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SCENES AND CHARACTERS

ILLUSTRATING

CHRISTIAN TRUTH.

No. II.

THE SKEPTIC.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF "THE WELL-SPENT HOUR," "WORDS OF TRUTH," &c.

BOSTON AND CAMBRIDGE:

JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY.

1835.

THE
SKEPTIC.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF "THE WELL-SPENT HOUR," "WORDS OF TRUTH," &c.

The world 's a prophecy of worlds to come.—
If man sleeps on, untaught by what he sees,
Can he prove infidel to what he feels?
Who reads his bosom, reads immortal life.
YOUNG.

BOSTON AND CAMBRIDGE:
JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY.

1835.

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THE SKEPTIC.

CHAPTER I.

REASON THE DEFENCE OF FAITH.

IT was Sunday evening, — that pleasant hour to the virtuous poor, — when Alice Grey was sitting by a bright fire in a small, comfortable-looking room. There was no one with her except her infant, which was sleeping quietly in its cradle by her side. Her calm, innocent, and intelligent face, and the decent and respectable appearance of every thing about her, gave to the little apartment a grace and attraction which larger rooms, and more elegant furniture, and greater beauty often fail of possessing.

She would frequently look at the cradle with that indescribable expression, with which a happy mother gazes on her sleeping child, and then cast her eyes towards the door as if expecting some one to enter; one who, you would readily apprehend, was the father of her baby, and the partner of her duties and pleasures.

While she was thus sitting by the table, with

her arms resting upon the great Bible which she had been reading, her face suddenly lighted up with a still brighter glow of pleasure as the door opened, and her husband entered.

"Well, wife," he said, as he hung up his hat and great-coat, "are you not going to give me a scolding for staying away so long, when I said I should be gone only half an hour?"

"No," answered Alice, "I am not in a scolding mood; and who could be, James, with this good book on one side, and a sleeping baby on the other? both speak to me of the kingdom of Heaven, where there are no harsh words. But I have missed you very much; you know on Sunday evenings we read together, and hear Fanny and Jemmy say their hymns and the lessons they have learned at Sunday school. The children did not enjoy themselves so much as usual, and I could not help wishing you were with us."

"Well, Alice," said her husband, "don't say any more about it; I was sorry not to be here at the time they said their lessons, but I could not get away from Ralph Vincent without affronting him, he had so much to say; and he took me a long walk instead of the little round he at first intended."

"Have you been all this time with Ralph?" quickly asked Alice.

"Why not?" replied James; "what is the matter with Ralph, that I should not be with him? he knows a great deal and has a great deal to say."

"He has a great deal to say," answered Alice, "and thinks he knows a great deal."

“And perhaps,” retorted James, “you think, Alice, you know more than he does.”

Although this was said in a laughing tone, there was in it something painful to his wife; it was different from his usual mode of speaking, and it proved also to her that he did not agree with her in her opinion of Ralph Vincent's vain and superficial character. After a moment's pause she looked in her husband's face, and, with a tone of great seriousness but of true tenderness, said, “Dear James, I do not like Ralph; I think he has too high an opinion of himself.”

“How does he show that?” said James.

“Why, he is always boasting of what he can prove, and talking about the light of reason, as he calls it, and jesting about religion; whatever he does not like, he calls priestcraft; that's his word, I believe. He seems to me to try to frighten people; he says things that he thinks very smart, because they are indelicate, or irreverent; and then he looks round to see who is astonished, and stretches himself up to his full height (and you know he is very tall), and he seems as if he thought he was a great man.”

“He does know more than you or I.”

“I do not,” rejoined Alice, “pretend to know so much as he does, or as your wife, James, ought to know. I have read scarcely any thing except this best of all books,” putting her hand on the Bible. Her humility, her affectionate tone of voice, the simple truth of her remarks on Ralph, and may be the compliment to himself, for all men are susceptible of such things, quite subdued her

husband's slight dissatisfaction with her, — or rather with himself, for this was the real cause of his momentary captiousness towards his wife.

Ralph belonged to that set of men who call themselves free-thinkers, or free inquirers, which means, with many of them, free to inquire, and free to think, and free to rail, against the Christian religion; free to abuse and contemn what they see is held sacred, and dearer than life, by thousands of their fellow-beings; free to hold up to scorn and ridicule the support of the poor, the sick, the forsaken; free to misrepresent and deride the conclusions of the philosophers and sages, — the patient, and faithful, and fearless seekers after truth, (the *true* “free-thinkers” of the world,) who have believed in the simple story of Jesus of Nazareth; free to trample upon the altars of human hope, of human trust, of human joy. This freedom they claim; but they are not free, we boldly assert, to see and to recognise the internal and the external evidences of the truth they despise; not free to estimate the worth of a faith, that not merely enables weak human nature to die with courage and calmness, — this may be done by the infidel suicide, — but enables the poor, the despised, the injured man to bear his trial with a quiet fortitude, and a holy joy, with no one but the Being in whom he believes to witness his virtue. They are not free to estimate the truth of a faith that enables the mother to consign her infant to the grave, with the consoling trust that the child liveth, though her arms cannot press it to her aching heart.

They are not free to weigh the value of "the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for," — of "that pleasing hope, that strong desire, that longing after immortality," which exists, or has existed, in the heart of every human being. They are not free to estimate the weight and importance of the fact, that almost every man believes in something invisible; that even every superstition is an argument in favor of the existence of God. They are not free fairly to examine, and calmly and faithfully to investigate, all the spiritual as well as the historical evidences of Christianity. Here the self-styled "free-thinker" is not free; he is the very bigot he despises; he himself is among the ranks of the superstitious, for he fears religious inquiry. He is free to see defects, but not to perceive beauties; free to attack, but not to defend; free only to find objections and to discover faults; free to see the spots in the sun, but his eyes are blinded to the splendor of the glorious luminary itself.

Ralph was one of these free-thinkers; and never was the most exclusive zealot more anxious to make proselytes to a faith that he considered essential to eternal happiness, than he was to make converts to his gloomy belief, that man lies down in the dust with the beasts that perish, with no brighter hope, and no further anxiety. No wonder that Alice Grey dreaded such a companion for her husband. She had for some time suspected that Ralph was anxious to undermine James's religious belief; she knew that he had succeeded in raising some doubts in his mind, and, with all

the watchfulness natural to true affection, she had narrowly observed the growth of their intimacy. It was a startling and exquisitely painful thing to her, to find that James had passed the Sunday evening, sacred as it had hitherto been to herself and her children, with Ralph Vincent.

There is an instinctive courage and wisdom, that seem suddenly to inspire the most timid and uninstructed, in times of great danger to those they love, with the power to perceive and adopt the most effectual means for their rescue. Alice forbore to censure his conduct; she said no more to her husband upon the subject of his absence from them all the evening; but she gave him an account of the children's Sunday lessons. It happened to be the love of Jesus for little children. "I wish, James, you could have heard Fanny when she said to me, 'Mother, if I had died in that fever I had last spring, should I not have gone to Jesus Christ, and would not he have taken me in his arms, as he did little children when he was on earth?' and I said to her, 'Yes'; for I never felt so sure, as I did at that moment, of the truth of our religion. That is a dear, good child, and I sometimes feel as if she was not made for this world."

Alice had touched the right key; James loved this child with that love which is itself a proof of immortality. "Alice," said he, "I dare say that Ralph would call me superstitious; but I never look at Fanny without a feeling as if she had come from another and better world, and as if she still belonged to it."

“Don’t call it superstition, James,” said his wife; “I feel so about all our children, but most so, as you say, when I look at Fanny; and as I see nothing given to us in vain, this very feeling makes me believe in the promises of the gospel. Why should we have this desire to live again? Why should a life to come seem so natural to our children as well as to ourselves, if it were not true that there is one?”

“Ralph says,” answered James, “that priests have taught us this.”

“But who taught the first priests, and why have men believed them?” asked Alice. “There have been men, I suppose, as wise and as learned as Ralph, and the whole set that he belongs to; and if they could prove there was no truth in the Christian religion, they would have done it before now.”

“It is not easy to prove a thing false, although it may not be true.”

“But if, James, we had a will in our possession that declared us heirs to a large property, and any one were to deny that it was a legal will, should we give it up till it was *proved* that it was false?”

“But suppose,” said James, “it had been handed down through a great many generations, for so long a time that you could find no proof of its truth?”

“Why,” said Alice, “should not we feel still more certain that it was a true will? because we should say, if it could have been proved false, it would have been before now, and more especially

at the time when the first family claimed possession of it."

"But," answered James, "if you apply this to the New Testament, why then is not the religion of Mahomet, and all religions, true?"

"Don't you remember what Mr. T—— said to us upon this subject when you asked him? It struck me as a very good reason. All religions but ours have been established by power, by force of arms; but the first teachers of our religion were poor men, and had no power except their faith in the truth."

"Dear Alice," said James, "I believe our religion must be true, and at first, when Ralph began to talk against it, I would not hear him; but he laughed at me, and called me cowardly and superstitious; and then I thought perhaps he was right, and I would listen to him; and besides, I had a curiosity to hear his arguments. But, if it makes you unhappy, I will promise to talk no more with him."

"I would not have you make such a promise, James; but I think if you allow yourself to hear arguments against your religion, you ought to read and try to inform yourself of the arguments in favor of it. If your dearest possession is attacked, you ought to try to fit yourself to defend it. I would not have you hear all that is most precious in life abused and ridiculed, without one effort to protect it. I would have you put on the whole armour of Christ, and then you may fearlessly meet all enemies."

"You talk like the minister, Alice," said her

husband, "and I dare say that you could make better answers to Ralph than I can."

"James," said his wife, "though I would not make you promise not to hear Ralph talk, I do want you to make one promise."

"What is that?" said her husband.

"It is," said Alice, "never to taste of his whiskey-punch, that he talks so much about."

"Why," said James, "I might as well join the Temperance Society."

"And why not do that?" said Alice.

"You are a strange woman," said James; "do you think infidelity less dangerous than whiskey-punch?"

"While you keep your reason, and use it fairly, I do not fear that you will become an infidel," said Alice; "but if you allow yourself to drink whiskey-punch, you will, I fear, first lose your reason, and then your faith; and I strongly suspect this has been the case with Ralph."

"But, dear Alice, I never saw him intoxicated."

"Not so that he cannot stand," said Alice, "but so much excited by liquor that he can rail better than he can reason, and laugh and sneer better than he can comprehend; and, James, I do fear, that he will teach you to love his whiskey-punch, unless you guard yourself in season against it, and then I should fear that you might lose your faith. Does he not ask you, after you have been to walk together, and when he wants to have one of these long talks with you, — does he not ask you to stop in and taste of his whiskey-punch?"

“Why, to tell the truth, he does, Alice; he did this evening, and I accepted his invitation.”

“And do you think,” said his wife, “that this is safe? Believe me, James, it is not. O touch not, taste not; go not near it; for your soul’s sake, for your wife’s and your children’s sake, forswear it now and for ever.”

Till this moment Alice had spoken in a calm and collected tone, but now she spoke with an irrepressible energy and warmth, and her eyes overflowed with tears. “Dear Alice,” said her husband, “I have no objection to joining the Temperance Society, if you think it safer, and if you will be happier; you know I have always approved of it. I have not joined before, because, as I had no desire to drink strong liquors, I saw no use in it; but if you think best, I will go and sign my name to-morrow.”

“If, when to-morrow comes,” said Alice, “you feel as you do now about it, I confess I should be much happier to have you do so.” And thus the conversation ended for the evening.

CHAPTER II.

WOMEN SHOULD REASON ON RELIGION.

WHEN the morrow came, James was still more firmly resolved to join the Temperance Society.

He felt dissatisfied with himself at the recollection of the way in which he had passed the Sunday evening, and was convinced of the wisdom of the precautionary measure which his wife had proposed. He accordingly went and signed his name. This action, and the smile of his good Alice when he returned and told her what he had done, quite restored his tranquillity. "You may be sure that I shall pass this evening with you and the children," he said to his wife, as he went out to his morning's work in the printing-office.

Soon after, Alice's cousin Jane entered. "I have come, Alice," she said, as she seated herself, "to chat with you this morning while you are at your work; the pain in my side prevents my sewing to day, and I am low-spirited, and want you to cheer me up. Don't leave what you are doing; we can talk just as well."

"I am sorry," said Alice, "that you are sick again. What has the physician directed you to do for yourself?"

"Not to sew too long at a time, and to exercise in the open air, and one thing harder than any thing else, and that I find it impossible to perform."

"What is that?"

"To keep myself in good spirits. If it were not wicked to envy any one, and if I did not love you too well, I should envy you, Alice; you need no such direction from the Doctor. Happiness is a medicine not so easily obtained as he thinks, perhaps."

Alice knew too well the cause of Jane's sor-

row to make it necessary to ask, and she feared it was beyond the reach of human help. "Though we cannot find happiness, Jane, we may, if we seek for it, find patience; and patience leads the way to cheerfulness, and cheerfulness to hope, and so happiness comes at last."

"Yes," said Jane, "but not in this world."

Alice would have spoken of the still greater happiness in a life to come, promised to those whose inheritance here has been tears and disappointment; but she knew this was never forgotten by Jane. The present sorrow was pressing heavily upon her weak frame, and she tried to think of some alleviation for her immediate suffering. To speak what was in her heart to a true friend, she knew was one means of comfort. "Tell me," she said, "have you no hope that Ralph will be converted; that he will yet be a Christian?"

"I have none," said Jane, "unless you and James can convert him, or unless my constant prayer should be answered, and God should touch his heart, and turn it towards Him. For myself, my soul is bewildered; you know that Ralph and I have loved each other ever since we were children, and I find it hard to turn away from him now; and yet, Alice, I know it would be to peril my own soul to marry an unbeliever; and I feel that he who has commanded us, if the right eye offend us to pluck it out, bids me to separate myself from him, let him be ever so dear."

Jane covered her face to hide the tears that she could not suppress. "Do not despair," said

Alice ; “ your faith may yet be the means of saving him. You must reason with him, you must try to convert him ; as he loves you, he perhaps will listen to you, and treat your arguments with respect, instead of the ridicule with which he does mine.”

“ I cannot reason upon this subject,” said Jane ; “ religion is a thing above reason ; it is the pride of human reason that has caused so much infidelity. We are to believe like little children, and that is what our Saviour meant when he put a little child in the midst of his disciples, and said to them, ‘ Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ ”

“ I cannot understand this passage so,” answered Alice ; “ it was in reply to the question of the disciples, ‘ Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven ? ’ and was to rebuke their desire of power. Our Saviour, in directing his followers to humble themselves as little children, did not forbid the use of reason, which can only be fairly used in a humble and gentle state of mind, and in a childlike spirit. This is a proper, and the only sure, preparation for the right use of reason.”

“ But,” said Jane, “ one must be converted first, and the reason as well as the heart will come right afterwards.”

“ But how is this conversion to be effected ? ” asked Alice.

“ I pray and trust,” said Jane, “ that he may receive it from God.”

“ Did not our Saviour reason with his disciples,

and with those whom he wished to convert?" rejoined Alice.

"But that is a different thing; he knew all that was in the heart of man, and what would best influence them. He could always reason rightly."

"The fact that we cannot attain to his perfection in any thing, is no argument against our imitating him in our humble measure as far as we can; and it appears to me that our Saviour would not so continually have appealed to the reason of men, if he had not meant to teach them to use their reasoning powers."

"I," said Jane, "was never convinced of the truth of religion by argument; it grew up with me as the love of my father and mother did. I cannot remember when, or why, I first felt it. We cannot reason about our dearest and strongest affections. If, when I was left an orphan in the world, it had been necessary to reason with me, to convince me that I had a Father in heaven who cared for me, could I have been convinced of this blessed truth then? O no! I was, I thank God, taught to believe in him before I could reason, just as I was taught to love and trust my earthly parents."

"This was indeed a great blessing to you," said Alice; "but if you had also been taught, as your mind was capable of comprehending it, the reasons for believing in the existence of God, the reasons for believing in Christianity; had you been made to understand the evidences of the existence, of the teachings, of the death, and of

the resurrection of Jesus; would it not now be a great blessing to you? For if you do not want these proofs for yourself, to strengthen your own faith, you want to be able to answer Ralph when he states objections to your faith, — objections which perhaps he would not make, but for the knowledge of your ignorance.”

“But,” said Jane, “do you undertake to argue upon this subject?”

“I wish I could,” said Alice; “many of Ralph’s objections are so flimsy, that even I can find an answer to them; but many of them require a knowledge that I feel mortified that I do not possess. And I plainly see how it is that these infidel arguments have a power; — it is in consequence of people’s ignorance. The Bible is the only book that I have studied, and I endeavour to reason from that whenever I hear my religion attacked; but I deeply regret that I was not earlier taught to reason upon the subject; for I am persuaded that reason can defend what reason approves.”

“I cannot reason upon religion,” said Jane; “I feel too much about it; — and you do not, Alice, hear it attacked by one who is dearer to you than any thing in life, except that faith which promises a day of rest for the weary, and eternal consolation to the aching heart.”

“I do not,” said Alice, “hear it ridiculed by any one I love; but I am also tried, as you are, to a degree. I fear that Ralph has succeeded in exciting some doubts with regard to religion in my husband’s mind. I know that he is not at

present an unbeliever; but he has, I fear, doubts with regard to many truths that I hold sacred."

"What! James! is it possible?" said Jane. "Why, he was taught religion with his alphabet, as I was; he learnt it on his mother's knee, when he could hardly go alone, or speak plain, as I did. Can he doubt? O dear Alice, I thought that neither you nor James could ever lose your faith. O Ralph! Ralph! what have you done!"

"Nothing, I firmly believe," said Alice, "except troubled my husband's mind for a time, I know not how far. He must go through the trial of ascertaining whether his religion will stand the test of reason or not. If he is faithful in the use of the powers which God has given him, I do not fear the result."

"But," said Jane, "if he had never listened to objections, he never would have doubted; is not this a proof to you, Alice, that I am right?"

"That might be a safe ground for you or me, Jane, but hardly so for any *man*. In the course of business, and in his dealings with men, he is continually exposed to hear his religion attacked; for we know that there are many who profess a disbelief in it; and it appears to me that the duty of a soldier of the cross, is not to run away from its enemies, but to arm himself for the battle."

"Women, I think," said Jane, "may be exempt from fighting for religion."

"There is, however, no harm in their being able to defend what they hold dearer than life," said Alice. "There is, perhaps, no calculating the influence which a woman may exercise, either

for good or for evil. And when I think of the number of women, who I hear attend those infidel meetings, I consider them rather as victims of ignorance, than as converts to a new philosophy. Much I fear, that, ruined in happiness themselves, they spread a wide ruin round them. Knowledge, real knowledge, a right use of reason, would have saved them. I intend to take every pains, that my girls as well as boys shall be able to give a reason for the faith that is in them. And will not unbelievers suspect that we think our cause is a weak one, and that we cannot answer their objections, if we are afraid of hearing them? At first I suffered greatly at the thought that my husband listened to Ralph when he talked against religion; but, since then, I have comforted myself with the thought, that this trial will prove the reality of his faith; and that, if it stands it, we shall be great gainers. And perhaps, Jane, he may convert Ralph. Try to hope. The knowledge, that, notwithstanding your love for him, you will not marry him with his present views, may make him think more seriously about it; and, if he fairly examines, I am sure he will be convinced. It ought to be an argument in favor of the religion he despises, that it leads to such sacrifices as he sees you make. It must prove its reality in your heart at least."

"I wish I could hope for his conversion."

"And if he should not be converted, fear not, dear Jane, that He, whom you love better than any earthly friend, will fail to comfort and bless you."

"If I could talk and reason as you do, Alice,

I might perhaps hope to have some influence over Ralph ; but I cannot. I cannot argue, I cannot contend for my religion ; but I can suffer, I can die for it."

Alice feared that neither her life nor her death could convert Ralph. She felt that Jane was right in her opinion of her own powers. She was silent ; she knew not what to answer. After some minutes she said to Jane, in a tone of great tenderness, " Do not despair, dear Jane ; something may yet set Ralph to thinking seriously and rationally on this subject ; something may revive in him that religious feeling which I am persuaded is natural to every one. Let us try to hope." But it was the spirit of love rather than of hope, that inspired these words of consolation from Alice.

CHAPTER III.

SHOULD JANE MARRY RALPH ?

' Alas ! for those that love, and may not blend in prayer !'

