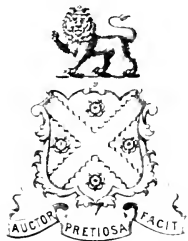


NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 06740448 7

LEDOX LIBRARY



Bancroft Collection
Purchased in 1893.



01
100

(Brooks)

ZEE

THE SIMPLICITY
OF
CHRIST'S TEACHINGS.

THE SIMPLICITY
OF
CHRIST'S TEACHINGS,
SET FORTH IN
SERMONS.

BY CHARLES T. BROOKS,
PASTOR OF THE UNITARIAN CHURCH, NEWPORT, R. I.

BOSTON:
CROSBY, NICHOLS, AND COMPANY,
117 WASHINGTON STREET.
1859.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1859, by
CROSBY, NICHOLS, AND COMPANY,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.



RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
PRINTED BY H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY.

P R E F A C E .

THE writer of these twenty-five Sermons — a few of the later fruits (or seeds) of a ministry of nearly as many years — has been persuaded to believe that they “speak forth the words of truth and soberness,” in a wholesome way, for an age vibrating uncomfortably between extremes of religious thought and feeling, and yearning, at heart, for that unity in faith and in life, which Unitarianism, in its best and true sense, seems to him to mean.

At the request, therefore, of those for whose judgment he has the highest regard, this volume is published with the hope that it may do something to help on that work which is engaging some of the noblest spirits of the time, — the reciprocal reconciliation of reason and religion ; the showing of religion to be a reasonable thing, and (what is quite as important) reason to be a religious faculty

and responsibility; the commending of Christianity as a manly and humane faith, and the joining together of what God has united, but men have sundered,—thought, feeling, and action,—as inseparable elements in the one grand whole of a man's true life.

NEWPORT, October, 1859.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. PILATE'S QUESTION.....	1
II. A REVIVAL OF KNOWLEDGE NEEDED.....	15
III. DOING AND BELIEVING.....	30
IV. RELIGION AS A HARMONIZER.....	43
V. THE STUDY OF CHRIST'S LIFE.....	58
VI. CHRISTIANITY TO BE LEARNED OF CHRIST.....	72
VII. THE UNITARIAN IDEA.....	85
VIII. THE CONSISTENT UNITARIAN BELIEVER.....	98
IX. THE REIGN OF THE FATHER.....	112
X. MAN, GOD'S OFFSPRING.....	123
XI. GOD'S PROVIDENCE.....	138
XII. "WHAT IS THE USE OF PRAYING?".....	150
XIII. WHAT AND WHERE IS THE CHRISTIAN HEAVEN..	163
XIV. THE MORAL RESURRECTION.....	175
XV. THE THREE PARABLES OF THE JUDGMENT.....	186
XVI. THE WORDS OF CHRIST, SPIRIT AND LIFE.....	198
XVII. THE CHURCH.....	214
XVIII. THE COMMUNION.....	227
XIX. THE LORD'S SUPPER.....	240
XX. THE TIME OF REFORMATION.....	254

XXI.	LOVE TO MAN AND LOVE TO GOD	268
XXII.	THE WINTER SOLSTICE	283
XXIII.	EASTER	296
XXIV.	THE BROAD COMMANDMENT	308
XXV.	THE PRESENT CRISIS OF FAITH	323

SERMONS.



I.

PILATE'S QUESTION.

PILATE SAITH UNTO HIM, WHAT IS TRUTH? — John xviii. 38.

THERE seems to have been a good deal of doubt, or at least difference of opinion, touching the question, in what character Pilate said this. From the manner in which this brief utterance of his is commonly read and commented on, one would suppose the general impression to be that he spoke either as a theologian or as a philosopher; for the tone and emphasis usually given to it would seem to imply that Pilate wanted to know what was *true*, — that he did not believe anybody could answer that question. The way in which his question is generally repeated, when it is read in the pulpit or made the subject of a sermon, ascribes too serious a frame of mind to the Roman governor. It makes him speak as a religious inquirer, putting the question in despair, or as a philosophical sceptic, throwing it out in defiance, — What *is* truth? Who can produce and prove it, among so many conflicting schools and systems? And, according to this interpretation

of his mood and motive, it was *because* he was so fixed in his scepticism, (whether of despair or of defiance,) — because he was so sure his question could not be answered, — that he so abruptly turned his back on the harmless enthusiast whom he mistook his illustrious prisoner to be.

