

# REPENTANCE



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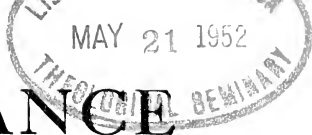
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# REPENTANCE



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BY

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*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand:  
repent ye, and believe in the gospel."*

*—Jesus*



Dayton, Ohio  
United Brethren Publishing House

1902

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## INTRODUCTION.

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ALL of the great doctrines of Christianity are vital and practical. Their relative importance would be a difficult matter to determine. If each be vital, the question of importance has no place. Some of them, as, for instance, those touching the being and character of God, and some of those touching the scheme of the redemption of man, seem to some minds abstract and uninteresting. But the subject of repentance never has had to argue its right to be held a practical question, or to beg its way to recognition and interested attention. Even the light of nature and the dictates of common sense teach the importance of the moral change in human character which we designate by the word "repentance."

Men of the world who are interested in the

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reformation of men and society, as well as Jew, pagan, and Mohammedan, agree in asserting the reasonableness and necessity of repentance, so that we are, in a broad sense, setting forth an uncontroverted moral and religious principle and duty, and not a Christian doctrine only. It is so evidently and so vitally connected with the plan and method by which any one in the wrong may get right and stay right, that its fundamental place in human, moral, and religious reformation and advancement is recognized by all. True, not every one has sincerely repented, but every one knows that he ought to repent; and every one who has a purpose, however vague and feeble, to become a better man, knows that repentance is, on his part, the step out of sin into righteousness, and he counts on some day taking it. So thoroughly has this doctrine become a part of the popular ethicoreligious creed of our day.

Repentance is, in fact, the one chief, practical doctrine and feature of Christianity which so commends it to a practical world. It is a calling men off from a life of sin and wrong-doing and a starting them out in a life of right thinking and doing, as relates both to their God and to their



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fellow-men. The world says, "Give us a practical religion." This is just what Christianity, the religion which preëminently teaches repentance, is. This may be the place to say that each doctrine of Christianity, in itself, and these doctrines as a system of belief held and taught by the church,—all this great body of living truth,—have but one purpose, and I am glad to say one tendency, too; namely, to bring about repentance, genuine heart and life reformation in men individually, and in society. While it is not my province to enter the general field of the defense and advocacy of Christian theology, yet when I am teaching and commending repentance, I am but holding up to the view and the appreciation of men the natural product, the crowning achievement of all Christian teaching.

The duty of repentance, it would seem scarcely necessary to say, rests upon the one who has known repentance and a correct life, but who may again have committed sin, as well as upon him who never has confessed and forsaken his sins. Righteousness and sin, and peace and condemnation, are not so much things of yesterday or last year as of today. Each of us knows by his own regretted ex-

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perience that while the conscious rectitude of yesterday gave peace, the conscious wrong-doing of to-day gives condemnation. It is now not the righteousness and peace of yesterday, but the sin and guilt of to-day that constitute my moral case before the bar of God, as well as of conscience. "The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression. . . . If he trust to his righteousness, and commit iniquity, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered" (Ezek. 33:12, 13).\* He has lost his place of innocence, and stands guilty. To become right and again stand acquitted before God and his conscience, he must repent.

In the same paragraph, it is written: "As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness. . . . If he turn from his sin and do that which is lawful and right, . . . none of his sins that he hath committed shall be remembered against him." He has become right, has "turned from his sin," repented, and stands acquitted before God and his conscience. To all

\*All quotations of scripture are from the American Revision Committee's edition of the Revised Version.

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classes alike, in this same message, the prophet, as God's "watchman," calls out, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." All this is eminently good common sense, good religion.

These are the Old Testament foundation principles upon which the New Testament superstructure of evangelical repentance is reared. So as to repentance, its duty and opportunity are held out every day to all men alike who may be under the shadow of sin. Barring the one concerning whom the Saviour said, "Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3: 29), we may understand that all who have sinned may also repent and be forgiven, for says Peter, Second Epistle, third chapter and ninth verse, "The Lord . . . is longsuffering to youward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

It may be said that it is natural to men to repent, just as it is natural to men to pray. We are nowhere else so "fearfully and wonderfully made" as in our moral and religious nature. This is the essential characteristic of our being; this is our crowning greatness; this constitutes our sonship

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of God. Said David, when singing Jehovah's glory and man's dignity (Ps. 8: 5):

“For thou hast made him but  
    little lower than God,  
And crownest him with glory  
    and honor.”

But, alas, we are spoiled by sin. We find ourselves in our innermost nature in constant moral struggle. Paul describes every man in his natural state and experiences thus, in Romans 7: 19-24: “For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practice. But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?” Here is our moral nature realizing its bondage to sin and longing for deliverance. I have said that it is natural for men thus to seek deliverance from sin, from its slavery and con-

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demnation. I do not mean in this to say that every man will seek and find divine deliverance from sin by repentance, but that, at some time and likely at multiplied times, there will come to his soul impulses to a better life. The ear of man's soul is not deaf to the higher voices, nor his spiritual eyes blind to the visions of better things. This is natural; this, every one of us will say, is his own experience.

Now the question arises, Why do not men listen to and obey these higher voices, follow "the law of God after the inward man," and, by God's help, break away from, or, rather, as Paul puts it, accept "deliverance out of the body of this death"? Let the unrepentant man answer this question, and let him look about sincerely and carefully for his reason before he returns the answer. The reply he gives is a very humiliating one; it is a confession made in shame that he has chosen rather to listen to the lower voices and to follow the "law in his members, warring against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity under the law of sin."

Now, the call and promise of the gospel to "repentance unto life" is the Divine coming to the

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help of the best there is in the human, that men may turn from this conscious slavery to choose and achieve the freedom which is freedom indeed. To follow this noble impulse of our nature and obey the voice of God is the grandest act of the human soul. I believe that every true, candid man will agree that in this very act we see our better human nature, our own selves, at the highest point. Proud and vain men affect to despise the humility that is at the root of repentance; but it is vanity that is shameful, while humility is one of the noblest traits of a great character, and is at the foundation of everything that is really great and honorable in man. Repentance is the proud struggle of the sincere soul against sin, and its triumphant rising, by divine help, into purity, peace, and the dignity of noble character.

The doctrine of repentance may not be as thoroughly comprehended as it is universally held in favorable thought; it evidently is not. But it is matter for gratification that men are open to an unprejudiced hearing of its claims, and so open to conversion to the high ideals of true Christian repentance as set forth in Scripture, and as held by all who have themselves become the subjects

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of true repentance, and are seeking to bring all men to a like experience. It shall be the aim in the treatment of the subject which follows, to place it before the minds of all, and especially those who may not yet have turned to righteousness, in such way as to set forth its true meaning and supreme importance, and to lead those under sin's dominion to repentance and a godly life.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DEFINITION AND NATURE OF REPENTANCE.

To understand the meaning of repentance, it is necessary to note the etymology of the word itself, found in the New Testament. The primary meaning of the Greek word, *μετάνοια*, is, afterthought, a change of mind on reflection. The verb from which the noun is derived means, to come to a conviction afterwards; to change one's mind or purpose. It includes both the thinking power and willing faculty. So that the original and literal meaning of the word "repentance" is, a change of will; and it is important to hold this real root-meaning in mind.

But the word is generally understood, and correctly so, to carry other ideas along with this central thought. Let us notice what this broader

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meaning is, and how it came about. One of the most prevalent conceptions of repentance is, godly sorrow for sin; but, according to Paul, II. Corinthians 7:8-10, sorrow and repentance stand in the relation of cause and effect. "Godly sorrow," he says, "worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret." He says, further, to the Corinthians, "I now rejoice not that ye were made sorry, but that ye were made sorry unto repentance." It is godly sorrow that brings men to repentance. Another conception of repentance is that it means reformation of life; but in various passages of scripture repentance stands related to reformation as cause to effect. In Acts 3:19, Peter, in his sermon, says, "Repent ye therefore and turn." John the Baptist, in calling upon the people to "bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance," refers to a reformed life, not as repentance, but as the fruit of repentance.