Forest Sanctuary.

ALICE was right in her conjectures with regard to Ralph, and had formed a just estimate of his character ; but from the straight forward simplicity of her own character, and the instinctive purity of her taste, she was perfectly insensible to the real attraction of his society to those who could be flattered or amused by him. She was right, too, in her suspicion that Ralph was trying to make a convert of her husband. He had sys-

tematically set himself to the work of overthrowing James's faith. He indeed went farther. He wanted to persuade him that there was no future life, and no superintending power, that governs and cares for the interests of man. Ralph had attended Miss Wright's lectures, he had read Tom Paine, he had read many of the sad accounts of the enormities committed by persecuting bigots, and interested priests, in the name of Christ ; he had fully possessed himself of all the cant terms and expressions employed by unbelievers in the abuse of Christianity. He had the farther advantage of a ready wit, and a lively vanity, and he was, as he thought, completely armed for the cause of infidelity. He was perfectly ignorant that Miss Wright's lectures contained nothing that had not been advanced and answered long before he or Miss Wright was born ; he had never asked if there was any answer to Tom Paine ; he had never asked, whether the religion of selfish priests, and murderous zealots, was, in reality, the Christian religion ; nor had he ever carefully weighed the evidence of the existence of a Being whose name he profaned, and whose word he ridiculed and despised. This was the man who called himself the champion of freedom and of truth ; while he was, in fact, the slave of his senses and his vanity. Still he was a fearful foe to the happiness of James.

For some days after the time we have spoken of, James avoided Ralph. He felt that he had disturbed his happiness, and he could not help wishing he might never hear him talk again.

But James had a real regard for Ralph ; he thought him well-meaning ; he knew and had experienced his generosity, and he viewed him as an injured man ; for he believed there was nothing against him but his opinions, and for these he considered it wrong to censure him. He thought very highly of his talents. "I almost fear," said he, "to talk with Ralph again about the Bible. Even you, Alice, would not find it quite so easy to answer his arguments as you may suppose."

"There is a great deal of nonsense and falsehood that cannot easily be answered," replied Alice ; "but that does not prove that it is either sense or reason."

"I am not taking Ralph's side," he answered ; "but if you knew more about the matter, Alice, you would not think it so plain that he is always in the wrong. You have never thought of the objections to Christianity ; you are ignorant of what wise men have said against it."

"It is true," said his wife ; "I know nothing upon the subject but what I have learned from the Bible ; all I know is, that I find there satisfactory answers to the questions that my soul would ask about God and a future life. When I look at our sweet Fanny, and see how pale and thin she looks, and fear that she may leave us by the way, my heart aches for the assurance that we shall live again, and meet in another world, where there is no more death ; I find it declared in the Bible that we shall. When I see the wicked prospering in the world, because he is

rich, and the good man sinking and dying from poverty, I want to be assured that there is a great day of reckoning, when justice shall govern the world; and I see it there declared that God will judge the world in righteousness. I want to be assured that the poor, suffering slave, who cannot plead his own cause, who cannot tell his own story, has a Friend who sees and pities him, and will one day comfort him; and I find it declared in the Bible, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the great Father. When trouble is around me, and my mind is disquieted, I go to the history of Jesus, and all is peace and joy. When I want to set before my children an example of perfect goodness, I go to the history of Jesus, and I have found it; and in reading his words I cannot but feel and believe, that never man spake like this man. These are all my arguments, James; to me they are convincing. I suppose that it is my ignorance, that makes it so difficult for me to believe that either wise or good men have thought otherwise. I should not be able to answer any objections that were raised by Ralph or any unbeliever; but I nevertheless believe there are sufficient answers to all their arguments. Though my father was a clergyman, yet you know, James, he was poor, and I had to work with my hands, and had very little time to read. I am sorry that I did not make time for the purpose, so that I might now be able to give a reason for the faith that is in me. But I should as soon have thought, upon a beautiful May morning, when every bird seemed to be

singing a hymn of praise and gratitude, of studying some dusty book, to find reasons to prove that God made this glorious world, and gave me a heart to enjoy it, before I joined in the universal song of thanksgiving, as I should have thought, before I believed the Bible, of seeking for arguments to prove that God inspired that blessed word, which is the dayspring from on high, and which sets before my rejoicing eyes the glorious morning of the resurrection."

"Dear Alice," said her husband, "I confess that these are better arguments after all, than Ralph's."

"I do pity my poor cousin Jane," said Alice.

"Why, she truly loves Ralph," said James.

"And the more 's the pity that she does; she has poor health, and he'll be the death of her, I fear," answered Alice.

"But don't you think," said James, "that Jane is foolishly scrupulous not to marry Ralph, because he has different opinions from hers? He is not accountable for his opinions, and he is a good, honest fellow."

"I cannot think Jane foolish," said Alice; "I should do the same thing; for a religious woman to be so intimately connected with an infidel, as in the married state, is like the living being chained to the dead. It is an unequal bargain; he loves her with a selfish, a limited affection; she loves him with an eternal love. Upon that subject which is the highest, the holiest, the one of unfailling interest, they have no sympathy."

"But," said James, "if she holds the truth, if

she is right and he is wrong, she may convince him, and so she may save her husband. It appears to me, that, according to your own principles, she ought to marry him."

"I think not," said Alice; "if a woman can hope to produce any real change in her lover's religious opinions, she is quite as likely to succeed before as after marriage. It is true, that the importance of the subject ought of itself to be reason enough for fair inquiry; and if it were justly estimated, no earthly happiness would come in competition with it. But we do know, James, that, with such a man as Ralph, to call such a pretty woman as Jane his wife would influence him far more; and if there is any hope of his giving his mind to this subject, and becoming a Christian, it is for the sake of being her husband."

"He is too proud to be converted by a woman," answered James.

"Say, too vain. Ralph is self-conceited; it was, I think, partly for the sake of being singular that he became an unbeliever."

"If it is only vanity, Jane may cure him of his unbelief, and his vanity too, if she marries him. Believe me, Alice, my love for you has cured many of my faults, let me have ever so many left; depend upon it, I should have been worse without you, Alice. O do persuade Jane to marry him; rely upon it, he will be a better man."

"Never," answered Alice; "never would I advise a woman to pledge her faith to a man who believes in nothing but what his senses can teach

him ; who knows nothing of those invisible realities which form the very soul and joy of existence ; which insures to her, when her beauty fades and age comes on, a love for that inward bloom, that immortal youth, which the religious man alone can justly estimate."

"But, Alice," said James, "this is selfish. If she really loves him, she ought to think more of his happiness than of her own, and ought to be willing to make this sacrifice. You know, if she determines not to marry him till his opinions change, and he still holds these opinions, they must be separated, and he may marry an irreligious woman, who may increase all his faults, and insure his ruin, while Jane will remember that she might have saved him."

"I well know," said Alice, "that a tender spirit, like Jane's, might suffer much from this idea, but I think it a false view of the subject. This is, after all, only a possibility ; and if you admit objections like these that might occur on one side, you must do the same on the other. Is it not possible that Ralph might undermine her religious faith ? She is ignorant, and has never reasoned upon the subject ; all his arguments have a power over her on that account. She has nothing to oppose but feeling. True, this is now her strongest, her highest affection ; but can she be sure it will always be so ? But, even if she could defend her own soul against the chilling effect of his heartless doctrines, could she defend the souls of her children ? and has she a right, with her views, to expose herself to the unutterable agony

of thinking, that she has been the means of bringing into this world, so full of the goodness of God, a being who scoffs at his name, and does not acknowledge his power, and numbers himself among the brutes that perish? O James, we have loved, and we do love each other; God is our witness. I have sometimes feared that I loved you too well. But now, this very moment, I would part from you, sooner than have that sorrow at my heart, which Jane would feel, if she could accuse herself of voluntarily choosing, for the father of her children, a man who did not believe in a future life."

James was silent, and looked troubled; how glad would he have been at that moment to possess as firm a faith as his wife in the truths of our religion. He had hitherto been so entirely united with her in feeling and opinion, that, while she was speaking, he felt as if he believed as she did; but when she had finished, and he recurred to his own thoughts, he found that doubts, like evil spirits, had entered the paradise of his affections, and had touched with their chilling questionings the holiest bond that can bind mortals together, — a belief in an eternal life. How could he express this to Alice? "After all," he said to himself, "these are only doubts. I must struggle with them like a man. The enemy is around me and within me, and I must contend with him alone; but he may yet be conquered, I have not yet yielded him the victory." Alice observed the serious and even sad expression in her husband's face; but she attributed it to his sor-

row for Ralph, and thought it was because he was convinced that Jane was right in refusing to marry him while he held his present opinions.

CHAPTER IV.

MIRACLES.

“WHAT does a miracle mean?” said Fanny to her father, as she and Jemmy came, to claim their place on his knees, during that short, happy hour to children, just before bed-time. “Our teacher in the Sunday school told us to try to find the meaning of the word *miracle*, to bring to her next Sunday. She told us to ask our parents; and we want you, father, to tell us what it means.”

James thought awhile, and then said, “Do you remember, Fanny, the last summer, when we carried you to see your uncle, at Milton, my taking you into the grist-mill, and showing you how they ground the corn?”

“Yes, father, perfectly well. They put the corn into the hopper; and then you showed me how the water turned the wheel, and then how the wheel turned the great round stones, and then how the stones ground the corn into meal.”

“Well, Fanny, if the corn had been put into the hopper, and no wheel, or any thing else, had turned the stones that ground it into meal, but it

had been put into the hopper, corn, and come out meal, without any thing to change it into meal, we should call it a miracle, — a wonderful thing, above human power.”

“As you know the water was changed into wine, at the marriage feast, at the command of Jesus,” said Alice.

“Then, father,” said little James, “I saw a miracle once.”

“How? my boy; what was it?”

“Why, father, I saw some chickens, last summer, come out of some eggs. Uncle showed me one of the little chickens with his head just peeping out, and he told me that egg had once been exactly like all the other eggs I had ever seen.”

“But we do not call this a miracle,” replied his father, “because it has always been so; all chickens have been born in this way, and we have all seen it a great many times.”

“Then, father,” said Fanny, “a miracle is a very wonderful thing, that nobody has ever seen before?”

Her father was silent; he was thinking of a conversation he had lately had with Ralph about miracles.

“A miracle,” said her mother, “is not only a wonderful thing that no one has ever before seen, but it is something contrary to what any one has ever seen. If, for instance, at the bidding of a man, instead of a chicken, a flower were to come out of the egg, we should say he had performed a miracle. Now we know that no one could do such wonderful things unless God gave him the

power. So, when Jesus performed miracles, it was to convince people that God sent him."

"I should have thought, mother," said Fanny, "that they could not help believing him, he was so good, and so kind to every one."

"But there were some people," replied her mother, "who did not love goodness, and could not believe in it, because they did not find it in their own hearts. These men would never have believed that he was the Son of God, if he had not worked miracles; they would have considered him a deceiver."

"O mother," said Fanny, "how could they help believing that he spoke the truth?"

"If," said her mother, "they had been innocent and true themselves, they would have believed him without requiring miracles."

"How happy Jesus must have been, mother, to possess such great power; because he could make sick people well, and bring the dead to life, and make the blind see and the dumb speak. And how very happy he must have been when he raised Lazarus from the grave."

"Now, father," said Jemmy, "do tell us the story of the three brothers, who went all over the world to try who could bring back the most wonderful thing."

Their father told them the story; as he finished, Jemmy said, that the piece of tapestry, that carried people wherever they wanted to go, seemed to him the most wonderful thing; but Fanny preferred the apple, that cured the sick if they smelled of it.

“This story,” said Fanny, “is not a miracle, for it is not true; but the miracles were true.”

“Yes,” said her mother; “no one ever believed the story your father has just told you; but millions have believed the miracles. But it is time, my children, to say good night.”

Alice led her children to their quiet pillows; she joined in, and guided, their simple prayers, — those pure, angelic petitions, for blessings to the kind Father of all, which, more than any other human words, make one feel the Divine presence. When she returned to her husband, he resumed the subject of their conversation.

“It appears to me,” said he, “that Fanny’s notion of a miracle is as correct as yours, or as any that we can obtain. Suppose that we actually witnessed a miracle. We can only say that it is a wonderful thing that we never saw before. That water should be turned into wine is, after all, not so wonderful as that an egg should turn into a chicken. Nature is a series of miracles.”

“But you must acknowledge,” replied Alice, “that the power which could interrupt or change this succession must be greater than nature itself. It is on this account, is it not? that any interruption of this order (which is what we call a miracle) is more wonderful in fact than any of the most extraordinary things that happen according to the known laws of nature.”

“But there is the difficulty, Alice, with unbelievers; they find it very difficult to believe that these laws could be interrupted. The course of nature is so certain, so regular, so exact, that

nothing but the testimony of one's senses, and hardly that, could convince one of the reality of a miracle. For instance, it seems to me almost impossible, that the sun should not rise and set to-morrow, just as it has risen and set for these many thousand years."

"So is it," said Alice, with a sigh, "that this material sun blinds our dazzled eyes to the glory of Him who placed it in the firmament. The very perfection of the works of God hides their Creator from his creatures. Do you remember, James, those beautiful lines which the minister quoted in his sermon a few Sundays since from a foreign writer? I think I can repeat them.

'He veils himself in everlasting laws,
Which, and not him, the skeptic seeing, exclaims,
"Wherefore a God? The world itself is God."
And never did a Christian's adoration
So praise him, as this skeptic's blasphemy.'

It seems to me, that, because the world around us is so wonderful and beautiful, some people believe that there can be nothing beyond it; and they do in fact make a God of nature itself, or rather of the laws of nature, as they call them. Better far be like children and believe every thing a miracle, or like the Indian, who thinks that God speaks in the thunder and in the sound of the wind through the trees."

"But, Alice," said James, "if our religion is, as Christians believe, so perfectly adapted to the wants of our nature, and if it could prevail by its truth, what need was there of miracles? You have often said, that in the life and teaching of

Jesus you find satisfactory answers to all the questions that your soul asks about God ; now, if the Bible, if the instructions of Jesus, were proof enough of their divine origin, why were the miracles necessary ? ”

“ It seems to me,” answered Alice, “ that your own remark about the laws of nature is a satisfactory answer to your question. Men had got to think that there was no power greater than nature, and nothing but the testimony of their own senses, and hardly that, could convince them there was.”

“ But that did not apply to the Jews ; they believed in a Supreme Power.”

“ That is true ; still, nothing but miracles could convince the Jews that there was any religion, or any views of God, that could be worthy of belief, which were not authorized by the accredited interpreters of their sacred books. Jesus had entirely disappointed them in their conceptions of the Messiah ; and what influence could he have had over the mind of a Jew, if he had not been gifted with miraculous powers ? ”

“ I have perceived,” said James, “ that the children’s minds are not much affected by the miracles of Jesus. You noticed that Fanny asked why they would not believe in Jesus because he was so good. Dear child ! she rejoiced that he could perform miracles, only because it enabled him to heal the sick and raise the dead.”

“ If all hearts were like Fanny’s,” said her mother, “ there would certainly have been no need of miracles to convince people that the re-

ligion of Jesus was true. And does not this view of the reception of truth in her pure mind help us more perfectly to understand the meaning of the declaration, 'Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven' ? and is it not a beautiful thing, James, to have our children thus bring back to us the religious instruction we have given them, more pure and excellent than we could give it ? I never converse with Fanny upon religious subjects without finding my own faith strengthened."

James sat silent and looking very serious, for some minutes, wishing in his heart that he could have such an entire and confiding faith as his wife and child had ; but he could not resolve to express his doubts to Alice, he could not bear to give her the pain of knowing how far Ralph had influenced his opinions. At last he said, "Ralph thinks, that, if there ever had been such a thing as miracles, there is no reason why there should not be miracles again in order to satisfy the minds of those who cannot be convinced in any other way."

"It seems to me," replied Alice, "from all the information that I have been able to obtain, that the historical evidence of the miracles of Jesus is sufficiently strong ; and if so, the miracles which were then performed must have now, on candid minds, the same convincing power as if they were performed before their own eyes. They cannot reasonably expect that God should grant them special aid in discovering the truth, when he has given them power and opportunity to ascertain it by their own faithful exertion."

“But,” said James, “we should find it more easy to be satisfied with the historical evidence, if the facts themselves were not so unlike any thing we know from our own experience. Some persons, to be sure, believe that they have themselves experienced such a special aid; but how can they prove to themselves, or others, that they are not imposed upon by their own imaginations?”

“There can,” rejoined Alice, “of course be no *outward* proof of such special divine agency, no proof which must satisfy every one, except the performance of miracles. But I do not believe that there is nothing in our own experience in any way like those wonderful assurances of an ever-watchful Providence, giving us light and strength where our own powers are truly insufficient to the task appointed us.”

“But an unbeliever would ask, ‘What proof can you bring that any such aid is ever given?’”

“The events in the history of our own hearts,” replied Alice, “are, to be sure, only matters of personal experience, and not sufficient to serve as proof to others. But, even if we have not ourselves experienced instances of such special divine assistance, it is natural and right that our faith should receive strength from the experience of others, in whose sincerity and conscientious examination of their own hearts, we have reason to repose confidence. But these are special grounds of private faith; and what is most convincing to ourselves, may be little capable of being communicated and brought home to other minds.

The simple truth, as it is in Jesus, is sufficient to convince our reason; and where our confidence in our own reason is not strong enough to raise our faith above every temptation to doubt, the miracles he wrought are as a helping hand held out to the sinking spirit. Thus we find in Jesus all that our nature longs for or requires. When he calls upon us 'to judge of ourselves what is right,' he addresses himself to our strength; when he bids us to 'believe him for the very works' sake,' he adapts himself to our weakness."

CHAPTER V.

CHARACTERS AND MORAL RELATIONS.

RALPH VINCENT had, with all his faults, many good qualities. He was generous, good-natured, and honest; he had rather showy talents and was a general favorite. His father was a rich farmer, and he was his only son; his mother died when he was a child, and his father had only thought of giving him a good school education and keeping him out of mischief, as he used to say, as long as he could. He had early shown a fancy for the printing business, and his father had indulged him in choosing his own occupation. He was now in the same office with James.

Ralph's faults were vanity and self-conceit, and an entire absence of any steady principle of

action. He had no bad habits, except the one we have before alluded to. His vanity appeared in every thing, even in the manufacture of his whiskey-punch. His was better than any that was ever made before; and if he could have doubted it, a glass of it satisfied him that it was so, a second persuaded him that he was the king of good fellows, and a third glass enabled him to quote Tom Paine and laugh at the Bible. He had a great deal of mother-wit, as it is called, which always with him took the place of argument, and, when his tongue was wet with whiskey-punch, there was no resisting his merriment. It was one of his boasts, that *he* could stop drinking just where he pleased; he despised getting drunk. Ralph's father had promised to settle some property on him when he was married, but insisted upon his living upon his earnings till then. Mr. Vincent's ambition was centred in his son. He was aware of his religious disbelief, but considered it, as he said, only a folly. He called Ralph's opinions new-fangled notions, adopted, he said, as other new opinions were, for fashion's sake. He would often say to his friend, the clergyman of the town he lived in, "The boy is too big for a birch rod, or I'd soon cure him of his infidelity. Have not his father, and grandfather, and great-grandfather, and so on, clear back to Noah, as far as I know, all been to church every Sabbath-day, and believed every word the parson said, let him say what he would? A free inquirer he calls himself, I hear; I'll teach the upstart to be a free inquirer, I'll be bound

for him; I'll give him enough of his infidelity; I'll show him something yet that he can't help believing, and make him ready to believe any thing I'll tell him."

Notwithstanding these threats, Ralph's father was, after further consideration, determined to try first all gentle means with his son. His favorite plan was to get him married as soon as possible to Jane, who was every thing that the fondest father could desire for his son. Ralph loved her, and she loved him; his father had the money to set them up in the world, as he said, in a creditable, snug way, and why were they not married directly? He could see no reason, and married they should be, he was resolved. Ralph was as much in earnest as his father; he truly loved Jane, and he continually urged her to give her consent and fix the time for their marriage. Jane returned his affection; but though she loved him, she loved that faith, upon which rested all her hopes of happiness in a future life, better.

