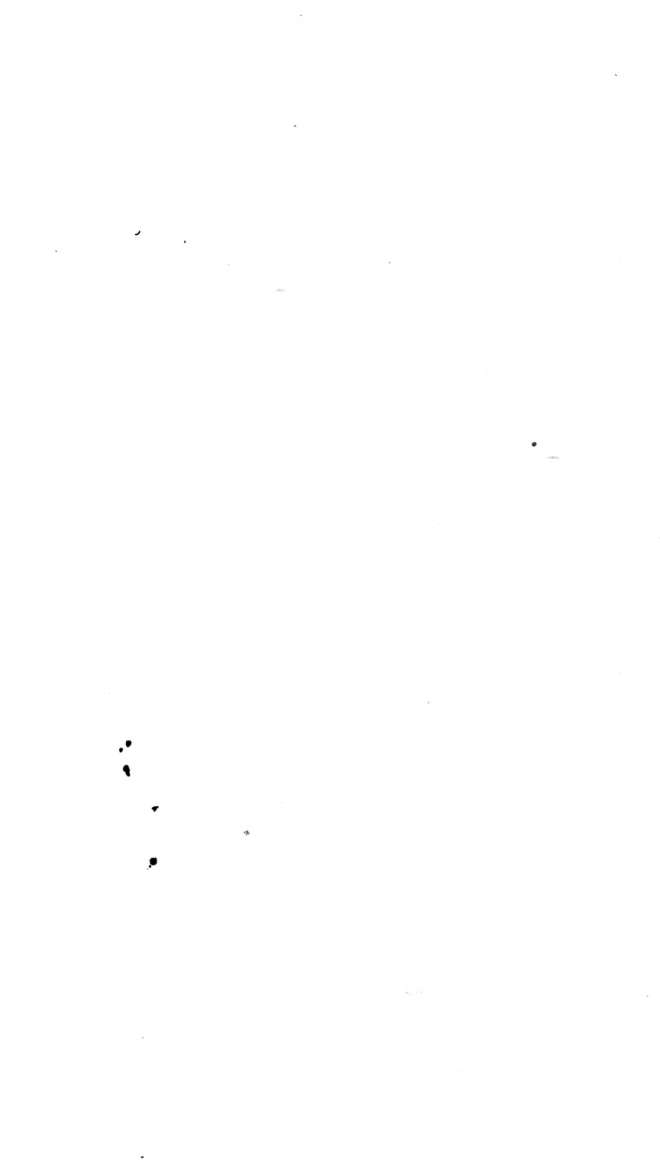
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NICODEMUS WITH JESUS;

OR

LIGHT AND LIFE

FOR THE DARK AND DEAD WORLD.

John
BY *Rev. J. M. P. Otts*
REV. J. M. P. OTTS.

“Christ, my all!
My theme! my inspiration! and my crown!
My strength in age! my rise in low estate!
My soul’s ambition, pleasure, wealth! my world!
My light in darkness! and my life in death!”

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P R E F A C E.

IN sending this little and unpretending volume to the public, we are actuated by a desire to do good and to preach the gospel of Jesus to a larger number of persons than that which assembles before us every Sabbath. The circumstances in which it had its origin, encourage us to hope that good may be done by its publication. The idea of writing a little work on the conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus was suggested by a large and interesting Bible-class, which the author instructs every Sabbath evening. When we came to study this portion of the sacred Scriptures, both the class and the in-

structor became unusually interested in it, and we lingered long on these precious words of Jesus. We found that they possessed a richness of thought, of which we had not before been fully aware. We did not know, until we began to study this passage closely, that so much and so important truth was compressed and imbedded in so small a compass. The whole class seemed to think that, in this interview between the Divine Founder of the gospel and the learned doctor of the law, we had sprung an inexhaustible mine of Divine truth. It is an epitome of the whole gospel.

As the Bible-class was so much interested in these lessons, the author determined to deliver the substance of them in sermons before his congregation; and he found that his whole congregation became as deeply interested with the discourses as the Bible-class had been. He then thought that what

met with such universal favor among his own people would be likely to do good on a larger scale. He, therefore, determined to put his thoughts on this remarkable conversation in the form of a book, and to send them out to the public, to preach the gospel in places where he could not go.

The Christian public will find this little volume very catholic in its spirit and doctrines. The class, which originally listened to it, in oral instructions, is composed of Christians of various denominations, none of whom ever found the least objection to the doctrines or the spirit in which they were conveyed. While the author is very firm in his own convictions of Divine truth, and earnest in the defence of his peculiar views on proper occasions, he did not think it advisable to introduce any controverted points in a little work on the fundamental principles of our holy religion. He has not, however, in

his desire to please all, shunned to speak firmly what he believes to be the mind of the Spirit in those words of his inspiration, which he has attempted to explain. There are ten thousand magnificent points in which all Christians agree; and on them we can meet and hold sweet fellowship together, and agree to differ in peace and love about the few points of minor importance, which separate us into various denominations.

THE AUTHOR.

NICODEMUS WITH JESUS.



CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT INTERVIEW.

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, the same came to Jesus by night.”

—JOHN iii. 1, 2.

AFTER the day's toil and fatigue, in preaching and miracle-working, at the Temple and on the streets of Jerusalem, the Saviour had retired to his place of temporary abode—perhaps it was the house of some kinsman of the beloved disciple—to spend the night in repose and quiet, to recuperate his exhausted physical energies for another day's arduous labors of love and mercy among a perishing

people, whom he had come to save. We must never forget the fact, that our blessed Saviour was as truly man as he was really God; and in his humanity, like any other man, he was susceptible of weariness, and needed sleep and rest. But on this occasion, the night brought no repose to his tired body, nor cessation from his willing labors; for, when the sable clouds of night were hung out from the skies, and had enshrouded the earth in gloom and darkness, and all around were hushed in the unconscious embrace of refreshing slumbers, one of the rulers of the Jews, of the sect of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, crept through the silence and solitude of darkness to the apartment of Jesus, and sought a private interview with him, in order to have more fully explained some of the sublime and mysterious truths which he had proclaimed in his public discourse on the previous day. The Lord did not plead weariness, as he might have done, and turn the inquirer away in his ignorance; but, with a patience and endurance that were inexhaust-

ible, because they were divine, he bids the ruler to be admitted to his audience, and refusing sleep to his eyes and rest from his labors, he spends the night in personal and instructive conversation with the teacher of Israel. This conversation is intensely interesting, on account of the high character of the persons who met, and of the most transcendent importance, on account of the weighty topics discussed. Here was one of the best representatives of the old dispensation, then just passing away, meeting in private conference with the Divine Founder of the new order of things, which was to take the place of the old; and in the interview Jesus unfolds to Nicodemus, the expounder of the law, the fundamental principles of the gospel, and of that spiritual kingdom which he had come to set up on earth.

Every word in this conversation is pregnant with some most important truth, and some of them have an eternity of meaning which the finite mind can never grasp into full comprehension. The deep and unutterable sin of fallen humanity, the unbounded

and inconceivable love of God for a rebellious world, the indescribable sufferings of Jesus, as the atoning substitute for condemned sinners, the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost, and the justifying efficacy of the blood of Jesus through faith, all pass in rapid but perfectly distinct review in this short conversation. The whole scheme of redemption, including every essential part acted by God and man in it, is condensed in marvellous conciseness within the very limited compass of twenty-one short verses. Heaven and earth meet in it. The adorable Trinity is revealed,—the Father as planning, the Son as executing, and the Spirit as applying, redemption to fallen man. It discovers what man is by nature, and what he must become by grace, before he can see God in peace and glory. Never was so much and so important truth compressed in so small a space. It is an epitome of the whole gospel. It is as precious as the diamond, which contains the greatest possible amount of wealth in the smallest possible compass. Whoever reads and un-

derstands this conversation, will know truth enough to save his soul, and will be inexcusable if it is lost. Volumes might be written in exposition of it, and still many important truths implied in it would be left unexplained. It is like an inexhaustible mine of precious ore, from which we may dig for ages, and still leave unlimited stores for the discovery of future generations.

This conversation took place at night; and there was not only a night of darkness on Nicodemus's body, but there was also a night of ignorance on his soul. He had heard Jesus preach, and seen the wonderful miracles which he wrought, and these had only opened his mental eyes wide enough to discover to him the darkness of his mind, and to induce a desire to know more of Jesus. He was like the blind man, whose eyes Jesus afterwards opened, who at first saw men as trees walking. He had some glimmerings of the truth, but he did not yet see distinctly. He knew that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, but he was not yet convinced that he was the great Messiah,

the Deliverer and King of Israel. His curiosity was excited, and he wished to learn more of the truth and of Jesus, and so he came to him by night.

It does not seem that he came to Jesus solely on his own individual responsibility, but that he was the willing commissioner and representative of others, who thought of Jesus just as he did; for he says, "Rabbi, *we know* that thou art a teacher come from God," and Christ replied, "Ye receive not our testimony." Why these plurals, if no one was concerned in this conversation but Nicodemus? The "*we know*" of Nicodemus, and the "*ye receive not*" of Jesus, seem to us to indicate that Nicodemus stood before the Saviour, in this interview, as a representative character. We cannot suppose that the plural was used for the singular in the way of etiquette, or of the rhetoricians, between such characters in a private interview, in which such weighty topics were discussed. No, Nicodemus was there as the representative of a class, who thought and believed as he did in regard to Jesus, and who had com-

missioned and sent him to consult with the Lord concerning the nature of his office and mission to earth. If Nicodemus was a representative character, whom did he represent? Not the common people, as it seems that Dr. Lightfoot supposes, for this class did not generally confess that Jesus was a Divine Teacher, and besides, Nicodemus, as he was a ruler, would not be likely to come in their name. Nor do we suppose, as some others seem to do, that he spoke thus indefinitely of certain persons, such as Joseph of Arimathea, who had come to the same conclusion with himself, in regard to the work and office of Christ. We are inclined to think that he came to Jesus as the authorized commissioner of those members of the Sanhedrim who were of the sect of the Pharisees. If this was not the case, why is the Evangelist so particular in stating that Nicodemus was of the sect of the Pharisees, and a ruler in Israel? It seems to us that John lays a peculiar emphasis on this fact, for no other purpose than to indicate the class of persons whom he represented in this interview with

the Saviour. It appears that he represented not all the rulers, nor all the Pharisees, but only those rulers in Israel who were Pharisees. It is probable that when Christ began his public ministry, and suddenly appeared in the Temple and drove out those who sold doves and oxen, and overturned the tables of the money-changers, the whole Sanhedrim convened, to consider in what light they should recognize Jesus, and what action they should take concerning him; and, perhaps, in the full meeting they could arrive at no definite determination, and, after the adjournment of the Sanhedrim, those rulers, who were of the sect of the Pharisees, held what in modern times is called a caucus, to determine what course they should pursue in the matter. In this meeting they found themselves convinced, from his miracles, that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, but they were not prepared to receive him as the promised Messiah. They, therefore, commissioned and sent Nicodemus, one of their number, to consult with Jesus, in order to discover something more definite of his

claims and character. If this supposition of the cause and design of Nicodemus's visit is correct, it will throw a great deal of light on the future conduct of the Pharisaic rulers towards Christ. Nicodemus's words express not only his own opinion, but also the true conviction of all those rulers in whose name he spoke, and show that they were convinced that Jesus was, at least, a prophet—a teacher sent from God.

Then all their cruel persecutions of our Saviour were against the light of their minds and the dictates of their consciences, and sprung from the diabolical malice of their hearts. They rejected Christ because he did not come in accordance with their selfish expectations and proud desires. They knowingly despised the Lord of glory, and wittingly instigated the Romans to crucify him, because he did not come as a glorious warrior, and in the pomp and exaltation of an earthly king, to deliver them from the Roman domination. This is the great aggravation of their cruel persecutions and hellish murder of the Prince of light and

life. They were hurried on, in this infernal work, by bitter malice and worldly disappointment at his humble and unobtrusive character. They would not have a Saviour so pure and self-sacrificing, and who required such purity and self-sacrifice in his followers.

If this interpretation of the reason and design of Nicodemus's visit to Christ is correct, it may be asked, why did he come at night? The common opinion, that he came under cover of darkness for the purpose of concealment, cannot be correct. If the Pharisean rulers sent him, he would not be in any danger of being regarded by them as having become a disciple of Jesus for going, nor could he have feared that they would cast him out of the synagogue for executing their own mission. It could not, therefore, have been any fear of the Pharisaic rulers that induced him to choose the night for the time of his visit. If it was fear that made him go at night, it was the fear of the common people, and not of the rulers. The Pharisees were exceedingly anxious to be popular with the common people, and there-

fore they would not be likely to do anything that would put them in bad odor with that class of persons, and to avoid this they might have dispatched Nicodemus under the cover of the secrecy of night. But it is not necessary at all, to suppose that it was a desire to keep the matter private that led them to choose the night for this interview. Another reason may be assigned, which seems to us equally probable. Christ was engaged all the day long in his public labors, so that there was no opportunity for protracted and private conversation with him in the daytime; and this fact is a sufficient reason why the night should have been selected as the most suitable time for this conference. We think, however, that both these reasons might have had their influence in causing the night to be chosen as the time for it. The Pharisees might have desired that the fact of their sending a messenger to Jesus should be kept secret from the common people and the Sadducean rulers, and at the same time have wished that their commissioner should go at such a season,

when he would have ample time to discuss, thoroughly, the points on which they sought information. Both these reasons would point to the night as the most convenient and proper time.

Who was this Nicodemus, that thus talked with Jesus? Very little more is said of him in the Scriptures, save what is made known of him in this conversation, and we are not certain that his name is mentioned at all in secular history. We have, however, in the Talmud, a Nicodemus ben Gorion, who is said to have been a disciple of Jesus; but he is found living at the destruction of Jerusalem. This certainly might have been, and that Nicodemus be the same that is mentioned here. This Nicodemus ben Gorion was said to have been so very rich that he could have supported all the inhabitants of Jerusalem for ten days. It is very possible that this was the Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night; but it is, by no means, certain. Nicodemus is mentioned only twice again in the Scriptures; once, as defending Jesus in the Sanhedrim, of which he was a

member, (John vii. 51,) and again as assisting Joseph of Arimathea in the burial of the crucified Saviour. He was a Pharisee by sect, a teacher of the law, and a ruler of the Jews.

Here, then, is a self-righteous Pharisee, a worldly wise expounder of the law, and a proud ruler in Israel, in private conversation with the lowly Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Divine expounder of the spiritual and true meaning of the law, and the King of kings and Lord of lords. And how superior in wisdom and power does the meek Jesus appear over the learned and mighty of earth. At every turn in the conversation Nicodemus is confounded and amazed at his own ignorance, and astonished and awed at the divine wisdom of Him who "spake as man never spake." Let us quietly, and in becoming humility, take our seats at the feet of the beloved disciple, who, in all probability, heard this conversation, and learn from him what Nicodemus said, and what Jesus answered; and while we listen, we will wonder at the ignorance and sin of man, and praise,

in adoring amazement, the wisdom and grace of God, which schemed and executed a plan of redemption for the fallen race of humanity. We will find that the world is dark in ignorance and dead in sin, but that Christ is the Light and Life for the dark and dead world.

CHAPTER II.

THE DIVINE TEACHER.

“Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.—JOHN iii. 2.

WE suppose, for reasons already assigned, that Nicodemus came to the Saviour and sought this private interview with him, as the commissioner and representative of the Pharisaic members of the Sanhedrim, and that it was on their authority, and by their direction, that he spoke this opening sentence ; and these words must, therefore, be regarded, as not only expressing his own individual opinion in regard to the person and office of Jesus, but as also expressing the true conviction of the party which he represented. We are not to suppose that Nicodemus was any better informed or more enlightened, when he came to the Lord, than

those who sent him; and as to the impression made on his mind by the words of Jesus and their influence on his future conduct, we will inquire in another chapter.

The belief that Jesus was a teacher come from God, did not exist in the mind of these rulers as a mere conjecture, but they had arrived at an assured conviction, as to who and what Jesus was. Rabbi, *we know* that thou art a teacher come from God. They do not seem to entertain the least doubt about the matter. They had such irrefragable evidence that he was a divinely commissioned and authorized teacher, that there was no room in their minds for even a suspicion that he was an impostor. And in the light of this fact, we must view all their future conduct towards him. They rejected and persecuted him even unto the bitter death of the cross, knowing that he was a teacher sent from God. They might not have known that he was the promised Messiah, but they knew that he was not an impostor, and that he was at least a prophet of the living God; and, when they instigated

the Romans to nail him to the cross, they knew that they were putting to death a messenger from heaven. And the great aggravation of this awful crime is found in the fact, that it was perpetrated against the honest convictions of their minds. His crucifixion sprung from the pure malice of their hearts; and the greatest of all crimes, is that which is perpetrated by an enlightened mind through the promptings of a malicious heart. The wickedness of the murder of the Prince of light and life by the cruelty of the Jewish rulers, who knew that he was a teacher sent from God, is unparalleled in the annals of crime.

Not only did they assert most positively, that they knew that Jesus was a divine teacher—an instructor from heaven and a messenger from God,—but they also assigned the reason, which forced them to this conclusion. “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: *for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him.*” They had seen him heal the sick, cast out devils, cleanse the temple, and

probably some of their number were present at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee, and had seen him change water into wine; and, perhaps also, he had exhibited, in their presence, many wonderful signs of his miraculous power, which are not recorded in the Gospels. They were perfectly convinced that the wonders he performed were genuine miracles, because they were things which could not be accomplished by natural means or magical arts. Though they were unacquainted with the spirit of the law, they well understood its letter, and knew the might and authority of the miracle. They knew what it proved. They knew that the miracle incontestably evinced that the performer was either God himself, or the approved and honored servant of God; and, as they were perfectly convinced that Jesus did perform real miracles, they were constrained to admit, the lowest possible conclusion to which his miracles inevitably drove them, that Jesus was a teacher come from God.

Let us see how the miracle would logically

conduct them to this conclusion. To see this we must first inquire, what is a miracle? The miracle is an event which demonstrates the presence and action of a power above the established constitution and laws of nature, because it implies the momentary suspension, or the counteraction of the operation of some known law, or because it is performed by means entirely outside of all laws of nature. In other words, the miracle is the immediate product of the Omnipotent fiat, working above, and apart from, all the established laws and secondary agents and causes of nature. The difference between the real miracle and the mere wonder, lies in the fact that the former is a product of a power above nature's laws, and the latter is the product of a skilful and ingenious combination of natural laws, modifying the operations of each other and producing a result, which amazes those who do not understand the combination that effects it. The laws of nature may be brought to bear one upon another so as to produce an effect, which is the joint product of several laws, and the

effect, thus produced, would be marvellous and incomprehensible in the eyes of all beholders, who do not understand the ingenious contrivance by which it was accomplished. This event would not be a miracle, because it is nothing more than the product of the established laws of nature ingeniously modifying the operations of each other. It is a prodigy, but not a miracle. In this way, cunning impostors may deceive the ignorant, and palm off on them their lying wonders for real miracles. But, when a known law is visibly suspended, or its known operation perceptibly counteracted, or when something is done which is clearly above all laws of nature, then the event is a real miracle, and is felt and acknowledged to be such by all beholders. The miracle belongs to the category of creation, and is the perceived manifestation of the Divine power, who made the world and established the laws of nature by the omnipotent fiat of his will, and who, by the volition of his almighty will can suspend, counteract, or work above these laws. Such were the miracles of Jesus.

From the very nature of the miracle, it will follow that none but God can work miracles. The miracle is an event contrary to, above, or apart from, the laws of nature; and the laws of nature are the established constitutions of God's will, which condition the being and limit the powers of all his creatures. It is absurd to suppose that any creature, no matter if he be the tallest archangel in heaven, could suspend God's will, or work above it; and this absurdity is implied in the supposition, that a creature could work a miracle, for, as we have seen, the miracle is an event in suspension of, or above the laws of nature, which are nothing but the expressions of the will of God made permanent in the constitution of matter and spirit. And besides, the miracle is the immediate product of omnipotent energy, and cannot therefore be the work of a finite being. God cannot delegate his omnipotent power to any of his creatures; for, the moment a creature becomes endowed with it, he will be omnipotent and equal in power to God. Such a supposition would give us two In-

finites, which is an absurdity, and an impossibility; and, moreover, if a creature could be endowed with infinite power, it would then be at his choice, whether he would ever lay aside that power or not. All miracles are, therefore, the immediate and direct works of the Omnipotent Jehovah, who made and established the laws of nature, and who can suspend, counteract, or work above them, when, where, and how he pleases.

But did not the prophets and apostles work miracles? No. But God at their call performed miracles, in attestation of the truth of the doctrines, which they taught at his bidding. They were only *inspired* men, and in no other sense were they endowed with miraculous power. They were inspired to know what to teach, and to know when and how God would exhibit his omnipotent power in attestation of the truth of their teachings. And in exact accordance with this fact, they did not profess to perform miracles in their own strength, but merely declared that such and such miracles would be

performed in the name and power of the Lord, as a sign and proof of their Divine mission and the truth of their doctrines. No miraculous power was delegated to them, or claimed by them. They were prophets and nothing more. They had their name from the two Greek words, *πρό* and *φημί*, which mean to speak for another, and which designate a spokesman or interpreter for God. They declared the thoughts of God, as they were revealed to them, and made known, as they were taught by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, when, where, and how, God would manifest his power in attestation of his own thoughts as spoken through their mouths.