Now we see what repentance correctly defined is,—it is that change of will or purpose which is caused by sorrow for sin, and which leads to reformation of life; but, as is so often the case with a strong, comprehensive term, this word finally gathered into itself closely attendant

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thoughts, and became the popular and correct expression of all of them. So that, by scriptural usage and in doctrinal conception and language, repentance embraces in its meaning almost all the feelings, volitions, and acts involved in a sinner turning to God and righteousness. The definitions given in dictionaries, cyclopedias, works on theology, and in current literature, all agree in their essential idea. Repentance is held to embrace, besides its divine elements, practically all of man's part in salvation and reformation. It is the person's response to the gospel message.

In all that has been written, I do not believe that a better and more comprehensive definition of true repentance can be found than that given in the "Assembly's Shorter Catechism": "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after new obedience."

In that matchless parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke fifteen, we have pictured, in verses seventeen to twenty-one, the son's return. In these verses every element in the experience of a true penitent

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is distinctly traced. Note, here are consciousness of sin and want, sorrow for sin, a consciousness of better things, resolution of repentance, abandonment of sin, return to God, confession to him without palliation, unreserved consecration to his service. Let us notice these points briefly:

By consciousness of sin is not meant the mere knowledge of it, but the person's realizing how wrong and base and baneful a thing it is, and that it is dominating and ruining him. "He came to himself"—a wonderfully suggestive expression. He awoke as out of an evil dream to see what he had lost and to what depths he had fallen. The first step in repentance is this coming to see and feel our real condition. The impenitent sinner is asleep, and, unless he awake, it will be the sleep of death. He must come to himself.

The awakened prodigal was not only conscious of his sin and shame, but he felt that there were better things for him, and began to hunger and thirst for them. There was "bread enough and to spare" in his father's house. He was again conscious of his better self, and experienced the awakening of ambitions for the higher and nobler things of life. Sorrow for the folly and sin of his



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course is the background which gives meaning and pathos to all that is said and done. Without this beautiful contrition there would not have been, there could not have been the beginning or the advancing on to completion of this great transaction.

The prodigal's sorrow is of the kind which Paul says "worketh repentance," and the specific act of repentance is now reached—"I will arise." The resolution of repentance is clear, deep, and final. With all his heart he determines to change his course of life. His forsaking of his life of sin is immediate and positive and complete.

The very instincts of the true penitent direct him where to go—"I will go to my father." This is the final, the crowning act, in every penitent's life—the arising and going to God. It is the father, it is God whom he has offended and grieved, and to him he must go for pardon and peace. In our sinning we may wrong our neighbors and injure ourselves, but, as Trench truly says, "Strictly speaking, we can *sin* only against God."

From the lips of every sincere penitent flows the fullest confession of his sins. "Father," says

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the repentant son, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." How becoming and how evidently necessary this confession appears; and it is full and ingenuous, right from the heart. He makes no defense, offers no excuse. He is too sincere for this; there is no argument to offer. What next and last? He proposes to toil for his father in the field of humblest service. The service of God, in all which that embraces, also, of service of men, is the divine purpose in our creation—is life's highest ideal.

Thus does this parable teach us much more than the love and forgiveness of God. We do not get all its meaning in the fatted calf, the ring for the hand, the shoes for the feet, or the feasting and music. The other great practical lesson is that of the way of the wanderer back to God, to pardon, purity, and peace. It is the greatest lesson for the race; and it is put into such living form as to make its impression distinct and lasting.

No one of any nation or of any generation can mistake the meaning of the gospel's call to repentance. Repentance is not mere feeling, a thing of words and sentiments, a temporary change in the weather of the soul. It is a distinct alteration of

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the focus of the intellect; it is an act of the will; it is a transferring of the affections; it is the joint rational act of the whole triune soul—intellect, sensibility, and will; it is an abandoning of the old path of impiety, error, and ruin, and a turning Godward, truthward, heavenward. God's command to repent calls to altered thought, altered love, altered life and works. It is the greatest interference that can possibly be proposed with the individual's natural instincts, with habit's set way, self's pronounced sinful pleasures—with the whole current of life. It penetrates to where the soul is most sensitive, to its innermost self. It asks that it make readjustment, set its house in order, both the things outside and the things inside. It calls for the most diligent search with sincere purpose to know and to do the right, at whatever smart or pain or cost, for unless this is the spirit of the act, there can come no genuine alteration of purpose, can be gotten no divine help, and there can be no reformation and no developing of noble Christian character.

The following statement of repentance by the distinguished Timothy Dwight is well worth reproducing here: "The repentance of the gospel

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is formed of the hatred of sin, sorrow for it, a disposition to confess it to God, and resolutions to renounce it. From this definition it is manifest that evangelical repentance is the direct removal of sin from the soul of the sinner. By the hatred of sin, which it includes as a first principle, the soul is withdrawn from the practice of it. By the sorrow for it, it is warned of the danger and evil of returning to it again. By the confession of it to God the soul is brought into near, full, and most endearing views of the glorious goodness of its Heavenly Father in forgiving its iniquities, and is most happily prepared to watch and strive and pray that it may offend him no more. By its resolutions to forsake it, the penitent is fortified against future indulgences, and prepared to assume a life of filial obedience. In all these things we cannot, I think, avoid perceiving that evangelical repentance is the direct and the only means of removing sin originally from the heart, and, consequently, from the life of a moral being; and that thus it is absolutely necessary to prepare men for obedience to the law of God and a general conformity to his character and pleasure. To such beings as we are it is therefore indispensable, if

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we are ever to become the subjects of real and enduring happiness."

It may be well to notice at a little greater length the breadth, the mental reach of the change contemplated in repentance. It sweeps the whole horizon of human beliefs. It means a change from error to truth, an abandoning of every false doctrine and embracing of the great cardinal doctrines of Christianity. Christ warned his disciples to beware of the leaven, the doctrine, of the Pharisees. The repentance of a Pharisee, then, evidently, would mean, preëminently, a change of his fundamental belief.

It is not infrequently suggested that the important matter is not what a man believes, but what he does. Says the assuming liberalism of the day, "Let us be concerned not about creeds, but deeds." What specious reasoning! As though a man's beliefs were not the very molders of his life. Our creeds and deeds stand related to each other as cause and effect. Says the great Teacher: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7: 16, 17). There is axiomatic truth itself

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in the saying of Christ, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8 : 32). Error enslaves, truth makes free. An individual's life and a people's life can rise no higher than their dominating moral and religious principles.

The task before Christendom of the conversion of heathendom is the turning of them from their errors to the truths of the gospel. Paul, the preacher of the ages, everywhere presented to the people, whether Jews or Gentiles, the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and called upon them to forsake their errors and embrace the truths he presented. Notice his discourse in the Areopagus at Athens. (Acts 17.) After his skillful introduction, he says, "What therefore ye worship in ignorance, this I set forth unto you." Having made further exposition of their error, and having set forth "the God that made the world," he says, "The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent," etc. The truth has come, error is seen, so the call—God's "command"—to forsake the wrong and embrace the right, is at once given in clear, ringing notes. The believer in false gods and false philosophies is called upon

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to change his mind, to repent. Men—"the world"—will God judge in righteousness, according to the new knowledge enjoyed.

What hope had Paul for the Athenians, unless they could be brought to a radical change of beliefs? So he dropped great seed-truths into their hearts, with the hope of leading them to see and renounce their deep-rooted errors. Mark, that in this matchless sermon Paul says nothing whatever touching the vices and abominations of the city, seen on every hand; nothing even against heathen priestcraft and impure worship. Saint Paul was a preacher indeed—a master reformer. He knew that truth expels error as light banishes darkness. He was striking at the center; he was after the fountain-head of Athenian sin—their beliefs.