"I will not," she said to Ralph, "put my fate and my happiness into the hands of a man who does not believe in any thing beyond this life. I had rather die now alone, believing that I shall live again, than live a long life with all the felicity that life can give, but with no hope beyond it." Ralph found it vain to argue with her; religion was an instinctive sentiment of her nature, and, as we have before seen, she considered it a sort of sin to argue about it. Her parents had taught her that it was true, and her heart confirmed it. She had become attached to Ralph before he had

formed his present opinions, and now these two feelings were contending in her innocent heart for supremacy ; but she had as yet been loyal to her highest and holiest love. She had never reasoned upon the subject of religion ; the authority and opinions of others were to her sufficient sanctions of her faith.

Ralph was aware of this, and tried to turn it to his own advantage. As he was one day counting up the names of sensible and good men who, he said, were unbelievers, Jane answered him, "When you can persuade Alice and James to believe as you do, then you may hope to convert me. I pray Heaven that they may convert you ; I well know that I cannot ; till then, Ralph, we had better part."

Ralph, however, had no such opinion. His vanity, as well as his affection, was piqued ; and one of the results of this conversation was his determination to try every possible method to convert James, hoping afterwards to bring round Alice, and thus finally to subdue Jane's objections.

Thus reckless of the happiness of beings whom he pretended to love, and of his own future destiny, did this vain and misguided man hurry on in his ruinous career ; seeking for arguments to prove to himself that he and all men were upon a level with the brutes that perish, and endeavouring to convince others of the truth of his gloomy faith.

If he had a lingering doubt, or the insulted soul within him for a moment insisted upon its heaven-born rights, or his heart was touched with

a natural feeling of compunction, a glass of whiskey-punch quieted his mind, and restored his courage and self-complacency.

He assailed the religious faith of James by every means in his power. He related to him all the enormities that he had read of, which had been committed in the name of religion; he used wit and eloquence, abuse and sarcasm; he made him read Fanny Wright's Lectures, and other books of the same character. But there was one point he could never gain with James; he could never get him to raise the glass of whiskey-punch to his lips, although he assured him no beverage was so good, and nothing could be more innocent.

"I have pledged my sacred word," said James, "and I will never break it."

"Do you call this virtue?" said Ralph. "What is the merit now of your not drinking to excess? You are a slave to a promise."

"I call it prudence and safety," said James. "I can find opportunities enough to exercise my courage and virtue. I am not ambitious about the merit, and I am very thankful to find myself bound to do right; and as I am my own master, I will not complain of being a slave."

Ralph abused Temperance Societies in words we do not wish to repeat; but James heard it all unmoved; his mind had been disturbed, had been troubled to its very depths; his spirit was like a vessel in a storm; it was tossed to and fro, clouds were hanging heavy upon it, and the light of heaven was obscured; but his promise to keep

this spark within him of the immortal flame undimmed by spirituous liquors, this sacred promise was as a life-boat to his soul, and saved it from sinking into the depths that opened round him.

From every discussion with Ralph, he returned to his wife and children with his mind perplexed, but not stupefied; disturbed, but not degraded. He was still a man, and had the judgment of a man; his anxious affections were still tender and disinterested; and though there were fears implanted in his soul with regard to the future life, he had not lost his power of enjoying those pure pleasures of the present, which nourish the desire of immortality. As he entered his own little parlour, and felt his children's arms round his neck, and heard the sweet voice of his wife, his heart instinctively recovered its faith in immortality.

Could Ralph once have persuaded James to taste of the stupefying draught that he was continually offering him, he might have obtained a fatal advantage over him; it would have smothered that living consciousness of immortality, that held out against what appeared to him sound argument, because it was new and confidently urged; it would have deadened his capacity of finally judging of himself what was true.

James had heretofore believed in the Bible as a matter of course, without thinking of the reasons for his belief; he was a Christian without knowing why he was a Christian; and now when he first heard objections made to his religion, and arguments against the Bible, he knew not what to answer. His whole soul was troubled within

him, and he was almost unconsciously acted upon by an unprincipled man, who thus thoughtlessly and heartlessly trifled with the dearest interests of his own soul and the souls of his fellow men.

Unhappily for poor James, now, when more than at any other period of his married life, a perfect openness towards his wife was most important to his happiness, he was reserved and silent upon the subject that occupied his thoughts. Many reasons conspired to produce this effect. He could not bear that Alice should have the pain of knowing that he doubted of any thing that was sacred to her. The faith of his wife was so clear, so serene, so firm, that it always seemed to James, when she expressed it, as if there was something wrong in him that prevented his believing as she did. He half envied, as he loved her for it. He felt as one does when he hears a sweet strain of music, — as if it would be a sort of sin to interrupt it with a discordant sound; and such, he felt, were some of the gloomy doubts that rose in his mind, awakened by his conversations with Ralph.

There was another cause that kept him silent towards his wife, and every one but Ralph; he was unwilling to acknowledge to himself that he was a skeptic; he turned away from it, as a sick man does from confessing that he is the victim of a fatal disease. He shrunk from the thought of acknowledging the doubts that tormented him. And no wonder; for, if human nature trembles at hearing the words pronounced which declare that the limits are visible of this earthly existence, how much more must it shrink from the sentence

that speaks of a termination of the life of the soul, to him who has hitherto believed in its immortality.

James and Alice had some time before formed a plan of studying the New Testament together, but, for the reasons we have stated, James now avoided it; he always found some excuse when Alice proposed it; he could not be a hypocrite, and he could not, or he thought he could not, say all that was on his mind to his wife. Thus was James left to struggle single-handed with the enemy of his peace, bereft of the aid which he might have derived from the clear mind and calm and rational faith of his wife. Alice felt that there was a reserve between them; she feared what was the cause of it; but she also was unwilling to confess it to herself, and she feared to give her husband pain by the detection of what he seemed to wish to hide. She hoped, she believed, that it was only a temporary cloud over his mind, that would soon pass away; and the only change in her was manifested by a redoubled tenderness and watchfulness of affection. She seemed like the embodied spirit of religion, who with silent pleadings was calling him back to his first and highest love.

CHAPTER VI.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION, SLAVERY TO THE SENSES.

WITH old Mr. Vincent words and thoughts were deeds. His resolution to take summary measures to drive out his son's infidelity was no sooner taken, than he made preparations for a journey to Boston, in order to execute his threat. "I'll teach him," said he to himself, as he was opening the old bureau-drawer that contained his best suit, in order to dress himself for a visit to the city, "I'll teach the puppy what it is to be an infidel." In the same drawer which contained his Sunday's best, was an old Bible, which had belonged to his wife, the mother of Ralph. The sight of it softened the old man; he drew a deep sigh. "My poor Eunice, if you were alive now, you would rather suffer over again all the pain you endured at his birth, than know him to be a denier of his Master. It would have been better for the poor fellow that I should have died rather than you. True, I have sowed and reaped, and made the farm bring in a little something, and laid up money enough to set him up in the world; but you would have looked after his soul. You always used to tell me that religion was the one thing needful, and I always supposed Ralph would take it the natural way. I thought he would of course believe as I did, but I have

left him too much to his own head. I ought to have seen to it before ; but perhaps I can save him yet. I will spare neither money nor pains. I will take his mother's Bible to him ; he cannot despise that."

"Walk in," said Ralph, as his father knocked at the door of his room, after a long ride in the stage-coach. "Why, father, is it you?" said he ; "I am very glad to see you. But, what brought you ? how came you, — at least, what" —

"What made me come ? I suppose you mean to say," answered his father ; "you'll find that out in due time. But first I want some supper."

His son saw him supplied and refreshed ; and then the old man put his feet up to the fire, and without further preface began thus. "I have come to the conclusion, Ralph, that I have left you too long to yourself. To come to the point, I have given you heretofore too loose a rein, and now I mean to take it up a little shorter."

"Why, what have I done, father, to offend you ? I don't know what you mean ; you will not I hope condemn me unheard. Some one has prejudiced you against me."

"Condemn you unheard, and prejudiced me against you ? These, I suppose, are your fine play-actor or Fanny-Wright words. But this is the long and the short of the matter ; you must turn about at once, or you'll get into difficulty."

"I wish, father, you would tell me what you mean."

"I mean," said Mr. Vincent, "that you are not any longer to belong to that ungodly set, who

deny their Lord and Master, and that you are to burn all this wicked trash of theirs;" and he threw a pamphlet into the fire that he had taken up, and that Ralph had just laid down. "I mean that you are to return to the religion of your fathers, that you are to pray to God, upon your bended knees, for pardon for having forsaken him and his worship, and that you are to swear, upon this Bible, that belonged to the mother that bore you, and whose death was caused by your birth," — here the old man choaked with emotion and stopped for a moment, and then went on, — "You must, Ralph, swear on this holy book, that belonged to one who is a saint in heaven, that you will give up all these wicked opinions. Ralph, I insist, — Ralph, I beg of you, your old father begs of you, he bends the knees of his heart, he pleads with you, he entreats you, to forswear, now and for ever, these wicked opinions, that lead you to deny the God who made you, and the Saviour who died for you."

As he uttered these words he caught hold of his son's hand, and looked up into his face with that solemn earnestness which only the deepest and most fervent desire can excite, and as he finished, the big tears chased each other down the furrows in his sun-burnt cheeks.

Ralph was a man, and he could not but be affected at such an appeal from his aged father. He made no answer. "Tell me, Ralph," said Mr. Vincent, "will you do what I wish? Will you make your old father happy again?"

"How can I? father," said Ralph. "I would

do any thing I could to make you happy ; but how is it possible for me suddenly, and by my own will, to change my opinions ? If I were to pretend to do it, I should be a liar and a hypocrite, and even you would think me then worse than an infidel."

"Is it possible ?" said his father ; "can it be really so, that you, Ralph, who have the form and spirit of a man, — that you can really and truly believe that you are no better than this poor dog who is licking your hands, from love of his old playmate ? Poor dog ! I could sooner believe that even his honest heart was to live again, as a reward for his fidelity, than I could believe myself no better than a brute, and deny the soul that is in me, and the hope that God has planted in my heart. Much I fear, Ralph," said the old man, "that you have sold your birthright for a mess of pottage." And he fixed his eyes on Ralph's pitcher of whiskey-punch, that he had prepared while his father was eating his supper.

Ralph assured his father that he never was intemperate.

"It would be your only excuse. When a man makes a beast of himself by drinking, no wonder that he doubts whether he ever was a man ; but for a man in his sober senses really to believe that this something here, Ralph, within us," and the old man put his hand to his heart, "that this something, which, to an honest man, is more than house and land, which makes us tremble if we do not obey its commands, this king in our breast to which a good man is a faithful subject, and to

which he will sacrifice even life when he demands it, — to believe that this is but dust, of the earth, earthy ; — this is saying to corruption, 'Thou art my father, and to the worm, 'Thou art my mother and my sister ; this is being lower and meaner than the brutes ; for they are, and they are happy in being, what God has made them. O Ralph, I thought I had a man for my son.'"

The energy with which the old man had spoken, the strong excitement and painful nature of his feelings, seemed to have nearly exhausted him. He sunk into a dull silence. Ralph was deeply moved ; but though his soul was not quenched by his own abuse of it, yet its highest and purest emotions were deadened. He who has lost his faith in God, his faith in that voice which he has planted within him declaring his immortality, his faith in his own nature, will find his belief impaired in all that is invisible. How can he have an unquestioning faith in the devoted, self-sacrificing love of a parent, or of any other human being, when he has lost his belief in his own soul ? Ralph was sorry to see his father unhappy, but he had lost the power of measuring the extent of his grief. He had turned himself out of that spiritual Eden which is the original heritage of every man. He could only see, he could only think of, he could only understand, the visible.

"You will find," he said to his father, "that I shall never disgrace you. I am in very good business ; my employer finds no fault with me ; my character is unquestioned ; and if I were only

married to Jane, and you helped us a little, I should do very well. Why should you be so troubled about my opinions? they hurt no one. I would believe as you do, if I could; but I cannot believe in any thing but what my senses teach me. What I can touch, or taste, or see, or hear, or smell, why that I know and believe in, and that 's all."

The old man listened to him till he had quite finished; then rising quickly from his seat, "You are more of a fool than I thought you were, Ralph; must you see, or hear, or touch, or taste, or smell of a thing, before you can believe in it? Why, my donkey is not so much of an ass as that; for when he comes home from market, he can believe that he shall find his manger filled with hay for him, though he can then neither see, hear, touch, smell, nor taste it. But no wonder; you have made yourself now neither hog nor dog, and there 's no use of talking to one who has neither the instinct of a brute nor the sense of a man, and I had better go to bed. I am tired enough. I wish I had stayed at home."

Ralph took a light, and his father followed him in silence to a chamber that his landlady had prepared for him.

"Good night, father," said Ralph, as he quitted the room.

"Good night, Ralph," said the old man; "and may Almighty God convert you; I see I cannot."

Ralph, when he returned to his room, found that he was not happy. His father's voice, as he said, "Good night, Ralph," had awakened the slumbering remembrances of his boyhood, when

he believed all that was told him, with the simple, undoubting trust of childhood. He had exchanged this innocent and happy credulity for a dark and gloomy unbelief. There was a feeling of discontent, a sort of home-sickness or heart-sickness came over him, and he wished that he was a little boy, sleeping, as he used to do, in his father's bed, and in his father's arms, his pride, his hope, his joy, loving him with an unbounded love, and believing that every thing he believed was true. What had he gained in exchange for this unquestioning, this childlike happiness? He was not satisfied with himself, he felt that he was not; but he went no farther.

“One cannot,” said he to himself, “be always a child; how foolish I am to feel so. To believe a thing simply because another does, is silly. I have inquired for myself, and I have come to the conclusion that all that these priests teach us is false. I can't help my unbelief, any more than I can help being so many feet high.” And he stretched himself up to his full height, took his glass of whiskey-punch, and began to recover his self-complacency.

Had Ralph but cherished the tender emotions that his father's voice had awakened, had he examined those feelings of dissatisfaction with himself, he would perhaps have come to the conclusion that he had been an inquirer only on one side of the question. He had sought after the objections to Christianity, not after the truth; he had studied the books of infidel writers, but not the answers of believers in Christianity; he

had sought after arguments against religion, but had not made the same effort to become acquainted with what could be said in favor of it. He had taken a strict account of all the abuses and enormities that had been committed in its name; but he had passed over all the heroic deeds, the magnanimous self-devotion, the silent endurance for conscience' sake, of which its history is full. He had set down in a note-book all the wicked acts of interested and unprincipled religionists, of ambitious and worldly-minded priests, but he had made no record of those living streams of private charities, of domestic joys, of silent, unobtrusive virtues, which, if we may so speak, have, as they flowed on, fertilized and adorned the whole surface of life. Neither had Ralph ever once fairly and faithfully studied the authentic histories of the religion he contemned, to learn whether it was indeed such a system as some represented it to be. He had lost his power of discriminating between a *blind credulity* and a *blind unbelief*. He had nearly lost his capacity for holding a rational faith; nothing but the highest and most strenuous exercise of his reasoning powers could have restored him to himself, and revived in him that original, instinctive reaching after immortality, which vanity and false reasoning and sensuality had smothered.

CHAPTER VII.

JANE'S DECISION.

“RALPH,” said Mr. Vincent, as they sat down to breakfast, “I have thought of the best plan for bringing you to your senses, and making a man of you again.” Ralph loved his father, and had a good temper, so he submitted to this humiliating address.

“What are you going to do to me, sir?”

“I am going to marry you right off to Jane.”

“Thank you, sir; there is nothing I should like better. But how will you manage the matter? Jane must be consulted, I suppose.”

“I’ll see to that,” said the old man. “I’m going there as soon as I have done my breakfast.”

Accordingly Mr. Vincent set off for a visit to Jane, elated with the belief that he should certainly succeed in his undertaking. Jane received the good man with a sincere and affectionate welcome. “As I have not much time to spare, Jane, I must come to the point directly. I mean that you and Ralph shall be married at once, and I want to have the time and every thing settled before I leave Boston, which will be at eleven o’clock.”

Jane was too much accustomed to Mr. Vincent’s abrupt manner to be offended with it; and she had a truly filial affection for him. She looked very sad, and seemed unwilling to answer. “Come, Jane,” said he, “you are too good and sensible to be uppish about a man’s manner when he means right; come, speak up, and say when you’ll be

ready ; here 's money enough for gimcracks, and there 's enough more where this came from. It 's all yours and Ralph 's ; and for the want of a better let me be your father, and you shan't have any thing to complain of, if I can help it. I can promise you an old man 's love, and an old man 's blessing, indeed an old man 's thanks, if you marry my son ; and so, if you love him, as I reckon you do, what 's to hinder ? ”

The tears ran down Jane 's cheeks, and she still made no answer. The old man fidgeted about, and got up, and walked about the room, and sat down, and then walked about again. “ Come, Jenny, dear, take courage and say what 's on your mind. ”

“ Ralph knows, ” at last she said, “ why I do not marry him ; he knows that I could not venture to trust my happiness with a man that holds such opinions as he does. ”

“ A fiddlestick, ” said the old man, “ for his opinions, or perhaps this stick might be better for them, ” lifting up his walnut cane ; “ I tell you, Jane, the boy is only a fool ; he 's trying to make a brute of himself ; but after all he is a man, and he can't help that, and you 'll bring him to his senses, if you marry him. Jane, you 'll make a man of him again, I 'm certain that you will. The yoke will bring him to ; there 's nothing like the yoke, depend upon it. I 've tried it, and I know what it is with the stubbornest creatures ; I 'll burn all his lying books, and we 'll make him go to meeting twice a day, and he 'll come out, in three months, as sleek as a sheep newly washed and shorn. ”

“ I am afraid,” said Jane, “ that I should never succeed in changing his opinions, and should run the risk of having my own changed, and so peril my own soul.”

“ Now, Jane, that ’s what I call nonsense,” answered the old man ; “ as for your own opinions, you have only to do as I do, and say you won’t have them changed ; and as for his opinions, a conceited jackanapes, didn’t a woman, a Miss what ’s her name, Miss Wright (well named, I ’m sure, for she ’s missed the right, for an honest woman) ; but as I was saying, that Miss Wright, a fool of a woman, has made an infidel of him, and you, a woman of common sense, can’t you make him a Christian ? I ’ll lend a hand to the good work, Jane, if you ’ll only put your shoulder to the wheel first ; but it must be your work, for he won’t mind me.”

Jane drew a deep sigh, and said nothing ; she looked very sad. “ Come, dear Jenny,” said the old man tenderly, “ come, consent to marry my foolish boy ; bad as he is, he has good stuff in him, though it ’s his old father that says so. You can save him from ruin, you can save my grey hairs from being brought in sorrow to the grave. Come, consent to be my daughter, my own best child.” The tears rolled fast down Jane’s cheeks, but she was silent. “ Speak, Jane, O speak,” said Mr. Vincent ; “ may I go tell Ralph that you will marry him as soon as all things are ready ? ”

“ I cannot, O I cannot,” said Jane ; “ I could die for Ralph, I would willingly die to save his soul ; but how can I promise before God always

to love and honor one who does not believe in Him? O, I dare not do it. How could I expect, how could I pray for his blessing upon us? I can, I do pray day and night, that Ralph may be converted, that his heart may be touched, that he may be turned from the error of his ways; but do not till then ask me to marry him; my conscience forbids it."

The old man looked deeply distressed. "Poor Ralph," he said, and the tears ran down his cheeks, "there is nothing now to save him from his folly. Well," he said, and he struck his cane hard upon the floor, "well, I may as well go home; I might as well have stayed there, for any good I've done by coming. And is this all you've got to say to me, Jane?"

"O!" answered she, "if I could only say to you, how grateful I am to you for your kindness, and if I could only be sure that you would forgive me and still love me! If you knew all I suffered, you would, I am sure, you are so good."

"Poh! poh!" said the old man, "I an't good, or I shouldn't have such a son; I'm afraid I did n't sow the fear of God in his heart when he was a boy, or he would not have such a crop of weeds in his silly brains. He has not been trained up in the way he should go. Well, I can tell him however, that he shan't have my money to hire theatres to blaspheme his Maker in, or to buy infidel books with. But it's time for me to go. Good bye, God bless you Jane, though you have refused the old man; but you mean right, so here's my hand, and you shall be as if you were my own

child, though you don't marry that scapegrace of a son of mine." Jane pressed and kissed the hard hand of the good old man, and they parted.

"That 's what comes of women's studying Latin and Algebra, and such trash," muttered the old man to himself, as he settled himself down into his seat in the stage. "It 's a pity the law can't get hold of such cattle as that Miss Fanny Wright is ; but unluckily there 's no pound for such stray sheep, let them commit ever so many trespasses."