It can now be easily seen, how the miracle demonstrates the divine mission of the prophets and apostles, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The miracle proves that he, at whose word the miracle is performed, is either God himself, or the friend of God. God alone can perform miracles, and he would not prostitute his omnipotent power in attestation of the lies of an impostor. The miracle, therefore, presents God as a

witness, testifying in favor of the claims of him, at whose call the miracle is done. A person appears on earth, and claims to be sent from God as his prophet, and professes to know the thoughts of the Divine mind, and to reveal his will to man, and he gives out, that God will perform such a miracle in attestation of the truth of his claims and professions. The miracle is performed just as the man said it would be, and, thereby, God himself is presented as a voucher for all the claims of the man. The miracle sets God before the world as a witness to the truth of what the man claims to be and to teach. The exhibition of God's omnipotent power, through the man, is incontestable evidence that He has communicated his thoughts to him. God neither could, nor would, work a miracle at the call of an impostor, nor in the support of his lies. The idea of such a thing is horrible and blasphemous, for it is to suppose that God could or would lend his omnipotence to the support of imposition and falsehood.

We now see how his miracles, by the irre-

sistible force of inflexible logic, drove Nicodemus and the other Pharisaic rulers to the conclusion, that Jesus was at least a teacher sent from God: for no man could do the miracles which he did, unless God were with him. Their views of Jesus were correct as far as they went, but the difficulty was, they stopped short of the whole truth. They did not pursue the argument from the miracles of Jesus to the legitimate conclusion to which it ought to have conducted. They were compelled to acknowledge Jesus as a teacher sent from God, but they were not prepared to receive him as the Messiah. They were ready to recognize him as a prophet, like Moses or Isaiah, but they were not prepared to give to him a higher title and a more exalted name, and to receive him with homage as the Son of God incarnated—the long expected Messiah, and the desire of all nations. But if they had but pursued the argument, drawn from his miracles, they would have found that they as conclusively established his Messiahship, as they proved him to be a teacher sent from God.

Let us see how this would have been the case. His miracles were of such a nature that they established the fact, beyond a doubt, that *God was with him*; and Jesus explicitly claimed to be the Christ, and wrought his miracles in attestation of that claim. Now he either wrought his miracles by virtue of inherent and personal omnipotent power, and thus proved himself to be God, or God stepped in, and performed the miracles at his call, and thus became a voucher for the truth of his claims. In whatever light you please to view the miracles of Jesus, they prove him to be the true Messiah. He was not only a divinely authorized teacher sent from heaven, but was also a divine person. He claimed to be divine, and his miracles demonstrated his Divinity, for it is impossible to suppose that they could have been wrought in attestation of a false claim. This was just the point at which Nicodemus and his sympathizers failed. They were convinced, from his unmistakable miracles, that he was a teacher sent from God, but they failed to prosecute the argu-

ment to its legitimate conclusion, and to see that he was the true Messiah. Their judgment of Jesus was erroneous, only by reason of its deficiency. They were right in regarding him as a teacher sent from God, for he is the great Teacher of this sin-darkened world; but they were wrong in failing to recognize in him the Messianic teacher of the human race. He is the Truth incarnated, and teaching itself, and not a mere teacher of the truth.

Nicodemus, in his confession, unconsciously gave utterance to a truth of far more transcendent significance than he dreamed of, for Jesus is the great Teacher and Saviour of the fallen and ignorant race of Adam. The world is in darkness, and He comes as the true light from heaven to enlighten it. Man, apart from the Divine Light of the gospel, is an incomprehensible mystery to himself. He knows not what he is, nor whence he come, nor whither he is going. "Man," says Pascal, "knows not in what rank to place himself. He is obviously astray, and fallen from his true place with-

out being able to find it again. He seeks it everywhere with uneasiness, and without success, in impenetrable darkness." Philosophers and mortal teachers have labored to dispel this darkness of universal ignorance that overshadows the human race, but they have all signally and confessedly failed. Now and then they have caught a disconnected glimpse of the truth, but all the light that they have been able to shed into the thick darkness of the world, is nothing more than the lurid flashes of heaven's lightning, darting and glaring through the blackness of the tempestuous night that broods over the earth. Here and there they have lighted up their little farthing-candles of human discoveries, whose doubtful and glimmering rays are only sufficient to make the circumambient darkness visible, and to force man to feel how miserable and helpless his situation is. But, at last, Jesus was born, and in him the sun of righteousness arose, and he shines forth as the light of the dark world, bringing life and immortality to light. He appeared among men as the great Teacher of

the human race, and taught man what he is, what he was, and what he must become. He discovered to him his origin, and revealed to him his destiny. He taught man that he is fallen, and revealed to him the elevation from which he had descended, and pointed out the way of recovery. He is the great Teacher, the eternal Revealer of the truth, and the true light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world. The prophets that were before him, and the apostles that were after him, were only his messengers, and could only teach as they learned from him. He is the great sun, and the original centre of all moral light; and all his ministers, prophets, apostles, and preachers, are planetary orbs circulating around him, and reflecting the rays of truth which he sheds upon them. All the rays of light that dispel the darkness of the ignorance of sin, come originally from Christ, who is the great Teacher sent from God, and the true light of this dark world. He is not only a teacher sent from God, but he is God come down, and teaching man. All this is implied in

the idea of Christ as a teacher sent from God, and establishing his right to teach as one having authority by the wonderful miracle which he did, and was, unconsciously, contained in the admission of Nicodemus. But as he did not comprehend the full significance of the mighty miracles which compelled him to the admission that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, so he did not fully understand the import of his own confession. He unconsciously uttered this glorious truth, which then existed in his mind, as the germ of an undeveloped idea. He was constrained to acknowledge Jesus as a teacher sent from God, and to regard him as a prophet among prophets; but he failed to grasp the full conception of his real character, and to recognize him, as he is in truth, as the Prophet of prophets, and the Teacher of teachers—as God incarnate, teaching men the way of truth, and life, and immortality.

CHAPTER III.

THE DIVINE LIFE-RESTORER.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”—*JOHN* iii. 3.

A SUPERFICIAL reader would see no connection between the declaration of Nicodemus and the reply of Jesus, and would suppose that something is lacking to complete the sense. Accordingly, many commentators have very unnecessarily puzzled themselves in vain attempts to discover the lacking link, which they suppose to be necessary to form a nexus between this and the preceding verse. But when we get a proper conception of the idea that was in Nicodemus's mind, and descend to the bottom and comprehend, in all its profundity, the meaning of Christ's answer, we will perceive a logical and beautiful connection between the two.

In order to see this connection, we must remember the character and purpose of Nicodemus's visit to the Saviour. He came as the representative of the Pharisaic members of the Sanhedrim, and sought a private interview with the Lord, for the purpose of discovering his real character, and the nature of his mission to earth. For the purpose of making known the design of his visit, he declared to Jesus the idea which he, and those whom he represented, had formed of him, in such a way that his declaration amounted to an inquiry whether his conception of his character and person were true or not. It was as much as if he had said, "We know that thou art a teacher sent from God; now is this a true and full idea of your mission and work on earth?" We have seen that this idea is correct as far as it goes, but that, after all, it is erroneous, because it falls short of expressing the whole truth. Now Christ's reply supplies what is lacking to this conception of his character to make it complete and perfect. Nicodemus said, "We know that thou art a teacher come

from God;" and Jesus replied, "I am not merely a Divine Teacher, but also a Divine Life-Restorer: for verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." It was as much as if he had said, "The world is not merely dark in ignorance, and so needs new light, but it is also dead in sin, and so needs new life. I have come not merely to instruct the ignorant world, but also to regenerate the dead world. A man must not only have his mind enlightened by me, as the Divine Teacher, but he must also be born again and receive a new life from me, as the Divine Life-Restorer, or he can never become my disciple, and enter the kingdom which I have come to set up on earth." Christ's reply, added to the idea which Nicodemus had, completes the conception of the character of the Saviour, and presents him as the Divine Teacher of the ignorant world, and the Divine Life-Restorer of the dead world. The gospel requires not only new views of the truth, but also a new man to practise the new truths received; and the Saviour

comes, therefore, as the light and life of the dark and dead world. The world is dark in its ignorance, and it feels its darkness, and seeks the light with uneasiness and without success. It is also dead in sin; but it is unconscious of its spiritual death. Now Christ came into this dark and dead world both to dispel the darkness of ignorance, and to bring life and immortality to light. He regenerates with a new life in time, and gives hope of a blessed immortality beyond the confines of time; and the life which he gives begins here, and is carried to perfection in the regions of immortal bliss and glory.

The life which Jesus restores to the soul comes by birth. It is not a mere renewal of the mind by dispelling from it the darkness of error, and imparting to it the illumination of truth. Such a renewal would be a mere reformation, and could be effected by Jesus in his character as the great Teacher; but, as the Divine Life-Restorer, he performs a far deeper work in the hearts of men—the work of regeneration. Reformation comes through truth imparted, and affects only the external

manners of life; but regeneration comes through grace infused, and affects the deep fountains and well-springs of being and action. Reformation is a change from bad to good in the external conduct; and regeneration is a radical change in the subjective principles of moral actions. The one is effected by natural means, and the other is the product of supernatural agencies. Christ might be a reformer if he were nothing more than a man; but he would not be a regenerator unless he were divine, as well as human.

This radical change in heart is called a birth, and it bears some analogy to natural birth. As the child in natural birth experiences a fundamental change in the condition of its being, is introduced into a new element, made acquainted with new objects, and begins an entirely new mode of existence, so the soul, in its supernatural birth, experiences a fundamental change in the condition of its being, is introduced into the element of holiness from that of sin, is made acquainted with spiritual things in a spiritual way, and

begins to live a divine life in Christ Jesus. There is as much difference between an unregenerate and regenerate soul, as there is between the embryo and the born child. Before birth the child exists, and has a kind of life, but in its birth it is introduced into a new sphere of existence, and to a new kind of life; and so the soul exists, and has a kind of life before regeneration, but in its regeneration it is introduced into a new sphere of existence, and has a new kind of life. In both physical and spiritual birth there is a radical change—in the one instance in the state of the body, and in the other in the state of the soul, but in neither case is there a change of essence. And as by the one we become citizens in this world, so by the other we become citizens in the kingdom of God.

This spiritual change, which every man must experience before he can become a citizen of Christ's kingdom, is called a *second birth*. "Ye must be born *again*." Some would read, "ye must be born *from above*." We own that the Greek, (*ἀνωθεν*), is am-

biguous and will bear this translation, and also, that the idea thus expressed is true; but the learned Grotius has remarked that in the Hebrew and Aramaic,—in one of which languages our Lord, discoursing with a Rabbinical Jew, certainly spoke,—there is no word of double meaning, corresponding to the Greek word here translated again, and as Nicodemus's reply shows that he understood the Saviour to speak of a second birth, we conclude that the translation in the text is correct. For the same reason, we cannot agree with Alford that "*born afresh*" would be a better translation. The idea in this construction would be, that unless a man begins his life entirely anew, he cannot be Christ's disciple. This is a truth, but it is not the fundamental idea expressed in the text. Perhaps the Evangelist used this ambiguous word in the Greek under the guidance of the Spirit, because the three ideas expressed in it are all true. It is a *second* birth, which is from *above*, and by which one begins his existence *afresh*. As it is called a *second* birth, it is compared to

some former birth or life, and it is generally supposed that the spiritual is here compared to the natural birth. This is only partly true. As this spiritual change is called a *birth*, it is compared with natural birth, but the word *again* implies a deeper idea, and carries us back to the former spiritual life which humanity lived in Adam, and lost in his fall. Adam, in his primeval state, lived in holiness, but by his fall he died in sin, and plunged his whole race into spiritual death. Now Christ comes, as the second Adam, to *restore* that life which was lost in the defection and sin of the first. He comes to *restore* to the children of men that original life, which the race possessed in its primeval pair before they died in sin. He comes, not to give to men something which the race never had, but to *restore* the life which they once possessed, but have now lost. Hence, the life which Jesus imparts to the believer's soul is called a *second birth*. This new life is not a birth from the womb, but a birth from the tomb. It is a spiritual resurrection from the grave of sin. Christ comes, then, as the Divine Life-Restorer to restore to the

race that spiritual life which was once theirs in Adam, and which they lost in his fall, and have forfeited, again and again, in their own actual and personal transgressions. If, therefore, we merely regard Christ as a great teacher—as a prophet among prophets, or even, as the Prophet of all prophets and the Divine Teacher of the human race—and fail to conceive of him, in his higher character, as the Divine Life-Restorer of the dead world, we will not form anything like an adequate conception of his person and mission to earth. Christ came into this world as the true Light, shining in darkness and enlightening every man that cometh into the world, and as the true Life, walking among the dead, and reinvigorating with a new spiritual life every one who becomes his disciple. And to restore to those now spiritually dead this new spiritual life, was the chief end of his mission and work on earth. We will never see the Saviour in the glory and dignity of his exalted character until we sit at his feet and learn the truth from him as the great Teacher, and praise and adore him as the Divine Life-Restorer.

CHAPTER IV.

NICODEMUS'S UNBELIEF AND RIDICULE.

“Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”—JOHN iii. 4.

NICODEMUS was astounded and offended at the reply of Jesus—it was so different from what he expected. It was not a direct answer to his words, but a reply to the secret thoughts of his mind; hence his astonishment. It did not flatter his knowledge and attainments, but revealed the depth and darkness of his ignorance; hence his offence. Nicodemus came to Jesus, vain of his learning, and proud of his works, but the Saviour informs him that it is not *learning*, but a *new life*; not *new works*, but a *new man* to do them, that are the fundamental requisites to discipleship in his school. If Nicodemus would become his

disciple, he must begin with a *new life*, and that new life must begin with a *new birth*. Nicodemus did not expect this kind of an answer. He was astounded at the novelty and mystery of his doctrine, and offended at the humility it required. Because he could not comprehend the teachings of Jesus, he rejected them with unbelief, and turned the whole matter into ridicule. "Can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

The doctrine of spiritual regeneration was not an absolute novelty, now taught for the first time. It might have been a new idea to Nicodemus, but that fact would only prove his profound ignorance of the spiritual significance of the Old Testament, of which he professed to be a teacher. Men, before the coming of Christ, could no more be saved without the new birth than they can now; and, accordingly, the doctrine of spiritual regeneration is abundantly and clearly taught in the law and prophets. We give the following passages as proof of

this fact. "I will give them one heart, and I will put a *new spirit* within you; and I will take the *stony heart* out of their flesh, and will give a *heart of flesh*: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God." (Ezekiel xi. 19, 20.) "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed: and make you a *new heart* and a *new spirit*; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel xviii. 31.) "A *new heart* also will I give you, and a *new spirit* will I put within you." (Ezekiel xxxvi. 26.) "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." (Jeremiah xxiv. 7.)

We could multiply these quotations to an indefinite extent, but these are enough to show that the doctrine of spiritual regeneration is fully and distinctly taught in the Old Testament; and had not Nicodemus been profoundly and culpably ignorant of the

Scriptures, of which he pretended to be a public teacher, this doctrine would not have been a novelty to him. "Though the form of expression which Christ employed," says Calvin, "was not contained in the law and prophets, yet as renewal is frequently mentioned in Old Testament Scriptures, and is one of the first principles of faith, it is evident how imperfectly skilled the Scribes, at that time, were in reading the Scriptures. It was certainly not one man only who was to blame for not knowing what was meant by the grace of regeneration; but as almost all devoted their attention to useless subtleties, what was of chief importance in the doctrines of piety was disregarded." Neither Nicodemus, nor those who sent him, knew anything of spiritual regeneration by personal experience, and, perhaps, they rejected the doctrine with contempt, because it is so antagonistic and humiliating to the pride of the human heart. But still, we cannot believe it possible that Nicodemus could have so entirely and stupidly misunderstood our Lord's words, as his question would

seem to imply. The idea of the new birth was not altogether foreign to Rabbinical views. They described, as Dr. Lightfoot informs us, a proselyte when baptized as "*Sicut parvulus jam natus.*" We, therefore, agree with Alford and Stier in thinking that Nicodemus manifested something of the spirit that would not understand, and something of a disposition to turn to ridicule what he heard. He had no spiritual discernment of this doctrine, nor experimental acquaintance with it, although he had, doubtless, heard of it as a theory in theology; and because it was contrary to his own personal experience, he treats the most serious of doctrines with frivolity, and turns it to sport and ridicule. And this has been the policy in argument with skeptics and rationalists from Nicodemus down to the present day. When Voltaire could not refute his opponent, he sought to silence him with an unanswerable sneer; and when he found that he could not argue the world out of religion, he attempted to laugh religion out of the world. It is the custom of

the Rationalists of the present day to laugh at the high mysteries of religion, which they cannot comprehend, and to turn to sport and ridicule such doctrines as are distasteful to their proud and corrupt hearts. Is not this the way with many hearers of the gospel? It requires them to begin a new life, to deny the flesh, and to mortify its lusts, and to follow Christ in holiness and newness of life, through evil as well as good report, all of which they are unwilling to do, and so they turn the religion of Jesus into ridicule. With a laugh they stifle their consciences, and with a frivolous jest they put off the most serious concern of their existence. Oftentimes when the preacher, in all earnestness, preaches the gospel, sinners make merriment of him and his message.

The man of God proclaims that all men are by nature dead in trespasses and sin; the sinner laughs and exclaims, "What nonsense! I am as much a live man as he is." The preacher teaches, Ye must be born again; the sinner cries out, "How ridicu-

lous! Can a man that is old be born again? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" The minister is in deep earnest, and the church is stirred up to an unwonted zeal, and God's Spirit is poured out, and souls are converted. There is deep and genuine feeling, and a little nervous excitement in the congregation. The preacher pleads with tears streaming from his eyes, the congregation prays fervently, and the new-born sons and daughters of God burn in the ardency of their first love. But there are present unmoved lookers on, some proud in their worldly wisdom, some frivolous in their folly, and some stupified in their debaucheries, who make sport and ridicule of the whole matter. They say, one to another, "What is all this ado and uproar about? One would think the house is on fire, but we see no danger nor cause for all this commotion. These men are surely full of new wine." And there are those proud of their learning and refinement who say, "Well, I would like to have religion, but I cannot

stoop to get it in this way." And others there are who say, "Well, if that is religion, I do not want to get it at all." There are many who, like Nicodemus, with some frivolous and sportive remark, stave off conviction from their minds. Many, like him, are too proud to be saved in the gospel way, so they jest with their Saviour, and sport with their own immortal souls.

There is nothing more common nor more dangerous than this spirit of levity in religious matters. It is peculiar to no one class of persons. The high and the low, the learned and the ignorant, are all prone to it. Whatever is mysterious or distasteful is turned to sport, and dismissed with a light remark and a laugh. Just at this point philosophers, with their proud smiles of incredulity and derision, and their sneers of contempt for the mysteries of religion, and the vulgar, with their boisterous merriment and their obscene jests at parsons and saints, meet, and go laughing together in companies to hell. It was in this spirit that Nicodemus first met the doctrine of Jesus re-

specting the new birth. He did not, perhaps, fully comprehend the doctrine; but he understood enough to know that it was humiliating to his pride, so he attempted to refute, and, in proud derision, to reduce it to a ridiculous absurdity. He took the words of the Saviour in their most literal signification, and put upon them a forced meaning that Christ never designed them to bear. But this is just what was to be expected from one in his position; for, as a teacher of the law, he busied himself about the letter of its meaning, and never penetrated to the spirit of its signification. If he had been familiar with the spirit of the law and prophets which he pretended to teach, he would have understood the doctrine of the new birth, which, as we have already shown, is abundantly and clearly taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. If we could only get men to lay aside their frivolity, and to divest themselves of the garments of pride, and to think seriously, and to ponder well the doctrines of religion, they would soon come to Christ in humility and penitence, and sit at

his feet with the docility of little children, and learn from him as the great Teacher the way of pardon, and receive from him, as the divine Life-Restorer, immortal life.

CHAPTER V.

THE NATURE OF REGENERATION.

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”—JOHN iii. 5.

CHRIST does not directly notice the ridicule of Nicodemus, but reiterates most solemnly the doctrine which he had laid down as a fundamental principle in his gospel, and then proceeds, in his office as the Divine Teacher, to unfold and explain the way in which, in his higher character as the Divine Life-Restorer, he gives life to dead sinners. Christ's reply, reiterating his doctrine of the new birth, is as much as if he had said to Nicodemus, “You may ridicule my doctrine, and make all manner of sport of it, but your derision and contempt cannot alter it. It is true, and there it stands, and there it must stand forever. You may reject it with

scorn, but it is the only way in which you can ever find entrance into the kingdom of God; for I most solemnly declare and swear* unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

The new birth is here declared to be the only possible entrance into the kingdom of God. Now, if we get a proper conception of the phrase "kingdom of God" in this connection, it will throw much light on the nature of the new birth, which conducts to it. This phrase is of frequent occurrence in the New Testament, and has four different significations, all of which are intimately connected with each other, and sometimes all four are blended together in the same passage. It sometimes means the church invisible in heaven, sometimes the church visible on earth, sometimes a state of grace in the heart which fits for worthy membership in the church, and sometimes it means

* The repetition of *amen*, or *verily, verily*, among the Jewish writers, was considered of equal import with the most solemn oath.—*Dr. Adam Clarke.*

the true doctrine of the gospel which the church is to teach. When we read of *preaching the kingdom of God*, as we do in Mark i. 14, and Luke iv. 43, "the kingdom of God" means the doctrine of the gospel. When we are told to seek first the kingdom of God, and that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, as we are in Matt. vi. 33, and Romans xiv. 17, it is evident that "the kingdom of God" means a state of grace which fits for worthy membership in the church on earth and in the skies. The passages are so numerous in which the phrase, "kingdom of God," means both the church militant on earth and the church triumphant in heaven, that we will make no reference to them.