This is what I mean by the breadth and mental reach of this question of repentance. It is, of course, a matter of deed, but it is preëminently first a matter of creed. To become a Christian is to become a believer, a thorough believer in its vital truths; else, it matters not how kindly disposed toward the church, the man is not a follower of Christ. "He that is not with me is against me," said the Master. The Mohammedan believes in

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Mohammed, the Buddhist in Buddha, the Christian in Christ. "No man can serve two masters." Christ must be for every one of his servants "the Lord and the teacher" supreme. Yes, repentance, conversion to Christ, lays its foundation broad and deep. Its essential character and meaning is a profound change from error to truth, from the wrong to the right, in beliefs, principles, purposes, and affections. It is a transferring of the building of life's moral and religious house from the sand to the rock.

The inquiry may well be raised whether the unstable life so frequently seen among professed Christians may not be attributed to their superficial repentance. It is impossible to develop strong, symmetrical Christian life unless there have been received in the heart the fundamentals of saving truth. In the Christian life everything is built upon the foundation of deep, immovable convictions, convictions which are burned into the very soul, when, on its knees in repentance, and close by the cross of Christ, it "turns from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18).

Believers who are thus grounded in the knowl-



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edge and experience of saving truth will stand firm and walk erect, rejoicing in their unshaken trust and in their exalted privilege as “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2: 19, 20).

## CHAPTER II.

### CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS FURTHER CONSIDERED.

EVANGELICAL repentance, as we now hold it in general conception, is surely not abstruse or indistinct, but a clear, well-defined thing. But we shall be interested and profited by looking further at some of its important features.

One of its first and prime elements is a genuine sorrow for sin as committed against God; and committed not only against his just laws, but also, and especially, as committed in the face of his tender love and continued benefits. There is not only a sense of sin, but also a grief that the sin has been committed against so holy and loving a God and Father. The heart of the penitent no doubt is moved and troubled from a view of God's justice and from the dread of his power, contemplating the consequences of sin; but as he looks at the long-suffering mercy and the paternal love of God, his heart recoils from the principle of sin itself.

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The great winning power of Christianity lies in its clear and very impressive presentation of the love of God. The love in the gospel is its chief strength, its melting, persuasive power. This may not appear at first thought, but upon reflection each one of us will see that were there no "good tidings" of proffered pardon in the gospel message we would not give it place even in our serious thought, much less in the love of our hearts. God, who knows sinful human nature, knows how best to appeal to it effectively. His plan is that of a father seeking to reclaim his wayward son by a loving, pleading proffer of pardon upon his return. Offered forgiveness is to be the creator of repentance. It is a wonderful proclamation, and as effective as wonderful. God commends his love to us, moreover, by giving his Son to die for us—for us sinners! This breaks down the barrier of fear and doubt, and implants hope in the offender's heart, and also breaks his heart. Paul says that the goodness of God leads us to repentance. One has put it in strong and beautiful language, thus, "Repentance is the tears shed in view of the cross." From the gospel is gotten the great truth that to forgive is divine, and from the same gospel comes

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the great truth to match it, that it is given to human beings to repent.

How well is the love of Christ and its effect upon a sincere soul expressed in the beautiful verses of Fanny Crosby:

“Oh, wond’rous, deep, unbounded love,  
My Saviour, can it be  
That thou hast borne the crown of thorns,  
And suffered death for me?

“I kneel, repenting, at thy feet,  
And give myself to thee;  
I plead thy merits, thine alone,  
For thou hast died for me.”

Touching the influence which God’s love has upon men, a distinguished preacher recently said, “The reflection that the moral rule of God is paternal, that love pervades holiness as fire permeates a mass of molten matter, that the perdition of a single soul entails an irreparable loss upon Himself, to avert which He exerts Himself to the utmost, is the mightiest of all incentives to repentance. He is waiting and watching for every one of you, anxious to give the signal which shall make all the bells of heaven ring out because you have come home.”

The great and lamented Phillips Brooks, in speaking of the sacrificial death of Christ for man,

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in his sermon on "The Conqueror from Edom," says: "My friends, far be it from me to read all the deep mystery that is in this picture. Only this I know is the burden and soul of it all; this truth, that sin is a horrible, strong, positive thing, and that not even Divinity grapples with him and subdues him except in strife and pain. What pain may mean to the Infinite and Divine, what difficulty may mean to Omnipotence, I cannot tell. Only I know that all that they could mean, they mean here. This symbol of the blood bears this great truth, which has been the power of salvation to millions of hearts, and which must make this conqueror the saviour of your hearts, too, the truth that only in self-sacrifice and suffering could even God conquer sin. Sin is never so dreadful as when we see the Saviour with that blood upon his garments; and the Saviour himself is never so dear, never wins so utter and so tender a love, as when we see what it has cost him to save us. Out of that love, born of his holy suffering, comes the new impulse after a holy life."

Let us have a short statement of another master mind of his view of how men get right with God. Said Joseph Cook, in his address at the

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Chicago World's Parliament of Religions: "The truly religious man is one who has 'changed eyes with God.' It follows from this definition, and as a certainty dependent upon the unalterable nature of things, that only he who has changed eyes with God can look into his face with peace. In Berlin University, I once heard Professor Dorner call out to his class, 'The scientific truth of advanced modern ethics is not so much that man has a conscience as that conscience has man.' Shakespeare said, 'Conscience has a thousand swords.' John Wesley said, 'God is a thousand consciences.' How am I to keep peace with myself, my God, and my record of sin, except by looking on the cross until it is no cross to bear the cross, except by beholding God, not merely as my creator, but also as my Saviour, and being melted by the vision and made glad to take him as Lord, also."

It will both broaden our view of the thought before us and, I hope, reinforce our judgment of the abiding importance of repentance, to have it briefly set forth from the philosophico-scientific standpoint. In Book III., Chapter 5, of MacKenzie's "Manual of Ethics," occurs this para-

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graph: "The religious experience known as conversion seems to be a normal fact in our moral development. Recurring to the mode of expression which we have so frequently made use of, we may say that this phenomenon occurs when a man is made aware of a higher universe than that within which he is living, and at the same time becomes conscious that that higher universe is one within which he ought to live. Such an experience occurs in its intensest form only when the higher universe that is presented to us is recognized as the highest of all; that is, it occurs in the religious life. . . . There is often a violent reaction against the past, a condemnation of its acts, and even of its ideals, repentance, and remorse."

Professor Mackenzie speaks thus further in chapter six, under the head, "Remorse": "When an evil deed has been done, and when the wickedness of it has been brought home to the actor, it is accompanied by what is known as the pain of conscience. This pain arises from the sense of discord between our deeds and ideals. . . . If it is an evil deed of any considerable magnitude, it is not merely accompanied by a pang of con-

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science, but by a recurrent and persistent sense of having fallen from one's proper level. This persistent feeling of degradation is known as remorse. In its deepest form, it is not merely a grief for particular acts, but a sense of degradation in one's whole moral character—a sense that one has offended against the highest law and that one's whole nature is in need of regeneration. The best expression of this in all literature is, I suppose, that contained in the Fifty-first Psalm:

“Against thee, thee only have  
I sinned,  
And done that which is evil  
in thy sight.

. . . . .  
Behold, I was brought forth  
in iniquity;  
And in sin did my mother  
conceive me.’”

Notwithstanding the evident meaning of repentance, it is probable that many persons think themselves repenting, or would fain so flatter themselves, when they have no sorrow on account of sin against God and conscience, but on account of their fear of the hurt and punishment it is likely



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to bring upon themselves. It is not so much sin they hate as hell they fear. This, it scarce need be said, is not repentance. The criminal who is sorry, not because he has committed a crime, but because, being caught at it, he is to be punished, would not be called a truly penitent man. Here, again, is a man who is sorry for his sin because it fixes a scandal upon his character, or hurts his business, or involves others with him in public shame. He curses the day he committed the crime, for he finds himself disgraced and ruined; but all this he may feel, and yet know nothing whatever of true repentance. In each of these cases the sorrow for the sin and the purpose to get away from it, all spring from mere low self-love. It is as selfish and sinful as were the sins themselves.

It is evident from Scripture, and is the dictate of common sense, that not a mere feeling of sorrow for sinful acts or a sense of shame upon the exposure of our iniquities, or the fear of punishment, or every case of professed reformation, is an instance of repentance. If bitter remorse of conscience and confession of sin constitute true repentance, then Judas was a true penitent, for he was overwhelmed by the sense of his crime.