"How has she injured you?" said his next neighbour, who happened to be the minister of the town Mr. Vincent lived in, and a true friend to him and to every individual of his parish.

"What has she done?" said the old man ; "why, she 's made a blockhead of my only son ;" and then he went on and related the whole story of his trouble to his old friend.

"And what do you mean to do?" said the clergyman.

"Why, the best I can, and that 's just nothing at all ;" answered Mr. Vincent. "But," he continued after a short silence, "there 's one thing I can do, and I guess I shall try it ; and that is, to give my property to some one else, that will not make a bad use of it as he will. At any rate, I can threaten him with it."

"But that would not change his opinions," answered his friend.

"I don't believe he has any opinions of his own ; it 's nothing but his vanity. He always wanted to be dressed in the newest fashion, and to be cock of the walk wherever he was ; and the greater fools his company are, the more like he is

to shine amongst them. He 's a coxcomb, I always knew he was, though he is my son."

"But I have heard you say that your son had a generous spirit."

"And so he has," said the old man.

"Then," rejoined the clergyman, "the fear of losing your money will not influence him; it will only make him angry."

"What would you do?" said Mr. Vincent.

"I would be very gentle and careful in all I did and said. I would try to persuade him to read and study the arguments in favor of Christianity; I would try to convince him of the folly of relinquishing such a blessing upon slight grounds. I would point out to him the cruelty, the sin, of endeavouring to overthrow a system which is the support of human weakness, the protection against human passions, against human selfishness; I would try to address him as our Master addressed the sinful and the erring."

"But you know," said the old man in a softened tone, "I can't preach, I 'm only a rough farmer. I wish that we could any how get him home, and that you, sir, would take Ralph in hand; a real long talk with you might do him good. But he is so headstrong that I fear nothing can stop him; he 's got the bit between his teeth now." The old man was silent and sad the rest of his journey.

CHAPTER VIII.

PERSECUTION STRENGTHENS UNBELIEF.

THE winter was past, and it was now the spring of the year. One evening, as James and Ralph were leaving the printing-office, their employer requested them to stop, as he had a few words to say to them. "I do not wish," said he, "that you should return again to the office. I hear that you are in the habit of attending the meetings of the infidels; I shall employ no men who are professed unbelievers. I am not surprised at finding Ralph among the followers of Fanny Wright; but from you, James Grey, I expected better things. I still hope that you may repent while there is time for repentance." He paid them their wages and bade them good bye.

Ralph made what he considered a very handsome bow, and said in an under tone, "Small sorrow at parting," and turned on his heel with an air of indifference; but James was stupefied with astonishment and anger. He was not willing to be called a follower of Fanny Wright; he was shocked at being thus publicly placed among the ranks of unbelievers. He saw himself suddenly stripped of the means of supporting his family, his character injured with his employer and with all who knew that he had been turned out of the office, and his conduct for the first time in his life questioned. He considered this as altogether unjust. He had, as he thought, done no wrong; it

was true, he had attended some meetings of the self-styled Free Enquirers ; but he was not a confirmed infidel ; he had only determined to hear what they had to say. It is true, his original faith had been shaken, but he had not adopted theirs ; he had found their creed too hard for him to believe, he had at times been shocked and disgusted by the levity and indecency which he occasionally listened to, and at this moment his mind was in that state in which the gentle and practical arguments of his wife in favor of religion were fast producing their natural effect, when this harsh and unjust measure of his employer roused all the angry passions of his nature. James was too proud and too indignant to utter a word in his own defence, and, simply saying, " As you please, sir," he left the office.

Ralph was now in high spirits. " The very thing I wanted," said he ; " now I 'll go and print liberal books, and help on the glorious cause of unchristianizing the world. They want a smart fellow there, and they 'll be glad enough to get me ; and I 'll get you in too, James. Is not this just what I told you ? that Christians never omit an opportunity of persecuting those who do not agree with them ? But stop in, and take tea with me, and we 'll talk it all over, and see what 's to be done." James followed him, hardly knowing what he did, or where he went. How could he go home and tell his wife, that he had just been turned out of employ, and should soon have no means of support ? As he thought of all this, and recurred to his own state of mind and his faithful

services in the office, he was more and more convinced of the injustice of the treatment he had received, and he began to have a sort of sympathy with a persecuted cause. "This is, indeed, persecution," said he; "how shall I support my wife and children? my little Fanny sick too, and wants a doctor every day."

"Never fear," said Ralph; "I will get you as good and a better place in less than two days, where I will promise you that you will meet with no such treatment. They are all your true liberals, they print none but liberal books, they say only liberal things, they are not guilty of illiberal actions. You may read what you please, think what you please, say what you please, and do what you please,—laugh at all ministers, and use the Bible for waste-paper if you like; they never meddle with you. We shall meet with a glorious set of jolly fellows; there's nothing they are afraid of, for there's nobody there to make them afraid. Come, James, give up your nursery-rhymes and Red-riding-hood stories, and be a man. You have no master now, except the Temperance Society; taste my whiskey-punch, and let it now christen you a man."

James's passions were inflamed, his heart swelled with a sense of injustice, his whole soul was troubled; it was with a pang he thought of meeting his wife and children; and but for his sacred promise, he would have swallowed the tempting draught. He pushed it impatiently from him. "No Ralph," he said, "you know that I have given my word that I will not drink spirit. I

should be glad enough now to take any thing that would help me to forget for awhile ; but I cannot make myself a liar."

"But what are you so troubled about?" said Ralph; "I can get you as good a place by to-morrow."

"I do not like to assist in printing such books," said James; "you know that I do not think that you are right, though I am not quite sure that the Christians are so either; but this I know, the Christians print better books than the infidels, and there are some of yours that I should be ashamed to print."

"That's as you please," said Ralph; "you will not however run the risk of being turned out of employ because you see and hear and read and think for yourself. And what if you do not like the books? that's not your affair, you are only the printer; that's to be settled by those who employ you, and who read the books."

"If they teach what is false and immoral," said James, "and I know it, my conscience tells me that I have something to do with it; and if I can get employment elsewhere, I don't want to go there."

"But," said Ralph, "I think the Christians teach what is false, and truth is the only good thing."

"You must find some one wiser than you or I, to say what is truth," said James; "and I begin to think it is safer and happier to be even wrong with the Christians than right with the infidels, — if you are right, which I am not sure of."

“Then,” said Ralph, “you don’t want me to engage a place in the office?”

“Not if I can do better,” said James; if, to be sure, they drive me to it, I can’t see my wife and children starve. But I must go home and tell Alice the bad news.”

Ralph, who always believed in his own success, began to feel sure that he should finally win over James to his side, and hurried to tell Jane what had passed. “Well, Jane,” said he, “we shall soon be married; Mr. — has turned James and me out of the office as two infidels; and I think that James will join me in obtaining a place at the — office, where they print liberal books only, and then we shall have him safe enough; in a few days I shall cry victory.”

“And in a few weeks, or perhaps months,” said Jane, “I shall be at rest, — as you think, Ralph, for ever; — but, as I firmly believe, only from sin and sorrow.”

“Poh, poh,” said Ralph, “don’t talk of death. If you die, I shall make a point of dying too. We free inquirers believe that if a man does not wish to live, and can do no *good* in the world, there is no harm in taking French leave of it; and if you leave me, Jane, I shall not stay behind.”

Poor Jane shuddered at this impious speech. The fever-spot kindled in her cheek; but she was too weak to answer him, even if her heart had not been too full for utterance. “I pray,” she said, after a short silence, “that you may live to repent, and James too. I am disappointed in him.”

“O! come, come, Jane,” said Ralph; “don’t

be cast down ; remember your promise ; let us be married. You may yet convert me."

"Death breaks all promises," said she. "My spirits are laid low for ever, and I can only pray for the mercy of God upon you. I have loved you, Ralph ; had you been a Christian, it would have been hard parting ; but I and all my earthly affections are fast passing away."

After some vain efforts to persuade Jane that she would soon get well, and to make her feel as happy as he pretended to be, with an unusually heavy heart Ralph returned to his lodgings, and sought refuge from his uncomfortable emotions in the flattering friend we have before alluded to. Its fummy inspiration soon composed him to self-complacency and then to sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

HOME CLEARS UP THE SKEPTIC'S DOUBTS.

ALICE met her husband at the door, and taking his hand as he entered, "I wish," said she, "to speak with you before you see Fanny." In her eagerness to communicate what she had to say, Alice did not perceive his disturbed expression of countenance, and she went on to relate what her heart was full of. The doctor, she said, had just gone, and had declared that Fanny was fast growing worse ; that she was no longer a subject for

medicine, and that the only thing that would do her good was a change of air and exercise ; that if she could go to ride in good weather, there was a chance for her life, as she was so young. " Now, James, with a little economy, we can manage to meet this expense, and I wanted you to know what the doctor said beforehand, that you might speak of the thing to Fanny in such a way as to prevent her thinking of the cost of riding ; for you know she is so conscientious and considerate, that it will be impossible to make her go, if she thinks it is more than we can afford." As Alice finished speaking, her husband sunk down in a chair, and covered his face with his hands. " Don't, my dear husband, be disheartened," said Alice ; " her life may yet be spared to us ; the doctor seemed to have much hope from the effect of exercise in the open air. It looks as if it would be a fair day to-morrow, and we will begin then and try the effect of it, and take her out every fair day. When you cannot go with her, I will ; you can hire a gentle horse that I can drive, and let us hope that this will restore her. I feel as if it would."

As she finished speaking poor James actually groaned aloud. " Yes, I will do it, I will go there," said he ; " the sin be upon his head who drives me to it, I will go now and tell Ralph to engage me a place ;" and he was going out of the door, when his wife caught him by the arm and implored him to tell her what he meant. " I mean," said he, " that I have been turned out of the office as an infidel, and that, for aught I know,

I shall be a beggar; and that I shall have no money to pay for a chaise for Fanny, unless I can get in at ——” He stopped, for he could not bear to tell Alice where he thought of going.

The mind of poor Alice for a moment was bewildered. “But, James, you are not an infidel,” she said at last; “and how could you in any way deserve this treatment?”

“No,” said James, “I did not deserve it; I am not an infidel.”

“Thank God for that,” said Alice.

“But if I was, do you think that he has a right to punish me for my opinions?”

“I do not think it would be the best way to make you a Christian,” said his wife; “but let us be Christians, James, and he cannot hurt us.”

“But he does hurt us,” said James. “It will be known everywhere that I was turned out of employ because I was an infidel, and I do not believe that I could get in at any other office but one, and there I must go.”

“What office,” said Alice, “not the ——”

“The office,” said James, “where they print liberal books, as they call them, which means infidel, atheistical, or any other books.”

“And will you go there?” said his wife.

“How can I support you and the children? how can I find money to pay for carrying Fanny to ride? shall I see her die, when I might save her life? No, I will go; it is my duty to go; I don't write the books, or make people read them; I only print them instead of another man. I am as innocent as the press itself; I will go.” And he was hurrying out of the house.

“James! my husband!” cried Alice, “for the love of God stop! Consider of it at least till to-morrow; all Christians are not so bigoted as this man; you will get employ in another office. Fear not for the morrow; the money can be obtained. Try to be calm; but above all things do not let Fanny see your trouble. You will feel better to-morrow. My heart is not cast down; my husband is still a Christian; his faith has not been overcome; only compose yourself. Come in, and see our sweet Fanny; she has been asking for you; she will make you feel better; she seems already one of the kingdom of heaven. Tell her you will take her to ride to-morrow. I know how I can earn the money; do not be anxious about that, my dear James.”

The words of Alice fell like oil upon the troubled spirit of her husband. He silently took her hand, and went with her into the chamber of his sick child. “Father, I am so glad to see you! Come and sit close by me. I think I feel stronger when I am holding your’s or mother’s hand,” and Fanny put her little thin hot hand into her father’s, as he placed himself by her. The touch opened the fountains of tenderness in James’s heart, and the tears ran fast down his cheeks. “Do you know, father,” said Fanny, “that the doctor is not going to give me any more medicine? and that he wants me to ride? I am so glad that I have no more of those terrible doses to take; do you think you can take me to ride, father?”

“Yes, my child, you shall go to-morrow;” and

James felt at the moment as strong a faith as Alice's, that the means could be obtained. All his angry, all his anxious feelings, were lost in one overwhelming fear lest he should have to part with his little Fanny. The child went on. "Father don't you wish that Jesus was on earth now, that he might heal the sick, and don't you think he would make me well? You know he was always kind to children, and perhaps if you or mother were to go and ask him, when you came home you would find me as well as the centurion did his servant when he returned. Or perhaps he would come to me. The other night, when mother was holding me, my pain grew better, and I fell asleep; I dreamed that he took me in his arms, and I waked up and I found mother's arms were close round me. Will you, father, take my Testament, that my teacher at the Sunday-school gave me, and read to me about Jesus healing the sick?" Her father did as she requested him. She listened for a short time; she then grew sleepy, and her mother put her to bed. "Thank you, dear father," she said, as she bade him good night; "I feel better now, and we shall go to ride to-morrow. Shan't we?"

"Yes, my child, we will;" and he kissed her.

Alice's words were verified. Fanny had made her father feel better. He sat silent for a long time, thinking over his intimacy with Ralph, and the arguments he had used to prove his religion false, and the books he had been induced by him to read. He tried to sum up all the evidence that

had been presented to him against the truth of Christianity, and he felt that the simple and confiding faith of this little child, was of more weight than the whole of it. As this thought was passing through his mind, he sat with Fanny's Testament still open in his hands, turning over the leaves almost unconsciously, when this passage arrested his attention, *Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter into it.* "Would I were a little child," he said to himself; "would I were in the place of my dear Fanny! How gladly would I die to save her life; how gladly would I die if I could by that means obtain such a sweet, confiding faith. I have said I was not an infidel, and, thank God, I am not; but my mind has wandered away from its quiet home of faith and love, and wasted its time and powers like a foolish prodigal. It has fed upon husks, and now has only strength enough left to return and throw itself into the arms of a pitying father. And yet, as Ralph says, if our faith is true, what is the harm of hearing objections made to it, and how could I help the effect they produced? How is it that Alice was never puzzled by Ralph?" As he came to this part of his silent soliloquy, he said aloud to his wife, "How is it, Alice, that your faith is so strong and undoubting? You do not, like Jane, think it is dangerous and even wicked to reason upon the subject; you do not shun argument; but, it seems to me, the more you hear and the more you think, the more satisfied you are of the truth of our religion. You are never tormented with doubts, and I can see that

your faith grows stronger and stronger every day. How is it?"

"It is the study of this book," said Alice, putting her hand on the New Testament. "It is the very story itself, which is to me a proof of its truth. It must be true, for any one that could utter a falsehood could not have invented such a story. The character of Jesus is so natural, so all of a piece, so faultless, and yet so real. How came such a story to exist as this book contains, and how came it to be believed for so many years, if it was not true? It is far more difficult to believe it false than to believe it true. And if it is true, then the more we think of it, the more we read it, the more we have it by heart, the more truly shall we believe in it."

"I have not read and studied it enough," said James, "or I have not read it in the right way. I believe it is true, but I do not believe it as you do. With me it is only an acquaintance, but to you, Alice, it is a familiar friend."

"We once began to study it together, you remember, James."

"I do, Alice; and I forsook it for the miserable works of unbelievers. I have too often left the society of my wife and children for the vain and heart-chilling talk of Ralph."

"Let us," said Alice, "begin again to read the Bible together."

"We will," said James; "you and Fanny shall be my teachers." After a few moments James continued; "To tell you the truth, Alice, I think that Ralph keeps up his courage when he talks

of annihilation by means of his favorite whiskey-punch ; and, with the blessing of God, I do believe that it is my promise to abstain from spirituous liquors that has saved me. If I had once begun to drink, my mind would have become muddy, and I cannot tell how far I might have gone. This evening I felt so badly at the thought of being turned out of the office, and of not having any thing for you and the children, that I did really want to drown my cares for a while, till I got over the blow."

"And then," said Alice, "Fanny would not have had her father to read her to sleep, and I should not have had my husband to comfort and bless me."

"Yes," said James, "I should have come with my angry passions inflamed, and my mind stupefied, and even you and Fanny could not have made me feel as I do now. I thank God, that I made that promise to you, Alice ; it is that which has saved me. I had better have let those books alone, and been studying the Bible with you and Fanny. I had a sort of curiosity to know what these infidels had to say, but I have suffered enough from it."

"And why," said Alice, "have you not told me that you were unhappy?"

"Because," said James, "I could not bear that you should know that I doubted for a moment whether our religion was true ; and then, whenever I saw you and the children, I felt better ; it seemed as if I caught some of the strength of your faith. This has been my state of mind for months."

“You have,” said Alice, “for some time been studying all on one side of the question; let us now study the other together. Let the past be forgotten.”

“All,” said James, “except the good lessons we may learn from it; and to-morrow shall be the beginning of a happier life to us.”

CHAPTER X.

WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR OPINIONS.

“I have thought of a way,” said Alice to her husband the next morning, “of doing something to earn some money. I shall take an infant to nurse. I know a lady who would be glad to put her child under my care.”

“But, Alice,” said her husband, “you have already too much to do. I cannot consent to it.” His wife, however, succeeded at last in convincing him that she was equal to the undertaking, and it was settled that she should take the child. James, as was agreed upon the night before, took Fanny to ride. While they were gone, the doctor called in, when Alice mentioned to him her wish to take a child to nurse. He expressed his astonishment at her adding to her labors. She then frankly told him the whole story of the rise and progress of her husband’s skepticism, of the influence which Ralph Vincent had exercised

over his mind, of his dismissal from the office, and of his present unhappy state of mind. Happily for Alice and her husband, the physician was a truly religious man. He was an enlightened Christian; he had studied the subject faithfully; he had himself passed through that perilous season of doubt which many thinking minds have experienced; he was possessed of the arguments against as well as for a faith which he now held with an unwavering assurance; he was a humble, earnest Christian. "If," said he to Alice, "your husband continues to use his powers faithfully upon the subject, only taking a fair view of both sides of the question, you need have no fear for the result. He has hitherto looked at only one side; we must now lead him to take a view of the other;" and he promised Alice to take the first good opportunity of conversing with her husband upon the subject.

In the afternoon Dr. Howell came in to see how his little patient bore her ride. He found her better for it. "O," said the child, "I am sure I shall not complain of being sick if I can go to ride with father. Indeed I think my sick chamber is a happy place. I have more pleasures than a great many well children."

"I find," said the doctor to Alice, "that Mrs. West will be very glad to have you take her little boy to nurse."

"I am sorry enough," said James, "that my wife is obliged to add to her labors at this time, and I think it is very hard that a man should be punished for his opinions. Do you think, sir, that a man should be blamed for what he thinks?"

“I would not punish a man for his opinions,” said the doctor, “for this is no way to reform him; but I think that to a certain extent a man is accountable for his opinions.”

“Why, sir, how can a man help what he thinks upon a subject?”

“Opinions,” said Dr. Howell, “are the result of facts and probabilities which have been presented to our minds upon any given subject. It depends much upon ourselves whether we know all or only a part of the facts and probabilities which relate to a subject, and, consequently, whether our opinions are fairly made up or not. Some people have not the leisure or means to investigate for themselves, and they are easily made dupes by those who, having a little more knowledge than they have, can impose upon their ignorance and credulity. Let those people simply resolve, that, till they are able to judge of both sides of this question involving their eternal interests, they will not relinquish that instinctive belief in a future life which seems to be the inheritance of every man. If a judge is to try a cause which relates only to a paltry sum of money, he is bound to hear the evidence on each side of the question, to take into consideration every circumstance of the case before he decides upon it; and shall a man, upon the most solemn and important question that can be presented to him, one which involves an interest, not only to others but to himself, which makes all other interests comparatively unimportant, think himself at liberty to decide against it without the closest and most extensive

study of the subject? Shall he resign his inheritance and that of all his fellow beings, without the fullest and most satisfactory evidence, that the instrument which gave it to him and them is forged?"

"Surely not," said James; "but he perhaps thinks that his own interest and feelings will secure him from giving too much weight to the arguments against his religion when it is attacked."