As the phrase bears these four significations, the question arises, in what sense did our Lord use it in his conversation with Nicodemus? We think it is probable that all four of the meanings are here blended together. One must be regenerated before he can receive, with spiritual discernment, the

doctrine of the gospel; and it is by regeneration that the kingdom of God comes into the heart of the man; and it is by regeneration alone that we are fitted to be worthy members of the church on earth; and it is only those that are really regenerated by the Spirit, that will ever find entrance into the kingdom of God in heaven. It is clear that one must be born again before he can enter the kingdom of God in either one of the four senses of the phrase. While we think it is probable that all four significations are here blended together, we regard the last two ideas as the prominent ones in the passage. The new birth alone qualifies for membership in the church terrestrial and in the church celestial. By the baptism of water we are qualified for, and admitted into membership in the visible church, and by the baptism of the Spirit, we are prepared for, and admitted into membership in the invisible church. Baptism is an external sign of internal regeneration, and the visible church is to the invisible, just what baptism is to regeneration—an external manifestation

of it; and as baptism is the external initiatory rite of introduction into the visible church, so regeneration is the internal initiatory rite of admission into the invisible church. Unless we are born of water in baptism, we cannot become members of the church militant on earth; and unless we are born of the Spirit in regeneration, we can never become members of the church triumphant in heaven. This explanation of the passage does not teach the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, but only that baptism is an outward sign of the inward grace of regeneration, and admits to membership in the visible church on earth, which is an outward sign of the invisible church in heaven, the only entrance into which is the new birth by the Spirit.

The new birth is, then, a radical change in the sinner's soul by the power of the Spirit, through the grace of Christ, which fits him for communion with the Saviour and saints on earth, and for communion with the triune God and holy angels in the kingdom of glory beyond the skies. It is a superna-

tural change wrought in the soul by the agency of the Holy Ghost, and, therefore, to the mind of man it is a mystery of grace—a fact revealed but not explained. As it is the work of the Infinite, the finite cannot comprehend it in all its points and bearings. It must be experienced to be understood, and, even then, it will not be fully comprehended. We may know it as a fact, but we will never be able to tell all about how it takes place. Just as it is in natural birth, when born we know that we are born, but who has ever been able to tell how he was conceived and brought forth? But we shall say more about the mystery of the new birth in a chapter especially devoted to that head. We have already given a general explanation of it, and we will now speak briefly of some of the particulars relating to it.

1. It is a change from spiritual death to spiritual life. By the fall, the whole race is given over to the dominion of sin, so that all the descendants of Adam are, by nature, dead in trespasses and sins. Now regeneration is raising the dead soul to spiritual life.

By nature the understanding is darkened, the affections are perverted, and the will is enslaved to evil. In this state the soul is totally disinclined and disabled to all good. Now regeneration is the enlightenment of the understanding, so that it has a spiritual discernment of the truth as it is in Jesus; the regulation of the affections, so that they love holiness; and the renewal of the will so that it chooses the good. Thus the soul is raised to a new spiritual existence, and enabled and inclined to embrace Christ and his gospel, and to live a divine life in communion with the Spirit, and in obedience to the Father, through the mediation of the Son.

2. This change is total and universal, reaching to every faculty and capacity of the soul, but it is not a change of the essence of the soul. All the qualities and dispositions of the mind are altered, but its essence remains the same. The old soul is not annihilated and a new one created in its stead, but all the old habits and tendencies of the soul are destroyed, and new and holy ones imparted in their room. As in the resurrec-

tion of the body, the essence continues the same, but the body shall be spiritualized, so in the regeneration of the soul, the essence continues the same, but all its faculties, capacities, and habits are evangelized. It is in this sense, that old things pass away and all things become new. After conversion, the soul does not have one less, or one more new faculty or capacity than it had before. The powers of the soul remain unchanged except in the motives that actuate them, and the ends to which they point in their works. Neither does this great change annihilate the natural temperaments of the mind. They are only modified by grace. Hence we find among Christians all kinds of temperaments. There are sanguine, phlegmatic, bilious, and melancholic Christians; but these natural temperaments are restrained and regulated by grace. If a man is impetuous before his regeneration, he will be a Peter afterwards; if he is of a doubting cast of mind, he will be a Thomas; if he has a tender and an affectionate heart, he will be a loving disci-

ple like John; if he is bold, fearless, energetic, and persevering, he will be a disciple of mighty works and glorious achievements like Paul.

3. The new birth is a supernatural change. Those who are born again, are born of the Spirit. They are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. It is a change of nature; therefore, the power that effects it, must be above nature—supernatural. It is a spiritual resurrection; and the dead soul can no more change its own nature from sin to holiness, than the dead man can raise himself out of the grave to life again. “You hath *He quickened* who were dead in trespasses and sins.” A man by natural efforts may reform his life in external conduct, but he cannot by native strength regenerate his heart.

4. Though the change is perfect in parts, it is imperfect in degree. Regeneration is a total and universal change in all parts of the man, though none of the parts are at once perfectly matured in the Divine life; but the new creature groweth up to perfection. It

is a birth. At birth the new-born infant experiences a total change in the condition of its being, and has all the parts that belong to the matured man, but it is by degrees that these parts grow and attain to the maturity of life; so in regeneration the soul experiences a total change and receives all the graces that belong to the matured Christian, but it is by degrees that these graces are brought to maturity. Hence the apostle says to such, "as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

5. Time would fail us to trace this radical change through all its particulars, therefore it must suffice, in a little work like this, to add concerning it this much. It is a real change—a change from nature to grace, and from sin to holiness; it is an inward change of principle and end of action—an outward change in the objects and operations of the mind; it is a new habit in the soul, disposing to every good word and work; it is a new law of grace in the heart, giving the disposition and ability to obey the outward law of

the word in the life; it is Christ formed in the heart—the Holy Spirit taking up his residence there—and the image of God restored to the soul. In one word, it is the participation of the human in the Divine nature, and the happy reunion of the soul of man to his Creator. This is the great change, which every man must experience in the new birth before he can enter into the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER VI.

MAN'S STATE BY NATURE.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”—JOHN iii. 6.

AFTER reiterating, in the most solemn and emphatic manner, his doctrine of the new birth, which he had declared to be, not of *man*, but of the Spirit, he proceeds, without noticing his ridicule, to answer Nicodemus's hypothetical question, by telling him that, even could a man enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born again, it would not be the birth of which he speaks, nor answer in its place; because that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and only that which born of the Spirit is spirit. You will notice that the Saviour partly answered Nicodemus's objection in the preceding verse, where he tells him that man must be born of the Spirit. It was as much as if he had

said, the birth of which I speak is spiritual, and inasmuch as you suppose it to be fleshly, you entirely misapprehend my meaning. He now proceeds farther to teach that, even if a second fleshly birth were possible, it would not accomplish the necessary change in man's nature. A second birth of flesh would only produce flesh, and by it a man would not be any more fitted for the kingdom of heaven than he was by his first birth. What is required is a new birth by the Spirit, in order to make man a spiritual being and fit him for the kingdom of heaven, which is spiritual.

When it is said, that which is born of flesh is flesh, we are not to understand that all sin consists in sensuality. Under the term *flesh* is comprehended the whole sinful nature of man in both soul and body, and under the term *spirit* his whole regenerated nature. The word flesh here means what Paul designates as carnal mindedness and the old man, and spirit denotes that which he designates as spiritual mindedness and the new man. By natural birth nothing is produced but the

natural sinfulness of man's fallen state, and if a man should thus be born twice or twenty times, by natural birth nothing else could be produced. It is a spiritual birth that is required, that man might become a spiritual and holy being.

The law that Christ lays down is, that everything begets its own kind. The apple-tree produces apples, the fig-tree yields figs, and the horse begets a horse; so fallen and sinful man begets fallen and sinful children. By the law of representation, in the divine economy of the covenant of works, Adam was made the federal head and representative of his race. The law of generation determined the character of those whom he represented. All, therefore, who descend from Adam by natural generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression, inasmuch as he was constituted their federal head, and the guilt and consequence of his sin in the fall are imputed to, and visited upon them by the law of representation. All Adam's descendants are, therefore, born into the world sinners and under the curse of

God's law. As all men are sinful by nature, and as everything begets its own kind, it follows that everything that springs from fallen man is sinful. That which is born of flesh is flesh, is the same in meaning as, that which is born of the sinner is sinful.

Not only are the children of the sinful race of fallen man born sinful, but also the feelings, the thoughts, the words, and the works of fallen man are all sinful. From the unregenerate man, there can spring nothing but sin. The very ploughing of the wicked is sin. The very best deeds of the unconverted are but painted vices. It is not the external matter of a deed that makes it good or evil, but the motive from which it springs, and the end to which it is directed, determine its moral character. The only proper motive for any action is *love to God*. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy strength. The only proper end for an action is the *glory of God*. Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, *do all to the glory of God*. Now as *love to God* is the only lawful motive of

action, and a desire to *glorify God* the only lawful end of human conduct, it can be easily shown how it is impossible for an unconverted man to do a single good and acceptable deed. Paul tells us that the carnal mind, by which he means the unregenerate soul, is enmity against God, is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. If the carnal and unregenerate heart is enmity against God, it cannot love him and act from love to him; and as it is not subject to his law and neither indeed can be, and as his law is that all things should be done to the glory of his name, it cannot direct its actions to the glory of God. It follows, therefore, that all the actions of unregenerate men, as they can neither spring from the proper motive nor be directed to a proper end, are sinful. The expression, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," means that whatsoever the unconverted sinner does is sin. His nature is sinful, and whatever proceeds from his nature partakes of the sinfulness of his nature. The good tree brings forth good fruit, and an evil tree brings forth evil fruit. A good

apple-tree produces good apples, and a crab-apple-tree produces nothing but crabs. A good man produces good works, and an evil man produces only evil works.

When we say that everything that the unconverted man does is sinful, we do not mean to say, that all unconverted men are equally sinful, or that all their actions are equally wicked. Among evil fruits some are worse than others. The fruits of some evil trees are merely unwholesome and bitter, while the fruit of others are so poisonous that it produces instantaneous death. So it is with the sinful deeds of unregenerate men. Some of them are positively hurtful, and others simply unprofitable so far as a holy life is concerned. Some of them may be like the crab among good apples. Outwardly it looks like a small apple and has a delightful odor, but when bitten it is found to be sour, and cannot be eaten without sugar. Just so many deeds of the flesh may be outwardly like holy deeds, and be delightful in the contemplation, but they cannot be received and

turned to any benefit without the overruling and modifying grace of God.

It follows from this, that a man cannot convert his own heart and change his nature from sin to holiness, for until his nature is regenerated he is absolutely unable to do any good thing. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and the flesh cannot therefore regenerate itself, and in its own strength pass from sin to holiness. A man must be born again by the renewal of the Spirit before he is capable of a single good action; hence, it is perfectly idle for a man to talk about regenerating his own heart. The stream cannot rise above the level of the fountain, and sin cannot produce holiness. That which is engendered of the stag and born of the hind, is always a deer and never a lion, and so that which is engendered of the flesh and born of fallen humanity, is always sin and never holiness. Throughout universal nature, in animate and inanimate creatures, and among sentient and intelligent beings, the invariable law is, that like begetteth its like, and no-

thing can generate a being higher in the scale of existence than itself.

Only that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit. All that which is spiritually good in this sinful world, is the production of the Holy Ghost. Every good feeling, thought, word, or action, that is felt, thought, spoken, or done by mortal man, is begotten in him by the power and regenerating influence of the Holy Ghost. Man, by nature, is lost in a state of total depravity and universal corruption, and everything that originates in his unconverted heart is unholy; for, who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? It is only when man has been washed in the laver of regeneration by the living Spirit of the eternal God, that he becomes capable of feeling a good emotion or desire, or of exercising a godly thought, or of speaking a holy word, or of doing a truly righteous deed. It is only the Holy Spirit, descending into the sinner's heart in his renewing grace, that regenerates his soul; and dwelling there in his sanctifying power, that enables him to live a holy and spiritual life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.”—JOHN iii. 7.

SINCE that which is born of the flesh is flesh—since man is by nature sinful, and independently of the regenerating grace of the Spirit, is absolutely incapable of any spiritually good action—marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. Ye must be born again, or ye can never enter into the kingdom of God. There is an emphasis on the word YE in this solemn declaration. It is meant to be universal and to include all flesh except the person of the Divine speaker. He does not say WE, but YE must be born again. Christ is man as well as God, and though according to his humanity he was born of the race of Adam, yet he knew no sin and had no corruption of nature, and so needed

not this second birth. All mankind, descending from Adam in ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression, and are so made partakers in his guilt and depravity; but Christ, though born in the flesh of the race of Adam, did not descend from him in ordinary generation. His was a most extraordinary birth. According to the flesh he had a mother but no father; and in his divinity, he had a father but no mother. God is his eternal Father, and He is the eternal Son. The eternal generation of the Son from the Father is one of the inscrutable mysteries of our holy religion, and no less so is his incarnation of the Virgin Mary. Conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin, he was born of her, and yet he was without sin; and, because he was without sin, it was not necessary that he should be born again. O the mystery of his conception, birth, life, and death! Without man he was conceived in the womb of a virgin! Without sin he was born of woman! Without sin of his own he suffered and died for the sins of others!

And as in his birth, he sprung from a virginal womb, from which no child before had been born, so in his death he was laid in a new tomb in which no mortal before had laid! Born of the poor and buried by the rich! Because in his incarnation he was born without man and without sin, death could not hold him, and the grave could not detain him. He burst the bars of death and triumphed over the grave and Satan. He was absolutely without sin, and could not therefore be born again. His birth was exceptional, but all others descending from Adam in ordinary generation, are born into this world with depraved and guilty natures, and must, therefore, be born again, or they can never see God or enter into the kingdom of heaven.

1. Ye must be born again, because without the regeneration of the Spirit man cannot live a holy life; and only a holy life can be pleasing in the sight of a holy God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and man must be born of the Spirit, in order to become spiritual. We have seen in the preceding

chapter man's natural inability to all good. The best works of the unregenerated are but glittering sins. Without regeneration there can be no faith, and "without faith it is impossible to please God." "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Faith is the vital act of a living soul. It is a spiritual fruit that grows only on a spiritual tree. It is only when we are transplanted into the garden of Jesus by regenerating grace, that we can have faith, and it is only when we have faith, that we can please God, or do anything but sin.

2. Ye must be born again, because regeneration is absolutely necessary to qualify fallen man for communion with God. Like seeks its like, and there can be no communion between those totally dissimilar in character. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" God and the unregenerate sinner are as much unlike each other, as darkness is different from light. They cannot agree in a single particular, for God abominates sin, and the carnal mind is enmity against God, and cannot be subject to his law. What

communion hath light with darkness, or what concord can there be between Christ and Belial? Will the lamb gambol with the wolf, or the dove consort with the vulture? No more can God hold fellowship with the sinner, and Christ commune with the unregenerate. An agreement must be made between God and the sinner before there can be any communion between them. They must be made alike in character, or they can have no fellowship with each other. Now God is immutable. He cannot change and become like the sinner, in order to walk with him. The sinner must be changed and made like God, or he can never commune with his Maker. He must be born again or he will never be fit for God's society.

3. Ye must be born again, because the new birth is necessary to prepare fallen man for heaven. You must be prepared for heaven in time, or you can never be admitted to its joys in eternity. No preparation can be made beyond the grave for the next life. All the lively stones that are to be built into the glorious spiritual temple in the upper

Jerusalem, are prepared on earth for their places in the skies. When Solomon built his magnificent temple on Mount Moriah, there was not heard in Jerusalem the sound of a hammer or any other instrument of iron. All the stones were prepared for their places in the quarry where they were dug. This temple on earth was a type of that spiritual temple of lively stones which is now being built in Christ in the celestial Jerusalem. All the saints, who are the lively stones to be built into that glorious temple above, are here to be dug out of the quarry of sin and fitted for the kingdom of heaven by regenerating grace, or they can never be translated to the skies.

Heaven is as unsuitable for the unregenerate as they are unsuited for it. There is nothing there that can correspond to their taste or contribute to their enjoyment. They have not even learned the language of heaven. They could not talk with the angels and saints and the blessed Saviour. They know only the vocabulary of sin, and can neither speak nor understand the dialect

of the skies. They can neither relish nor digest the food of the supernal world. The meat and the drink of the celestial beings is to enjoy God while they glorify him. Unregenerate souls could not live on this spiritual food. They could neither perform, nor take delight in, the employments of heaven. The employment of the saints are to contemplate God's holy attributes, to behold his face, and to move in swift obedience to perform his will. The unregenerate cannot contemplate God's holy attributes with complacency, nor bear to behold his face, which always frowns on sin, and they have no skill in the performance of his will. They could not sing the songs of the redeemed, for they have never washed their robes in the Lamb's blood and made them white. What could the unregenerate do in the kingdom of heaven? They could find no peace, nor joy, nor rest for their guilty and unholy souls in the kingdom of absolute purity and perfect holiness. As the foul beasts and birds, that prowl and fly at night, are frightened, if overtaken by the

light of day, from their lairs and nests, so the unregenerate would be tormented and made perfectly miserable by the glory of that eternal day that shines in universal splendor on all the plains of the celestial paradise. Ye must be born again, or heaven can be no heaven to you.

4. Ye must be born again, because, without regeneration you can never enter the kingdom of heaven. If you refuse now to be prepared for heaven, how can you hope to be admitted into the realms of glory when you depart out of this world? Christ has said, except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven and see God. These are the solemn words which He has sworn to perform, who has the keys of the kingdom, and opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens. When he shuts the doors of heaven against you, all earth and hell combined could never open them again for your entrance. Unless you are born again, he will most assuredly close for ever the doors of the upper kingdom against you. He stands now and knocks at the door

of your heart and pleads for admittance, that he might prepare your soul for his heavenly kingdom. If you now refuse him admittance, you will stand at his door and knock in vain, for he will only admit those to his kingdom who admit him now to their hearts.

Without regeneration you can have no holiness, and "without holiness you cannot see God." The pearly gates of bliss can never be opened to any but the holy. Heaven is a place of holiness, and nothing but holiness can enter there. One unconverted soul would spoil heaven, should it be permitted to enter the shining gates of the new Jerusalem in its unregenerate state; and God will never suffer the kingdom of glory and bliss to be spoiled by those who will not obey him on earth. Heaven is a holy, happy, and glorious place. It is happy because it is holy, and it is glorious because it is holy and happy. Now the admission of one unconverted sinner would spoil heaven in all these respects. Happiness is inseparably connected with holiness. Wherever

there is sin there will be misery. Admit one unregenerate sinner into heaven, and then the holiness of heaven would no longer be perfect, and consequently its happiness would not be absolute, and, therefore, the glory of the celestial would be marred. The entrance of one unregenerate person into the kingdom of glory would spoil heaven, for it would be the introduction of sin, and misery, and shame, into the holiness, happiness, and glory of the supernal world. God will not spoil heaven to save a soul that refuses to yield to the gentle wooings of the Holy Spirit and be born again. Everything there is holy. The Holy Trinity is there; the Holy Father, the Holy Child Jesus, the Holy Ghost, are there; the holy angels who never sinned, and the holy saints, who have been washed and made holy in the spotless righteousness of Christ, are there. Heaven is the home of the holy, and all the blessed and glorious company of the holy will rise up and exclude the unregenerate and unholy from their joyful society.

Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a

man be born again, he cannot see God. Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. If ye would live a holy life—if ye would have any communion with God—if ye would be fitted for the society of heaven—if ye would find an entrance into the kingdom of glory—*ye must be born again.* If ye would not be banished from God's presence—if ye would not be cast into outer darkness—if ye would not be hurled into the bottomless pit—if ye would not be damned eternally with devils, in adamantine chains, on beds of penal fires—*ye must be born again.*

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE NEW BIRTH.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”—JOHN iii. 8.

THIS new birth, which is so absolutely necessary to admission into the kingdom of grace on earth, and into the kingdom of glory in heaven, is a mystery—a fact revealed and experienced, but not explained nor understood. We can know that it does take place, but how it takes place we can never tell. We may become experimentally acquainted with it, and feel its power in our own souls and see its effects in others, but there is much about it we can never comprehend. How the Holy Spirit operates in the sinner’s heart at all, how he changes his nature from sin to holiness, and how he alters the natural dispositions of his mind, and the long esta-

blished habits of his life, we may never be able to tell, but that these changes do occur we may know from our own experience and by observing what takes place in others. The fact that we cannot see the Spirit nor understand the mode of his working in the human heart, should be no hindrance to our belief in his existence and work. And this is requiring no greater faith in grace than is daily exercised in nature. We never saw the atmosphere, nor do we understand the nature of its movements, but we have felt it and seen its effects, and must, therefore, believe that it exists and moves. The Saviour might have selected any other of the mysteries of nature to illustrate the point, but he takes that which is, above all others, symbolic of the action of the Spirit. The atmosphere is invisible, its ever varying motions are incomprehensible, and yet its existence and motions are facts recognized and admitted by everybody. Let us now notice a few points in which this mystery in nature, illustrates the mystery in grace, of which Jesus speaks.