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If sudden awakening of conscience and fear and trembling, with some professions of interest in the things of a better life, constitute true repentance, then Felix, the heathen governor, was penitent as he listened to the searching preaching of Paul. If the experiencing of one or of several surface awakenings and temporary inclinations to "do better" were repentance, then all who read these lines have repented, for it is not supposed that even the least pious of you have been so reckless as never to have thought upon your religious duties and interests sufficiently to have experienced some genuine concern. Aye, I dare say that some of you have spent anxious days and sleepless nights under the lashings of conscience and the fear of the consequences of your sinful lives. Yes, you have even, at such times, prayed to God to forgive you, and have resolved that you would reform. Are you supposing that on these accounts you have truly repented? In the light of present-day conceptions of what constitutes true religion, can such surface work, such mere tampering with the great question, be honestly considered genuine, evangelical repentance?

True repentance is a very different and an in-

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finitely higher thing than this. To reiterate, it is born of a sense of the heinousness of sin itself. The penitent feels that he has wickedly offended God, grossly trampled under foot his just law, and basely violated his own conscience.

It is not contended that the fear of punishment or any other self-centered pain of heart, is not at all connected with true repentance. Such thoughts and feelings, perhaps, almost always enter as subordinate ingredients in the awakening of the sinner to repentance; but they are soon lost to view because of higher, overshadowing considerations. The true penitent soon has come to the place where he has lost sight of the hell of the future in his keen realization of the nearer hell of the present. To have fully awakened to a sense of his past abject and degrading slavery to sin makes him loathe it. And now being brought, also, to see his rebellious attitude toward God, he becomes conscience of the ungrateful, base return he has been making to a gracious Father in heaven, and he laments over his course with a deep contrition of soul. And further, while his sense of sin and unworthiness is the deepest, God extends to him the full and free pardon of every sin, a pardon

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by himself provided in the giving of his Son, "that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). This "love so amazing, so divine," wounds him to the heart, and the clearer he sees the "wideness in God's mercy," the deeper that wound becomes. God thus freely forgiving the penitent is the reason to him why he should never forgive himself. He grieves, he repents, not because he has been offending a sin-punishing, but a sin-pardoning God.

It is seen how that the cross of Christ magnifies both justice and grace. Calvary sends forth a double message to men, declaring with one voice the dark and dire character of sin, and with the other forgiveness for it and triumph over it. This is what makes it the one, only place where reformation can be accomplished. It is at the cross where every penitent kneels. But the higher note in its message is that which proclaims the divine mercy. Here "mercy glorieth against judgment." Its great purpose in the divine economy is to show that "where sin abounded grace did abound more exceedingly" (Paul). So the cross becomes preëminently the expression of the love of God as exhibited in the death of Christ for sinful men; and

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that love is for all times and all peoples the power that turns men to repentance.

So did the Saviour himself declare when he said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32). Moody's favorite text was John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." This was, in fact, the kernel, the soul of all that matchless preaching by which he led hundreds of thousands to repentance. The declaration of the divine Teacher (John 3:17), "God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him," is the proclamation whose appeal to the head and heart of the race is becoming more impressive and effective with each succeeding generation. In it the helpless sinnerhood of man is met by the mighty Saviourhood of Christ.

## CHAPTER III.

### FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF PRIME ELEMENTS.

THE part confession plays in genuine repentance is worthy of special notice. At the introduction of the kingdom of heaven and its King, by John the Baptist calling the people to repentance, it is said (Mark 1:5) that the people were baptized in Jordan, "confessing their sins." The Greek word used would imply that there was not only a confession in general, but a confession in at least some detail, a special confession of definite sins. This is indicated, also, in the narrative, especially as given by Luke, where different classes are represented as receiving special instructions from John, suited to their particular character. The same thing is indicated in Acts 19:18, where it is said that in Ephesus many of "them that had believed came confessing and declaring their deeds."

There are numerous passages in the New Testa-

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ment which incidentally show that in one's turning from a sinful life, or from any sin in which he had been overtaken, it was understood that he confess to God and men. The necessity of confession had been a maxim in religion with the Jews for ages. Proverbs 28:13:

“He that covereth his trans-  
gressions shall not prosper,  
But whoso confesseth and  
forsaketh them shall obtain  
mercy.”

Psalms 32:5:

“I acknowledged my sin unto  
thee,  
And mine iniquity I did not  
hide:  
I said I will confer my trans-  
gressions unto Jehovah;  
And thou forgavest the in-  
iquity of my sin.”

So, in John's preaching repentance, confession was made a prime part of it, strictly required by him, and as obediently made by the repentant people.

The moral value of confession is not to be over-

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looked. It may be asked, Why should confession be required? what moral value is there in it? God "understandeth my thought afar off," what need to rehearse my sins to him? We may be helped by reflecting that men, we ourselves, require those who have injured us, but now come to be reconciled, to make confession of their fault. A repentance that does not find expression in acknowledgement of the sin committed is mere sentiment. If we shrink from doing this thing, our repentance is not deep enough to be of any moral value to us. We have not gotten the victory over our old master, sin; we are in the same old prison, bound by unbroken fetters still.

Let us turn to Scripture for a few helpful examples of open-hearted, noble confession. In Nehemiah 1, we have a great man's confession. It is a model, no apology, no reserve: "I confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against thee. Yea, I and my father's house have sinned." He makes a clean breast of it, and his prayer reaches the ear of Jehovah. Note the case given by Christ of the penitent publican, who "smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner. . . . This man went down to



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his house justified" (Luke 18:13, 14). To such prayers the door of mercy is always thrown open wide. The moral value of a confessing repentance is given us in a very clear and forcible way by Paul, writing to the repentant Corinthian church (II. Corinthians 7:11), "What earnest care it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what longing, yea what zeal, yea what avenging."

Confession not only gives assurance to men—and let us be allowed to say to God—of personal thoughts, feeling, and purpose, but it also gives strength and permanence to the new-made resolutions of a better life. It is very important that the man who, in his heart, comes across the moral line and takes a stand for God with his people, do everything he can to renounce the past, "burn the bridges behind him," and to intrench himself in his new position.

Confession is inseparable from repentance; it is the natural and irrepressible impulse of a truly penitent heart. It is the past that pains the repentant man, and he wants to make it all right with God and man. Insincere people are generally willing to confess their sinfulness, but not

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their *sins*; but the sincere man is not dodging and tampering, he is acting the man; he meets, and is glad to meet the issue squarely. In no other way can he stand in conscious uprightness before his own conscience, or receive the pardon and approbation of either God or men. So he will soon have found his way to God in prayer, and his offended fellow-men he will reach by word, by letter, by telephone,—some way,—and know the joy of being “reconciled to his brother.”

This great principle is taught by Christ when he puts the law of confession and forgiveness between man and man thus, in Luke 17:3, 4: “If thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Along with this confession of wrongs done our fellow-men will naturally and necessarily go restitution, so far as that is possible. Note what Zacchæus says, Luke 19:8, “If I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man I restore fourfold.”

Finally, let the importance and necessity of the confession of our sins in order to forgiveness be judged by the plain, unmistakable words of Scrip-

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ture. I. John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The relation of faith to repentance is so evident that a formal statement touching it would scarcely seem called for. They are, in correct theory and in experience, inseparable. True repentance would be impossible without faith. When Paul was making his farewell address at Miletus to the elders of the church of Ephesus, he declared that in his teaching and preaching he had been "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The meaning evidently is, that in so far as great fundamental truths were concerned, he had set forth repentance and faith as preëminently the means of salvation. This is a summary of the preaching of Paul, and of all the apostles as well, and is the essence of the gospel for all ages—"Repentance whereby we forsake sin, and faith whereby we steadfastly believe the promises of God."