"That is not always the case," replied the doctor; "men are apt to demand an unquestioned certainty with regard to their most precious possessions; a certainty which it is unreasonable for our limited vision to demand; and this creates a great sensitiveness to the slightest objections that can be made to their faith. They are like jealous lovers, who, having given up the holy ground of faith, the essential in every noble affection, become the sport of any weak or interested person who wishes to govern their opinions. Thus the pleadings of their own hearts, early impressions, the voice of mankind, all that should be allowed as arguments in favor of what they wish to believe, become grounds of doubt and suspicion, from the very fear lest they should overrate their value."

"I cannot say," replied James, "that the reasonings of the infidels have convinced me; but they have perplexed me. I cannot answer all their objections. I have been disgusted at much that I have heard from them; but I think there is a good deal of sense in Miss Wright's Lectures, though I can-

not be satisfied that she is right. Lately my mind seemed to be coming back to my wife's opinions; but this injustice of my employer is rather in favor of what Ralph says of the Christians, that they will always abuse whatever power they have."

"Is it only Christian men that abuse power?" asked Dr. Howell. "I will set aside the question of its being right or wrong that one should refuse to employ infidels in his office, and grant that it is an abuse of power, and that Christians have often persecuted others; are not men all over the world disposed to abuse power when they possess it? In order to make this argument of any worth, you must prove that the religion they profess leads to an abuse of power."

"But," said James, "he does this in the name of religion, and in defence of it."

"That may only prove that he does not understand the true spirit of his religion, and that he *is not*, not that he *is*, a Christian."

"But how shall we find out what is Christianity? These men, who persecute for opinion, call themselves Christians; and what is their religion worth if it does not influence their conduct?"

"To the first question I answer," said the doctor, "that you must find out for yourself what is Christianity by a careful and humble study of its spirit, as displayed in the life and words of its Founder. And to your second question, I answer, that it is nothing against any principle or any system, that it does not always influence its advocates in the way in which it is intended it should.

Would you object to all systems of education, because no one of them invariably answers the purpose for which it is designed? Would you deny the great principle of truth, because its advocates are sometimes false? Every moral system and every moral principle must, from its very nature, leave men free to choose whether they will act according to its dictates or not."

"I would ask, sir," said James, "how far you hold a man accountable for his opinions?"

"Just so far (and no farther)," answered the doctor, "as he has honestly and faithfully used all the means in his power to form correct views. Has he entered upon the subject with a desire to discover the truth, or (to use Miss Wright's own words) has he sought for truth as a jewel to be *found*, not to be coined; not with a view to find arguments in favor of a previous opinion or on one side of the question, but the simple truth as it is? So far as he comes short of this, he is blameworthy."

"But how few men or women can do this," replied James.

"Remember, I said all the means *in his power*," answered the doctor. "Men who read infidel books can of course read other books; they who study arguments against the Christian religion can, if they choose, study arguments in its favor; and men who go to hear infidel preaching can go and listen to the preaching of Christian ministers."

"There are some men," said James, "who can read no religious book except the Bible, and

they read that with a superstitious feeling which prevents their forming an opinion; and when that is attacked, and they lose their reverence for that, they know not where to go."

"Let them take this very book and read only the four Gospels as they would if they were found in any other book; and then see if they do not think it more difficult to believe that they are false, than that they are true. I would almost say, let them determine not to believe, but yet let them judge fairly of the internal evidence of their truth, and they could hardly escape being convinced. Let me ask if you have ever so read this book? not by separate chapters, but as a whole, as you would examine a document that was questioned; in that state of mind, in which, if you were on a jury where a man was tried for his life, you would read and study any thing relating to the question? Have you examined this whole subject as you would, if upon your decision depended the life or death of a fellow being?"

After a short silence James replied, "I have been very serious in my inquiries, but I must confess I have listened too much to the pleadings against the cause. I thought I was well acquainted with the arguments in its favor."

"If you had been," said the doctor, "you would not, I think, have been so much shaken in your opinions as I fear you have been. You have spoken of Miss Wright's book. I will recommend a book to you which I think you will find more conclusive than hers. In the two volumes of Dr. Channing's works, which I will

lend to you, you will find, I think, more logical argument and more true eloquence in favor of religion, than Miss Wright can boast of against it. The Duddleian Lecture, and the Sermons in the last volume upon the Evidences of Christianity, I would particularly recommend; and when you have read them, I think you will perceive the difference between argument and assertion, between indiscriminate abuse and sober reason, between a ranting vindication of the rights of man and a calm survey of, and a fervent pleading for, his highest interests. I do not impugn Miss Wright's motives; I believe her honest and benevolent. But she dwells on the surface of the subjects she treats. She is consistent with her own principles, and makes what she can see and measure the sum total of her faith, except in those instances where her own nature asserts its rights and, in spite of her, leads her to the infinite. She acknowledges some principles which lie at the foundation of all religion; and she has borrowed, perhaps unawares, what is best in her book from the very system she derides and calumniates. But I fear, that, while I am preaching here, my patients may think I am neglecting the duties of my own profession." And he hurried off.

The effect of this conversation upon James's mind was very beneficial; it helped him to arrange his thoughts, which had been so long in a disturbed and unhappy state. The temporary reserve between him and his wife had vanished entirely; and this seemed to remove a weight from

his mind. When he compared his present state of feeling with what it had been for some months past, he found, although he could not avoid censure from his conscience, that he was still far happier than he had been through this cheerless period. His anger towards his employer had ceased; he felt the spirit of opposition to Christianity, which Ralph had infused into his mind, die away as he drew nearer to his wife and children. "This surely," he said to himself, "is real; here is no need of argument; this is the embodied spirit of religion. Here will I study faithfully the word of God, imploring his help and his guidance." Alice was by his side watching the expression of his countenance. She seemed to know what was in his heart without his speaking. They fell upon their knees together, and James poured forth in the unstudied language of genuine prayer, the fervent desire of his soul for a more realizing sense of the existence and presence of the Great Being, whom he addressed, — a clearer knowledge of his nature and moral character, — and a deeper and holier love towards him, than he had ever before known. He prayed for his guidance in the study of his holy word, and for that humble and teachable state of mind, which should fit him for the reception of truth, and which should one day be rewarded by his being received as the true and faithful disciple of his Son Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THINGS UNSEEN ARE REAL.

THEY who know not the fulness and depth of the stream of love which is opened in a mother's heart at the birth of her own children, may perhaps think that Alice received the infant she was to nurse, only as an added care, which hard necessity obliged her to submit to. On the contrary, in the morning when the unconscious stranger was brought to her, she pressed it to her bosom, and said, with a look of the tenderest pity, "Poor little thing, your own mother's heart aches at parting with you, and surely I will be as a mother to you;" and from this moment the arms of her love never quitted her little charge. Let us for a moment contemplate the scene which their humble abode now presented. Their darling child, their first-born, their fairest and loveliest, was withering and fading like a blighted flower. The father of the family was stripped of his means of support, his character was questioned, his mind injured, his spirit cast down. His excellent wife, at the time when the cares of the nursing mother were according to the law of nature terminating, was obliged to resume them and draw anew upon the fountains of her life for a being not, like her own child, a part of herself. And was not Alice troubled and disheartened? No; her eye beamed bright and her step was free and elastic, as when in her childhood she chased butterflies in her fa-

ther's field. Was it, that she did not think, that she did not feel? O no; it was, that she saw beyond this visible scene; a heavenly hope, a holy love, was in her heart. She trusted that her husband's soul was returning from the gloomy regions of unbelief to the calm sunshine of his Christian home; she hoped that her dear Fanny would recover, and be the comfort and stay of her declining years. With this hope she could "outwatch the stars," and not faint; she could labor all day, and not complain; for a boundless, unutterable love was her support, and inspired her with an inexhaustible strength. When some friend, who did not look into her soul and who wondered at her cheerfulness, asked her if she was prepared to part with her precious Fanny, she would answer them, "I think the best preparation for the future, whether it be joy or sorrow, is the right performance of the duties of the present. I hope still for the life of my child; but, if God wills it otherwise, I trust that he will give me the strength I shall need for my trial."

The evening of the day after Doctor Howell's conversation with James, he brought him the Sermons he had promised him. While he was pointing out the discourses which he wished him to read first, and making some remarks upon them, Ralph came in. He had not seen James since the evening they were dismissed from the printing-office; and he began to apprehend that he should lose his convert after all. "I fear," said he, in rather a supercilious tone, and casting his eye on the book, "you are so engaged that I should be an intruder."

“Not at all,” said James; “I should like that you should hear what Doctor Howell thinks upon some of your opinions.”

“O, I am used to having my opinions abused,” said Ralph. “I suppose I know all that the doctor has to say.” And he seated himself and stretched out his legs and folded his arms, as if he was prepared for any thing that might be said.

“I should never abuse opinions, unless I wished to confirm them,” said the doctor.

“It may be,” said Ralph, “that you agree with me; gentlemen of your profession are more disposed to free inquiry than those of other professions. You notice facts, and judge by your senses, the only means by which we actually *know* any thing.”

“How do you come to that conclusion?” asked the doctor.

“By the use of my own reason.”

“Can you tell me the form, color, or taste of your reason?” said the doctor.

“It is not necessary that I should,” answered Ralph. “I know that I have reason, and that is enough.”

“You see,” said Doctor Howell, “that you have already acknowledged the existence of something that is not the object of your senses; and you cannot pursue this argument without referring to faculties and existences that are not, and cannot be, proved by the senses.”

Ralph thought a minute, and then said, “I think that was not a fair question. We have a *consciousness* by which we know things with certainty.”

“And yet Miss Wright, your great authority, says that all knowledge is derived from positive sensation. So my question, according to her, was a fair one; and I have a right to ask you, what is the shape and color of a thought. You must then acknowledge, that there do exist things not cognizable by the senses; or tell me how reason, hope, fear, and all moral and intellectual qualities look; or else you must deny their existence.”

“For argument’s sake,” answered Ralph, “I will agree to this; but you cannot deny that our knowledge of these faculties is, as Miss Wright says, derived from accumulated sensation.”

“If you mean, that if a person could neither see, hear, taste, smell, nor feel, he would know *nothing*, you assert what you cannot prove. If such a being did exist, you could only be sure that he would not have the knowledge that the senses alone can teach; it would not follow that he was possessed of no knowledge, and no consciousness, not derived from the senses, and which, not having the use of the senses, he could not communicate; just as you could not be sure that a man was not a painter, who had no materials and no instruments for painting. The fact that all our knowledge begins with the senses, is no proof that we have not and cannot have any other. The question at issue is, whether we have not, in fact, a knowledge of, and a belief in, many things which are not objects of the senses.”

Ralph could not deny this, and the doctor proceeded. “I think then, that the argument against

religion, that we can believe only what is the object of our senses, and that as we cannot see God we cannot believe in him, must be given up."

"But," said Ralph, "we have a consciousness of truth, of virtue, of love, and of courage; we have a consciousness of our reason; and so we know that these things exist."

"And if," replied the doctor, "my consciousness of the existence of visible things and invisible truths leads me to the conviction of the existence of a Creator, a Father of our spirits, as well as Former of our bodies, why is not my ground as tenable as yours? My observation of visible things, as far as I can understand them, teaches me that there is no effect without an adequate cause; this leads me to believe in a Great First Cause. The invisible truths, of which I have a consciousness, and which you acknowledge as existing, lead me to the belief of the existence of other spiritual realities. You must either deny the existence of any thing that is not the object of the senses, or you must acknowledge the reasonableness of my faith."

"Why, here is a difference, and this is the ground that we hold; we believe as far as facts lead us, and no farther. We know that there is such a thing as truth, virtue, love, hope, &c. We know that certain things take place in the visible world; we have nothing to do with mysteries."

"You know," answered the doctor, "a certain number of facts, and you believe continually in mysteries."

"Believe in mysteries! that I don't."

“ Yes, certainly you do. You would put a little seed not larger than the end of your finger into the ground, and you would believe that it would in time become an immense tree under which we all might find shelter ; and yet this is a mystery. You said at the beginning of our conversation, that gentlemen of our profession are more inclined than others to your views. It may be so ; but I must be allowed to say, that, if this is true, it proves our vanity and shortsightedness. It is not the tendency of the profession itself. The effect upon my own mind of every step, that I have gained in a knowledge of the structure and laws of the human frame, has been to teach me, that there is an inexplicable, mysterious power that moves the whole machine. The birth of every child is a holy mystery, a miracle to me. The anatomist knows a few more facts, and he, therefore, better than an ignorant man, knows that there is a mysterious agency that must have so beautifully and wonderfully ordered and harmonized the exquisite machine of the human body. It appears to me, that the manifestations of design in a single organ might convert the most stubborn atheist.”

“ I suppose,” said Ralph, “ that there must be some cause or other for every thing ; but what that cause is, I know not ; whether it is a Being that cares for the work it has produced, I know not.”

“ It is enough for my argument,” said the doctor, “ that you feel compelled to acknowledge that there must be a Creative Power.”

“But I assert,” said Ralph, “that as we do not, and cannot *know* any thing about this Power, we have nothing to do with it. The attempts that men have made in all times to understand what this power is, and the arrogance with which all have pretended that they alone held the truth, have been the cause of more than half the sin and misery in the world. Among all men you find some object of worship ; some worship stocks and stones ; some the sun, moon, and stars ; some the spirits of rivers, or of the winds, or of the woods ; and all think their worship the true one, just as much as the Christians do theirs.”

“You have now acknowledged a very important fact in favor of the reality of the ground of religion,” said the doctor.

“How ?” said Ralph.

“If all men of all times have worshipped something invisible (for all idols are representatives of an invisible power), it is a strong argument in favor of the reality of spiritual existences. It is a very powerful argument in favor of the existence of unseen things, that among all men, from those in the most savage state to the most refined, there has been a belief in invisible things and a future life.”

“All priestcraft !” said Ralph ; “the priests have always found it for their interest that the people should believe in these things ; for, of course, they, as the expounders of the mysteries of the faith, must possess great power, and that is what all men court.”

“But,” replied the doctor, “on what could

they ground this power, but the readiness of men to believe in the invisible? and why is this readiness universal? and how comes it, if this is a contrivance only of priests, that the same trick should be played all over the world? Remember, I am not arguing now for the truth of any particular form of faith; but to prove the fact, that the religious sentiment is natural to man, and that the whole history of man attests it. The fact, that there have always been men who have abused this to their own purposes, is no argument against its existence; it only shows that these men understood what was in human nature, and knew how to turn it to their own purposes."

"O, I grant," said Ralph, "that men are always inclined to be superstitious; they like ghost stories; but they may easily find what the ghosts are made of, if they join the free inquirers."

"If free inquiry," answered the doctor, "means fair and full and faithful inquiry, they would find that all superstition is grounded upon an original principle in the nature of man, which leads him to reach after the infinite, to believe in the invisible, and to hold this part of his nature, his own spiritual being, as more real and incontestable, than what his weak and uncertain senses can teach him. Faithful inquiry would convince him, that, although superstition is as childish as the belief which makes an infant think its mother can give it the moon, it yet has in it the germ of a living faith, which after-life and its opening faculties shall not deceive."

"Well," said Ralph, rather impatiently, "I

came to ask you, James, if you were disposed to take a place in our office, for I have entered the office of the 'Free Enquirer,' and I think I can get you a good place if you are disposed to take it."

"No," said James; "I have resolved not to enter into their employ."

Ralph said good night, rather abruptly, and left them.

"The weather is so fine," said the doctor, "that I prefer when visiting my patients to walk rather than ride; my horse is therefore at your service, and to-morrow I shall send him; and if he should do you more good, my little Fanny, than his master has done, why, I will not promise that I shall not be jealous of him." He bade them good night, and left them with the feeling in their hearts, that he was to them a physician to their souls as truly as to their bodies.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CREDULITY OF UNBELIEF.

JANE loved her cousin Alice very tenderly, and her disinterested nature had sincerely rejoiced in the thought that she was possessed of a happiness which in her own case was not to be hoped for. She had believed that the love of James and Alice was founded upon the basis of a common faith.

She knew that Ralph was making every effort to undermine James's religious belief; but, unmoved as she was in her own mind by all his arguments, she had never really believed that he would succeed with James. She well knew the character of Ralph, and his determination that every thing should bend to his wishes; and that this made him often give a false coloring to facts. She doubted the accuracy of the account he had given her of the state of James's views. She accordingly went to see Alice, and inquire into the affair for herself. Alice gave her a simple and full account of the causes of her husband's dismissal from the printing-office, of his feelings and opinions, and of the present state of his mind. "You know, Jane, that James has ever been one of those who must have proof of every thing. Like Thomas, he must see the print of the nails. His heart is already a believer; and our good doctor is trying to convince him, that a right use of his reason will afford him satisfactory evidence of the truth of our religion. He has brought him Dr. Channing's Sermons on the Evidences, and he has recommended to him to make a careful and faithful study of the history of Jesus as given by the Evangelists. Through these means I hope, and feel assured, that my husband's faith will yet be made whole. And yesterday, Jane, after he had come home from taking our little Fanny to ride, I saw him take the Bible and go into a room by himself. Once or twice, as I went in and out for something, I just caught the expression of his countenance, and he appeared like a man that was read-

ing a story that he had never read before. Any one might have thought, as they looked at his face, that life or death depended upon the truth of what he was reading."

"And surely," said Jane, "it is life or death that depends upon the truth of this story. O! could not Dr. Howell convert Ralph?"

"They held a long argument last evening," replied Alice, "and I thought that the doctor succeeded in making some impression upon him. He obliged him to acknowledge one or two truths that he began with denying."

"O! thank Heaven," said Jane.

"I expect the doctor again this evening," continued Alice. "I wish it might so happen that Ralph would fall in."

"I shall see him in the course of the day," said Jane eagerly, "and I will ask him to come here with me." She then bade good morning to her cousin and returned home.

"Mother," said little Fanny, who entered soon after, "I did not quite understand all that was said last evening as I was lying down in the bedroom; but it appeared to me that Doctor Howell was trying to prove that there is a God."

"It is true, my child; he was."

"Is there any one," said Fanny, "who does not believe in God?"

"Yes, my child."

"Then I am sure they cannot think; why, I feel as if I should have known it, even if you, mother, had not told me. While you were talking, I was looking up at the moon; and I was

thinking that it could not hang up there so beautifully all by itself; that there must be, as you have told me there was, some great and good Power who held it there. There was another reason that came into my mind; it is this happy feeling I have in my sick room. Why, mother, it does not seem a dull place at all to me. Sometimes, when my body is in pain, and I can hardly move myself, I feel very happy. Even when you are away from me, I do not feel alone; and I am sure it must be, that God is with me then, and makes my heart so happy and strong."

Jane came in the evening, accompanied by Ralph. He said as he entered, "I hope I shall see that preaching doctor again; for I think he will not get the better of me in the argument to-night. I suppose you hope, Jane, that he will; I wish you would give up your superstition and listen to reason." With Ralph, this meant "listen to me." As soon as Dr. Howell entered, Ralph began; "As there are so many of the free inquirers, doctor, who yet believe in a First Cause, I will relinquish that argument to you; but I think you will have to give up the argument in favor of revealed religion." This he said with an air of great confidence, and as if he was sure of victory.

Dr. Howell answered very quietly, "I should be glad to hear your arguments; and if I can find no answer to them, I will give up and acknowledge I am conquered, and hope that some more worthy champion may take up the cause."

"In the first place," said Ralph, "we deny the truth of the miracles. We think, with Mr. Hume,

that it is a much more probable thing that a story should be invented, than that the laws of nature should be violated. There may have been such a man as Jesus, but all the wonderful stories about him are the inventions of his followers."

"Have you ever read Dr. Channing's remarks, in his Duddleian Lecture, upon Hume's argument? or any other treatise in defence of the miracles?"

"No," said Ralph.

"A *free inquirer* should read both sides, or he has hardly a right to his name. If you had read only those remarks, you would have learned that this argument of Hume proves too much. We have the book here, and we will refer to the very words. 'This argument of Hume's,' says the writer, 'proves too much, and therefore proves nothing. It proves too much; for if I am to reject the strongest testimony to miracles, because testimony has often deceived me, whilst nature's order has never been found to fail, then I ought to reject a miracle, even if I should see it with my own eyes, and if all my senses should attest it, for all my senses have sometimes given false reports, whilst nature has never gone astray; and, therefore, be the circumstances ever so decisive or inconsistent with deception, still I must not believe what I see, and hear, and touch, what my senses, exercised according to my most deliberate judgment, declare to be true. All this the argument requires; and it proves too much, for disbelief in the case supposed is out of our power, and is instinctively pronounced absurd; and, what is more, it would subvert that very order of nature on which the argu-

ment rests; for this order of nature is learned only by the exercise of my senses and judgment, and if these fail me, in the most unexceptionable circumstances, then their testimony to nature is of little worth.'