1. The atmosphere is absolutely necessary and indispensably essential to the existence of physical life. We breathe it into our lungs, absorb into our blood, and it penetrates every pore and interstice in the human frame, and permeates the whole physical system. We are in it, and it is in us. We live in it, and move in it, and without it cannot exist. Without the atmosphere there could be no respirations of the lungs, the blood would be vitiated, and every animal, vital, and sensorial function would immediately cease its operation, and the body would instantaneously die. Now the atmosphere is no more essential to physical life than the Spirit, is to spiritual life. We live in the Spirit and the Spirit dwells in us. The Holy Ghost is the element in which the Christian lives, moves, and has his spiritual being. Without him the functions of the Divine life can neither be put forth nor kept in operation. The Spirit, breathing himself into our souls, enlightens the understanding, and gives us all our spiritual discernment of the truth of the gospel; regenerates the affections, and

gives us all our Christian emotions and desires, and renews the will, and gives all our holy volitions. Without the atmospheric air man could not exist, and without the Holy Spirit the Christian could not live.

2. Both of these agents—on one of which physical life depends, and on the other spiritual—are invisible. We cannot see the atmosphere. We perceive its existence by the sense of feeling, and by an induction of facts obtained from observing its effects. We feel it when it fans our own bodies. We see its effects when it gently waves the grass and agitates the leaves of the forest, or when it sweeps over the land in terrific tornado, overthrowing fences and throwing down houses, bending to the earth the lofty pine, and breaking in pieces the sturdy oak; we hear its sound, sometimes in the gentle murmur of the whispering zephyr, and sometimes in the mighty roar of the bellowing hurricane. Just so, we cannot see the Holy Spirit, but we feel his mysterious operations in our own hearts; and see his effects in the changes he produces in the lives of others; and hear his

voice, sometimes in the gentle wooings of his word and providence, and then again in the thunder tones of the terror of the law, or in the loud lamentations of the calamities of earth.

3. The motions of the atmosphere on the earth are various and ever-changing, so are the operations of the Spirit in the church. Now there is a calm, now the gentle zephyrs fan our cheeks and whisper in the tree-tops, and now the awful tornado sweeps over the land, or the tempestuous gale rolls old ocean's billows into huge watery mountains, and makes them walk in awful grandeur on his foamy surface. And so with the Holy Spirit in the church. Sometimes there is a spiritual calm. It seems that the Spirit for a while suspends his operations. But few sinners are converted, and the church grows cold. The church needs a revival—an agitation in its spiritual atmosphere. But now the Spirit begins to breathe in gentle influences on Zion; Christians are refreshed, sinners are silently converted, and the church imperceptibly grows. And, at other times,

the Spirit sweeps over the land in powerful revivals. Sinners cry out in alarm, the mighty of earth are brought down, and the proud made low; sinners are converted by scores and hundreds together, and the whole earth is filled with awe and amazement at the mighty works of the Spirit.

4. The wind bloweth where it listeth, so the Spirit worketh where He pleaseth. We have no artificial means to compel the wind to blow when there is a calm, nor to still the tempest when there is a storm. The calm-bound sailor must await the time of the wind, for he cannot blow it up by human machinery; and the tempest-tossed vessel must brave the gale, for the storm cannot be stilled by any human invention. So the church cannot compel the Spirit. We can only wait upon God in prayer and the appointed means. The Spirit will go at his own will, where he has his own work to do.

We hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So it is again with the Spirit. We hear of precious revivals, but we cannot tell when they

will come to us, or where they will next appear. We can no more forecast the operations of the Spirit than we can the motions of the wind. To secure the presence of the Spirit and the conversion of sinners, we can only wait upon the Holy Ghost in prayer, and the use of the means that he has appointed in the church. All human contrivances, and "machineries" to produce religious excitements in the church, are worse than useless. Not those revivals that are "gotten up" from earth, but those that "come down" from heaven, are genuine and to be desired.

We have said that the Saviour might have chosen any other of the mysteries of nature to illustrate his point, but he selected the one he did, because it is not only illustrative of the nature of the new birth, but also symbolical of the particular and general work of the Spirit in the conversion of sinners; but the great truth designed to be taught in this passage, is that grace is no more mysterious than nature. If we wilfully reject and ridicule the doctrines of religion because they

are mysterious, we should also, to be consistent, reject the facts of nature. A fact in nature, observed but not understood, is a mystery; and a fact in religion, revealed but not comprehended, is also a mystery. The two mysteries stand on the same level, and if we reject one, we should also reject the other. Nature is full of these mysteries, and we should not, therefore, be surprised to find them also in our holy religion. They do not disprove the truth of religion, but, on the contrary, go to show that the God of nature is also the God of revelation. The spiritual birth and life are no more mysterious than the natural birth and life. We cannot tell how we began to be, nor how we live and have our being. We do not know how the heart pulsates nor how the lungs respire. Yet we do not doubt our own existence because we do not know the mode of it. Then suppose we cannot tell how the Holy Ghost regenerates a sinner, or how a Christian lives in Christ, shall we, for that reason, reject these truths, which are facts both of experience and revelation? Where is the supe-

rior philosophy, the profounder penetration, and the more rational discernment of that man, who rejects the revealed facts of religion, because they are mysterious, while he believes the observed facts of nature which he cannot comprehend, over the man who believes both the mysteries of nature and grace on precisely the same grounds? It is nowhere. The philosophy of Scepticism is not philosophical, and the rationalism of Neology is not rational.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RATIONALISM OF NICODEMUS.

“ And Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?—JOHN iii. 9.

NICODEMUS'S question indicates doubt, but not frivolity. It seems that he was made serious at this point in the Saviour's conversation, and lost his disposition to ridicule the Lord's teaching; but still he opposes it with his rationalistic scepticism. He refuses to believe because he cannot comprehend the doctrine. He proudly demands, *How can these things be?* Unless he can see *how* they take place and exist, he will not believe that they exist at all. O the vanity of the human intellect, when it assumes the high ground that it will believe nothing but what it can comprehend! The conceivable is not the limit of the real, and the comprehensible should not be made the boundary of belief.

How little of all that man is obliged to believe, does he fully understand! He does not know how the warm blood courses through his veins, nor how the food he eats is changed into blood, and then into sinews and flesh and bones, to support his life. He cannot tell how he breathes, and lives, and has his being. And though he cannot understand any of these things, yet they are facts which he not only does believe, but which he is compelled to believe. Even the superficial thinker must see, that this arrogant assumption will lead men into the most glaring absurdities and inextricable contradictions. If man thinks at all, he will be compelled to see that he knows nothing absolutely and to perfection. Around every object of his knowledge there hang many circumstances which he cannot understand. Take an illustration. The apple, loosened from its stem, falls to the ground. Why? Sir Isaac Newton answers, it is drawn towards the earth's centre by the force of gravitation. But what is gravitation? Newton could not tell, and there has not yet risen a mightier than he to

give the answer. Why does the force of gravitation draw all things towards the earth's centre? The profoundest philosophy has not yet been, and perhaps never will be, able to assign the cause of this every-day-observed fact. Shall we deny that it is a fact, because we cannot understand it? Common sense would convict the man, who dares do so, of insanity, and send him to bedlam. The man who adopts in earnest the presumptuous position that he will believe nothing but what he can comprehend, not only divests his mind of all knowledge, but even strips it of all possibility of knowing anything, and will lose himself in eternal night in the interminable intricacies and windings of the labyrinth of a bleak and universal scepticism. Does vain man suppose that there is nothing beyond the comprehension of his own little short-sighted intellect? Shall a proud mortal in the presence of the Divine Teacher, or with his written word in his hand, adopt the motto of the heathen sophist, Protagoras—"Man the measure of all things"—and circumscribe the infinite God, and all his mighty works of

nature and grace, within the range of his own contracted powers of understanding? This is the length to which he goes, who asks, in the spirit of Nicodemus, *how can these things be?* It is intolerable arrogance for a creature, whose senses are confined to a point, who cannot tell how he lives, nor how the world in which he lives sprung into existence, and became adorned and beautified with all the teeming millions which fill its bowels and diversify its surface, to ask, of the revelations of God's Son, *how can these things be?* It is a provoking presumption in a worm, who cannot tell how creation was evoked from emptiness, and how the silence and solitude of vacancy were broken up by the songs of angels and the morning stars bursting into light, to talk of believing nothing but that of which he can grasp the height and depth, the length and breadth, and comprehend in his own mental powers, cramped and confined, as he is obliged to see they are, on every side by weakness and limitations. And this is precisely the arrogant presumption of Nicodemus, and all the modern neologists, who demand an explanation of *how* these things

can be, before they will believe that they can be at all.

But Nicodemus acted in this case just like the sinner usually acts in similar circumstances. When the matter of the new birth was first brought to his personal attention, he began to ridicule and sport with the doctrine; but when the necessity of it was pressed home upon him, with tenderness and earnestness and deep solemnity, he becomes serious and loses his disposition to laugh, but begins to find difficulties in, and to make objections to, the doctrine as something that is incomprehensible and even impossible. This comes from the craftiness of Satan. If he cannot destroy the soul by stirring up within it a spirit of levity, he tries what can be done by raising within the mind difficulties and doubts. If he cannot induce men to laugh themselves to hell, he tries to make them doubt themselves away from heaven. When he cannot get men to come directly to him through frivolity of life, he knows that, if he can but induce them to stand still in the pride and vanity of their intellects, and re-

fuse to be born again, because they cannot see how the new birth can take place, he will be sure to get them after awhile; for, when Christ is entirely gone from them, he will come up boldly to seize them. He is more afraid of the Bible than of all other books together, and he knows that, if he can get men to ridicule that holy book, and to doubt the words of Jesus, he will have the way clear for great progress in the world. Because he knows the mighty influence of doubt and uncertainty in divine things to increase the immorality and misery of the human family, the father of lies and sophistry has sent the spirit of rationalism abroad into the world, as his mightiest weapon, in these latter days, for the destruction of souls. "It has," says one, "laid its reckless hands on the temple of orthodoxy, and would drag its pillars to the ground. It has infected the schools of philosophy, and corrupted the purity of theology. It has filled the philosopher with a lofty conceit of his own wisdom, and degraded the Bible in the estimation of the theologian. It has ascended

the pulpit, and preached blaspheming nonsense in the house of God. It has stood in the presence of a crucified Saviour and poured derision on his dying love. In the garb of the gospel, it has denied the very essence of the gospel. It has seized the public press and scattered its poisonous sentiments in all directions, that it may unsettle the faith of the believer, and plunge the weak and wavering into depths of a confirmed and hopeless infidelity." It is all the more destructive, because it is an insidious and seductive temptation that appeals to the pride of man. Satan comes with it, appealing insidiously to the pride of the heart, as he did with the forbidden fruit to our first parents in Paradise—saying, eat of this, and you shall become as gods, and know all things. And when the man eats, and fails to know all things, he is so deluded that he will not believe that there is anything beyond the ken of his knowledge. Proud man! Deluded mortal! When he cannot grasp the universe within his mind, he would trim it down to the dimensions of his own

narrow comprehension! Because he cannot see everything, he would shut himself up within a house of his own making, and then deny that there is anything outside of the walls within which he had confined himself.

The spirit of rationalism is not confined to the schools of neological philosophy,—it is natural to the human heart. Not only the Strausses of Germany, the Newmans of England, and the Emersons of America, but multitudes of the ignorant and unlearned in all nations and ages are unconsciously imbued with the spirit of rationalism. Rationalism in religion is simply opposition to supernaturalism, and this opposition is found in the clown as well as in the philosopher. True religion stands midway between rationalism on one side, and superstition on the other, and all men, except the few whose imaginations are tamed by a sound philosophy, and whose hearts are subdued by Divine grace, run into one or the other of these extremes.

We should not ask, *how can these things be?* but, *are they so?* And provided they do not contradict reason, though they may be

above its comprehension, it should be enough for us to know, that a Teacher sent from God has said that *they are so*. We should receive them simply on his testimony, for God vouches for his veracity, and the infallibility of his doctrines, in sending him as a teacher to earth. What a God-sent teacher proclaims is the word of God, and the naked word of God, should be sufficient to command our faith. Nicodemus came to Jesus, acknowledging him to be a Teacher sent from God, and logical consistency required him to receive his words as the truth, though the truth contained in them might be above his comprehension. Though he could not understand the mode of the existence of the truths taught, he should have received them as facts on the testimony of Jesus, whom he professed to recognize as a Divine teacher. But he sets up his own puny reason as the criterion of Divine truth, and will not believe, because he cannot understand how these things can be. O the vanity of proud mortals! But let us see what the Lord says in reply.

CHAPTER X.

NICODEMUS'S IGNORANCE REPROVED.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a teacher in Israel, and knowest not these things.”—JOHN iii. 10.

HAVING expelled all frivolity from his heart and put an end to his ridicule, by the serious earnestness of his manner, and the sublime importance of his doctrine, our Lord next proceeds to reply to the unbelief of Nicodemus; and, in the first place, he reproves him for his ignorance. “Art thou a teacher in Israel, and knowest not these things?” The doctrine of the new birth, as we have already shown, is distinctly and abundantly taught in the Old Testament, of which Nicodemus professed to be a public expositor and teacher; and if, therefore, he had been even intellectually qualified for the office which he presumed to fill, the new

birth would not have been a novel and strange idea to his mind. It is plain that he did not even understand the letter, much less the spirit, of the Sacred Book, which he pretended to expound to others. If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall in the ditch together. While Israel had such blind teachers as Nicodemus, we cannot wonder at the ignorance of the people. If the teachers did not understand, even intellectually, the theory of the new birth, how could they teach its necessity and spiritual significance to the people? If the teachers were ignorant of this fundamental doctrine, how could we expect the people to be anything but a blind and perverse nation? As their best and most enlightened teachers, which class Nicodemus most certainly represented, were so utterly ignorant of the very elements of the gospel, there was the greatest need that Christ should come as the Divine Teacher to instruct the people in the way of light and life.

Nicodemus's profound ignorance of the spirit of religion is apparent from another

fact. As a teacher in Israel he must have been familiar with the practice of the baptism of proselytes, and he could not have understood the spiritual idea of that baptism without becoming acquainted with the doctrine of the regeneration of the soul. That was an external baptism of water by man, symbolizing an internal baptism of fire by the Spirit. Nicodemus stopped with the sign, and never penetrated to the more essential thing signified in it. He was on this point about as ignorant as many teachers of the present day, who teach the human-invented doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Christ had previously condemned his ignorance in this point, when he told him, except a man be born of the Spirit as well as of water, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. If a man is satisfied with the outward sign, he can never be saved. He had as well suppose that he is rich when he gets the casket without the jewel, as to suppose that he is prepared for heaven, when he receives the external baptism of water without the internal baptism of the Spirit. He

who supposes that the external rite of baptism is all that is necessary to prepare for communion with God and fellowship with heaven, is no more fit to be a teacher in the church than a blind man is to be a guide in the wilderness. The regeneration of the soul is the vital doctrine of religion, and the man, who is not acquainted with it, is utterly unqualified to be a teacher in Israel.

What most of all wholly and utterly disqualified Nicodemus for the office which he pretended to fill was the fact, that he was not only theoretically ignorant of the doctrine of the new birth, but he had no experimental acquaintance with it. He had not himself entered into the kingdom of God, and how could he conduct others into it? A teacher in religion, who is intellectually ignorant of the doctrine of regeneration, is bad enough, but one that is spiritually a stranger to it is ten-fold worse. The man who sets himself up as a teacher in Israel, and pretends to preach the way of life, and at the same time denies the necessity of the new birth, and scouts at the idea as some-

thing that is absurd and impossible, is an emissary of Satan in the camp of Immanuel. He who teaches that the baptism of water is all that is meant by regeneration, and that this external baptism, together with the reformation of the conduct, is all that is required to fit one for the kingdom of God, is no better, nor more worthy of confidence as a religious teacher. Such teachers will not enter the kingdom themselves, and they stand in the door to keep others out. This is the first, the important, and the life doctrine of religion; and he who is ignorant of it is utterly incompetent to instruct in holy things. Can he, who has never seen the light, speak of the glory of day, or discourse of the beauty of colors? No more can he, who is himself unregenerate, teach religion, or discourse of the beauty of holiness. Can he, who knows not the way, give directions to the traveller? No more can the unregenerate teach sinners the way of life. Nicodemus was altogether incompetent for the high office which he presumed to fill, because he was intellectually ignorant of the

Scriptures he pretended to expound, and had never experienced in his heart the regenerating grace of the Spirit, which is essentially necessary to qualify one to teach in Israel.

How many Nicodemuses have we in the pulpit at this day! Men proud of their talents and vain of their learning, and yet experimentally unacquainted with the very first elements of religion! Men as unfit to teach religion, and preach the gospel, as the clown, who has not learned his alphabet, is unfit to teach a grammar-school! If they do not belch out shocking blasphemies into the face of heaven, they babble nonsense from the sacred desk. They may entertain their hearers with learned disquisitions in philosophy, or sublime discourses on astronomy, or smooth and flowery discussions of morals, but they cannot preach the gospel, simply because they have not yet learned the very alphabet of religion.

CHAPTER XI.

NICODEMUS'S UNBELIEF REPROVED.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.”—JOHN iii. 11.

AFTER reproving Nicodemus for his ignorance, the Lord reproves him for his unbelief. This reproof was deserved, because there was the best and most sufficient evidence for a foundation to faith. In order to appreciate this evidence, we must inquire, who are the WE, who speak what they do know, and testify what they have seen. On this point we find quite a variety of opinions among commentators. Some suppose that the plural is used here rhetorically for the singular; Alford thinks that it is a proverbial expression, and means only the Lord; Stier is of the opinion that it includes the three persons in the Holy Trinity; Bengel

understands it to mean Christ and the Holy Spirit; Knap thinks the Saviour refers to himself and John the Baptist, whom Nicodemus had heard; and Calvin, Beza, and Tholuck suppose that Christ means himself and all the prophets. We agree with the latter view. The persons designated by the WE, include all the teachers sent from God, to which class Nicodemus had confessed that Jesus belonged. Their testimony is worthy of all confidence, because God is their voucher. God chooses and sends into this world teachers, and in the miracles which he performs at their call, he attests the truth of their doctrine. The words of a teacher sent from God should be believed, not because they are his words, but because they are God's words, spoken through the mouth of the divinely inspired teacher. We should receive the declarations of such teachers, whether we can understand them or not, because they are the words of God, and his thoughts are as much above our thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth. We should, for the very reason that the

Scriptures are the word of God, expect to find in them many things mysterious and incomprehensible, but these mysteries should not hinder us from receiving the testimony of the inspired teachers, who speak what they do know, and testify what they have seen.

The true nature of faith is here intimated. It is not knowledge from experience or demonstration, but a conviction resting on the testimony of others. There are three rational and logical sources of knowledge—perception, demonstration, and faith. Of these three, faith gives us most of our information, for we have, by far, the larger part of our knowledge through the testimony of others rather than by the perceptions of our own minds or the demonstrations of our own reasons. The knowledge of faith exists in all degrees, from mere suspicion, through every degree of probability, up to undoubted certainty. The degree of assurance we have in our faith, depends on the amount and character of the testimony on which it rests. The word of a man of doubtful veracity is enough

to create suspicion, the assertion of a single man of truth will give us probability, and the combined testimony of many of undoubted veracity will give us such a foundation for belief, that their words cannot be rejected or gainsayed. Now on this principle there is the broadest and firmest foundation for Christian faith. We are not required to believe on the testimony of any single individual, but on the testimony of many of the most undoubted veracity, who lived at great distances from each other both in time and place, between whom collusion was impossible, and in whose testimony there are no contradictions nor real discrepancies. They were men of the purest morals and holiest lives; and most of them sealed their testimony with their blood. And what is more than all this, they were inspired teachers sent from God, and in the manifestations of his omnipotence through them, in the miracles wrought at their words, God presented himself as a witness, and became the voucher for the truth of their doctrines. So the ultimate foundation of Christian faith is, not the

testimony of a great number of the best and holiest of men, but the testimony of God himself. For the inspired teachers only spoke the words of God as God revealed them.