We will bear in mind that the faith is "toward our Lord Jesus Christ." "Jews and Greeks," all the world, every penitent who seeks pardon and salvation, must look to Christ, who said, "I am

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the way, and the truth, and the life; no one cometh unto the Father, but by me." This expression means so much, that in the pardon and salvation of a soul it makes Christ all. So declared Peter, in his first preaching, "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12). This verse will bear rereading. Every word is intensely significant, and the force of the declaration is cumulative. To it may be profitably added the words of Peter and the apostles before the council, "Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins" (Acts 5: 31). Yes, to the penitent, "Christ is all," and faith and hope must center in him. He "was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification. Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Paul to the Romans).

Do we understand that we are saved only through and by this divine person, this God-man? It is not a set of doctrines, or the sacraments of religion, or the intellectual belief in the historic

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Christ, or anything we can do or say or believe that brings us pardon and salvation, only as they are means by which we are brought to him who "was manifested to take away sins" (I. John 3:5). "Who his own self bear our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed" (I. Pet. 2:24). "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). "I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). So, my unsaved friend seeking salvation, your repentance must not only be accompanied by faith in general in God the Father, but faith gathered about the Son your Saviour, "for him the Father, even God, hath sealed." He is the representative, the very personification of God in the scheme of salvation; and "this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29).

As to the theoretical side of repentance, what it is as an act of the soul, and what it aims to produce in the outward life, we are agreed. And upon this point, also, I suppose, all will agree,

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that the final test of the genuineness of repentance is the effect it has upon the life of those who profess it. Indeed, we may say that there is no repentance at all where there is no reformation of life. I believe we may say, without modifying terms attached, that true repentance always includes reformation. Shakespeare well describes repentance as "Heart's sorrow and a clean life ensuing." It is a "ceasing to do evil and learning to do well." This may be said to be its practical side, but it is a side of the moral octagon without which it would be imperfect. To this practical, visible side of this greatest of human transactions we will now give special attention.

The scriptures I may quote are not cited as proof of the position taken, but as inspired descriptions or statements of the great fact always taken as a matter of course. Paul tells us, in Ephesians 4:22-24, (which please read,) in a unique and very forcible way, what takes place in the life of the man who becomes a Christian. He calls it a "putting away" and a "putting on." The change is radical, complete, and evident. It is a personal, practical change, not only of the fundamental principles of life, but also and necessarily

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of acts and habits and entire outward character. Notice, it has negative and positive sides; it is quitting the bad and beginning the good. The "old man" is put off as we lay aside a garment, and the "new man," in like manner, is put on. The old man in the "manner of life," which is "corrupt after the lusts of deceit," is exchanged for the "new man that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth." As Paul puts it elsewhere, II. Corinthians 5:17, "If any man is in Christ he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new." The man is new—new not only in his view of righteousness, choice of will, and affection of heart, but new also in words and acts—new inside and outside.

Another passage in which the same figures are used, and the "old man" and the "new man" are described at length, is in Paul's letter to the Colossians 3:5-17. This is, perhaps, the most specific, full, and significant statement in all Scripture of what genuine turning to God means in radical transformation, great uplift, and permanent ennobling of character. Note, too, its wide sweep, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the

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name of the Lord Jesus." Its significance and lesson are the more impressive when we bear in mind the sensual, base plain on which the Colossians had been living. The passage is matchless as a twofold ethical picture, painting in colors true to life and fact the change from moral midnight to moral midday in human character and conduct wrought by evangelical repentance.

The forsaking of the life of sin and entering upon the life of righteousness is not a merely formal or conventional act, nor is the living of the new life of Christian service an easy-going course of conduct. The Christian life is a most positive and pronounced thing from its beginning to its close. Among the practical precepts given by Paul in Romans 12, is this, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Here we have close discrimination and settled convictions called for. And we need this in these times when the spirit of indifference to sin seems quite prevalent. Says Joseph Parker, of London: "Have we as individuals and as churches lost the true notion of sin? Is it no longer infinitely abominable to us? Is it toned down to something almost indistinguishable? We cannot be right in our relation to



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Jesus Christ, we cannot be just to his holy cross, until we regard sin with unutterable repugnance, until we rise against it in fiery indignation, fighting it with all the energy of wounded love, and bringing upon it condemnation of concentrated and implacable anger.”

True repentance extends to all known sin, without exception. All sin must be repented of and abandoned. Every sin, whether it consists in neglecting a duty enjoined or in committing an act forbidden, whether it be against God or ourselves or our neighbors, whether it be peculiar with the individual or is his going with the multitude to do evil, whether it be a so-called little or great sin, whether it be known to men or only to the man himself, whether it be in word or deed or secret thought—every sin, without exception, as far as it is known, is hated and lamented and forsaken by the truly penitent and reformed man. If a professed Christian indulges in any one known sin, however small he may think it, he is a stranger to true repentance. It matters not how sorry he may be for other sins, or how fully he may have forsaken them, his clinging to this makes him an unrepentant, an unreformed, a sinful man.

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In a striking passage in "Grace Abounding," John Bunyan thus describes his vision of the entrance to the way of life: "But forasmuch as the passage was wonderfully narrow, even so narrow that I could not but with great difficulty enter in thereat, it showed me that none could enter into life but those that were in downright earnest, and unless also they left that wicked world behind them; for here was only room for body and soul, but not for body and soul and sin." One has well said, "There are no little sins; there are no little virtues; there are no minor pieties; the character of the universe is one; it is equally holy at every point; he who breaks one law injures the whole circle of duty, and proves himself to be capable of breaking out of that circle at any point that may suit him at the moment." The case is so clear that it needs no argument.

Does some man, in reading this, find his conscience smiting him? What can be done to save such men?—to save them from themselves? What a battle is this struggle against sin! It is a losing battle with every man who does not, in deepest, absolute sincerity, in his very inmost soul, re-

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pudiate all sin, and utterly cease the indulgence of it in his life.

The divine requirement is (I. Thes. 5:22) that the Christian "abstain from every form of evil." Forms of evil are various, and not always easily detected, but generally the sincere, conscientious man can see where clear and unmistakable truth and good lie, and also when a principle or course of action is of a doubtful kind. From such he should stand aloof.

Why should not the man who has entered "the kingdom of heaven," and sworn allegiance to Christ, feel himself bound by the most sacred obligations to be always a thoroughly loyal subject? I ask, in the name of common consistency and in behalf of the sacred cause which is so often betrayed by those who do not "walk worthily of the calling wherewith they were called," why every Christian should not stand true and be active in every-day faithfulness to his highest ideals of Christian living?

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CARDINAL CHARACTER OF REPENTANCE.

FROM what has been already said respecting the essential meaning and nature of repentance, its cardinal character as a doctrine of religion is very evident; but, as is the case with every fundamental truth, so in the case of this, every view we take of it adds to its evidently vital character. While already no little scripture has been quoted in the preceding pages, let us take more special note of the prominent setting-forth of this doctrine in the Book. It may be worth while here to recall that, in the case of some very important and well-defined doctrines of theology, their becoming such was by a process of inference, of the combining of various teachings of Scripture; they were built up, as a superstructure of different parts; or, stated under another figure, they were a growth, an evolution.

We are indebted to the ages, to the men who

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have preceded us, for much of the rich heritage of Christian doctrine which, without our toilsome research and thought, is ours to-day. But respecting the doctrine of repentance, no such processes were necessary; it stood forth from the beginning on every page of Sacred Writ as a clearly defined and essential feature of religion. Repentance is as old as religion; it is a necessary part of the religion of sinful beings. So, while the repentance which we are having in mind, it is true, is Christian repentance, it is not, by any means, a new element in religion and the worship of God, but only an old element, an old act of the human will in a new setting—repentance of a higher type, prompted by the new and higher motives of the gospel, and leading to correspondingly higher results in heart and life.