"In the preceding paragraph, Dr. Channing adduces another argument, which, to a believer in the existence of God, I should think would have great weight. He says; 'If there is a Being higher than nature, the origin of all its powers and motions, and whose character falls under our notice and experience as truly as the creation, then there is an additional standard, to which facts and statements are to be referred: and works, which violate nature's order, will still be credible, if they agree with the known properties and attributes of its author; because, for such works we can assign an adequate cause and sufficient reasons, and these are the qualities and conditions on which credibility depends.'"

"This argument is not much to me," said Ralph; "all these things I consider as dreams."

"I cannot say so," said James; "my reason teaches me that there is a God, a Creator; and I cannot help attaching certain attributes to him. I cannot help thinking, that, if there is a God, he must have a regard for the beings he has created, that he must be just and good."

"And if," said the doctor, "there is a Creator, and he is just and merciful, what is there strange or difficult in believing that he may interrupt the order of nature, which he himself has established for a beneficent purpose, when a more beneficent pur-

pose is answered by its interruption than by its continuance? We see a peculiar call for this exertion of his power, when men, from the very perfection of his works, are induced to stop short of the mighty hand that has set every thing in order, and worship the result instead of the cause."

"But we worship nothing," said Ralph.

"I ask pardon; I must deny that. Miss Wright and other infidel writers recognise and deify nature, the law of nature, the order of things, as if it were a Supreme Power. There is only this difference; they ascribe all things, visible and invisible, to an unintelligent, unconscious something, a sort of blind, irresistible chance, a stern, unmeaning fate; while the Christian ascribes law and order, the effects of intelligence, to an intelligent cause; and consequently sees, in the laws of nature and the order of things, the evidences of an omnipotent intelligence, the works and the government of the God of nature; in short, the infidel believes in an omnipotent ignorance, and the Christian in an omnipotent wisdom."

"But," said Ralph, "what has this to do with the question of miracles?"

"Why, much; all that a Christian demands;" answered the doctor. "If we acknowledge a Power superior to nature, then what objection is there to believing in miracles? Admit design, and power to accomplish design, and then we have but two questions to ask; What was the design of miracles, and, Is there sufficient historical evidence that they were actually performed?"

“ Ah, there 's the rub,” said Ralph ; “ how can you prove the facts ? ”

“ It is impossible to do justice to such an argument in a small compass,” said Dr. Howell ; “ but I will ask you a few questions. Do you doubt whether such a man as Jesus Christ really lived ? ”

“ Why, I suppose a man so called did live.”

“ That such a man lived, and called himself the Messiah, and was crucified by Pontius Pilate, is a matter of history, and proved by the writings of those who were enemies of his religion. The next question is, What was his character and his conduct ? What did he teach ? What, in short, was his history ? Now we find four different accounts of the life of Jesus, written near enough to the time when he lived to have made it possible to detect and expose any false statements they might contain. They all agree in describing him as a model of the most perfect, of an unheard-of excellence ; while he declared himself to the Jews as the Messiah, still disdaining to avail himself of their selfish prejudices and narrow preconceptions of his character and mission. He stands all alone in unapproachable purity ; instructing those who despised him ; reproving the wicked though in power ; comforting and blessing the poor, the afflicted, the forsaken ; healing the sick, raising the dead, declaring to all a life to come, a day of future rewards and punishments. We see him foregoing all the comforts, all the pleasures of this world ; devoting every moment of his existence to the promotion of the highest

interests of men, and finally laying down his life for them, by voluntarily submitting to an ignominious death to prove the truth of his mission and bring them to God. We hear of him again, rising from the tomb, and declaring to his disciples, that he was going to his Father and their Father, and that they and all his true disciples should follow him.

“This story is told by four different men, agreeing in all essentials, and yet with such differences in each narrative as might naturally happen, which on this account increase the credibility of the whole, as they remove all suspicion of any preconcerted plan. If this story be true, we must believe in all that it teaches. If it be false, we have to believe that the most sublime, the only, model of perfect excellence, ever held up to the admiration of mankind, was drawn by impostors; that the most exalted conception of moral truth, ever presented to man, was given by deceivers; who contrived this fiction and devoted themselves to the defence of it, not with any hope of worldly advantage, but with the certainty of persecution and the prospect of death for their reward. Surely if the infidels can believe this, they have a capacity of belief, a blind credulity, which exceeds that of the greatest enthusiast in religion ever known, nay, even of the wildest fanatics.”

Ralph fidgeted about, and strange to say, was not prepared with an answer. He had never read, he had never heard, any calm argument in defence of Christianity; all his learning, all his

skill, had been exercised in finding arguments against it. He was prepared for abuse, for persecution, for any thing but reason. Ralph's self-conceit, which had eaten up all the better qualities of his nature, was most sorely fretted by being worsted in an argument in the presence of Jane, whom he yet hoped to convert to his own views, and of James, who had never been able to foil him in debate. Anger at last helped him to words. "It's not worth while," said he, "to talk about these things with any one who can swallow down all the marvellous stories in the Bible. I can only say, like the poor negro, 'I won't believe any of them.'"

"Efforts at wit," said the doctor coolly, "are very common and very easy upon religious subjects; but when Lord Bacon declared, 'that he would rather believe all the fables of the Talmud and the Koran, than that this universal frame is without a mind,' he by his single name left a shield broad enough to defend any coward who might be frightened by the shafts of real wit, or the sticks and stones that the ill-furnished hands of the ignorant may cast at him on account of his belief."

Ralph perceived that he had merely offended the doctor's taste; and he felt somewhat as the man does, who is convicted of a vulgarism or an impropriety in the presence of one of pure and refined manners and feelings. He made another effort at getting upon tenable ground. "Look, sir," he said, with an oratorical air, "look at the whole history of the clergy, or rather at the

bloody story of priestcraft. Let the gloomy walls of the Inquisition reveal their frightful secrets. In whose name have all these enormities been committed?"

"In the hallowed name of him," answered the doctor, "whose whole life and every word denied and rebuked such deeds. In the name of the peaceful Jesus, who taught that all men are brethren, blood has been shed like rain; in the name of him, who denied himself, who refused all the distinctions of the world, who preached against earthly glory, who washed his disciples' feet, who declared that he came to minister to others; — in his meek and holy name, power has been usurped, the dearest rights of men have been trampled upon, wealth has been unjustly accumulated and expended upon lawless passions and sinful pleasures, while the poor, whom he came to save, have starved in the sight of the feast that they might not approach. Yes, these things, and worse than these, — cruelties not to be named, have been committed by men who have dared to call themselves Christians. I know all this well."

"How then," said Ralph, "can you vindicate such a system?"

"Because I find," answered the doctor, "that for all these things the life and the teachings of Jesus, not only furnish no apology, but are in direct contradiction to them; and because I find further, that, in opposition to these traitors to the holy cause of Jesus, there is an innumerable army of those who have taken up the cross and followed their Master's steps, — who have relin-

quished for his sake all that life has to give, — who have suffered tortures without uttering a complaint, — who have died, rejoicing that they died for his religion. More than this, I see millions humanized by faith in him. I see his ministers all over the world, carrying comfort to the broken-hearted, giving instruction to the ignorant, strength to the weak, and joy to the desponding. I see them calling the thoughtless to consider, the mistaken and erring to learn wisdom, the sinful to repent. I see both these pictures; both are equally true. I have, however, a firm faith, that truth will yet conquer error; that the religion of Jesus, as it is in its original purity, will prevail. This is the system I defend, because I am convinced it is the truth.”

“It seems to me pretty plain,” said Ralph, “that a system which produces such very opposite effects must have something wrong in it; that it cannot, as you pretend, come from Heaven.”

“I come to no such result,” said the doctor; “when I am satisfied, as I am from a faithful study of the history of Jesus Christ, that no evil effect can fairly be attributed to it, that his religion sanctions no principle and no action that is not in strict conformity with the law of reason and the law of love, I see, in all the evil that has been done in his name, only a proof of the tendency of mankind to indulge their own selfish passions; and their power to do this necessarily belongs to that moral freedom which is essential to virtue. Men cannot be constrained to be good

or religious ; it involves a contradiction in terms ; goodness must be their free choice, and the effect of the highest and best use of their own powers."

"Well," said Ralph, "doctors will disagree. I can't say I'm satisfied, but it is too late to bring up any more arguments to-night."

"There is," said Doctor Howell, "one subject which I wish to discuss with you ; upon which, if you are a true disciple of Miss Wright, we essentially agree, and respecting which we may therefore end more to your satisfaction. It is the capacity of man for improvement, which she recognises as his distinguishing characteristic. I shall visit my little patient to-morrow evening, and should like to talk further with you then, if it is agreeable to you."

Ralph bowed, and giving his arm to Jane with rather a dissatisfied look, said, "Good night ;" and the little party broke up.

CHAPTER XIII.

RELIGION IS INFINITE PROGRESS.

"IF it had not been for affronting the doctor," said Ralph, as soon as he was fairly in the street, "I would not have agreed to endure another long, tedious prosing, such as we have had this evening."

"It has not been tedious to me," answered Jane.

“O, you like inquiry meetings, prayer meetings, and all other long-faced meetings; but to me they are very tiresome, when I am unlucky enough to get into one. If you had not been in the room, I don't think I could have held out so long.”

“I am sorry,” said Jane, “that you had no better support for your patience. You intend to go to-morrow evening, I hope.”

“Yes, I suppose I must.”

Jane parted from Ralph with a heavy heart. “Where now is my hope?” she said. “It should be, it must be, O God, grant it may henceforward be, only in Thee.”

According to his promise, Ralph accompanied Jane the next evening to her cousin's. They found the doctor by the bedside of little Fanny, trying to soothe and charm away, by his pleasant stories and lively conversation, some of the moments of pain that his professional skill failed to relieve. “O,” said Fanny as Ralph and Jane entered, “you are going to talk about religion again, I suppose. Do, mother, have the door wide open, so that I may hear all that is said; I cannot understand all, but some of it I can; and I can bear my pain better while I am hearing people talk of interesting things.”

“You remarked,” said Ralph, as he resumed his conversation with Doctor Howell, “that you agree with Miss Wright in the belief of man's capacity for improvement. It appears to me that this truth, acknowledged and acted upon; may and will produce all the good results, which reli-

gion could effect; while it has none of the evils belonging to it which every religious creed has."

"I cannot agree with you," said the doctor, "that the principle of man's capacity for improvement leads to as good results without as with religion. I think it naturally, and almost necessarily, leads to religion. Without the idea of an indefinite, an infinite progress, the principle of improvement wants its vital support, and will hardly retain its power over us even in our present short existence. If what little of wisdom and excellence a man can gain in this world is to die with him, indolence or a mistaken calculation of his own happiness will slacken or perhaps entirely check his efforts. But if he believes that every attainment he makes in knowledge and virtue is only an advancing step in an endless course of improvement, if he feels assured that no effort, not the smallest, is lost, he has a continual and ever-increasing stimulus to exertion."

"If," said Ralph, "he has an enlarged benevolence, he will find a sufficient motive for effort in his desire to improve the happiness of the whole human family. He himself, to be sure, has the advantage of whatever good he arrives at, only for a short time; but he bequeathes it to his race, and that is motive enough to a generous mind."

"Perhaps," said the doctor, "to a truly noble mind this may be motive enough for very great exertion; but no one can labor with the same earnestness of soul for a finite, as for an infinite good; and let the *race* be as happy as it may, still no *individual* can enjoy in this life any but a

dying, unsatisfying happiness, if he is not a believer in immortality. All the heathen nations, in the midst of their darkest and wildest superstitions, still had a belief in a future life; and this of itself is a strong argument in favor of its existence."

"But you must," replied Ralph, "acknowledge, that there is greater magnanimity in the virtue that looks for no reward, or for a very transient one, than in that which anticipates for every sacrifice some future compensation."

"No man," said the doctor, "labors and suffers without a motive; he must either gratify his own feelings at the time, or be assured of future enjoyment, or he will not act at all. The question is, what motive will lead to the greatest exertion, or rather, what happiness is worthy of the greatest effort. Now the greatest effort is the devotion, not only of a man's time, his health, his powers, but even his of life to his duty. Now, if this life is all, if there is to each individual no greater good than life itself, and if there is no future existence, surely he would be a fool to sacrifice his life for any thing; for this sacrifice can bring him no higher good than the one he resigns, and he would act without a motive, and this, we know, no man in his senses does; therefore a disbeliever in a future life wants the motive to the greatest exertion, the stimulus to the highest virtue."

Ralph was silent; and the doctor continued. "Look into domestic life, look at every affection, look at every virtue, unconnected with a future

state ; it wants elevation, it wants security. The mother, who sees in the first openings of the mind of her child the germs and promise of an immortal nature, must have a more enlarged, a more unfailing love for it, than that mother who looks upon it only as a little intelligent animal, whose extent of progress and whose sum of happiness she can easily reckon. Nature, at least the nature of man, is so unlimited, that even he who does not believe in immortality, in fact loves his child with an immortal love ; but this is only one of those noble inconsistencies which betray the existence of the soul that he denies. Reason would teach such people to measure their affection by the nature of what they love. It is so with all the other affections ; they would become narrow and selfish as soon as the objects on which they were fixed were felt to be finite. It is so with every virtue ; whence would spring its undying power, but from the belief that this life is only the school-time of existence, and that there is an unbounded futurity depending upon the manner in which we improve its opportunities and submit to its discipline ? whence its unfaltering trust, its fearless heroism, but from the belief that death is not an extinction of life, but a new birth, an entrance upon a more perfect, a more glorious being ? It is this hope, that enables men to live and suffer with cheerfulness, or to die with courage and calmness."

"It may be," said Ralph, "that a belief in a future life has often a good effect upon the minds of men ; but this does not prove it to be well found-

ed. The expediency of religion, its safety, and its utility are often urged; but these are merely and selfish reasons, and do not form a substantial argument for its truth."

"That is true," answered the doctor, "but they surely come in confirmation of other arguments. If a belief in a future life gives elevation and constancy to man's highest and purest affections; if it animates and ennobles every virtue; if it opens to him the widest sphere of thought and intellectual energy; if it conquers the fear of death;—all these facts furnish strong presumptive evidence in favor of its truth."

"I do not," said Ralph, "see the use of all these speculations and reasonings; they are employed for every and for any purpose, and people always make out to prove the thing they wish, be it what it may. My senses enable me to ascertain certain facts, and so far I *know*, and no farther; all beyond these facts is dreaming, nothing else."

"I insist upon it," replied the doctor, "that you yourself prove by that very remark, that you do believe many things that you cannot thus prove. You say, that all that is not fact is a dream; you cannot call that a fact, but a deduction simply of your reason from facts. Now I acknowledge the value of these facts as fully as you do, but my observation of facts brings me to a different conclusion; and I might, I think, call your conclusion a dream, with at least as good reason, as you can mine."

"How can you prove that?" said Ralph.

"Perhaps I cannot prove it; but I may show it

to be most probable. We will, if you please, return to our first argument; the capacity of man for improvement. Now it is a fact that all other animals are born without this capacity, or they possess it, if at all, in a very inferior degree, and to a limited extent. The beaver makes his house, and the bee his cell, exactly as all other beavers and bees have done before them; there is no progress in their history, all beavers and bees are alike. But there is nothing in the nature of man that indicates a law that says, Thus far shalt thou go and no farther. Men are nowhere alike; they exhibit every degree of moral and intellectual attainment, from the lowest to the highest; or rather they show, that in their capacity for improvement there is no highest or lowest, but something indefinite, something infinite. These are facts, undeniable facts, relating to the nature of man; from hence the Christian philosopher draws the conclusion, that his nature, his destiny, is infinite. Again, the animal necessarily attains to the perfection of its nature, whereas the progress of a human being depends upon his own free effort. This capacity of infinite improvement and free agency, this free power of striving after infinite perfection, is the characteristic endowment of man, which raises him above animal nature to the kingdom of spirits. The universal law of progression, which in the inferior creation assigns to every species of beings a certain degree of perfection which they must attain and cannot surpass, this same divine law applies also to man; not as a necessary impulse, but as a moral pre-

cept; and not only as a general regulation for the whole race, but as an injunction adapted to the capacity and wants of each individual. The Creator has made it to depend on the free will of each human being, to rise in endless perfection by virtue, or to sink by passion even below the brutes. The destination of man for free and infinite improvement is manifest in all his mental endowments; in his innate longing after a state of perfection and happiness unattainable in this life; in his intellect which is capable of unlimited enlargement; in the power of his affections to ascend in devotion to the Father of spirits; and in his free will, which enables him to rise above every earthly condition and desire, and above every degree of excellence he has hitherto attained. Thus you perceive, that the fact of man's capacity for improvement leads my reason to a belief in the religious principle, which essentially consists in his capacity and destination for an infinite progress beyond this life."

"Ah," said Ralph, "when you get into that undiscovered country, we part company. These are happy dreams, but I am no dreamer."

"And yet," said the doctor, "you acknowledge man's capacity for indefinite improvement, and so does Miss Wright. How then can you limit it to this life? How can you avoid seeing in it the pledge and preparation for an immortal life? In all other created beings, you find an adaptation of their capacities and desires to the purposes and end of their existence; why should

we not believe that there is an equal perfection in the nature of man? And surely, if death is the extinction of life, he of all beings is the most imperfect, the most miserable. Well may he call death the king of terrors, who does not believe in a future life."

"Cowards may," said Ralph; "but to a brave man, who fears not the short pain he must endure, it is merely a quiet sleep at the end of a long day. He who has nothing to hope, has nothing to fear."

"True courage," answered the doctor, "is an intelligent principle, not a blind impulse. And the unbeliever in a future life, who calmly resigns the present which is the greatest good he acknowledges, bears witness unawares to the existence of the immortal principle within him, which alone could be capable of such a sacrifice."

"Now you are in the land of spirits again," said Ralph; "but it is time to wish pleasant dreams to all. I can dream only when I am asleep;" and with this smart saying, as he considered it, he departed with Jane.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEPARATION.

THE discussions that Jane had listened to between Ralph and the doctor had convinced

her of the perfect hopelessness of any change in his views. She had long felt persuaded that it was right and best for her to be separated from him entirely. She said nothing to him on the subject during her walk home, as she wished to avoid a scene that she felt herself unequal to bear. Her own mind had been strengthened and enlightened by what she had heard, and she felt, what she had never before experienced, a courage to do in this case what she was satisfied it was right should be done. The thought of the pain it would give Ralph softened her feelings towards him; and when she broke the silence that she had maintained till they had reached her door, by bidding him good night, it was in a tone of unusual tenderness.

“Why, dear Jane,” said Ralph, “that ‘Good night’ should mean ‘Walk in’;” and he kept her hand and was about entering.

“No, Ralph; I am fatigued, I cannot ask you to walk in.”

Ralph seemed resolved to enter. “You must not come in,” she said; “good night, Ralph! we must part now;” and she hurried into the house.

Ralph could hardly tell the reason, but he felt greatly disturbed. “Why,” said he to himself, “Jane spoke to me as if she really loved me; and yet, if she does, how is it that she will not marry me? It is strange that she can make such a point of my believing as she does. How kindly, how tenderly, and yet how sorrowfully she said ‘Good night.’ It’s a pity I could not be turned into a

Christian, to please her and my father. I wish I was like Jane; I am not good enough for her, that's true. Heigh ho! that preaching doctor has made me nervous; -I must take something to screw me up again. Ralph took his usual *night-cap* as he called it, and awoke in the morning the same vain and conceited being as ever.

The next time Ralph called to see Jane, he was told that she was gone into the country, and had left for him a letter.