The teachers sent from God, on whose words we are to receive the gospel and to believe in Christ, are not doubtful witnesses, who gave merely conjectural testimony, but they were men confidently assured of the truth of what they spoke. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." They were assured, by their own internal consciousness, that God spoke to them the words that they uttered as his oracles. We may not be able to tell how these men knew that they were inspired, but we cannot tell how men know anything. We may know how impressions are made on the physical senses, but the most delicate analysis of physiology, and the keenest acumen of philosophy, have not been able to tell how these impressions are conveyed to the inner man, or how the mind, through them, becomes cognizant of external things. So men, in-

spired by the Holy Spirit to know the thoughts of God and to teach them to men, may be conscious of the fact of their inspiration, without being able to tell how they are inspired. At any rate, it is a fact that the inspired penmen, on whose declarations we are to receive the doctrines of revelation, were conscious that they knew the thoughts of God, and they spoke only what they knew to be mind of the Eternal. And as to the historical facts which they recorded, they testified only to what they had seen, either in natural sight, or in the vision of prophecy. One could not reasonably ask, nor possibly have, better evidence than that on which Nicodemus was required to believe. If the testimony which they had could not convince them, no other could; and Nicodemus, and the other Pharisaic rulers, who would not receive it, were inexcusable in their unbelief, because it was most unquestionably sufficient to be the broadest and firmest foundation for the faith required.

Applying the words, "we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen," to

the mystery of the new birth, which was the immediate subject of conversation, and in regard to which Nicodemus was expressing his doubts, they have another meaning. They, then, mean that they spoke of a change which they knew by personal experience in their own hearts, and testified to a fact which they had witnessed in others. All those teachers, prophets, apostles, and preachers, who were sent from Christ, were regenerated men. This great change of heart and life is an essential and indispensable qualification to fit one to be a teacher with Jesus, and all those who were sent out by him before his incarnation, or that have been sent out since, to proclaim the doctrines of religion and to teach the mystery of regeneration, speak what they know by their own internal experience, and testify what they have witnessed in the cases of others converted under their observation. This was an additional reason why their testimony should be received, and a farther rebuke to Nicodemus's unbelief. This fact also contrasted Nicodemus and the Jewish teachers,

whom he represented, in a very unfavorable point with the true teachers of religion. It showed that the former were destitute of an essential qualification that must be found in all worthy teachers of religion. The destitution of regenerating grace was the secret of their unbelief, and the real cause why they would not receive the testimony of Jesus and his disciples. They were carnal, and could not receive the things of the Spirit. They rejected the gospel because it condemned their lives. Their depravity was the cause of their unbelief, and their unbelief was the source of their transgressions.

Human nature is the same to-day that it was in Nicodemus's day. Men act now just as these rejecters of the gospel acted then, and are still influenced by the same causes. The gospel condemns their wickedness and requires a change of life, and, for that very reason, they will not believe it; and because they will not believe it, they go on in transgressions, from iniquity to iniquity. Men now reject the doctrine of spiritual regeneration, because they know that, if it is true,

they are not in the way to the kingdom of heaven. They say, "it is a mystery, and we cannot believe it; it is an impossibility, and we will not receive it." They thus attempt to persuade themselves that the new birth is something that is impossible, or, at least, unnecessary, because they are unwilling to admit that they are wrong, and to commence their lives anew with this confession, and by seeking the regeneration of the Spirit.

But men must not only admit the regeneration of the soul as a doctrine, but also experience it as a reality in their own hearts, or they will be forever lost. Except ye are born again, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Woe to the teacher who preaches against this doctrine! Woe to the hearers that are blindly led by such blind teachers! Beware that ye reject not the testimony of Jesus and his teachers, and receive the words of unregenerate men for gospel doctrine, and thus lose, through unbelief, your immortal souls.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY THINGS.

“If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?”

JOHN iii. 12.

AFTER reproving the ignorance and unbelief of Nicodemus, the Saviour begins to prepare his mind for the reception of more mysterious and more sublime truths than any he had yet revealed. He had only spoken to him of earthly things, but he was now about to speak to him of the heavenly things connected with regeneration; and if Nicodemus refused faith in things terrene in their nature, how could he believe in things altogether celestial? But notwithstanding his unbelief in what he had already heard, the Lord proceeds to make known to him the higher mysteries of the Christian religion, because it was necessary to speak of the

heavenly things in order to explain the earthly.

What are the earthly things which he had told Nicodemus, and what are the heavenly things of which he is about to speak? The commonly received opinion is, that by the earthly things is meant the natural mystery of the wind, and, by the heavenly things is meant the spiritual mystery of regeneration by the Spirit, which is illustrated by the phenomena of the atmosphere and its motions. According to this interpretation the idea is, that there is as much mystery in nature as in grace, and as good a foundation for faith in the one class of mysteries as there is for belief in the other. If Nicodemus believes that the wind blows, though he cannot tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth, he should believe also the heavenly mysteries which the Saviour reveals, notwithstanding they are incomprehensible in many points. For instance, he should believe that the Holy Spirit can, and does, regenerate the human heart, even though he is not able to tell how the Spirit performs this mysterious work.

We have just as good reason to believe the heavenly things—the doctrines of grace—as we have to believe the earthly things—the facts of nature. This is true, but it is not the truth taught in this passage of Scripture, though it is a truth, clearly and abundantly taught elsewhere. If Christ had referred to the parable of the wind in the earthly things, he would not have said, *ye believe not*, but I have told you earthly things, and *ye understand not*.

The whole passage will be clear and easily understood, when we notice that the earthly things are the doctrines which the Saviour had taught up to this point in his conversation, and the heavenly things are those higher doctrines of grace, which he now proceeds to reveal. He has yet spoken only of the earthly side of regeneration, and Nicodemus does not believe; how shall he believe, if the Lord should speak to him of its heavenly side, which he must do, if he tells him how those things are possible with God, which seem to be impossible with men. Faith is belief on testimony, and the earthly side of

regeneration is experienced by man, and man may, therefore, testify to its truth; but the heavenly side of it can only be known as it is revealed from heaven. Now if Nicodemus will not believe the words of the Saviour, which can be confirmed by the experience of mortals on earth, it is not to be expected that he will give any credence to his words when he speaks of those higher mysteries of religion, which no mortal has seen or can see. The earthly things are the operations of the Spirit in the hearts of men on earth. The effect of these operations is visible to mortal eyes, and the operations themselves are matters of consciousness in the experience of men. They are called earthly, because they pertain to this mundane existence, and must be experienced, if experienced at all, in this life and in this world. But there are other mysteries connected with the new birth which are far removed from human view, and which can never be subjected to mortal vision, nor realized in mortal consciousness. These more profound and inscrutable mysteries pertaining to the redemption of fallen man are the heavenly things of

which Jesus is about to speak. Now, if Nicodemus would not believe the terrestrial part of the new birth, which might be, and actually was, confirmed by the testimony of those mortals who had experienced it, there was but little probability that he would believe those sublimer mysteries composing its heavenly side, which no mortal had seen or could see. Nicodemus asks, when the earthly side of religion was presented to him, "How can these things be?" The Lord forewarns him that he will not believe, if he should turn to him its heavenly side, which he must do in order to explain its earthly side, and to answer his sceptical question. Christ had, up to this point in the conversation, only taught him the first rudiments of the gospel, and as he would not believe these first principles, there was but little hope that he would give any credence to the celestial mysteries of the council of eternity, in which the salvation of man was made possible. But as he had asked, the Lord proceeds to explain to him how God had made it possible to save fallen and sinful man in consistency with his justice.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INCARNATION.

“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven.”—JOHN iii. 13.

THE Lord now begins to speak to Nicodemus of the heavenly things—those higher mysteries, which were determined upon in the council of the Triune from all eternity, and which are necessary to render the salvation of fallen man possible. The first one of these great mysteries is the incarnation of the Eternal Son. This is the corner-stone in the edifice of the divine scheme of salvation. In order to save fallen man, it is necessary that he should have a Saviour, who is both human and Divine in the same person. Let us first see wherein this necessity consists, and then we will find that Jesus is just such a Saviour as man needs.

Man is a sinner, and sin in its nature deserves punishment. Justice, in its inflexible nature, demands that sin shall be punished, and even God himself cannot pardon sin, in consistency with his immutable justice, until its penalty is paid. Sin, in its inherent ill-desert, merits punishment, and is absolutely unpardonable until its deserved penalty is suffered either by the sinner himself, or by a competent and accepted substitute in his stead. Now, where can this competent substitute be found? Not among the sons of Adam, for all his race are sinners, and each needs the atonement for himself. There is not one exempt from the penalty so that he could make atonement for his brethren. An angel cannot be our atoning substitute, for angels do not have a community of nature with us, and as the sin was committed in the flesh, the atonement must be made in the flesh. But suppose an angel could assume our nature, or that there could be found one, among all the descendants of Adam, that is perfectly free from sin; neither one of these could be a competent substitute

to make atonement for the human race; because the sin of the race is against a God of infinite purity, and the substitute, that renders satisfaction, must have infinite dignity of character. The sufferings of no mere creature can satisfy the demands of the law and redeem man from its curse. He who redeems man from the curse of sin, must be infinite in being, attributes, and dignity of character, in order to give infinite worth to his sufferings, that they might redeem from the penalty of sin; and he must be at the same time human, in order that he might, by his sufferings, pay the penalty which the human race owes. The Saviour of Adam's race must be man, that he may obey and suffer, as the substitute of man; and he must be God, that his obedience and sufferings may have infinite worth and be sufficient to redeem man from the curse and death of God's violated law. Now Jesus, and Jesus alone, combines this dual nature in one person. He is God, incarnate in human flesh, and endowed with a human soul. He is God and man in one person. He, and he alone, is

competent to redeem man from the curse of the law, and to reconcile his offended Maker to rebellious man. In the passage before us the Lord reveals the mystery of his incarnation to Nicodemus as the first, and most important, of those heavenly things, to which reference was made in the preceding chapter.

When Jesus says *no man hath ascended to heaven*, we do not understand him to mean that no mortal had gone up to the skies to live with God. Enoch and Elijah had ascended with their bodies, and were then living bodily in the presence of their God in the skies; and the souls of all the just, who have departed from earth, are now in heaven rejoicing with the angels. The ascension and descension here spoken of, refer to a profounder mystery than that of the immortality of the soul or the resurrection of the body. They relate to the incarnation of the Deity, which only took place in the person of Christ. In him heaven and earth meet, and the Divine and the human are united in one mysterious person. *No man hath ascended to heaven, but he that came down from*

heaven. The Incarnation is not earth ascending to heaven, but heaven coming down to earth; it is not man becoming God, but God becoming man. The finite cannot exalt itself into the Infinite, but the Infinite may descend into the finite. The incarnation of Jesus is not his humanity rising up to his Divinity, but his Divinity stooping down to his humanity.

This mysterious person, who descended from heaven to earth, that earth, through him, might ascend to heaven, did not cease to be Divine, when he became human; for he is *even the Son of man which is in heaven.* As he is the *Son of man*, he is truly man, and as he is *in heaven*, he is truly God. He is man in God. It also means that the Divine nature of the blessed Saviour is not contained in his human, but that his human nature lives in his divine. We do not mean that his human nature is absorbed, or swallowed up, in his divine;—his two natures are kept distinct from each other, but his human personality is swallowed up in his Divine personality, and becomes one with it. In the

Incarnate Saviour, there are two distinct natures, and only one person, in the same mysterious being. As man, when speaking with Nicodemus, he was on earth, but as God, he is always in heaven, and fills all immensity with his Divine omnipresence. As human he was of time, but as God he is eternal.

Now this Jesus, with his dual nature and single person, is competent to be the atoning substitute of fallen man, and to redeem him from the curse of the law and the penalty of sin. As man, he can obey and suffer in the stead of man, and because he is God, his sufferings have infinite merit, and satisfy the demands of Jehovah's violated law.

It is necessary that Jesus be both Divine and human to fit him to instruct men in those things that are altogether heavenly in their nature, as well as to qualify him to be the Redeemer of lost sinners. It needs a teacher, like Jesus, who is in heaven and on earth at the same time, to speak to the inhabitants of this lower world of those things that belong exclusively to the supernal world.

The great teacher, who declares the eternal mysteries of the upper world to those living on earth, must be God, in order to know the thoughts of the Divine Mind, and must be man in order to communicate them to mortals. And Jesus, the Saviour of Adam's fallen race, and the great Teacher of men in both earthly and heavenly things of religion, is the Light and Life of this dark and dead world, because he is both God and man in one mysterious and adorable person.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up”—JOHN iii. 14.

THE great end of the incarnation of the Saviour was to render his crucifixion possible, and the crucifixion of Jesus as our atoning substitute, is the second great mystery in the plan of our salvation, which the Lord explained to Nicodemus, as being one of those heavenly things to believe which would require a stronger faith than he had. This doctrine is taught in the old Testament, but it is there veiled under the shadows of types and symbols. If the Jews had not lost sight of the spiritual significance of the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, the crucifixion of Jesus would not have been a new and strange doctrine to them.

The Lord begins to speak of the mystery

of his crucifixion by reference to one of the most striking and beautiful types, which foretold and illustrated it in the old dispensation. He has a double purpose in this. The time had not yet come, when it would be proper to speak of this mystery plainly and without parable. For wise reasons the Saviour never spoke plainly of his death and crucifixion until towards the close of his ministry, when that sad and mysterious event drew near. He also chose to refer to an Old Testament type, as illustrative of it, to convince Nicodemus that it was not a new doctrine, now for the first time revealed to man, but that it is taught in that very law of which he pretended to be an expounder, and to show him that he is culpable for being ignorant of it.

Some do not see in the brazen serpent of Moses a type of Jesus, but such seem to us to be no better acquainted with the true meaning of that wonderful miracle in the wilderness than was Nicodemus. Assuming that this serpent was a type of the Saviour, as the great mass of commentators and

common readers of the Bible now regard it, the question arises, in what respects did it symbolize him? The history of the brazen serpent is given by Moses in Numbers xxi. 8, 9. The people were bitten by flying fiery serpents, and there was no cure for the bite; and Moses was directed to make a brazen image of the serpent, and put it on a pole in the midst of the camp, and whoever looked upon it was healed of the bite. The serpent that Moses lifted up was not a real serpent, but only an image of it, and this is a fact that has an important bearing upon its typical significance. The real and living serpent was symbolic of sin, and the poison of its bite in the body illustrates the demoralizing and deadening effects of sin in the soul. The bite of these serpents was incurable by medicinal arts or any other natural means, so the moral depravity of sin is irremediable by any human contrivance. These are the points of similarity between the real serpent and its poison in the body, and sin and its effects upon the soul. We are next to trace the resemblance between

the cures. The real serpent was symbolic of sin, and the brazen image of the serpent was the type of Jesus.

1. The brazen serpent was only an *image* of the living serpent that did the harm. It was in the exact form of it, but it had no poison or harm in it. Now Christ, who was made sin for us, *knew no sin*. (2 Cor. v. 21.) He was made in the image of sin, and suffered its penalty, yet he knew no sin, for he was perfectly and eternally holy and absolutely harmless. When we say that Christ, who was eternally and absolutely sinless, was made the image of sin, we mean that he suffered its penalty just as if he had been a sinner. The brazen serpent was not a type of his incarnation, except so far as that was a part of the penalty of sin. The image of sin in Christ consisted in his humiliation and sufferings, his crucifixion and death, and in his being dead and buried, just as if he had been the incarnation of sin, though he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. The brazen serpent was not a serpent, but only an exact image of it, so Jesus was

not a real sinner, but he was made an exact image of sin, when he suffered its full penalty in the stead of real sinners.

2. The chief point of resemblance between the brazen serpent and the Saviour is found in its exaltation, and this was typical of the triple exaltation of Jesus,—in his crucifixion, his ascension, and his gospel. As it was necessary that the brazen serpent should be lifted up in Israel's camp for the cure of the bite of the fiery serpent, so it was necessary that Christ should be lifted up for the cure of the sting of sin. It was necessary that Christ should be lifted up on the cross, if he would redeem fallen man. He must be nailed to the cross to complete the work which he had begun in his incarnation. He came into this world to pay the penalty of sin, and it was on the cross of Calvary that he paid the last iota of the debt of the law, which enabled him to die with the triumphant shout, "It is finished." The crucifixion was a victory over sin, and the cross an exaltation to the Saviour, for when he died upon it he triumphed over sin and nailed it to the

tree. When he died in his crucifixion he paid the full penalty of sin, and redeemed the world from its curse; for, in that sublime and mysterious transaction the gates of hell were shut, and the doors of heaven were opened to all who will believe in him.

The cross was only the beginning of the Saviour's exaltation, which was perfected in his glorious ascension to the skies. In his ascension he demonstrated to angels and to men, that his triumph over sin was complete and eternal, and that, though he was made in the image of sin, there was no sin found in him. He has been lifted up to heaven, where he now sits in glory unapproachable, at the right hand of his Father, to dispense life and blessings to all who come to him by faith in the merits of his crucifixion. We are to look to him, by the eye of faith, to be healed of the sting of sin.

And Jesus, in his preached gospel, has another kind of exaltation in the world. The sum and substance of the gospel is Jesus Christ and him crucified, and wherever this gospel is preached, Christ is lifted up as the

only hope and Saviour of sinners. The brazen serpent was exalted in the midst of the camp, that all might see it, and look and be healed; so Christ is exalted in the world in his preached gospel, so that all sinners might turn to him the eye of faith and be saved.

3. A look at the brazen serpent was the only cure for the bite of the fiery serpents in Israel's camp, so the look of faith at the Lord Jesus Christ, is the only cure for the poison of sin. No medicinal arts could save the life of a person bitten by one of those flying serpents, but one look at the serpent of brass, exalted on the pole in the midst of the camp, would bring immediate relief and perfect cure; so no human works or contrivance can heal the disease of sin and save the soul, but one look, with the eye of faith, on the exalted and crucified Saviour, will give immediate peace to the soul and bring it to life eternal. If ye would live, ye must look to the crucified Saviour, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no

reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became *obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*. Wherefore God hath *highly exalted* him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philipp. ii. 6—11.)

There was a necessity for the crucifixion and consequent exaltation of Jesus. "Even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up." This necessity was not absolute, but relative. Man could not have been saved without it, but God was under no kind of obligation to save sinners. God would have been eternally just, had he doomed the whole race of fallen man to eternal and irretrievable death, but his mercy interposed a scheme of salvation. But his mercy could not extend pardon to sinners at the expense of his justice,

and his justice required that sin should be punished. Sin deserves death—not merely temporal, but eternal death. This is what the inherent ill-desert of sin merits, and what God's immutable justice requires shall be inflicted upon it. Sin is rebellion against an infinitely holy God, and it deserves an infinite punishment, and nothing short of such a punishment can atone for it, and open the door of pardon to man. It would, therefore, seem that the inflexibility of God's justice, and the universality of human guilt, would shut for ever the door of hope and pardon on the human race, and overshadow this rebellious world with the blackness of despair, and the doom of eternal death. But Christ appears as the Light and Life of this dark and dead world, and brings life and immortality to light. The Lord appears in humanity, revealing a divine scheme of salvation, in which justice and mercy meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other; for, sin can be punished and the sinner pardoned. Man could not make, and God ought not to make the atonement; but Jesus

appears as the God-man, and is made sin for us, though he knew no sin, and in his body on the tree he suffered the penalty that we ought to have suffered, and thus appeased the wrath of God; and now God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. O the depths of the wisdom and mercy of God! Sin is punished and the sinner is pardoned! Here, in Christ crucified, is life for sin-guilty mortals, and nowhere else, except in this exalted Saviour, can pardon and life be found in consistency with justice. The wonder of grace is, that God saves the world by the death of his Son.

CHAPTER XV.

LIFE BY FAITH IN CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

“Even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but have eternal life.”—JOHN iii. 15.

THE design of the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour was to open a door of hope and life to a perishing world. As one look of the bodily eye upon the brazen serpent was an instantaneous and complete antidote to the poison of the real serpent's bite, and restored the body to the health and comfort of physical life; so, one believing look of the soul's eye on the crucified Saviour, is an effectual remedy for the disease of sin, and will immediately restore the soul to the peace and comfort of spiritual life. There is life in Jesus, and that life becomes ours by faith in him as the crucified Saviour. If we believe in him, we shall live with him for ever; but if we

refuse to believe, we shall perish in eternal death. How can faith in Christ crucified save the soul? In order to make this matter plain, let us look at our condition by nature, and also see what Jesus has done for us, that he might bring us to the life of the Spirit in him.

We are all by nature the children of wrath, and are exposed to the curse of God's law. That curse, as we have already seen, is death. This death is the reward which sin merits; and we are not only exposed to it, but are utterly unable to escape it in our own strength and by our own works. We are not strong enough to meet death and triumph over it. The penalty is infinite, and we are finite, and must be crushed under it if we are left to our own strength to grapple with it. If we are left to satisfy the demands of the law, by suffering the penalty of sin, Death will seize upon us and bind us in the adamant chains of penal and eternal wrath. The penalty is infinite, and, we are finite, and therefore we can never, through all the ceaseless cycles of eternity, fill up the

measure of Jehovah's unappeasable wrath. It is idle to hope, that we can, by any good works of our own hands, ever exempt ourselves from the curse to which our sins expose us. No amount of future good can cancel a single past sin. If we have committed but one sin, that sin makes us sinners; and we shall forever be sinners unless deliverance is brought to us from above. If a man owes but one debt, he will forever be a debtor until he pays that debt, or until some friend pays it in his stead. As well might a man think that by promptly and honestly paying all future debts, he could cancel all his old debts, as to suppose that, by future good works, he can cancel his past sins, and thereby deliver himself from that death, which they deserve. Man, therefore, is not strong enough to overcome death, if he should grapple with it; nor can he, by good works, satisfy the demands of justice, and so appease the wrath of Jehovah and escape the curse of his violated law. We are all sinners, and if left to ourselves, we are doomed to that eternal death which our guilt deserves.