The Old Testament is full of repentance, set forth both in precept and example. One of the most beautiful and instructive passages touching repentance is the well-known paragraph in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, I. Kings 8: 46-52, in which Solomon asks, in case the people sin, and are punished with captivity: "If they shall bethink themselves in the land

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whither they are carried captive and turn again . . . saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, . . . if they return unto thee with all their heart and with all their soul . . . and pray unto thee, . . . then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place . . . and forgive thy people who have sinned against thee." Such a piece of national literature as this not only expressed the already crystallized belief and practice of God's chosen people, but also stood as an authoritative article of faith which molded religious thought for all the coming generations. And this we see to have been the case, for the Old Testament form of expressing repentance,—and one than which no other more expressive can ever be found,—"Turn, ye, turn ye," is found in every book. Note a few passages: "Turn you at my reproof" (Prov. 1:23). "Jehovah testified unto Israel, and unto Judah, by every prophet, and every seer, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes" (II. Kings 17:13). "Hear ye the word of Jehovah, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of Hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your

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ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place" (Jer. 7: 2, 3). What a beautiful expression of repentance is this in Lamentations 3: 40, 41:

"Let us search and try our  
ways, and turn again to Je-  
hovah.

Let us lift up our heart with  
our hands unto God in the  
heavens."

"Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions wherein ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 18: 30, 31). "Yet even now, saith Jehovah, turn ye unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah, your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness" (Joel 2: 12, 13). Says Isaiah, the "evangelical prophet," chapter fifty-five, seventh verse, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man

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his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." These Old Testament scriptures make good texts for preachers and splendid instruction for all men, to-day.

Old Testament history is made illustrious, as a biography, by its recitals of the repentance of its great characters. Says Job, chapter forty-two, sixth verse, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." King Jehoshaphat and other kings called the nation to repentance. The Fifty-first and Thirty-second Psalms, written, as is generally agreed, by David, are the finest and most beautiful passages setting forth repentance and forgiveness in all literature. They are understood to be the expression of David's personal experience. The former is well given, by the American Revision Committee's edition of the Revised Version, the heading, "A Contrite Sinner's Prayer for Pardon," and the latter the title, "Blessedness of Forgiveness and of Trust in God." Turn, reader, to these matchless paragraphs.

But the repentance of the old dispensation may be said to have been incidental; that is, it comes to the front upon occasion. When the nation or



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a city or an individual has fallen into special sin, then, through some prophet or priest or ruler, is heard the command of God to repent, the call to turn from the sin in confession and reformation, and seek forgiveness. Under the gospel dispensation, we have a new and very different order of things—a new viewpoint, from which the whole question of religion is to be understood. Judaism and Christianity are two different conceptions. For instance, in extent, the one was tribal—for the Jew; the other is universal—for man. Judaism was a depository of the divine truth of its day, where the only world-thought was the defense and preservation of religion *against* the world. Christianity is a new divine truth, proclaimed and organized for the salvation, for the religious conquest of the world.

But in spirit and aim they are still more diverse. "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17). Here is a vast leap—upward, from law to grace, from "the ministration of condemnation" to "the ministration of righteousness," from the old to the new—the "new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth

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but the spirit giveth life" (II. Cor. 3). The theater of religion is transferred from tables of law and the outward observance of their commands and prohibitions, to the hearts of men, the aim being the transforming of their inner life and their obeying with "all the heart" the new law of love written there. Religion is now not an "obedience," but a "life." So the thought is not any more one of conformity of acts to a code of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," but of the heart relation of a man to God, his creator and sovereign, of a son to his father.

I have said that in the old dispensation repentance was incidental—on occasion; that that occasion was some special act of legal transgression; there had been sin, and hence must be repentance. In the new dispensation, there is no abrogation of the rule that there must be an occasion in order to a call to repentance, but the occasion here is a very different one. The occasion is not particular,—in an individual's act,—but universal—in a race's attitude. The core of the matter, the philosophy of it, is considered; at the root, human action is, and always has been, a question of attitude.

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And now, what is the attitude of the human race toward God? The old evangelical seer, Isaiah, had it in dim outline, "All we like sheep have gone astray." As Christ put it, we are prodigals; we have deserted our father's house, have gone off in virtual rebellion to set up outside of his dominion for ourselves. So we are sinners, all; we are all under a common condemnation. "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God," says Paul. (Rom. 3:23.) I am not now speaking of the race as a race only, but of each of us as individual members of it. We are all sinners, individually, both by attitude and by act, and we know it. Indeed, our sense of sin is so deep that we feel it to be more than an attitude—a condition. There is no other human experience more universal and more distinct than the consciousness of the three deadly facts, as Henry Drummond calls them, of the power and stain and guilt of sin.

Here, now, enters the gospel, with its plan to purify men and get them back to their allegiance and peace with God. It is a "gospel for a world of sin." And what, in the very nature and the actual necessity of the case, would be its first and

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its chief request and requirement? Repent, repent, return, my son, in contrition and confession, and I will receive you. It needs no argument to show that a scheme for the bringing of a race of rebellious sinners to genuine change of attitude toward God must include those states of heart which constitute evangelical repentance. So, when in the fullness of time the spiritual reformation of the world and the setting up of the kingdom of righteousness were inaugurated, the key-note of the divine requirement proclaimed to men was, repentance.

Let us notice a few striking passages of scripture. Of the herald of the new kingdom and its King, it is written, in Matthew 3: "In those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . And they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. . . . Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance. . . . I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I. . . . He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire." In Mark 1: 14, 15, is contained the following dec-

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laration: "Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel." In this passage we have, evidently, the substance of our Saviour's preaching; and it was clearly the substance of the preaching of The Twelve, who were his especially instructed under-preachers. In Mark 6, where we have the account of their first sending forth "by two and two," in verse twelve it is said, "And they went out, and preached that men should repent." This is all that is said concerning their preaching; it was evidently all that need be said.

In Luke 5:32, Christ declares the end of his coming, the object of his labors, to be to "call sinners to repentance." When, therefore, men repent, the purpose of Christ's mission is fulfilled. In Matthew 11:20, this record of Christ's thought and attitude is made, "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not." He declares that if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in them, "they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."

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We recall the conversation given in Luke 13:1-5, which occurred between Christ and certain people of the crowd, in which he twice declared, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." No skilled exegete is needed to see what was back of the following words, expressing both wounding disappointment and burning condemnatory judgment, "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41). Christ declares that the joys of heaven are increased by the repentance of sinful men, "I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

In his last teaching given the apostles respecting the meaning of his mission to earth, his death and resurrection, as recorded by Luke, chapter 24:46, 47, Christ said: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." So, was repentance the first note sounded by Christ in his preaching, the burden of all his ministry, and the

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theme and message put into the heart and upon the tongue of his apostles to be preached "unto all nations." True to their instructions as the ambassadors of Christ and heralds of his gospel, they went forth calling all men to repentance. In Acts 2, where we have the account of the first gospel sermon, by Peter, we read that, to the convicted multitude who asked what they should do, Peter answered, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins." Again to the throng, "Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). Again, before the council (Acts 5:31), Peter declared of Christ, "Him did God exalt, with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." In Acts 11:18, it is said, after Peter recounts to the church at Jerusalem the saving results of his preaching in the home of Cornelius, that the company "glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life."

When we turn to the career of the great apostle to the Gentiles, we find him proclaiming one message everywhere. In the Areopagus at Athens, the

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seat of learning of the Gentile world, it is, "God commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent" (Acts 17:30). According to his own statement (Acts 20:21), his theme had been for the years in Asia Minor, "Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." When making his defense before King Agrippa (Acts 26:19, 20), in covering his career as a minister of the gospel from his first appointment by Jesus Christ to that day, it was expressed thus, "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but declared to them of Damascus first, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judæa, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance." This is Paul's own synopsis of his world-wide preaching.

Evidently, according to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, as they set forth the plan and the proclamation of the spiritual regeneration of mankind, repentance is the one great end sought to be brought about. It is, at the same time, the doorway into the kingdom of God, and that kingdom itself set up in the heart of man. For the accomplishing of this are brought to bear upon men



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the great truths of religion touching God and man—God's justice and his mercy, his hatred of sin and compassion for the sinner, pardon as provided in Christ; man's sin, with its slavery and guilt and ruin, his freedom to choose righteousness and peace; and to make these effective are the awakening influences of the Holy Spirit, who has been sent to "convict the world in respect of sin and of righteousness, and of judgment."