“ Dear Ralph,

“ You are indeed dear to me, too dear, you well know it; we have loved each other from our childhood, but we must part; a higher duty, a holier love than any mortal should inspire, commands it. I must not speak of my rebellious heart; He who has made it so tender, will, I trust, forgive its weakness, and accept the sacrifice I now make, and give me the strength I so much need. I never could be happy as your wife; the bond between us would want the sanction of Him who is the source of all true affection; you could not unite with me in praying for his blessing, for you do not believe in him. In my highest duty, in my purest happiness, I should be separated from my husband. I feel assured that my best affections must be immortal; you believe only in time, and can love me only with a limited love. Ralph, this is not an equal affection. I could not be satisfied with the love of an unbeliever. I believe I have a soul, a never-dying soul. I believe that you have one also; if we

were married, our souls ought to mingle together and become as it were one ; then we could look with calmness upon the certain decay and change of these frail bodies, for that within us which was the source and life of our love, would be growing stronger and stronger, and becoming more pure for ever. But this belief, which would be the substantial happiness of my life, my everyday joy and support, would be to you a dream. This would, this indeed does, make a gulf between us. What, according to your views, do you love in me ? My fading cheek, that your fancy has been pleased with, a form that youthful recollections have endeared to you ; a something which you see and hear, and which is pleasing to you ; but this is passing away so fast that you really love a spectre, an unreal thing. For what your senses can discover of me will soon have vanished from this world, and you believe in nothing beyond. I must love something real and enduring. I must be loved for what is real, unchanging, immortal in myself. I cannot be willing to be loved as a flower, that is plucked in the morning and cast away in the evening ; I cannot give an undying love to a dying thing, — neither can you ; if there is no soul, no futurity, no eternity, in our love, there is no reality in it to me.

“ These feelings and opinions have produced a settled conviction in my mind, that it is my duty to separate myself entirely from you. I must not dwell upon the pain this effort gives me. I was an orphan when our love for each other began ; I had no brother or sister ; you know how my

heart has clung to you ; how you have taken the place of every other earthly relation and affection. The love, that most women divide among many near and dear friends, has in my case been stored up for one, for you alone. I have given you my heart in its youth, in its first glow, in all the strength of its love, as God gave it to me. You then need not be told what it costs me to part from you, to give up the dearest hope of my life, and to cast myself into the solitude we feel when there is no one to whom we may devote our whole hearts. Let the thought, dear Ralph, of my sufferings give you at least the sad comfort that you do not suffer alone, and let it, — O how fervently do I pray Heaven it may ! — let it lead you to think more seriously of that religion, of that belief in a future life, which requires our separation. Look into your own soul, indeed you have one, an undying soul, — O look into it ; call upon it, and it will declare to you its own rights, it will reveal itself to you. O, if your love for me is what mine has ever been for you, you must feel as if there was something within you that is not of this earth, a something that cannot die ; if you do not cast off in a day the remembrance of your old playmate, of your tenderest friend, of one whom you would have made your wife, if this remembrance, and this early love still clings to your heart, O let it teach you that there is something spiritual within you, something that shall live again when these bodies die. If, Ralph, by the sacrifice not only of my earthly happiness but even of my life, I could waken your slumber-

ing soul to a belief in itself, in its own immortality, suffering would become unutterable joy, and death would be a new life to me.

“And now farewell! dear Ralph, farewell! — May that Being, whom you do not believe in, still bless you, and one day bring you to himself. May that love, which you slight and turn away from, yet constrain you to throw yourself into its protecting arms, and, as a penitent child, may you yet be received and comforted. My prayers will go up to his mercy-seat with every rising and every setting sun, that you may be saved. Surely this hope and this love I may yet indulge. Again farewell!

“Ever your true friend,

“JANE.”

Ralph felt smitten to the heart by this letter. The pure love for himself, the heroic devotion to principle, which it manifested, for a moment awakened in him all that was left of what was generous and pure and tender in his nature. He had never loved Jane so deeply, so truly, as at that moment, when he saw himself deprived of the hope of being united to her, even of the happiness of seeing her, and hearing her, and being allowed to express his love to her. He felt like our first parents when turned out of Paradise; all the delight of existence seemed to have suddenly vanished out of his reach; all the decorations, the nameless charms which imagination and sentiment hang round the path of life, were swept away, as if by a cold wind. There was to

him nothing left but a chilling, dull reality ; he felt all alone and desolate. That spiritual and immortal nature within him, which he denied, had unconsciously to himself been called forth by the pure-minded being whom he had truly loved ; and now, when it had lost this only object of its affection, it came back asking to whom it should go. It had denied the power from whence it sprung, and Ralph felt its presence and reality by its intense and hopeless sufferings, its unceasing cry of misery. Had he listened to this cry of his own suffering soul, had he called upon his reason to hear and explain the prophetic lament of an abused and neglected nature, Jane's prayer might then have been answered, and he might have been saved. He felt the divinity stirring within him, but he turned a deaf ear to the heavenly messenger ; he called up passion, fiery, unrestrained passion to his relief.

“This,” he said, “is the effect of this hateful religion ; it destroys every natural affection ; it wars against every thing real and true, and sacrifices every thing to its wild dreams, its cruel commands, its visionary virtue. It has made Jane, who by nature was formed so gentle and true, unfaithful to her promises, cruel to one who she knew loved her, and whom she herself loved ; she has used me ill, she has forsaken me ; nothing but her religion would have induced her to have left me here to despair. She begs me,” he continued, “to think of the cause of our separation, she need not fear that I shall forget it ; no ! my whole life shall be spent in opposing such an un-

natural and hard-hearted system. Well has Miss Wright said, that it is the cause of all the evil there is in the world; I hate it; I have nothing now to live for, but to revenge myself upon it by overthrowing its altars and exposing the absurdities of its followers, and, most of all, of its ministers. I hate them; I hate the world that are their dupes; I hate myself for living among them, and being a man; better be a dog, a horse, any thing that does not pretend to be religious, than a miserable, deluded Christian. I'll keep no terms with them now; I will devote every farthing I earn, every faculty I possess, all my time to this great cause. Jane has broken the only bond between me and Christians; now they are all my enemies."

Thus fortified by the evil spirits of anger and revenge, Ralph set out with a new and almost fiendish determination to defend the cause of infidelity, and with a feeling of personal animosity towards a religion, the object of which is to bring peace on earth and good will to men.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DIE IS CAST.

RALPH resolved to make one more attempt upon James. He had considered him as almost a certain convert; and, though he feared the result

of the conversations he had listened to, between him and the doctor upon religious subjects, and knew that James was actually studying deeply the other side of the question, he still believed that some favorable opportunity would enable him to recover the ascendancy over him he had partially lost. It was not long before he met James in the street. He seized him by the arm and entreated him to walk a little while with him, as he had something very particular to say. James reluctantly consented, and Ralph began. "Do you know that Jane has gone off and left me, without letting me know where she has gone, or saying good bye or any thing else to me, or leaving me any consolation except a letter full of religion?"

"Has she actually gone?" said James.

"Yes," said Ralph; "and if I had wanted a proof of the perversion of mind which religion produces, her conduct furnishes it. Here my father is ready to establish us in a handsome way, she knows how truly I love her, and she does not deny that she loves me; and yet, forsooth, she says religion demands that she should sacrifice her own, my father's, and my happiness, lest, by her union with me, she should perhaps discover the falsehood and absurdity of her faith. This is another instance of the demoralizing effect of religion; — and, James, we free inquirers must unite in our efforts to overthrow this barbarous system, if it is possible."

"I do not agree with you in your opinions, Ralph," replied James; "I think them destruc-

tive of all the real happiness of life ; I thought so even when I feared that they might be true, but I am now convinced they are as false as they are injurious. I cannot blame Jane ; she may have given up happiness, but she has secured peace."

"And so," said Ralph, "you approve of her breaking all her promises to me, of her casting off our long mutual affection, as though it were of no worth ; you have no pity for the disappointment, the misery, which you know this inflicts upon me. You love Alice, James, and I thought that you at least would feel for me ; but you have grown religious, and that accounts for it. Now nobody cares for me, and I care for nobody."

"You are very unjust," said James ; "I do care for you, Ralph, and far more now than I ever did before ; I feel deeply the loss you have met with in losing Jane, but I still think that she is right in her determination. I confess I thought otherwise a little while ago."

"I knew so," said Ralph ; "it's your religion that has changed you."

"Yes," said James, "it is my religion ; I am willing, I rejoice, to confess it. My mind is changed."

"That is to say," said Ralph, "your heart is hardened ; you do not feel for your friend, or perhaps you get a good place in some Christian office by it."

"That is a hard taunt," said James, "and were you less unhappy, Ralph, I might not be so willing to forgive you for it ; but I will prove to you that I do feel for my friend, by bearing it pa-

tiently. You know not how truly I feel for you ; I would make almost any effort, any sacrifice, to obtain for you a promise of the blessed peace that I begin to have some glimpse of."

"And what miracle," said Ralph, "has been wrought, that has produced such an extraordinary change in you? and what saint has performed it?"

"I do not mind your sneer," said James; "it is indeed like a miracle; the change in a man from a belief that he is only a mortal, to the belief that he is an immortal being. I will tell you, Ralph, what has influenced my mind. The study of the history of Jesus, the volumes of Sermons you saw at our house, and the arguments of the doctor have all done much towards convincing me; but there is one most affecting argument that comes in aid and in confirmation of the whole, that I cannot resist." James paused a moment and then proceeded. "It is my little dying Fanny; she is, to use your own words, the saint who has wrought this miracle; the clear vision she has of a future life, and the intimate connexion she seems to hold with it, are to me an irresistible argument in favor of its truth. I see every creature fulfilling its destiny; I see that it has no power, no desire, given to it in vain; I see the human being, even a little, frail, sick girl, sustained in the midst of great suffering and privation by her hope, her belief in immortality. The spiritual world seems real to her; her soul asks for it, relies upon it, trusts in it; I cannot believe that this hope, this trust, is given in vain.

In the spirituality of her nature I see a proof of the existence of the Great Spirit that communicates itself to all, even the weakest of its children. It appears to me, that, in the pure and simple soul of my little Fanny, I have learned something of that pure and simple state of mind, which Jesus declared was essential for the reception of his word, and I have been converted by my own child. This, Ralph, is the miracle, for such it almost seems to me. You well know how dear this child is to us; and when I tell you, that she herself is teaching us daily that state of mind which will enable us to bear a separation from her, at the same time that her soul seems to be opening upon us in greater beauty and loveliness, showing us how much we lose, — when I tell you this simple truth, I have said more than all argument beside could say in favor of a religion that can so elevate, so convert the soul. I think that sweet child would convert you, if you could see and hear her as I do.”

“Is there no hope of Fanny’s recovery?” asked Ralph.

“I believe there is none,” said James.

“I am sorry for you; but one can bear better to lose one they love by death, than by what they consider unfaithfulness and absurdity.”

“I cannot view Jane’s conduct in that light,” answered James; “I think she has left you because her heart was faithful to her first, her highest obligations. She is any thing but absurd; and I do honestly think, Ralph, that in your secret heart you have never more truly respected

and loved her, than you do at this moment, — I should almost say, even for this very act. O Ralph, let me plead with you to look within, and make better acquaintance with your own soul, with your own noble nature, which I am persuaded you are doing injustice to. Indeed, do you not feel dissatisfied with your infidel opinions?”

“O, sometimes I am dissatisfied with every thing; I am so now; I am disappointed, angry, nervous, or whatever you please, but that is no argument against my opinions. I am not, like a sick woman, to be changed by a fit of the vapors; I am not so easily converted as you are, James.”

“You may sneer at my conversion as much as you please; you well knew, that though my faith in Christianity was shaken for a time, I never lost my faith in the existence of God. I was only a skeptic with regard to revealed religion. I thank Heaven I am now convinced of its truth. Indeed, when I consider the arguments on both sides of the question, the weakness of the reasonings against Christianity impresses me very strongly. Your arguments are after all, mere assertions that religion is not true; you cannot pretend to any evidence, except that your own senses have not revealed a future life to you; whereas history and man’s consciousness, his knowledge and his nature, all afford arguments in favor of religion. In this surely Christians have a great advantage over infidels. The unbeliever is bound to prove that religion is not true, by arguments as conclusive, and evidence as strong, as the Chris-

tian can bring forward to prove that it is; or else he must acknowledge that his belief is not as well founded."

"A man cannot force his belief," said Ralph.

"That is true; but a man can be as fair, as impartial, as faithful in forming his opinions upon the subject of religion, as if it were any other subject he were deciding upon. I do not think infidels usually are so. As far as my knowledge of them enables me to judge of their mode of attacking Christianity, I think them unfair and abusive. I know there is a want of justice and candor on both sides; but I have never read any book against Christianity, which I thought perfectly fair and free from abuse. But in the most important book that I have seen in vindication of Christianity, the Works of Dr. Channing, I find no unfairness, no abuse."

"Do you not think Miss Wright's book a fair one? has not she a good spirit?" replied Ralph.

"No, her abuse of the clergy is in a bad spirit; she utters what is perfectly false about them. When I read her book, I felt differently about it, perhaps, from what I should now; but this passage, which I well remember, struck me even then as very unjust. She says; 'They, the clergy, are constrained to conciliate every prejudice and gainsay every truth.' If Miss Wright knew any thing of the clergy of this country, she must have known this to be false; and if she was ignorant, she was inexcusable for carelessly uttering such a calumny. Whatever you or any man may think of their opinions, you must acknowledge, that our clergy, taken as a body, are upright and fearless

defenders of what they consider the truth; and that a clergyman in this country who should, in his pulpit, openly flatter the prejudices of men, or appear as the opposer of what he thought truth, would be despised, and obliged to quit his office. There is another very unfair and absurd thing in her book; she is continually harping upon the immense sum that it costs to support the clergy. She must know, if she is not very ignorant, that, except in a very few instances, the clergymen in this country are poor men, and that, usually, after their death, their families are dependent upon their own exertions for support, and sometimes are even objects of charity. My wife was the daughter of a country minister, and she has never received a cent from her father."

"But we think," said Ralph, "that they are useless and worse than useless."

"But they who appoint them, and listen to them, think that the subject of the instruction, which they receive from them, is of more importance than any other that human beings can give their thoughts to, — that it comprises all other interests; and, thinking so, they of course feel bound to support those who labor for their highest good. It is only strange, that the idea of money should ever be put in comparison with a so much higher concern; so that surely the cost is no argument against religion."

"But," said Ralph, "suppose it is not true?"

"Even then," answered James, "as reasonable beings, we ought to be desirous of knowing all that can be said upon such an infinitely important

question. If religion is true, you will acknowledge that it is of more importance than any thing else. Is it wise to decide hastily, and without adequate means of judging, upon a question on which depend eternal interests, eternal happiness, or unutterable misery? ”

“ If religion were true, I think we should have clearer evidence of it.”

“ I once thought it might be so,” said James ; “ but I have come to the conclusion that we have no right to decide that the evidence is not sufficiently clear, till we have fairly and faithfully examined it, without prejudice, and with a humble desire to arrive at the truth. If we had greater evidence, our faith would be a necessity, not a virtue.”

“ All imagination, a pleasant dream, James, that ’s all,” answered Ralph ; “ I wish I could dream too, but I am not so happy.”

“ Suppose,” replied his friend, “ suppose for a moment it is not a dream, this hereafter, this unseen world ; suppose that it is a near reality, and that the curtain which separates us from the world of spirits will soon be raised ; how shall he be prepared to enter upon this new state of being, who has devoted his life to proving that it has no existence, who has ridiculed and abused all those who have believed in it, who has thus denied and turned away from his own birth-right, who has committed high treason against his own soul, who has tried to quench the undying spirit which made him a man ? Will he not be like one who returns to his native land as an alien ? O Ralph, if there

be a God, if there be a state of retribution, if the unseen things be real, then he cannot be guiltless who has carelessly and wantonly slighted these great truths. I do feel that we should seek for religious truth as for a hid treasure, with our best faculties, our highest powers, our whole minds. We should seek it as the one thing needful. Do you do this? did I do this when I read only infidel books and turned away from my Bible, from my own soul, from the practical instruction in piety of my wife and children? Does the infidel society to which you belong do this? When the purest and most elevated of all subjects is treated with contempt and ribaldry; when the book sacred to millions of their fellow men, and containing the only story of perfect excellence, when this truly holy book is held up to scorn and ridicule,—is this seeking earnestly and reverently, like reasonable beings, like honest men, for the truth, and for nothing but the truth? O no, Ralph; this is, this must be their condemnation; they are not faithful, they are free-thinkers only on one side, they are earnest only to prove that we are intelligent brutes and not immortal men. The testimony of their earthly, imperfect senses is the only testimony they admit; the testimony of their own conscious minds, and the deductions of reason from experience and history, they reject. This is not honest, impartial, manly free inquiry; this is allowing the lower to rule over the nobler, the higher faculties. This is not right even according to principles acknowledged by infidels; and surely, Ralph, if the cause which they so unfairly condemn is the cause of

truth, of truth involving infinite consequences to us all, it must be as unsafe, as it is wrong, so to deny and condemn it.

“For some months past,” continued James, “I have trodden with you the cheerless paths of infidelity; my own child seems to me now, like an angel from heaven, leading me back to the paths of pleasantness and peace. I feel like a prisoner escaped from his chains, like a wanderer returning home. O, Ralph, that you too might join us, that you might turn away from the barren, and desolate, and soul-destroying course, upon which you have entered, and from which I have so mercifully been brought back by means of my wife and child, and give your mind, your whole soul, to the study of its highest, its immortal interests. Let me beseech of you, Ralph, to think seriously of these things. Come back to yourself, to all those who love you, to happiness, to peace of mind, to that God whom you deny.”

“Never, never,” said Ralph; “I cannot forsake the ranks now; I am fairly enlisted, I shall sink or swim with them. As for the truth, we think we hold it; but when the play is played out, we shall see the plot and know who’s right. Perhaps my fifth act is at hand, and if there is any thing to be known, I shall know it then. No! no! James; it’s too late now, the die is cast for me.” And he hurried off.

What Ralph had said of himself was true; the die was cast. His total want of religious principle deprived him of the only support against the desolation of heart which the loss of Jane occasioned,

and his habit of exciting himself by spirituous liquors deadened his reasoning powers, so that there was no hope of any change for the better, and he soon fell into a state of reckless despair. All his passions seemed to centre in that of hatred to Christianity, and a determination to make every effort to increase the number of converts to his own miserable views. He soon, in the prosecution of this plan, became involved in expenses which his own earnings would not meet; and after suffering much from dunning creditors, he at last, though unwillingly, wrote to his father, entreating him to send him a sum of money sufficient to relieve him from his present embarrassments; and gave as one reason why his father ought to assist him, that he was now very unhappy in consequence of Jane's desertion.

When the letter was handed to Mr. Vincent, it was at the sunset of a long summer's day. He had been hard at work, superintending his farm; and he was sitting on the step of his door, enjoying the refreshing coolness of the evening hour. He read the letter so deliberately twice over, that, but for an occasional twitch in the muscles of his face, no one would have perceived that he was much moved by it. He then folded it up carefully, put it in his pocket, and, covering his face with his large rough hands and resting them on his knees, he looked like a person in the act of prayer. The night wind blew damp and cold through the old man's grey locks before he lifted up his head, and slowly retired to rest.

The next morning by sunrise the old ink-horn

and the pen, — that same pen that had signed all his receipts for more than twenty years, that had been used to record the birth of Ralph and the death of his mother, — were taken out of the polished mahogany secretary in the best parlour; and after some hours' hard use of this faithful family servant, the good man seemed tolerably satisfied with his production. In the afternoon the horse was saddled, and towards evening he arrived with his epistle at the minister's house, to show it to him before he sent it.

“Let me entreat of you, my good friend,” said the clergyman, “not to send it; it may do harm, it can do no good; it will excite his passions, but cannot convince him.”

“That's neither here nor there. I shall send it just as certain as my name's Ralph Vincent. I have set down my foot, and I don't mean either to haw or gee for any man. I have been all this afternoon at Squire Crabbe's, and that's all settled. I had a kind of notion that you might approve of it; but, whether or no, I mean to send it.”

Accordingly the letter was despatched. The following is a faithful copy, with the spelling corrected as far as is possible, doing justice to his style.