Jesus finds us in this lost and helpless situation, and undertakes to save us by suffering in our stead, that death which we ought to suffer. He becomes our substitute under the law, and makes a vicarious atonement for us. What the law demands of us, he pays for us. "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. The chastisement of our sins was laid upon him. He was made sin for us who knew no sin. Yes, the veritable penalty, which we deserve to suffer, Jesus has suffered on our behalf. He has suffered the death due our sins that we might find life for our souls in his righteousness. He has suffered this death without any mitigation in his favor, and thus he has made a full atonement in our favor. He has obeyed the law perfectly, both in its penalties and precepts, by suffering and doing, as man's atoning substitute, all that the law can require of us. By this double obedience, he has opened the way of perfect reconciliation between God and the sinner, inasmuch as in his passive obedience to all the

penalties of the law, he has secured for us pardon, and by his active obedience to all its precepts, he has purchased for us a positive righteousness. In Christ we can stand before the Father, not merely acquitted, but also accepted in his favor.

Now the question arises, how can the sinner receive the benefit of Christ's obedience? Here faith comes in and begins to play its part in our salvation. By faith we are united to Jesus, and live a divine life in him. When we become one with him in faith, our sins become his by imputation, and are punished in him, and his sufferings cancel them; and his righteousness becomes ours by the same transfer, and we are accepted in it. Thus we are justified and have spiritual life by faith in Jesus crucified. Thus, by virtue of a living and uniting faith in Christ crucified, who is the triumphant and ever-living Saviour and Redeemer of lost sinners, we are delivered from spiritual death and introduced into a new and higher life. We perish not when we believe in Jesus, because our faith makes us one with him. "I in them, and thou

in me." There is a real union between Jesus and all that believe in him, so that, by virtue of this union, which is effected by living faith, he assumes their sins and satisfies the claims of justice against them, and imputes to them his own righteousness, and breathes into them the spirit of a new life. They live in him and he lives in them, and one life pervades them both, and that life is his own divine life, which restores to their souls the lost image of God, and reinstates them in favor with their Creator.

But how can faith accomplish this wonderful change, which restores the soul, from the death of sin, to spiritual life? *Ask not how.* Nicodemus is now silenced and listens in wonder and admiration to Him, who speaks as man never spoke, and begins to believe even while he cannot comprehend; and so should you. Faith itself is a mystery—it is more than mere belief, and no one can tell the wonders it may be instrumental in accomplishing. How did a look at the brazen serpent cure the bite of the real serpent? You cannot tell, but still it is a fact. It did cure

it. We may not be able to tell how faith unites the soul to Jesus, and becomes the instrument of our justification and spiritual life. But it is a fact that it does so—a fact revealed in Scripture and confirmed by the experience of thousands.

We have said faith is more than belief. We may believe the gospel and still not have that faith in Christ which saves the soul. The end of mere belief is a proposition expressing a truth, but saving faith terminates in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the living embodiment of all truth. The sinner hears the gospel and believes that it is true; and he sees Jesus *lifted up* as the Crucified in the preached word, and faith mounting up through the truths of the gospel, climbs to Jesus and rests in his person as the end of his hope for salvation. To rest in the mere intellectual belief of the truths of the gospel for life, is like looking at the pole on which the brazen serpent was elevated, without lifting the eyes high enough to see the serpent on its top, and hoping thereby to be cured. The gospel is the standard on which

Jesus is exalted in the midst of the world for its salvation. We must look with the eye of faith to the top of this standard, and in a crucified Saviour exalted there, or we can never be saved. There Christ crucified is *lifted up*, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life. Now, gentle reader, do you believe in this Saviour? If you do not, you are this moment a perishing sinner. The poison of sin is now rankling in your veins. Death—eternal death, is coming on apace. Would you live? All you have to do is to look to Jesus by faith and live. One look of faith will cure the disease of sin and save your soul. Only believe in Jesus crucified, and thou shalt be saved. The way of salvation is now made so easy that, if you refuse to look and live, your own conscience will constrain you to confess that you ought to die. Here is life offered you on the simple and easy terms of faith in Jesus—a crucified Saviour full of love,—and if you refuse to believe, you deserve to perish eternally in your sins. Here is Light to guide you, and Life to save you. Open

your eyes and look, and reach out your hand and receive eternal life. Believe in Jesus and you shall become one with him, and he will make you a joint heir with himself to eternal life and glory.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOD'S WONDERFUL LOVE FOR THE WORLD.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—JOHN iii. 16.

AFTER revealing the scheme of salvation by faith in an incarnate and crucified Saviour, the Lord next directs Nicodemus's mind to that unutterable love of the Father, which gave his only-begotten Son to be crucified for the redemption of this rebellious world. Language will fall infinitely short of giving expression to this wonderful love of God for this sinful world of ours. The beloved and loving disciple John, who speaks so lovingly in his Gospel and Epistles of Divine and Christian love, was so overpowered on one occasion with the ineffable idea of love divine which was revolving through his mind, that he could give no other expression of it than

to say, "God is love." He did not mean to convey the idea that God is not just and holy as well as loveable and loving, but that love was the characterizing attribute and the essential principle of his divine nature, out of which all his other attributes are evolved, and the central point around which they all revolve in the most harmonious order. It was his love that sent his only-begotten Son to be the Light and Life of this dark and dead world; and it is by his love shed abroad in the heart that he binds the children of men to his throne, and constrains them to circulate around him in the orbits of obedience, just as the sun binds the planets to him, and keeps them whirling in harmonious rotation in their adamantine spheres, by the invisible and all-powerful force of gravitation. As God is love, the love revealed in the passage before us, is the most glorious exhibition of Deity itself.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. This love divine for the rebellious world is incomprehensible in its height, unfathomable in its depth, and as

wide as the universe in its breadth. It is a love that brings the eternal Son of God down from heaven, incarnates him in humanity, and nails him to the cross, that he might be the Saviour of a wicked world. It is a love that reaches from heaven to hell, and from pole to pole, inasmuch as it is a love that saves sinners from the very verge of the bottomless pit and lifts them above earth to the realms of endless bliss, and whose unlimited salvation is offered to the universal race of fallen man. We have said that in this conversation there are single words which have compressed within them an eternity of meaning, and the little word *so*, in this connection, implies an idea of love that eternity alone can grasp and develope. The love of God, wherewith he *so* loved our wicked world *that* he gave his only-begotten Son to die for its salvation, is as long as eternity, and as boundless as the infinite circles of space. By sounding in the unfathomable ocean, though we cannot touch the bottom, we may become impressed with a sense of the stupendous volume of water rolling beneath our feet, and

though the love exhibited in the passage under consideration is inconceivably great, yet there are circumstances connected with it which will overwhelm us with a sense of its stupendous magnitude, and make us feel how infinite it is.

1. It is the love of God for the world. *God so loved the world.* And what is that world which God *so loved*? It is the sinful, rebellious, and ungrateful children of Adam's fallen race. The world is sinful and deserves his wrath, and yet God loves the world instead of destroying it. Justice calls for its utter destruction, and yet his love triumphs over justice and spares it. The world is in rebellion against its Creator; hates, and would, were it possible, dethrone the Eternal, and yet God loves this rebellious world. It is ungrateful and despises his favors, yet God can forgive and love it. The world even denies the true God, and makes to itself false gods of wood, stone, silver, and gold, and bowing before them gives them the worship that is due to the Supreme alone, and yet God loves this idolatrous world. O

amazing love! The world, so sinful, so rebellious, so ungrateful, so idolatrous, so deserving of consuming wrath, is spared, and not only spared, but God loves it? This is such love as only a God could exercise! Where there are the amiable qualities of holiness, sincere gratitude for favors bestowed, a holy adoration of the Majesty of his Divinity, and a cheerful obedience to his rightful authority, it is naturally expected that God would love; but when there are none of these, but all their contraries, as is the case with the wicked world, it is the wonder of men, the amazement of angels, and the astonishment of devils, that God should love this wicked world.

2. God not only loves the world, but he so loves it that he has given his only-begotten Son to die for it. Love is measured by the sacrifices it makes in behalf of the beloved object. And what does God's love sacrifice for the world? His only-begotten Son! An infinite sacrifice, proving an infinite love! As Christ had illustrated the scheme of salvation by the type of the brazen serpent, he

now seems to have referred to the sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham, as illustrative of that Divine love in which this scheme of life originated, which was also familiar to Nicodemus. If he had understood the spiritual significance of that wonderful transaction, he would have known something of the wonderful love of God for this wicked world, which brought down his eternal Son from the skies to be a sacrifice on the altar of redemption. The Saviour teaches Nicodemus out of the very book which he pretends to understand and expound, and thus convicts him of culpable ignorance, and shows him how much he needs instruction. Isaac was Abraham's only son by Sarah his lawful wife, and though he had another son, he is called his only-begotten son by Paul, when he speaks of "his sacrifice." (Heb. xi. 17.) Angels are called God's sons, and the saints are his children; the former are so by creation and preservation, and the latter by creation, preservation, and redemption; but in a higher and peculiar sense is Jesus the only-begotten Son of God. He was not created,

but he always was begotten of the Father by eternal generation. We shall not pretend to unfold and explain the mystery of this eternal generation. There is something in the relations which subsist between the adorable persons in the Trinity, which we can never comprehend, which renders the Son peculiarly and infinitely dear to the Father. Christ is called the *only-begotten* and the *dearly beloved* Son of the Father, and the two expressions seem to be almost synonymous in the Scriptures; and they indicate that the Son, on the account of some peculiar and mysterious relation subsisting between him and the Father, stands so high in the Father's affections that no other being can be compared to his position, or be loved with a love at all comparable with that love wherewith the Father loveth the Son; and, when it is said that the Father so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son to die for it, it is equivalent to saying, that God's love for the world is *infinite*, for it makes an infinite sacrifice for its redemption.

3. In the next place the depth of this love is seen in that, *to which* the Father gave up his only-begotten Son. We can never understand the depth of humiliation and suffering to which Jesus descended that he might save us. The Son descended from heaven and became man; and who can measure the infinite condescension of the incarnation of the eternal Son? He not only became man, but he became man in the lowest position of humanity. He was born in poverty, lived in poverty, and died in poverty. He had not a house in which to be born, nor were his parents able to get a room in the inn where they were sojourning at the time of his birth. He was born in a stable, and while he lived he had not where to lay his head, and when he was dead, he was buried in the tomb of a stranger. The foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay his head. Not only was he a man of poverty, he was also a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was rejected and despised by the world, and was made the jest of the scorner and the song

of the drunkard. But if we would see the depth of his condescension, and the infinity of the Father's love in giving him for the world's redemption, we must contemplate the inconceivable sufferings of his tragical end. Here we see the incomprehensible agonies of Gethsemane, when his soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death, and hear that prayer of awful agony which was wrung out from his breaking heart with great drops of bloody sweat—"Father, save me from this hour." "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But it was not possible. It was to meet that very hour, and to drink that very cup, that he had come into the world; and the Father could not save him from that hour or let that cup pass from him, *because he so loved the world that he had given up his "only begotten Son" to that hour of death and that cup of wrath*, that the world through him might be saved. And now let us see the magnitude of the Father's love in the infinite sufferings of his darling Son in that hour of death. He is betrayed by a pre-

tended friend, apprehended by a mob, and deserted in the moment of his trial by all his true friends. He is mocked and ridiculed, scourged and spit upon, tried and condemned. See him, when the crown of thorns is pressed down on his temples until the blood trickles down his cheeks; see him, when he is scourged until the blood runs down his back in streams; see him, when he goes out bearing his cross until his exhausted humanity sinks under the burden. But let us follow him to Calvary, and in the awful scene of his crucifixion, read the infinite love of the Father in giving his only-begotten Son for this wicked world. See him now nailed to the cross—a rugged nail through each hand and a rugged spike through his feet; see, the cross is lifted up and let rudely fall into its place in the earth,—and there hangs your Saviour, and the Saviour of the world, bleeding, groaning, and dying; and now see, in the midst of his sufferings, the Father withdraws from him, and hear the agonizing cry that is wrung from his breaking heart—“My God, my

God, why hast thou forsaken me." Here was the acme of the Saviour's sufferings and the crisis of the world's redemption! See, now, when the sun would no longer behold the horrible tragedy, but shuts his glories in from the bloody scene; when the earth could no longer stand still, but reels and rocks as if drunken with its Maker's blood; when the very rocks rend and shiver to pieces, and the graves burst open and the sleeping dead come forth. Here, read the infinite love of God for a lost and rebellious world, and let that unbounded love melt your heart to repentance and returning love. But still lower does the Saviour descend.—He is not only dead, but buried! O can you consider this love, and not be moved! Shall the rocks rend and break to pieces, and your hearts be harder than rocks, that they break not under the love of the cross? Shall the dead arise to life and come out of their graves, and you be so dead in sin that the love of Calvary shall not quicken your hearts into spiritual life? Tongue cannot express, nor imagination conceive, the mea-

sure of God's love for the world, as it is manifested in giving up his "only-begotten Son" to all this for its redemption. O let this inexpressible love constrain you to embrace this Saviour with adoring gratitude, for the infinite price which he has paid for your salvation.

The origin of our salvation is found in the immediate love of the Father, which provides for us a Mediator between his wrath and our sin, but since he has provided this Mediator he now only loves us through him. Out of Christ, God is a consuming fire. The secret love of the Father, with which he loved us in himself, is higher than all other causes of our salvation, but that love is now treasured up in his only-begotten Son, and can only be extended to us through his mediation. He has made reconciliation between us and the Father. All our hope of salvation, and the faith by which it is to be obtained, are to be centered in Christ, and are not to mount above Jesus to that *unmediated* love of the Father, which gave us the Eternal Son to be our Saviour; there-

fore, it is added, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. It would not avail to reject Jesus, and then to hope for salvation in the naked and *unmediated* love of God. Nicodemus could never be saved except by faith in the only-begotten Son, whom the Father's love gave as the price of our redemption. The Father is now in the Son reconciling the world unto himself, and we can never be saved until we meet with him by faith in his Son. All the hopes of the world are now bound up in the eternal, incarnated, and crucified Son, and the world can only be saved by faith in him. If Nicodemus and the Jews, and the kind reader of these pages, reject the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Saviour of this world, they thereby close the only door of hope and mercy upon themselves. God's love cannot save those who reject and despise the only provision for the world's redemption, which that love has made. You must be saved by Christ, through faith in his name, or you can never be saved at all. "Be it known unto you all," said Peter, when he had healed the

impotent man, "and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone that was set at naught of you builders, which has become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DESIGN OF CHRIST'S MISSION TO EARTH.

“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through him might be saved.”—JOHN iii. 17.

AFTER unfolding the scheme of salvation, which mercy has provided for the fallen race of Adam, and pointing to that wonderful love of the Father in which it originated and which was accomplished in the crucifixion of his incarnate Son, the Lord proceeds, in the next place, to disabuse Nicodemus's mind of an erroneous opinion in regard to the design of his mission to earth, which he entertained in common with the other Jews. It was a very prevalent notion among the Jews, that the Gentiles, whom they often termed the world, would be destroyed in the days of the Messiah. Doubtless the desire was father to the

opinion in this instance. They thought that that it would be the prime design of the coming of the Messiah to establish them as a nation in earthly prosperity and glory, and that he would utterly destroy all other nations before them, and give them universal dominion in this world. When Jesus stood before Nicodemus and claimed to be the promised Messiah, he corrected this false opinion, and taught him altogether a contrary doctrine in regard to the nature and design of that kingdom which he had come to set up on earth. It was not God's design in sending his Son into this world, to destroy it at all, but to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. Christ came not as a harbinger of death, but as the messenger of life. He came not to contract the mercies of God, but to expand them as wide as the world. So far from the Jews having their peculiar privileges increased by the coming of Messiah, his coming was the means of putting the Gentiles on an equal footing with themselves. Christ came in love, and for salvation, and the love that

brought Jesus to earth, was as broad as the world, for it has made salvation possible to the whole race of man. Christ came not to destroy, but to save.

Let no one suppose that this truth is contradicted by those passages in which it is said that Christ "is come to judgment." (John ix. 39,) and where he is called "a stone of offence," (1 Peter ii. 7,) and in which he is said to be "set for the destruction of many (Luke ii. 34). That Jesus should be made death to any, may be regarded as altogether incidental to his coming. The design of his mission to earth was that he might be made life to all who believe in him, but that very design of life to the believer makes him to be death to all who refuse to believe in him. The gospel of Jesus, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, is made the power of a double condemnation to all unbelievers. They are first condemned on the account of their sin, and then they are condemned because they reject the only remedy that love and mercy

have provided, or can provide, for their salvation.

Christ came into the world not to condemn it, but that the world through him *might* be saved. There is an emphasis to be put upon the word *might*. Jesus does not say that the design of his mission is that the world *must* or *shall* be saved, but that it *might* be saved. He comes and pays the penalty of sin, and renders salvation possible to all who will believe in him. His redemption is sufficient for the whole world, and if any one is lost, it will not be on the account of any lack of merit or virtue in the atonement, but just because they will not believe that they might be saved. In its sufficiency the atonement is as broad as the universe, but none except believers can enjoy its benefits.

This salvation is freely offered to all, and whosoever will, may accept and be saved; but alas! fallen man has no will to accept, and unless the Spirit of God renews his will at the same time, when he offers him life through Jesus, he will die in his sin and stubborn unbelief. There is an universal

offer of salvation, but all do not accept it, because God does not choose to renew the wills of all. Why he does not renew the wills of all men so that all would accept the redemption so freely offered, and be actually saved through the all-sufficient atonement of Jesus, we cannot tell. We do know, however, that he is under no obligation to change the heart of any, and whoever may be lost can never find fault with him, because they voluntarily reject an offered Saviour. If he chooses to save some by his constraining grace, and to leave others to the consequence of their wilful sins and rejection of Messiah, the saved can only praise him for his distinguishing love, and the lost can only condemn themselves, because they were never willing to be saved. The lost sinner can never say that he was willing to be saved through Christ, but could not, because his own stubborn and rebellious will is the only hinderance to his coming to Jesus. Whosoever will, may come to Jesus and find in him eternal life, for he was sent not to condemn the world, but that the world through him

might be saved. If you stay away and are lost, it is only because you will not come and be saved. The world *might* be saved if it *would*. What Jesus spoke when weeping over impenitent Jerusalem, he speaks to you. "I would, but ye would not." "These are fearful words," writes Dr. Owen, "'Ye would not.' Whatever may be pretended, it is will and stubbornness that lie at the bottom of this refusal."

This inability which keeps you from Jesus, when you might come, if you could only get the consent of your will, is nothing but the sinfulness and depravity of your nature. "Remember," says Horatius Bonar, "that what you call your *inability*, God calls your *guilt*; and that this inability is a wilful thing. It was not put in you by God, for he made you with the full power of doing whatever he tells you to do. You disobey and disbelieve willingly. No one forces you to either. Your rejection of Christ is the FREE AND DELIBERATE CHOICE OF YOUR OWN WILL. That inability of yours is a fearfully wicked thing. It is the summing up of your

depravity. It makes you more like the devil than almost anything else. Incapable of loving God, or even of believing on his Son! Capable of only hating and rejecting Christ! O dreadful guilt! Unutterable wickedness of the human heart!

Is it really the *cannot* that is keeping you back from Christ? No, it is the *will not*. You have not got the length of the *cannot*. It is the *will not* that is the real and present barrier. “Ye *will not* come unto me that ye might have life.” “Whosoever *will*, let him take the water of life freely.” Yes, kind reader, Jesus came into the world not to condemn, not to destroy, but to open a way of justification to sinners, so the world *might* be saved; but the world hates, persecutes, and rejects him, and therefore the world is condemned to eternal death, on account of its wicked and wilful rejection of its Saviour. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of

God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

“He that believeth on him is not condemned.”—JOHN
iii. 18.

IN a former chapter we treated of “Life by faith in Christ crucified.” There we spoke of faith as the condition which is attached to the covenant of grace, here we are to speak of it as the part that man performs in the scheme of redemption. There is but little difference, we confess, between the two aspects in which we view the matter of faith in this chapter and in that, but as the Saviour repeats this doctrine no less than three times in his conversation with Nicodemus, we think that we will not be doing wrong to give two chapters in this little book to its consideration. The Lord, having revealed the part which God performs in our salvation, begins now to speak of the part

man has to do in securing life to his soul. God plans, executes, and applies, and man only receives. He receives by faith, for the moment he believes in Jesus, he is delivered from the curse and condemnation of the law.

But is not faith the gift of God? Yes, but at the same time it is the act of man. Man, in his fallen state, apart from the assistance of the Spirit, cannot believe, because his native depravity both disables and disinclines him from embracing Jesus. Now the Spirit, by enlightening his mind and renewing his will, gives to man the disposition and the ability to believe in Jesus, and then man accepts him as his Saviour, and trusts in him alone for his salvation. And as God gives the ability to believe and man uses it, faith is justly said to be the *gift* of God and the *act* of man. God gives the ability in the new birth, in which man is passive; and faith itself is the first vital breath of the new born soul. This faith takes hold on Christ, and thus becomes the connecting link between the sinner and the sin-bearer. When we thus believe, we are delivered from con-

demnation and introduced into the opposite state, which is justification. How does faith effect this wonderful change? As we have already seen, Christ "was made sin for us, though he knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Christ was treated by the law just as if he had been a sinner, that we might be treated in grace just as if we were not sinners. Now it is only when we get into Christ that we can enjoy the benefits of his righteousness, and we can only get into him by faith. We have already explained this matter in Chapter XV., to which we refer the reader for further illustration of the way of life by faith in Christ crucified.