To proclaim and enforce all this awakening and saving truth, Christ, the great head and leader of the kingdom of heaven, has for sixty generations had his appointed ambassadors. They are to-day calling men everywhere to "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the awakening and saving summons that is destined to travel the world around, to be carried on its way by heralds of each succeeding generation, penetrating the distant and densest masses of "darkest" barbarous tribes, until "unto the uttermost part of the earth" it has been carried, to "make disciples of all the nations." Would that the call might be with greater unction and "power from on high," and with transforming influence upon the hearts and lives of men.

## CHAPTER V.

### FOES OF REPENTANCE.

It has been seen that true repentance arises from a conviction of having offended God. Its necessary background is a settled, intelligent belief in the being and character of God, his sovereignty, his holiness, his justice, his mercy. It is evident, hence, that any and all forms of skepticism which turn down or shade or obliterate belief in the existence of a personal, immanent God are foes to repentance and to all religion. There is no little such atheistic thought entertained among the people of Christendom.

Some men would fain substitute a law of nature for the living God. As says Dr. Josiah Strong, "The reign of law has been substituted for the reign of God." Such persons conceive of an unthinking, omnipotent principle, like gravitation; they think of a power like the mighty sea, carrying a vessel upon its crest or sinking it to its bottom

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with equal indifference; but a merely mechanical omnipotence is not God. The human soul can have no communication with such an abstraction. No man could feel accountable to such a pantheistic essence. No sinner in his senses would suppose himself offending this great "unknowable" by not living a life of prayer and uprightness. Agnosticism says, "If there is a God, we do not know him."

The clear fact is, that, from the standpoint of agnosticism, religion is unreasonable, impossible. There is no ruler of the universe to obey, no law-giver to offend, no supreme being to worship. We may see why it is that in this age of agnostic tendency of thought among many classes, there is a corresponding obliterating of the distinctions of right and wrong, sin and holiness, and an accompanying decay of conscience. With persons of such pantheistic conceptions, repentance has no place and a life of piety no prompting cause. Religion cannot exist without a personal God, the Jehovah of the Bible, upon his throne. The latent skepticism of these times is Christianity's most formidable foe. It is the parent, also, of what

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Dr. G. Campbell Morgan calls "the new atheism of indifference."

It has been agreed that a sense of personal unworthiness, sin, and guilt, is a prime element in repentance. So a false estimate of man, morally, an underestimate of human depravity and sin, and an overestimate of human virtues, would lessen the effect of the gospel call to repentance. It scarcely need be said that there is no little tendency nowadays to estimate unregenerated men as standing upon a higher moral plane than they occupy; many flatter themselves that they and their kind do not need to repent. As Van Oosterzee says, "There is a practical Pelagianism, which considers repentance unnecessary, except for some monstrous sinners." Sin is apologized for, reduced to a "mistake"—no very bad thing in "respectable people," such as are we. Respectability is made to "cover a multitude of sins"; but James tells us, chapter 5:20, that it is the converting of a sinner from the error of his way that covers sins. Many have abandoned the old process. The old sense of sin seems with many to be a "vanishing quantity." Even with some religious writers, it has lost its heinousness. Mr. Gladstone says,

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“They appear to have a very low estimate both of the quantity and the quality of sin; of its amount, spread like a deluge over the world, and of the subtlety, intensity, and virulence of its nature.”

Evidently, in proportion as this phase of thought touching human nature prevails, in like measure will the preaching of repentance fall upon unimpressed minds and hearts. I do not, I need not, with those who are really candid with themselves, and believe the Scriptures, and have a true conception of the meaning of the cross, argue the radical and dangerous error of all this self-flattery, this cant and twaddle about the newly-discovered inherent goodness in human nature. I only call attention to its being a great neutralizer of the message of Jesus Christ and his church to a sinful world.

Born of this error is another, that of the culturists. Having such good material with which to begin the making of a true man, all that is needed is culture. Prune down the bad and cultivate the good, and we shall have the strength and symmetry of noble, virtuous character; no call for the ingrafting of a new scion. Such is the theory of so-called “culturism.” Now, we all believe in cul-

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ture; we esteem it, we promote it, we seek it, we are enriched by it; but it has its own field, it does only its own part in the elevation and ennobling of humanity. But the culturists of our day of whom I am speaking are those who are "its exclusive advocates, who recommend it as the one panacea for all the ills of humanity, for its effect in cultivating the whole man."

While the error of this position, it would seem, could be seen upon even a little serious thought and candid observation, yet we are, many of us, so blinded by prejudice that we often do not see the things which are clear enough. To-day many people worship the idol that is called "culture." Above the cross, above the Christ, is placed this modern fetish, culture. To preach to an assembly of typical advocates of "Kultya" an old-time gospel sermon from the life-time text of Jesus of Nazareth, "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe in the gospel," would be worse than wasting sweetness on the desert air—it would be the offering of a gross insult.

Yes, the gospel of repentance has hard rowing against the current of modern culture. It is too insinuating, too abrupt, too gross a system of hu-

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man betterment. But, mark, the gospel stripped of its two-edged, piercing sword, the gospel with its teeth pulled, the gospel robed in the garments of culture, is all right. Have we two gospels from American pulpits to-day, the gospel of repentance and the gospel of culture?

A false conception of the sovereignty and "decrees" of God, it cannot be doubted, has been a hindrance to many men in the field of their own action in the matter of religion. It may have led to discouragement in one case, to delay in another, or in another to disgust with the whole beclouded matter. Now, as one has suggested, it is not decrees against which the moral sense protests, but against a certain philosophy of decrees, as when Augustine ties down the grace of God to the sacraments, or Calvin limits it by His inscrutable, sovereign will; as when we are told that God must be just, but need not be merciful; that law is unbounded, but grace limited; that God has an infinite love for all, but a special love for the elect. No, we can brook no such "class legislation" in God's plan of salvation, and there is none. "God is no respecter of persons"; he is indifferent to none, he is impartial to all. When the fogs of the

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mediæval view of the sovereignty of God shall have more fully cleared away, men will see more clearly the duty and the privilege of immediate repentance in the name of Him who, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man.

If other foes of repentance were named, they would all come under the general head of *rivals*, such things, to use a very generic term, as, when in action, in any way make less prominent and necessary the person's own individual heart-act in his salvation. Among such could be named formalism, ritualism, hierarchism, Phariseeism. Each is an all too prominent influence in the religious life of to-day. Each is a rival of the evangelical idea and spirit of the gospel.

Yet, notwithstanding all the foes named and unnamed of the great doctrine and fact of repentance, it will still, and it will ever be the key-note and the fruitage of the gospel.



## CHAPTER VI.

### CLOSING THOUGHTS.

IN the discussion of this theme, numerous vital things have been understood as basal. First, and most vital, is the atonement, ever to be held as the great trunk doctrine of Christianity, and nothing further than this need here be said. Another is the divine part, the agency of the Holy Spirit in the work of repentance.

It is understood by Scripture, and is a matter of experience, that the awakening and quickening influence of the Spirit is needed to bring about evangelical repentance. The divine Spirit—the executive of the Godhead—sends the gospel message home to the hearts, very often the unwilling hearts of men, and makes it effectual; and also in the effectual repentance of the sinner is recognized the presence of the Spirit's regenerating power.

So, while the act of repentance is that of the man's own free and regal choice, it is like the act

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of the will in every other field—a determination made after influences have been brought to bear which have been fully weighed. In all lines of choice men wait for light, and here the mind and heart are enlightened by that light “which lighteth every man coming into the world.”

It is hoped that the scriptural view of the universal necessity of repentance in order to salvation will have been impressed upon the minds of all. Its application is coextensive with the family of man, reaching to all lands and being obligatory upon all classes, high and low, great and small, the best and the basest; no dignity or rank, no ignorance or learning exempts men from the imperative command of God to repent.