“Dear Ralph,

“This comes to let you know that I am alive and well, and hope you are the same. I got your letter last night; but to come to the point, for I'm not much of a hand at a letter, I'm sorry to find you're the same old sixpence as ever; but come

to think on 't though, it 's after all only the new sixpence I don't like, coined by that strange woman, who I hear goes about the land like a roaring lion, seeking whom she may devour ; but howsoever I 'm going to cure you of them notions, and I reckon I 've got a plaster as big as the sore. You see, Ralph, you 've sent me one of your 'cutest letters asking for money ; money for what ? why, to pay your debts ; that 's honest, and I 'm glad that creature of a woman has n't beat that notion out of your head. You ought to pay your debts, that 's for certain ; but as you can't pay them yourself, you want me to do it ; that 's another part of speech. Well now, I tell you what ; none of them (I won't use bad words), none of them confounded infidels shall see the color of my money. If you choose to spend money to hire theatres for men to preach to two-footed men, that they are no better than four-footed beasts, why I say such and the like of 'em may grunt, bark, or hiss for my money till doomsday for all me ; and let 'em come to me for it if they dare, and I 'll show 'em what stuff old Ralph Vincent 's made of ; it 's ridiculous the way these infidels carry on. But, they 'll say, ' When the old man 's dead, we know who 'll have the money. So we 'll trust his son.' But here they 'll reckon without their host. Firstly, as the parson says, it 's ill waiting for dead men's shoon ; secondly, 'Squire Crabbe is now drawing up my will, in which I shall leave my money all to you, upon this condition only, that you have in the sight of God and men given up all them wicked and abominable new-fangled notions, and on your

bended knees prayed God to forgive you for your wickedness. But, thirdly and lastly, if you continue in your present evil ways, and your heart like Pharaoh's is still hardened like the nether millstone ; in short, if you still hold to them infidel notions, why then, you see, all my money, which, as it has been earned by a Christian, I call Christian money, is to go to the lunatic hospital ; where, Ralph, it's not unlikely you'll have your share of your father's money, for that's the place that will be likely to bring up a man who upholds such notions and such actions as yours. So you see this is the upshot of the whole matter ; you may be a rich, respectable man, or you may be a poor, despised vagabond, with nothing here and nothing to hope for hereafter ; and it's for you to choose which side of the hedge you'll take.

“ You say, in your letter, you hope I will pity you and help you on account of your being so unhappy since Jane has forsaken you. God knows I pity you, Ralph, and that's my reason for denying you now what you ask of me. I can't but think if you have but one way to go in, and that's the right one, you'll not be so stubborn as not to take it ; for, says I, he can't be such a fool as to give every thing for nothing. Poor dear Jane, such a feeling creature as she is, it must have gone against the grain with her to leave you, for she loves you and you know she does. Sure enough it's plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right hand with us both, but it's right ; and I hope the blessing of God will follow what we do. You know, Ralph, I don't value the money a

pin's head for itself; it's all for you. I have no chick nor child to give it to but you, and you know that you are more to me than house and land, or any thing else in the world; and glad enough would I be to give it all to you and my life to boot, if I could save you by doing it. But you see, it stands to reason my giving you money to carry on them infamous doings that I have heard of in that theatre would be the unpardonable sin in me, and I shan't do it, no, not by no means.

“ I left your mother's Bible on your table, for I had a kind of hope, as it belonged to her that bore you and who's a saint in heaven, that somehow or other it might get a hold on your heart. She was reading in it the day before you were born. O Ralph, my son! my son! would to God that I might die for you, if that would save you; there is time yet, indeed you cannot, you must not deny me, but come to me; my heart aches for my only son, my only child. The arms of your Father in heaven are always open to receive a repentant sinner; the heart of your poor old father yearns, as Jacob's did, to embrace his lost son. Return and take possession of all I have, and we will dress you in the best robe, and I myself will go for Jane and we will kill the fatted calf, and we will eat and be merry, for the dead will be alive again and the lost will be found. My hands are stiff with working on the farm, and my eyes are 'most done, so that, as I have said pretty much all I have to say, and praying that the God you deny will still bless you and turn your heart

to your duty to him and to me, I sign myself
your affectionate father,

“RALPH VINCENT.

“P. S. As I know that when you get into one of your contrary fits it takes some time to turn you the right way, I give you a whole fortnight to consider in. I am going a little journey and shall be back about that time, when I shall expect to find an answer to my letter, showing that you can hear to reason.”

As Mr. Vincent considered the success of his plan as certain, and was determined to lose no time, after he had obtained a proper submission from Ralph, in effecting his marriage with Jane, he thought it of the greatest importance that she should be made acquainted with his whole project, and be herself prepared for the result, which he had no doubt would be entirely favorable to his wishes. He had heard of the place that Jane had chosen for her retreat, and rather than write another letter he said he preferred taking the pleasure wagon, as he called it, and going himself. This name, by the by, might, to an impartial person who saw the vehicle so called, appear rather dubious in its meaning. “Maybe she’ll come back with me,” said he to himself, as he straightened up his broad round shoulders against the perpendicular back of the seat, which was the cause of the very attractive name bestowed upon the flaming-red, rattling affair, in which he set off upon his visit to Jane.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT IS DEATH?

THE change in little Fanny from this life to another was fast going on. The pure and innocent child was fast becoming one of those who constitute the unseen kingdom of heaven. The preternatural brightness of her eye, her high, expanded forehead, the snowy whiteness of her skin, and the almost unearthly expression of her whole face, gave sure indications that the spiritual was fast prevailing over the material nature, that the youthful soul was fast laying aside its earthly vestment and preparing for its upward flight. Alice saw and felt the sadly beautiful prophecy of her child's departure; the mother's heart still hoped, still prayed, that it might not be true, that she might still retain her treasure here; and this nerved her hand to perform all those thousand little services, which the sick and the dying require to smooth the painful passage from time into eternity. James sat by her bedside and watched her, till it seemed as if his soul became one with hers, and as if he caught some glimpses of a future life through her purified vision.

“Read to me, dear father,” she would say in every interval of ease. “Read to me about Jesus, about his raising Lazarus, and how he loved little children and blessed them. When I go to heaven, will he love me as well as you and mother do, and be as kind to me?”

When she saw that her father could not, from grief, answer her question, she would draw his hand to her hot lips and kiss it, and say with a smile, "Do not cry, dear father; you know that you and mother and brother and sister will soon come after me, and then we shall never part again." At other times she would express a wish that she might stay longer in this pleasant world, and not leave those she loved so dearly; but this state of mind was soon followed by a calm and cheerful submission to her heavenly Father's will.

"God is good," she would say; "I know God is good, and I will try to bear my pain and to be willing to die, mother." Thus her sweet spirit gradually ascended to the world of spirits, leading home in its upward flight the souls of her earthly parents. O! who can tell what revelations of a future life may be vouchsafed to the pure mind of a child in that mysterious hour, when the newborn spirit bursts its prison-house, and enters upon another life, its innocence unstained, its brightness undimmed, by the contamination of earth. Such beings seem to hold a more exalted place, to have a higher mission in this life, than the rest of mankind. They come as messengers from heaven to us; their angelic looks, their pure lives, are their credentials. They come to declare to us the existence of the spiritual world; they go, that they may carry back our captive hearts with them; they constrain us to love them; they bid us remember them; they call upon us to follow them. Surely, short as their existence may have been, they have not lived in vain. So felt

James and Alice in that solemn hour, when they looked upon their sweet Fanny as an angel of God, and saw that her mortal part had faded and died in their arms, and that her spirit had gone to Him who gave it.

They pressed the lifeless remains, the beautiful image of their child, to their aching hearts; they wept, sorrowing that they should see her face no more. No more in this life; but reason and the word of God promised that she should live again; and it seemed to them as if her soul, before its departure, had declared to them its immortality. Never had these parents felt so truly convinced that death could have no power over the soul of their child, as at this moment of bereavement; never was her intellectual, her moral existence, so real to them as now, when there was no answering voice from her to the questions their hearts were asking of the present state of felicity they felt assured she had entered upon. As James and Alice sat silent, watching the lifeless body of their precious child, the violence of their grief at her loss was assuaged by the indescribable look of sublime peace, almost of joy, in her face. What is the cause of this beautiful appearance, no one can explain; but all who have watched the dead, have observed it. It is a look, as though the departed spirit smiled once more through its mortal features, to assure the weeping friends of its existence and happiness; it seems to say to us "Peace be unto you. Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts."

The evening after James and Alice had com-

mitted the remains of their beloved child to the dust, they were sitting together with the clergyman and their friend the doctor, talking over the simple story of little Fanny's life ; the contemplation of which, while it awakened sorrow for her loss, brought with it a solemn, a sacred joy, -- the promise of an abiding peace. In one of those pauses in the conversation, when the mind of each one was so absorbed as to be unconscious that there was no outward expression of thought, there was a hard knock at the door. James went to see who was there ; and only stopping to say to his wife, that he was sent for on urgent business and could not say at what hour he should return, he left them.

The clergyman and Doctor Howell soon after took their leave, and Alice was left alone with her sleeping children. Then for a while, when no duty called upon her for immediate performance, then did the thought of the dead, of the departed one, swallow up all thought of the living ; then for a time, in solitude and silence, did that intense anguish come over her heart, which will not be stayed ; she threw herself upon the vacant bed of her little Fanny, and wept, as the mother will weep over the loss of the child of her bosom, as the God of Nature meant she should ; and here we leave her, to follow her husband to the sad scene to which he had been so suddenly called.

It was a message from Ralph which James had received, the purport of which was, that he had a few words to say to him, but that they would be

his last; and the messenger added that he believed he was dying. He said, that he had heard the report of a pistol, and, shortly after, Ralph's bell was rung violently; that when he answered the call, he found him lying on the sofa, but that Ralph had only given him the message which he had just delivered.

When James entered the room, Ralph made an effort to sit up and to reach him his hand, but immediately fell back again on the sofa.

“I have made a bungling piece of work of it,” said he; “I thought I knew the right place, but I suppose I got nervous after all; I did not like to put it to my brains; I choose to look like a man even when I am dead; but it will be all over soon, and we have no time to lose; so sit down close by me, James. I should like to send a message to ——” Here he stopt from faintness. James perceived that he was holding his side to stop the blood; he rang the bell, sent for the doctor, and did the best he could for his dying friend till he came. The doctor pronounced the wound to be mortal, and only administered what his art could furnish to alleviate his sufferings, and then sat down by him with James to watch and assist him in his parting hour. At intervals, as his strength permitted, he uttered the following incoherent sentences. “Tell my father I was tired of living, and so I thought I might as well quit. That was a hard letter. James, do you really believe there is a God? It can't be helped now. My poor father! I hope he'll pay my debts; but don't speak to him about the letter.

It will be all over soon. Comfort the old man, if you can. It wasn't the letter. Can it be, that all does not end here? If the doctor is right, what will become of me? Give me some drink. I am very nervous. Poor dear Jane! How clumsy I was. She loved me truly. I have a queer feeling as if the power that put the pistol to my breast was something different from this dying body. There is a question for you, doctor. Can the body kill the body. It puzzles me. But what's the use of thinking now. It's a frightful gulf I've jumped into. Don't tell Jane of it. I had nothing left to live for. She was too good for me. Can you be right, doctor? No! No! How dark it is! Who stays when the entertainment is over, and the lights are out? James, do you really believe we shall all live again? But it's too late now; I shall soon be at rest. Yes, at rest. That's the truth. Eternal rest! These dreams torment me. O this thirst! They shan't have a death-bed confession from Ralph Vincent. Give me that punch!"

The doctor reached him a little cold water; but before he could get it to his lips, Ralph was in the convulsions of death, and his soul had hastened unbidden into the presence of the Supreme Judge of all.

An awful stillness reigned in the apartment for some minutes after. The hour of death, when it comes at the appointed time to the trusting Christian, who calmly and cheerfully goes at the call of his Creator to new scenes of virtue and higher happiness, is still a deeply solemn time; but when he

who believes this life to be the whole of existence, rushes, unbidden, unprepared, from time into eternity, the whole soul shudders at the contemplation of the fearful, the presumptuous crime; and death is clothed with a new and an intolerable terror. There was no word of comfort uttered; there was no uplifted eye, as if seeking to pierce the veil that hid from mortal vision the inconceivable bliss of the departed spirit; there was no tear of ecstasy at the remembrance of the declaration, "He is not dead, but sleepeth." Death, and death only, was present to their minds; death, voluntarily chosen for the sake of its eternal stillness; the coward's exchange for painful duty; the cold, the frightful paradise of the infidel. Motionless and silent, the doctor and James sat looking at the lifeless remains before them, till their very souls seemed chilled at the terrible picture, and the frightful story that belonged to it.

Dr. Howell was the first to make an effort to shake off the paralyzing effect of the scene they had witnessed, and to remember that there were duties to perform. He undertook the care of the lifeless body; and upon James devolved the painful task of informing the unhappy father of the event.

When James entered his own house, he found Alice anxiously awaiting his return. She had suspected the message was from Ralph, but her simple heart little anticipated such a scene as her husband had been called upon to witness. "God be merciful to him!" was her first exclamation, after James had told her of all that had passed. "O,

his poor old father!" was the next; "poor dear Jane too! how will they be comforted?"

"When we stood over the death-bed of our dear Fanny," said James, "while my heart ached so bitterly at the thought of losing her, I yet knew nothing of death; but this night I have seen death in all its terrors. O Alice, from what have I been saved! how do I thank my God that I have been saved from the frightful death of the unbeliever! It seemed as if his soul, that he had so abused, so denied, would once more be heard in its own vindication. He felt its existence, and that instinctive belief in a future life, which he had called superstition, returned upon him like an accuser before the bar of God, into whose presence he had so rashly hurried. O Alice, it is not argument alone, it is not reasoning alone, that will satisfy us; but it is turning our attention to this something here within us, this consciousness of immortality placed here by our Creator; it is listening to its teachings and trusting to its declaration, that there is a God, that we are spiritual beings, that the soul cannot die, that we shall all live again. It was pride, and vanity, and sensuality, that ruined Ralph; his own soul, if he had not slighted its warnings, would have led him right. How can men desire to silence this voice of God within them, and turn themselves into brutes? O Alice! and I too was once deaf to this holy word spoken to every man at his creation, telling him that he is a living spirit."

James bowed his head and wept at the recol-

lection of his own errors, and in humility and silence prayed fervently to the God of mercy for his friend.

Early the next morning James set off upon the melancholy errand of informing old Mr. Vincent of the death of his son. "I am sorry to leave you at this time," said he to Alice, "but I had better go myself, I think."

"Never mind me," answered his wife; "think only how you can best break the sad news to the unhappy old man."

"Had I not better disguise from him the manner of Ralph's death?"

"I have never believed," answered Alice, "that any good can come from deception, or that we have a right to use it; I am always for having the truth met and endured at first; strength is ever given when it is rightly sought for. You, I know, will tell him as gently and as tenderly as possible; and the terrible story had better be told him by a friend.

Mr. Vincent on his return home had been much disappointed at not finding a letter from his son; and when James arrived at his house the next day, he was standing at the door, watching for the return of his messenger from the post-office. He was immediately struck with the expression of James' countenance, but, observing his mourning dress, he attributed it entirely to his sorrow at the loss of his child; and for a moment the kind-hearted old man forgot his own anxieties in his sympathy for the bereaved father. "You have lost your little girl, I see," said he, as

he took James's hand ; " I am sorry for you, but she was a good child."

This change of thought and feeling was a great help to James in his sad task ; it enabled him so to command himself, that he entered the house and saw Mr. Vincent seated in his own old-fashioned elbow-chair, before his mind was again turned upon his son.

" When I first saw you," he said, " I thought you might have a letter from my Ralph ; have you seen him lately ?"

" I have," said James ; but an involuntary shudder came over him as he uttered the words.

Mr. Vincent perceived it. " And, and, what 's the matter ? Something has happened."

" Yes," said James.

" What ? Tell me what ? Is he alive ?"

James seized the old man's hand, and answered only by that dreadful silence that announces unutterable sorrow.

" O God ! my son ! my only child !" groaned out the old man. " Why did he not send for me ? Was it a fever ?"

" No."

" What was it ?"

James could not answer. The sight of the old man's agony so palsied his faculties, that he knew not what to say. The unhappy father asked no more questions. James's looks and answers had served to reveal to him the truth ; his sufferings were too great for nature to endure, and he fell senseless upon the floor.

It was some time before he came perfectly to

him elf, and then there was a sort of iron composure in his whole aspect. He insisted upon knowing every particular ; he wished to hear every word he had said. When James repeated to him the words, " Comfort the old man, if you can," he groaned, and wept like a child, but soon afterward he recovered himself and begged James to go on. After he had heard all, he went out of the room and ordered his horse to be put to his wagon.

" You will return with me," said he.

" Where are you going ?" said James.

" To *him*," he answered, with a sort of convulsive calmness. " Dead or alive, he's my son ; and who will now be by him and follow him but his father ? I must be with him."

James did not oppose him ; and sad and dreadful as were these last duties to his lost child, the old man felt a consolation in their performance. He saw the grave close over what had been to him the dearest object in life, his only son, who had voluntarily resigned life, duty, and happiness, and with no hope for the future. All his worldly ambition was smitten to the earth ; he stood like a blasted tree, upon whose branches no green leaf should ever again be seen. James and Alice persuaded him to pass the night with them ; there was a fixed sorrow in his face, but he did not speak of his sufferings or of any thing that was past. The next morning he returned home.

A few days afterwards, his housekeeper was surprised at his directing her to put his spare chamber in order, for a guest ; and without say-

ing any thing but that he should return in a few days, he set off again in his wagon. When he last visited Jane, he had found her residing with some very poor relatives, who could ill afford even her simple board. Though her health was improved, it was still too delicate for her to labor without injury for her own support ; yet her unwillingness to depend upon a bounty they were too poor to bestow, induced her continually to make exertions beyond her strength. Mr. Vincent was conscious of some faint gleam of happiness at the thought of serving this excellent being, who had been the object of his son's affections, and who was to him the living representative of all that was good and lovely in his nature. He had always loved Jane like a child, and his stricken heart now yearned towards her, as the only desirable thing on earth.

Alice had written to Jane an account of the sad termination of Ralph's life, with all the tender and considerate love of which she was so capable ; but poor Jane, at hearing the dreadful story, had almost lost the little hold on life and comfort, which she had hitherto possessed. Mr. Vincent found her hardly strong enough to leave her room at the time he arrived. He put his arms round her thin and faded form, he pressed her to his withered heart, and the touch seemed to open anew the fountains of tenderness and hope. As soon as he could speak, he said to her, "I have come to carry you home, Jane. It is still your home, though not such a one as I —— " Here he was forced to stop. "Will you go with me?" said

he; "will you yet be a child to the poor old man who has nothing else to live for? Will you take pity on him? Will you comfort him?"

Poor Jane could not utter herself for some time, but, as soon as she was able to speak, she thanked him and promised to go; and when she was able to bear the removal, the old man carried her to his desolate home. There, during the remainder of his life, like an angel of consolation, she ministered to his comfort and joy. Her sincere and gentle piety seemed to create an atmosphere of purity and love around her, and all who moved in it were unconsciously and happier from its influence. It was said by his neighbours and friends, that the old man never smiled again; but there gradually spread over his face an expression of quiet religious submission, which was the indication of an abiding peace. He left all his property to Jane, and gave as his reason, that she knew better than any one what use to make of money.

Jane, the heiress, so excellent, so lovely, had many suitors; but her simple answer to those who desired to secure her hand in marriage, was, that she preferred a single life. This answer was so decided, and her manner and conduct so confirmed her words, that after a time no one thought of again asking the question. Neither she, nor Mr. Vincent during the remainder of his life, ever spoke of the cause of the undying sorrow, which, in the hidden recesses of their hearts, waited in quiet and cheerful submission for that solemn hour, when the soul shall be

freed from every burden but sin, when all the mysteries of existence shall be solved, and all dark things be made plain. After his death, Jane stood alone in the world, an orphan, without brother, or sister, or lover ; but, in the spirit of her Saviour, she stretched forth the arms of her love to the sick, the aged, the poor, the deserted, and they were to her for brother, and sister, and mother.

Our friend, James Grey, had entered upon a new existence ; he realized to the full extent of his being what it was to be born again. The burden that had heretofore hung so heavily between him and the Father of his spirit, had passed away, and his soul rejoiced in the reviving beams of the Sun of righteousness. He and Alice were in the habit of speaking of the life of their little Fanny, as of the blessed though brief visit of an angel from heaven ; it had been to them a mission of love, a beautiful message from her and their fatherland. The tears at parting were forgotten in the blissful thought of an eternal reunion. Their souls were more and more closely knit together, as they more and more constantly met in the one great centre and source of life and love. They lived a life of prayer, a life of unbroken peace, for they lived a life of unremitting devotion to duty ; and the great purpose of their existence was, that they might finally appear blameless before God, with the children that he had given them.

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