We will next consider the inquiry, does regeneration precede justification? It seems to us very evident that the answer to this question must be given in the affirmative. Regeneration is the work of the Spirit in the heart, and precedes faith; and justification is the sovereign act of God concerning the believer, and takes place immediately upon the exercise of faith. Until the soul

is regenerated by the Spirit, it is dead in trespasses and sins, and as faith is a vital act, it can only be the exercise of a living soul, and must, therefore, be preceded by regeneration. Faith is to the soul what breath is to the body,—both the sign and instrument of vitality. When the soul is born again of the Spirit, it then begins at once to believe, and its faith is the breathing and exercise of its spiritual life; then this faith brings the soul immediately into union with the Saviour, and becomes the instrumentality through which his righteousness is imputed to the soul; and as soon as the soul is thus united to Christ by faith, the act of justification takes place. Thus we are enabled to trace the connection subsisting between these two great doctrines, of which the Saviour principally spoke in his conversation with Nicodemus. Logically, regeneration precedes, faith follows, and justification comes last; but chronologically, all occur simultaneously, for in the work of regeneration one begins to believe, and in the act of faith he is justified.

How easy is salvation made! Only believe, and thou shalt be saved! This is all that is required, and all that can be done. Why then are any lost? Because proud man rejects a salvation, which is to be had simply for the receiving. The sinner may this moment be condemned in unbelief, and the very next moment, if he will only believe, he may be justified in his faith. This is too easy and too simple for proud man. He wants to do some mighty work, and thereby merit the salvation of his soul. He is unwilling to receive life by the hand of faith as an unmerited gift of free grace. "To do some great thing called faith," says Horatius Bonar in his excellent little book, *God's Way of Peace*, from which we have already quoted,—"to do," says he, "some great thing called faith, in order to win God's favor, the sinner has no objection; nay, it is just what he wants, for it gives him the opportunity of working for his salvation. But he rejects the idea of taking his stand upon a *work already done*, and so ceases to exercise his soul in order to effect

a reconciliation, for which all that is needed was accomplished eighteen hundred years ago on the cross of Him who 'was made sin for us, though he knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' "

CHAPTER XIX.

THE UNBELIEVER ALREADY CONDEMNED.

“He that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”—JOHN iii. 18.

CONDEMNED already! Who, and for what crime? The unbeliever for his unbelief. Why, unbelief is no positive act,—it is only a lack of faith! Will God condemn a man simply because he hath not faith in his Son? But are you certain that unbelief is no positive crime? It seems to us to be both a positive and a great crime. Unbelief is not a merely involuntary state of mind. It implies a volition of the will, inasmuch as it is the *rejection* of the Saviour. The refusal to act oftentimes requires a much stronger effort of will than the consent to do. The unbeliever is already condemned, and justly condemned, because his unbelief is the wilful

rejection of the remedy for the disease of sin, which infinite love has provided for his salvation, and the deliberate choice of death in preference to life.

All the race of man were made sinners by the fall of Adam, and have inherited from him an inborn depravity, which is in the human heart as a fountain of iniquity, sending forth streams of actual transgressions. Now, both for our original and actual sins, we deserve condemnation. But wicked man has complained and murmured against that Divine economy, in which Adam was made our federal head and representative. Man has said that he ought not to be held responsible for the sinfulness of his nature, as that came to him from Adam, nor even for his actual transgressions, as they are the unavoidable fruits of that natural corruption which he has involuntarily inherited from the first man. These complaints are unjust, and the reasoning, on which they are founded, is illogical and unsound; but still the unbeliever is not condemned on these grounds, but because, in his unbelief, he

rejects the remedy which love has provided against the sinfulness of his nature and the sins of his practice. The unbeliever is already condemned, not because he is walking in the steps of the first Adam, but because he refuses to follow the second Adam. He that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the only-begotten son of God.

This unbelief is a heinous sin in itself; nay, it is the most inexcusable and heinous of all sins. It aims a blow at the character of God, and goes as far as mortal can go to undeify the Deity. To make the truth of this fearful assertion apparent, we must bear in mind that the destruction of any of God's essential attributes, would be the destruction of his Godhead. We cannot conceive of God except as a being of omnipotent power, of omniscient knowledge, of immutable justice, and of eternal veracity. If he were deprived of either his omnipotence, or his omniscience, or his justice, or his truth, he would then be stripped of that which is essential to his Godhead, and could no longer

be God. If a single pin or wheel be taken from the machinery of a watch, what is left is no longer a watch, because it can no longer perform the office of a time-piece; so if any one of his attributes be taken from God, he would no longer be God, because he would not be competent to perform the office of the Ruler of the universe. Hence, the Scriptures say that it is impossible for God to lie, (Heb. vi. 18), because, for the great God to violate his veracity, would be for him to abdicate his eternal throne and cease to be God. Now the sinner's unbelief is an implied impeachment of Jehovah's veracity; it goes as far as mortal power can extend, towards undeifying the Deity. If we refuse to believe a fellow mortal's word, by that refusal we implicitly charge him with falsehood. On the same grounds, when we refuse to believe the gospel, which is God's word, we thereby charge the great God with lying. But the unbeliever, astounded at the malignity of the sin of unbelief, cries out, "you cannot fasten on me the enormous sin of charging falsehood on my Maker by your

fine-spun argument. I never thought of such a thing!" Well, if the argument does not please you, take the conclusion in the words of Scripture. Open your Bible and turn to 1 John v. 10, and read, "He that believeth not God, *hath made him a liar*, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." It is just as certain, that every unbeliever gives the lie to God, as it is certain that God cannot lie to him. And there is another scripture which says, "he that believeth, hath set to his seal that God is true." (John iii. 33.) Now, as the faith of the believer sets to his seal that God is true, so the unbelief of the unbeliever sets to his seal that God is false. O, unbeliever, you cannot escape this condemnation, for both reason and scripture fasten it upon you! Your unbelief charges the great God with falsehood, and while you refuse to believe the gospel and to trust in Jesus, you are doing all you can to make God a liar. Your unbelief is the most enormous and malignant of sins, for it is a most contemptuous slander cast upon the name of your holy Creator,

and it goes as far as mortal power can, to undeify the Deity of heaven, and to make him like the devil of hell, who is the father of lies. He that believeth not is, therefore, most justly condemned already.

Unbelief does not only aim a blow at the character of God in general, but it directs a particular blow at the Saviour. You cannot view Jesus in any aspect of his character, in which unbelief is not an outrage and grief to him. He came to this world in love and has suffered the full penalty of the law in the sinner's stead, that the world through him might be saved. Not to believe in him, is to despise his love, and to reject his mercy, and to do all in the unbeliever's power to render his sufferings of no effect. Suppose that all men should follow the unbeliever's example so that not a single soul should believe in him, then his death would be in vain, as not one soul would be saved by it. Would it not be an awful outrage to the love of the crucified Saviour, if not one soul should be saved by his inconceivable sufferings and death? The unbeliever is doing all in his

power to bring about this very result, at the mere thought of which the heart is appalled. Unbelief is a greater outrage to Jesus than was his crucifixion; for it is an attempt to render his crucifixion of no effect.

Surely he that believeth not, is already, and most righteously, condemned, because he hath not believed in the only-begotten Son of the Father. Yes, unbeliever, you are already condemned! The sentence is already passed, and there is left for you but one door of escape. That door is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Have faith in Jesus, and the moment you believe, you are changed from an already condemned unbeliever to an already justified believer. Faith can effect this wonderful change in your moral status the moment it is exercised in Jesus. By faith ye are saved. Fear not, only believe, and thou shalt be saved.

CHAPTER XX.

UNBELIEF NATURAL TO MAN.

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”—JOHN iii. 19.

WHEN the way of life is so easy that man has nothing to do but to believe and be saved—to look on an exalted Saviour and live, it seems wonderful that any should be lost; but the fact is, comparatively few are saved. In view of this fact the inquiry naturally arises and demands our attention, why do so few believe? The only answer that can be given is, *unbelief is natural to the heart of fallen man*. The fault is not in God, nor in the gospel of his Son, but in man. The gospel is sufficient for all, and all are invited, but men do not come, because they are naturally indisposed to holy things. The Light of life is in the world,

but men wilfully shut their eyes and bury themselves in voluntary darkness, because they love darkness rather than light. The Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.

Holiness and light are always associated together, and darkness and sin are congenial. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Light of this dark world; and coming to the light is believing in him, and loving darkness is rejecting him with unbelief. All the world is divided into believers and unbelievers;—those love the light, and these love darkness rather than the light. We are not to be surprised when we find that the number of unbelievers greatly preponderates over the number of believers, because men naturally love darkness rather than the light, and will not come to the light lest their evil deeds should be reprov'd. Man is a proud being, and does not want to admit that he is a sinner, and that all his conduct is deprav'd. He would rather be deluded than to know the truth, when the truth condemns him. Here is the secret of infidelity and all unbe-

lief. Love of the truth never made an infidel. It is self-love and hatred of the truth which lead men to deny and reject the truth, and to bury themselves in the darkness of error, falsehood, and infidelity.

The unrighteous are never altogether at ease. When they have done all they can to persuade themselves that all is right and well with them, they still have a secret consciousness that they have but deluded their souls. They are, therefore, perpetually afraid of the light, and will not come to it, lest the rottenness of the foundation of the house of their carnal security should be discovered. When they have done all they can to stifle the voice of conscience, still it will, now and then, speak out. All it needs to kindle it into flames, is a spark of light from the Sun of righteousness. Men in their natural state of unbelief, therefore, have the light of the gospel, and love the darkness of sin because their deeds are evil.

The holy reflect the light of Jesus; and the wicked hate the holy because their presence and godly lives bring their wicked

conduct out in bold relief, and show how evil their deeds are. The godly man sheds light around wherever he goes, and brings the wickedness of unbelievers into open notice; therefore unbelievers hate them and shun their company. Christ is the true and original light, and all his disciples are the reflectors of his light. Christ is the *Lumen illuminans*, and each disciple is a *lumen illuminatum*. As the man who hates the sun, would also hate the planets, which are illuminated by his light, so the wicked, who hate Jesus, the true and original light, also hate and shun his followers, because the light which they reflect in their holy lives is a perpetual condemnation and reproof of their wicked conduct.

In the dark, black is not different from white, but when day breaks, the difference is seen; so, where the gospel has not shed its light, the good may not be distinguishable from the bad, but let the light of truth shine in, and the distinction will be at once seen. Brown may be considered white, until it is compared with snow, so the moral

man may be considered perfect, until he is measured by the requirements of the gospel, and then, in the light of the gospel, all his deficiencies are made apparent. Men hate the gospel, because the gospel reveals their true characters. Unbelief is natural to sinful men, because faith is the vision of the truth as it is in Jesus and his gospel, in which they see themselves as they are, and they are unwilling to be convinced, or to admit how vile they are.

But the unbeliever cries out, am I to be held responsible for my unbelief, since it is natural to my fallen condition? But, why is it natural? Simply, because men love darkness rather than light. Their natural propensity to unbelief is the very core of the sin of their nature. They hate the light because they are evil. The plea is nothing less than this, "I am so sinful, that the sinfulness of my nature is an excuse for the sins of my conduct." This plea will neither stand among men nor avail with God. Would the court acquit the murderer, who pleads the murderous disposition of his soul as an

excuse for his crimes? Suppose he should say to the judge and jurors, that he had a heart naturally so malicious that he could not help killing his fellow-man. Would the jury acquit him, or the judge pardon him, on that account? By no means; for that very malice of his heart, to which he confesses, is the essence of his crime. Neither shall it be any excuse to the sinner to confess that he has such a natural hatred towards Jesus that he cannot believe in him. This very natural hate, in the human heart, of the light of the gospel, is the very essence of the sin of our fallen nature, and is itself an all-sufficient reason for the condemnation of the unbeliever; and he, who pleads it as an exculpation from the guilt of unbelief, will be condemned out of his own mouth. Shall the destructive serpent not be killed because its venom is natural? It is this very natural venomous quality in the serpent which enables it to bruise the heel of man, and puts an undying enmity between its seed and the human race, and justifies man in bruising its head. The plea that unbelief is natural to

man is no excuse nor even palliation for the sin of unbelief; on the contrary, it is only the confession to an inborn guilt which greatly aggravates the crime.

CHAPTER XXI.

EVIL-DOERS LOVE DARKNESS.

“Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprovèd.”

—JOHN iii. 20.

THE ideas of light and life, darkness and death, are associated together in the Scriptures. Light is the emblem of holiness, and day a picture of heaven; and darkness is a symbol of sin, and night a similitude of hell. In this lower world of weakness, work, and weariness, the vicissitudes of day and night are necessary, and constitute one of the greatest blessings which the Author of all good has bestowed upon our frail mortality. The day is for labor and toil, and the night for repose and rest. How wise and good is this benevolent arrangement of Divine Providence, and how suitable for the requirements of man in the circumstances in which he is

placed! By the labor of his hands and the sweat of his face, he is to procure food to eat and raiment to wear; hence, he needs the light of day to see how to perform his work, and the warmth of the sun to give increase to his labors. But man is weak, and his strength is soon exhausted, and his body becomes wearied, and his limbs languid; hence, he needs the night to furnish him an opportunity, in its silence and stillness, to recuperate his exhausted physical energies and to prepare him for the toils of another day. Now, although night is a blessing to the human race in our present condition, yet it is a mark of our infirmity, and tells that our strength is perishing, and that we are passing away.

The darkness of night is the chosen time for the perpetration of crimes that blush in the open day. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds be reprov'd. When night comes on and spreads her sable curtains over the land, and honest men have suspended their labors and are locked in the

arms of balmy sleep, then it is, that the wicked and riotous prowl about under cover of darkness to perpetrate their most nefarious deeds. Hence it is, that night and darkness have become synonymous terms with sin and wickedness. Robbers and murderers, in the shade and solitude of night, move to the committal of their horrid crimes; and the voluptuous sons of folly, under cover of darkness, pursue their nocturnal pleasures in haunts and scenes so sinful and disgusting that even those who are so sunk into brutality that they can visit them in the blackness of night, would blush to be found there in the light of day. Those who only see the world by day dream not of half the sin and misery that fill the earth. If some magic spell should change even a little village into marble at the midnight hour, the very attitudes of the stones would, on the succeeding day, reveal sins at which honest men would stand aghast. No honest man knows the amount of wickedness that is concealed under the gloom of darkness. Suppose the patience and forbearance of God

should become, exhausted with some great metropolis, as the city of Paris, London, or New York, and he should, at the midnight hour, change all its living inhabitants into marble, and leave them in the positions in which they had placed themselves, what sins, what horrid crimes, what disgusting scenes, would the very attitudes of these cold marble forms reveal! Here, would be the robber, with his marble hands in the very act of theft; and there, would be the cold form of the assassin petrified, with the weapons of death on his person, as he was creeping to the murder of his unsuspecting victim. Here, would be scenes of bacchanalian revels; and there, would be families disturbed and horrified by the return of the intoxicated and brutalized husband and father. Here would be the marble forms of husbands and wives in adulterous attitudes; and there, there would be the petrified forms of men and women, who in the day were considered pure and chaste, in attitudes indicating sins so horrid and disgusting in their obscenity, that modesty forbids the bare mention of

their names. The doers of evil hate the light and love darkness, and when the day breaks they come out in hypocritical disguise, or crawl to their dens and hide themselves in holes until the return of night.

Now just as the doers of evil hate the light of day and love the darkness of night, which conceals their wickedness from others, so they hate the light of truth, and love the darkness of falsehood, which conceals their wickedness from themselves. They hug self-delusion to their hearts, and in its darkness attempt to persuade that their evil is good. If they would but open their eyes to see the light of truth, the truth would so condemn their evil deeds, that they could have no peace in their sins. Self-deception and self-delusion are the only means which can enable one to enjoy his sins. The truth enlightens the conscience and kindles its fires, and, therefore, evil-doers hate the truth and love falsehood, and will not come to the truth, lest their deeds should be reproved.

Evil-doers hate the light of holiness as well as the light of truth, and love the darkness

of sin as much as they love the darkness of error. There is a native splendor in holiness which sinners cannot endure. They avoid the company of the good, because their radiant lives condemn their wicked conduct. And as they hate the disciples of Jesus, who bear his image and reflect the beauty of his holiness, they hate most intensely the Lord of glory, who is the true light that dispels the darkness of this sinful world. This is the reason why they will not come to him. They stay away from Jesus, who is the light, because they love sin, which is darkness. The wicked are not merely haters of the light because they are doers of evil, but they are evil-doers because they hate the light. This verse is not merely a repetition of the idea contained in the preceding one; it goes deeper into the human heart, and reveals the motive which actuates ungodly men. Thus the Saviour taught Nicodemus that he was acquainted with the secret springs of human actions. The idea is, that love of evil produces evil conduct, and evil conduct, in its reflex influence upon the

heart, increases the native love of evil. Evil deeds are not only the proof of a natural depravity, but they are the very workings and life of it, and minister to its growth in the fallen and unregenerate soul. Sin is self-multiplying. The root of sin in the soul can never be exhausted by the production of evil in the life. The more evil it produces, the more it is capable of producing. Sin in the life is like a stone rolling down a steep mountain side,—the farther it goes, the more force and velocity it gathers. Evil-doers naturally hate the light of truth and holiness, and they more evil they do, the intenser this natural hatred towards the gospel becomes. Sin feeds upon itself, and is not consumed. It grows stronger from each evil deed it produces. The longer the sinner stays away from Christ, the more he will hate him, and the probability is growing less and less every day, that he will ever come to the light and seek life in Him, who is the light and life of this dark and dead world.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOERS OF THE TRUTH LOVE THE LIGHT.

“But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.”—JOHN iii. 21.

OUR Lord concludes his conversation with Nicodemus by impressing upon his mind the fact, that one must not be merely a hearer of the truth, but a doer of it, if he would profit by it. It was with this same thought that the Lord closed his sublime sermon on the mount. It is the usual application of all our blessed Redeemer's addresses. After making known the truth, he reminds his hearers that they must practise the truth they hear, if they would receive any benefit from it. But there is also a deeper thought than this imbedded in these words, for here again, the Saviour reveals the secret spring and motive of human action. As hatred of the light is

the motive of evil-doing, so love of the truth is the motive of good-doing. Many fail to apprehend the true signification of these two passages, and mistakenly suppose that the Saviour teaches that men hate the light because they do evil, and come to the light because they do good. Their true meaning is, men do evil because they hate the light, and do good because they come to it. In other words, their doing evil is an evidence of their native depravity and inborn love of sin; and their doing the truth is a proof that their hearts have been regenerated and their minds enlightened by the Spirit. The doers of the truth have had their minds enlightened by Christ, who is the light of this dark world, and have thus been enabled to see the truth; and they have had their hearts enlivened by Him, who is the life of this dead world, and have thus been enabled to do the truth.

The doers of the truth are those who know the truth and practise it in their lives. None but the knowers of the truth can be doers of it. The truth must be known before it can be done. A man may be very honest in his

endeavors to do the truth, and still be very far from doing it, because he takes the false for the true. It is not enough that a man be sincere in his opinions. He must also have his opinions right, or he can never be a doer of the truth. It is a very prevalent mistake, that a man is not responsible for his belief, provided he be sincere in his convictions. There never was a mistake more fatal to sound morals and true religion, nor more contrary to the teaching of inspiration than this. If this were a sound doctrine in morals, and if Nicodemus was sincere in his conviction that Jesus was not the true Messiah, he could not have been blamed for rejecting him. But we are prepared to show, both from reason and Scripture, that this doctrine is false, and that man is responsible for what he believes as well as for what he says and does.

“What is truth?” This is the question which Pilate put to Him, who is the living and eternal Truth. The Lord did not deign to answer; but we are not to suppose that he refused an answer because the question is

unanswerable, but because Pilate was not serious and in earnest in propounding it. We venture the following answer, which we think will be found correct. Truth may be considered in a double aspect, as speculative and practical. Speculative truth is the exact correspondence of our convictions with the reality of things, and practical truth is the exact correspondence of our expressions with the reality of our convictions. The former is truth in thinking, and the latter is truth in doing. Now unless the thoughts are right, the actions, when they correspond with wrong thoughts, no matter how sincere they may be, are necessarily wrong. The error is prevalent, and has found advocates in the sagacious and acute Sir James Mac-Intosh and others of noted ability and purity, that morality has nothing to do with speculative truth. This error is all the more dangerous in morals and religion, because it is so ably and ingeniously supported; hence, the friends of a pure religion should be all the more diligent in searching out and exposing this fallacy. The argu-

ment on which it is based may be given in a nut-shell. It is this. Opinions are involuntary, and can therefore, be neither good nor bad. Man has nothing to do in *choosing* what he believes; therefore, he cannot be held responsible for his opinions. The fallacy lies in a misunderstanding of the province of the will, and in overlooking the distinction between will and volition.