It is not so much to be feared that men will deny the theory of it, as that they may slight or warp the practice of it. And what I wish to warn against is the danger that classes and kinds of people may outline for themselves classes and kinds of repentance. There is only one kind of repentance. One type of disease is in the system of us all, and for it there is but one remedy. The pill is strong and bitter and without sugar-coating. All classes must take it, or perish.

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The call in every case is to repentance immediate. This is a necessary part of the very thought; to propose a deferred repentance would be the clear granting of a license to sin. Every scripture calling us to repentance has its "now" or its "to-day," either expressed or implied. The folly, unworthiness, and danger of postponing repentance should lead every man, like the prodigal, to arise and go to God at once. Excuses and supposed difficulties, want of feeling, distraction by doubts, sense of unworthiness, unfavorable moral surroundings, press of business, imperfections of professing Christians, the buying and going to see a field, the buying and going to prove five yoke of oxen, or the marrying of a wife,—yes, excuses as numerous and various as the number and sinful ingenuity of those inventing them, will arise as if by spontaneity in the mind; but the sincere man will brush them aside, heed the voice of God, and be true to his own conscience and regardful of his highest interest. "Wherefore even as the Holy Spirit saith, To-day if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3:7). There is much meaning in this passage.

The heart-hardening of a man is a dreadful

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piece of suicide. This is what multitudes who have heard, and are now hearing the voice of God are doing. There are fifteen millions of such people, unrepentant youth and adults, in this gospel-favored land to-day. It is a sad and fearful fact, yet millions of them *intend* to repent, expect to quit their life of indifference and sin, seek and obtain pardon, and live in the favor of God, and die in hope of heaven. What presumption, what stupid folly, aye, what Heaven-daring sin! What can be done to awaken these people before they reach that fearful moral state portrayed by Christ in Matthew 13: 12-15, where, by long disregarding the light and truth, "seeing they see not and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand,"—awaken them before it is too late? We need some John the Baptist, some Tauler or Wesley or Otterbein or Finney, yes, ten thousand such, to stand forth proclaiming the gospel of repentance in notes that shall thrill the land with a trumpet call.

Thus does the gospel place its great truths, touching God and man, before the world and make its appeal to the intellect and the heart of the race. I say, it appeals to the reason of men. It is not my purpose to discuss the phi-

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losophy of religion, or its relation to the science of the day. While religion is neither science nor philosophy, it has some things which are within the circle of each. True faith and true reason never have been in conflict; science and Christianity are in accord. That among the unphilosophical votaries of science there has been no little skepticism is matter of common knowledge. The intense empiricism of the times has carried many off their feet, and the multitude with the leaders, so that the age just past has been dominated by the sensuous. The things of the supersensuous world have been doubted. The horizon has been largely bounded by that which lies within reach of the senses. But the age of this narrow, unphilosophical view of life is evidently passing, and we have already entered, let us hope, upon a new era of rational faith.

Says Henry Van Dyke, in his book, "The Gospel for a World of Sin": "There is a renaissance of religion. Spiritual instincts and cravings assert themselves and demand their rights. The loftier aspirations and larger hopes of mankind are leading the new generation forward into the twentieth century as men who advance to a noble

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conflict and a glorious triumph, under the captaincy of the Christ that was and is to be. The educated youth of to-day are turning with a mighty, world-wide movement toward the banner of a militant, expectant, imperial Christianity. The discoveries of science, once deemed hostile and threatening to religion, are in process of swift transformation into the materials of a new defense of the faith. The achievements of commerce and social organization have made new and broad highways around the world for the onward march of the believing host. Already we can discern the brightness of another great age of faith."

The great strength of our gospel is, that it does meet the spiritual need of every man who, with all his heart embraces it. We, its votaries, may each say, and with especial emphasis in this age of its manifest triumphs, as did Paul, when carrying it, in its infancy, to the world's proud heathen center, "I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). As it was in Paul's day, so now, "Christ crucified" is to some "a stumbling-block," and to others "foolishness"; but, also, just as then, so now, to such as accept it, it is

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“the power of God, and the wisdom of God”  
(I. Cor. 1).

Why, I ask, should not we sinful men, all, with docile mind and open heart, hear and heed God’s proffer of help and pardon? It may not, it does not, suit the fancy of us all, but that is not against it, but against us; and it is our part to cease objecting and comply. The divine purpose of grace has been perfected and put in operation, and is not to be bent aside for us, but we are asked to bend before it. The great facts and requirements and blessings of the kingdom of heaven have been determined and provided, and the proclamation of them has been made. They are a great and complete system, as complete as the system of nature, and as unalterable. The invitation is made to men to accept them, to their salvation. Light is come into the world, and men are asked to turn from darkness and walk in the light—to repent. The appeal is made to our highest reason and our highest conscience, enforced by considerations of our highest good.

The great folly and sin of Christ’s day was, as he said, that the light had come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light.

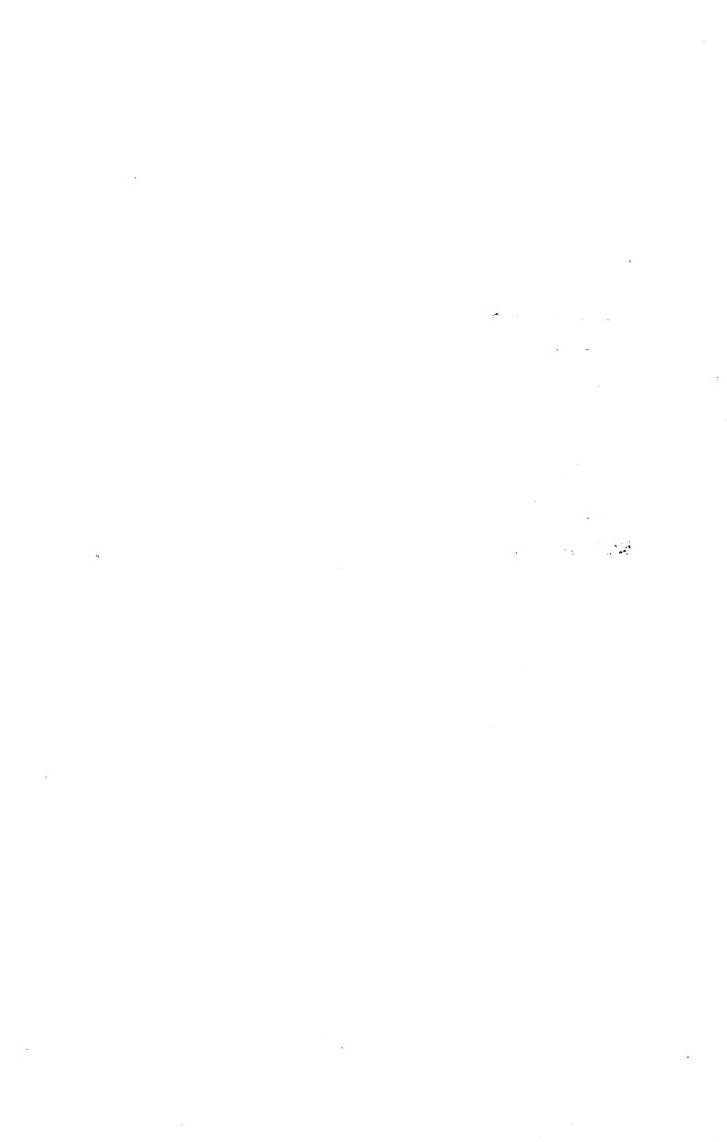
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(John 3:19.) This is the great sin of any age; it is the towering sin of our age. Its results on moral and spiritual life are baneful, suicidal. To turn from revealed light and persist in discovered error is like fighting against the stars in their courses.

Sin is unforgivable and irremediable when persisted in as sin; but the proposition and the promise of the gospel is that sin shall no longer be imputed to a man when, with penitence of heart and faith in Jesus Christ, he turns from it to righteousness. Nor shall it any longer have dominion over him, for the divine Liberator has broken its power and set him free. (Luke 4:18, 19; John 8:36.) I repeat, there could not be made to the world of needy, sinful men a more reasonable, self-commending proposition than the gospel's gracious high appeal.









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