Volition and will are not exactly the same thing; volition is the final determination of the will to act, but the will itself has a broader field of operation, "in which," says a recent American writer, of great penetration of thought, "are embraced all the wishes and desires, and all the appetites and habits, which constitute the springs of human action." Morality is not confined to the ultimate volition of the will, but is predicable of all the motives that conspire to its formation, for in a certain sense all our active powers are voluntary. This is the doctrine of Bishop Butler, who says, "the object of the moral faculty is action, comprehending under that name active or prac-

tical principles." It is also the doctrine of the venerable Dr. A. Alexander, who taught, that "men are more accountable for their motives than for anything else." Now our active principles or motives have much to do in the formation of our opinions. They determine the degree of diligence and sincerity with which we seek for the truth, and the sincerity with which we examine the evidences on which our opinions are based. It follows from this, that our opinions are in a certain sense under the control of the will; and, as the supposed involuntariness of opinions, which is the main pillar that supports the whole fabric of this erroneous and dangerous doctrine in morals, has been swept away, the superstructure itself must fall to the ground.

The fallacy of this erroneous doctrine may be exposed by the argument known as the *reductio ad absurdum*. If man is not responsible for his belief, the sincere infidel, and even the atheist, will be saved in spite of their belief that there is no heaven, nor hell, no God to reward the good or to pun-

ish the evil. If we are not accountable for our belief, falsehood is just as good as truth, darkness just as good as light, idolatry just as good as true religion, and heathen are just as good as real Christians. Let the heathen alone in their sincere belief of lies and idol-worship: it would be cruelty to them to break the chains of delusion that bind them to their false but sincere opinions. They are not accountable for their erroneous opinions, nor for the horrible systems of false religions which have sprung out of them, for they are sincere in their belief and practice. Any argument, that will thus put the truth and falsehood on an equal footing, and Christians and heathen on the same level, must be fallacious.

We have now proved that man is responsible for his opinions, by demonstrating that they are in a proper sense voluntary, and by showing that the hypothesis that he is not, conducts, in its legitimate consequences, to the most glaring and shocking absurdity. We might next bring forward a long catalogue of names of the highest authority in

support of our doctrine on this point, but we shall mention only one; but his *ipse dixit* is law on the subject, because he spoke by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Paul verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, so from an honest conviction of duty he consented to the death of Stephen, and went breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and beyond measure persecuted and wasted the church of God. (Acts viii. 3, 4; ix. 1; xxvi. 9; Gal. i. 13.) In all this he was sincere, and thought that he was doing God service, but afterwards, when the scales of his spiritual blindness and prejudice had fallen from his eyes, and he saw the truth as it is in Jesus, he did not suppose that his conduct was blameless and justifiable on account of the sincerity of his opinions and motives; but, on the contrary, for this very reason he confessed himself to be the chief of sinners, and the "least of all the apostles, not meet to be called an apostle, because he had persecuted the church of God. (1 Cor.

xv. 9.) Man is, therefore, responsible for his belief as well as for his actions, and the doers of the truth are those who both know and practise the truth. Many know their duty and do it not; and some there are who do wrong while they are trying to do right, from sincere but erroneous convictions of what duty is. The real doers of the truth are those who have come to Jesus, and had their minds enlightened by him to know the true from the false, and have received from him regenerating grace to enable them to pursue the right and to shun the evil. Those who come to the true Light of this dark world, are made to know the truth as it is in Him, and the truth when known, makes them free from error and wrong-doing.

Those who are the real doers of the truth, have it manifested that their works are wrought in God. Works wrought in God, are such as are done through his grace and in compliance with his will. Such are all the good works of believers. God works in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure. And as all the good works of

believers are thus the product of God's Spirit and grace working in them, the works themselves are said to be wrought in God. The doers of the truth love the light, and come to it, that they may know the true character of their works; for, when it is manifest that their works are wrought in God, they find an unspeakable peace and comfort in the assurance, which that fact gives them, that they are God's friends, and that God is reconciled to them through his Son.

You have now, my dear reader, listened to the conversation of your Saviour with Nicodemus, and if you would profit by it, you must be more than a mere hearer of the truth. You must be a doer of it. In this interview he has taught you truth of eternal importance to you, because it pertains to the salvation of your immortal soul. You must not only understand and believe this truth, you must also do it, or you cannot be saved by it. You must be born again by the power of the Spirit and be justified by faith in Christ, or you can never enter the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE IMPRESSION MADE ON NICODEMUS.

“There came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight.”—JOHN xix. 39.

WE suppose that most of the readers of this remarkable conversation are naturally curious to know what immediate effect it had on Nicodemus's mind, and what influence it exerted over his future conduct. He certainly enjoyed, in this interview, a high and responsible privilege, and if he did not become a doer of the truth, after hearing it from the lips of the Divine Teacher, there will be no excuse found for him in the day of judgment. Most believers only see the light of truth as it is reflected from some secondary teacher, but Nicodemus approached into the very presence of the Sun of righteousness and beheld his immediate glory.

He spoke face to face with the Lord of glory, and received from his own lips the fundamental principles of the gospel. But did he, with all his unusual advantages, become a believer? The Evangelist closes his account of this interview without informing us of its immediate effect upon Nicodemus's heart. We all, naturally enough, feel a great desire to know something more of Nicodemus than what is given in this narrative, but we are not disposed to complain of the abrupt manner in which it closes, because the abruptness of the conclusion speaks for the simplicity and historic truthfulness of the inspired narrator. If the Evangelist had not been giving a simple narration of facts, as they actually occurred, he most probably would have attempted in the close to illustrate the wonderful power of the words of his hero, by pretending that they made an astounding impression on Nicodemus's mind and exerted a miraculous influence over his future life. But we have nothing of this sort. There are, however, a few facts incidentally mentioned in the conversation

itself and in other parts of John's Gospel, from which we may infer pretty conclusively what impression the words of the Lord made on this ruler in Israel.

We have seen good reasons for supposing that Nicodemus came to the Saviour as the representative and commissioner of the Pharisaic rulers of the Sanhedrim. There is no reason to suppose that, when he began to speak with the Lord, he was any better informed of the character, or that he had any more kindly feelings towards the person of Jesus, than those who sent him. He came confessing that he and the other rulers were convinced, from the mighty miracles he did, that Jesus was a teacher come from God. They were prepared to receive him as a prophet, but not as the Messiah. When Jesus told him that he was not merely *a prophet*, but *the prophet* of prophets—the Divine Teacher of the human race, and more than all this, that he was the Divine Life-Restorer, and that a man must be born again before he could become a disciple, Nicodemus rejected his claims, and turned his doc-

trine into ridicule. This shows the darkness of his mind when the conversation began. But as the Saviour proceeded by reiterating his doctrine, and illustrating it by a common example of nature, it seems that his mind became partially enlightened, for his ridicule disappears and only his unbelief remains. At this point Nicodemus asks, how can these things be? Up to this point, Christ had only spoken of the earthly side of the new birth, but he begins now to speak of its heavenly side, and to reply to Nicodemus's unbelief. The heavenly things occupy the conversation to its close, when it seems that Nicodemus departed in silence. It appears that he left the Lord in a state of mind halting between two opinions. He was not fully prepared to admit the claims of Jesus, and to give up all and to follow him, nor could he make up his mind to wholly reject him and his claims. It seems that the interview put him into an inquiring state of mind. It opened his mind to conviction, and put him upon observing the future course of the Lord. We do not suppose that he at once became

his disciple, and secretly served him as did Joseph of Arimathea, but that the truth made gradual progress in his mind, and that he was fully convinced by the scenes of the crucifixion, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God—the Light and Life of this dark and dead world, and that he then fully yielded to the accumulative force of the proofs of his Messiahship, and became his disciple in good earnest, and united with Joseph of Arimathea in burying the body of the Lord. This conversation created in his mind an opinion favorable to Christ's claims, and induced him to study most carefully all the Scriptures relative to the Messiah, and to ponder well all the succeeding events of the Saviour's life, and they gradually confirmed his opinion that he was the Messiah; and, at last, when he saw Jesus, in accordance with the prediction which he had made in the private interview which he had with him, lifted up in his crucifixion as was the brazen serpent in the wilderness, all the circumstances of his life and death culminated in full conviction that Jesus could be no other

than the Son of God and the promised Messiah.

Nicodemus is mentioned in only two other places in John's Gospel, but in both places he is spoken of in circumstances and connections that justify the opinion which we have ventured to express, as to the impression this conversation made on his mind. In chapter vii. 50, he is found defending Jesus in the Sanhedrim, and contending that he should not be condemned without giving him a fair trial and an opportunity of making his own defence. This shows that he, at that time, entertained friendly feelings towards the Lord, although he had not yet become his disciple. He is mentioned again in chapter xix. 39, as joining with Joseph of Arimathea in burying the Lord. He is represented here as bringing a hundred pounds weight of a mixture of myrrh and aloes. This shows that, when he did become Christ's disciple, he was ready to make sacrifices in his cause, and to serve him with a liberal hand. This mixture was very costly and the amount exceedingly abundant. About the half of a

pound was the quantity commonly used in ordinary funerals. The great quantity used on this occasion shows the peculiar and exalted respect of Nicodemus for the deceased Saviour. Great quantities of this mixture were used only in the embalming of kings, and others from exalted stations of life. An immense amount was used at the funeral of Aristobulus, and it is said that five hundred servants bearing aromatics attended the funeral of Herod. Though Christ died the death of a slave, and was crucified as a malefactor on the Roman cross, yet, at the hands of Nicodemus, who came to him by night in the beginning of his public ministry, and of Joseph of Arimathea, who was secretly his disciple, he had the burial of a king. He was numbered among the transgressors, and yet was buried with the rich; and this remarkable fulfilment of prophecy, doubtlessly, confirmed the faith of Nicodemus and Joseph, when they afterwards came to reflect how they had altogether unconsciously assisted in its fulfilment. It was the love of the dying Saviour that drew out into full ardor and

open confession their love. The power of his death overcame the timidity of Joseph of Arimathea, and wrought full conviction in Nicodemus's mind. It made the timid disciple bold, and constrained the doubting and hesitating inquirer to yield full and candid consent, and to embrace with faith and love the Lord of glory, whom he respected and defended while living, and now received as his Saviour when dead, and after his resurrection, as we hope, followed through good and evil report as a faithful and obedient disciple even unto the day of his death; and we trust that he is now in the courts of the upper kingdom, believingly listening to the Saviour's sublimer discourses concerning the heavenly things.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CONCLUSION.

“The true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”—JOHN i. 9.

WE find, upon examination, that this conversation was not a rambling talk on disconnected subjects, for the lofty topics here discussed follow each other in natural order and logical sequence. The first verse is introductory, and tells who Nicodemus was, that sought this private interview with the Saviour; the second verse informs us what opinion he had of the Saviour when he first came to him. He regarded him as a teacher come from God. We have seen that this opinion was deficient—it is correct as far as it goes, but it falls short of the whole truth. The third verse supplies to the thought of the second what is lacking to complete the

idea of the Saviour's character, and presents him to our consideration as the Divine Life-Restorer, as well as the Divine Teacher of the human race, and teaches that it is necessary for a man to be born again in order to become Jesus' disciple, and before he can enter his kingdom. The fourth verse shows how Nicodemus at first received this doctrine with unbelief and ridicule. From the fifth to the ninth verse the Lord reiterates the doctrine of the new birth, and unfolds and explains its nature and necessity, and illustrates this spiritual mystery by the physical mystery of the blowing wind. The ninth verse shows that Nicodemus at this point ceased to ridicule, but that he was not yet prepared to believe, because he could not understand how these things could be. From the tenth to the thirteenth verse the Lord reproves the Jewish ruler and teacher of the law for his ignorance, and refutes his unbelief.

Here ends the first part of the conversation, in which Jesus has spoken only of earthly things, that is of the terrestrial side

of regeneration; from this to the close of the interview he speaks of heavenly things, that is, the celestial side of the new birth. In the heavenly things he reveals the divine scheme of redemption, as it was passed in the council of eternity, executed in time, and may now be embraced by man. In this part he makes known in logical order the mysteries of the incarnation, of the crucifixion, and of life by faith in a crucified Saviour. This brings the conversation down to the eighteenth verse, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth verses he shows what man is to do in order to enjoy the benefits of this Divine scheme of salvation, and what will be the consequence to him if he refuses to do his part. If he only believes, he is pardoned and shall be saved, but if he refuses to believe, he is already condemned, and shall be lost. The twentieth and twenty-first verses are the application of the conversation, and indicate the motives which actuate the godly and ungodly in their conduct towards the Saviour, who is the Life and Light of this dark and dead world. The former come to

the Light, and receive life, and live for ever; the latter love darkness rather than light, and so they refuse to come to Jesus, and perish in darkness and eternal death.

Now my dear reader, you have listened to this conversation of your Saviour with a sinner like yourself, and what impression does it make upon your mind? Have you recognized in it the Saviour as the Light and Life of this dark and dead world? Are you convinced of the necessity of the new birth? Do you believe the words of Him, who speaks as never man spake? Have you experienced that change of nature without which you can never enjoy communion with God on earth, or be admitted to his presence in heaven? Do you believe in the Saviour, who was exalted on the cross for your salvation? Have you accepted this Saviour as your Saviour, or are you prepared to accept him now? As this conversation left Nicodemus without any excuse for his unbelief, so if you turn from it without faith in the Saviour, it will leave you without any excuse or cloak for your sins. You have now heard the

truth, and you must be henceforth a doer of it, if you would profit by it. You must be born again. The Saviour has said it, and you know that he has said it; and now, if you fail to seek the Spirit that he may regenerate your heart, you will have no excuse to place against your just condemnation in the last day. You now know what you have to do to secure life eternal for your immortal soul, and, if that soul is lost, you will have none to blame but yourself. Only believe, and thou shalt have life eternal. Your soul is in jeopardy every moment you refuse to believe; nay, it is already condemned if you are now an unbeliever. You have but *one soul*, there is but *one way* in which that soul can be saved, and there is but *one opportunity* to save that *one soul* in the *one way* that is now open before you. The light of the gospel now shines around you, and if you lose your soul, it will be simply because you love darkness rather than light.

There is but *one way of life*—Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ saves the soul. If you

refuse to believe, you must be lost. If there was any other possible way of life you might reject Jesus, and yet live; but as he is the only Saviour, if you reject him, you must die in eternal death. You have but *one opportunity to save your soul*. In this life you must either accept or reject the Saviour, and so decide the destiny of your soul. If you were going to be put on probation after this life, and have another opportunity of believing to salvation afforded you, you might spend this present life in sin and unbelief, and yet be saved. But if you are not born again in this life, there will be no help nor hope for you in the life which is to come; and this life, which is your only opportunity to save your soul, is uncertain. Yesterday is past, and to-morrow may never come to you. You are only certain of the present moment in which you now live. Delay in this matter is always dangerous, and it may be fatal. Now, what is more, you have but one soul, which you are to save or to lose in this one life, and in the one way of faith in a crucified Saviour. If you had two souls, you

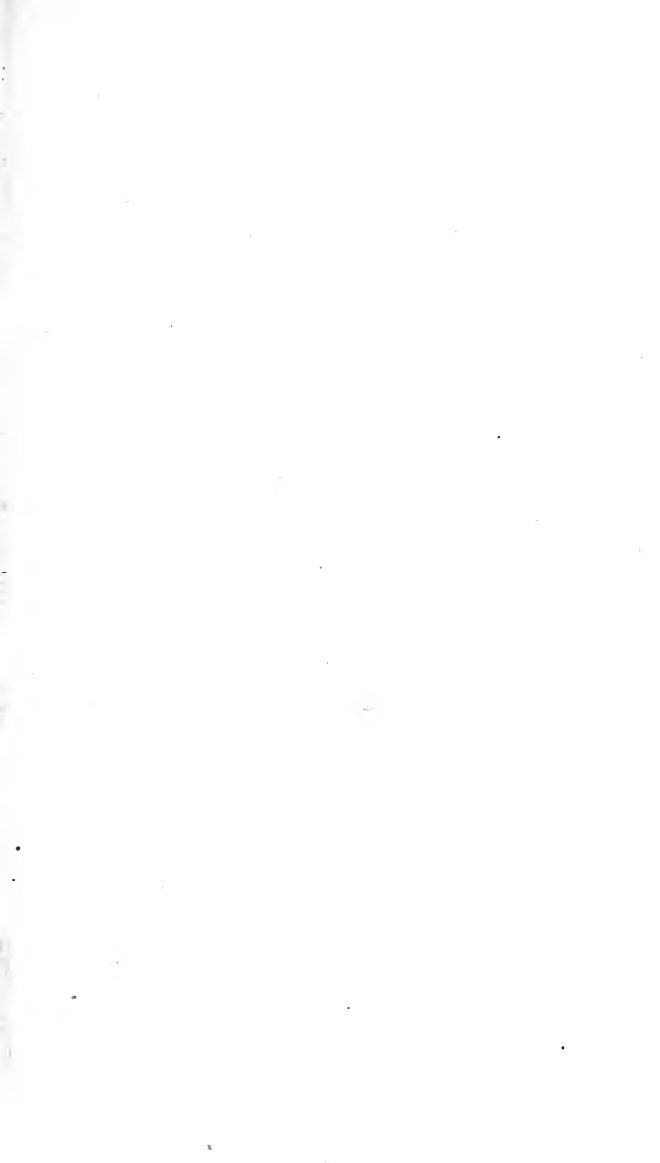
might experiment with one of them, and if that one should be lost, you would have another one to be saved. But there is no room for experiment and risk here, as you have but one soul, and that one soul is in jeopardy every moment of eternal death, unless you have been born again, and are this day rejoicing in the consciousness that your sins are pardoned and your soul justified through the merits of a crucified Redeemer. If you lose that soul, you lose your all, and you lose it forever. The Saviour told Nicodemus, and you have heard his words, that all you have to do is to believe in him. Believe in Jesus, and you immediately become a Christian. Christian is the highest name known on earth. It confers the most exalted honor, and conducts to the most glorious reward. To be a Christian, is to be a child of God, and joint heir with the Lord Jesus Christ to all the honor, glory, and felicity of heaven.

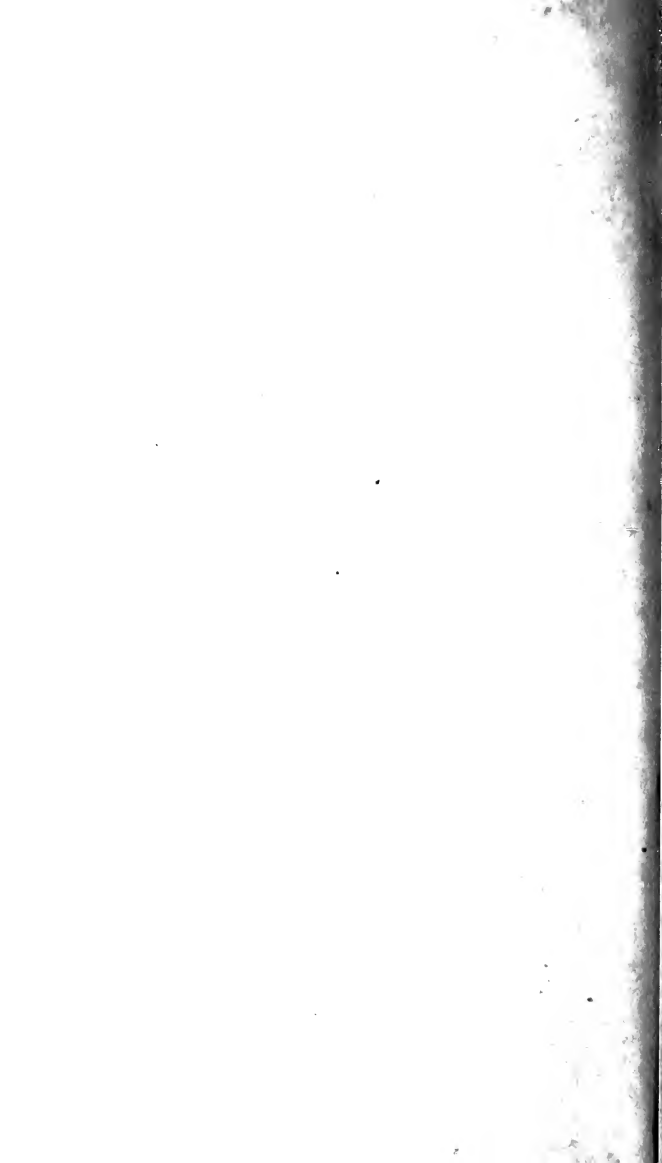
“ Who would not be a Christian? I have seen
Men shrinking from the term, as if it brought
A charge against them! Yet the honored name
Is full of gentlest meaning. Odors rise,

And beauty floats around it; from its eye
Great tears of heavenly sympathy descend;
And mercy, soft as Hermon's fragrant dew,
Springs in its heart, and from its lips distil.
Hark! 'tis the loftiest name the language bears,
And all the languages in all the worlds
Have none sublimer! It relates to Christ,
And breathes of God and holiness; suggests
The virtues of humanity, adorn'd
By the rich graces of the Holy Ghost,
To fit them for the paradise on high,
Where angels dwell, and perfect manhood shines
In the clear lustre of redeeming love,
For ever and for ever, and implies
A *son* and *heir* of the ETERNAL GOD."

THE END.









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