But whoso thoughtfully reads this interesting and significant passage of Scripture, and studies it in the light of the whole record of Pilate's successive interviews with the Jews and with Jesus, must feel that the common interpretations, which make him out either an anxious inquirer or a doubting sophist, are quite inadequate. There was, at once, a profoundness in the question itself which Pilate uttered, and a levity in the spirit with which he let it pass from his lips, neither of which the common interpretation appreciates. He does not ask, "What is truth?" — that is not the emphasis, — but what he says, though in the form of a question, was really meant for an answer — and, as he fancied, a triumphant answer — to what Jesus had so majestically uttered, and what his own conscience, if he had given it time, would have urged home upon him: — "Truth! What is *truth*? — What is all this idle talk to me, who am set to represent the majesty of an empire that deals with substances not with shadows, with facts not with fancies, and rules not by the superstition of the priest or the speculation of the philosopher, but by the sword of the magistrate, by the strong arm of visible power, and the prestige of success?" I think we get light upon Pilate's feelings and motives in this case from the reply with

which another Roman deputy interrupted Paul, when he was about to defend himself against the Jews on a charge similar to that now brought against Jesus; and that Gallio spoke substantially what was in Pilate's mind, when he said, "If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters." So Pilate (as the whole account of his conduct through the trial of Jesus goes to show) evidently regarded, or affected to regard, the accusation of the Jews and the counter-claim of Jesus, as "a question of words and names;" and one of those empty names was, to his mind, the one which Jesus had repeated with so much emphasis, — the word *Truth*. When he found that the alleged treason of his prisoner amounted to no more than this, — that this was the *residuum* of the furious outcry of his Jewish accusers, — that, after all, the poor man's claim was to no other throne than the doubtful and barren throne of Truth, — Pilate, evidently, at once regarded the whole matter as beneath his dignity, and thought to manage the bigoted persecutors by ridicule.

The sum and substance of what has been said is, that when Pilate uttered that memorable question (or exclamation), "What is truth?" he spoke neither as a theologian nor as a philosopher, but simply as a *politician*. Hence it would be equally out of the way to make the question, as from his lips, an occasion for proceeding to set forth what is *the* truth, as a matter of speculative doctrine (in other

words, to give what we suppose would have been the revelation Pilate did not stay to hear), and, on the other hand, to indulge in surmises as to his probable or possible sympathy with one or another sect of philosophers that doubted the existence of any standard of truth whatever, perhaps of any such thing as truth itself. Pilate spoke neither as a churchman nor as a schoolman, but as a statesman.

Lord Bacon seems to have been one of the first, and one of the few, to read our text with the right tone and emphasis, who begins his essays : “ ‘ What is truth ? ’ said jesting Pilate ; and would not stay for an answer.” Perhaps, indeed, in the expression “ *jesting Pilate*,” the noble author anticipates a little, for Pilate’s jesting was with the Jews, not with Jesus, and the very question, “ What is truth ? ” was really addressed as much to the infatuated Jews to whom he was going, as to the innocent man whom he so abruptly left. All goes to show, I think, that, as regards Jesus, the question was put more with the feeling of one marvelling how a man could excite such a commotion with people of sense by merely pretending to be king of truth (that is, as Pilate probably understood it, of opinion), than with any disposition to ridicule him who claimed such a sovereignty.

Lord Bacon reminds us that he who put the question of our text “ would not stay for an answer.” It might be interesting to imagine what answer he would have received if he had stayed, though we should probably go wide of the mark in our attempt

to act as spokesmen of Christ in this matter; and it is more than possible that Jesus would not have answered him, directly, at all. Pilate may have lived long enough to have his question answered by stubborn and unmistakable facts. He may have learned to read in the *acts* of the apostles a mighty reply to the question he had so carelessly, with so little apparent conception of its significance, thrown out in the presence of their Master. Little did he dream, when he treated so lightly one whom he regarded as guilty only of the harmless fanaticism of aspiring to the sceptre and throne of Truth — how strong that sceptre, and how exalted that throne, were one day to be, even in the eyes of men; how soon the days should come when that meek and lowly son of man, who claimed no higher or imposing name than the Word of God, should smite the nations with the sword of his mouth — should rule them with a rod of iron — breaking, with the sceptre of Truth, that power so little appreciated by the world's mighty ones, the rod of the oppressor, and judging, from the throne of Truth, that invisible but all-present seat of dominion, the souls and societies of men. He who asked, "What is truth?" might have seen what it was, if he had witnessed and heeded what took place, a few months after, in Jerusalem, when the truth came forth from the sepulchre in which blind bigotry, itself entombed in darkness, had thought to bury her forever, — came forth, blinding the eyes of her jailers with excess of light, and filling the hearts of unarmed and unlettered men with power to confront the uttermost terrors of earthly authority, and inspire thousands

of others to give their bodies a living and a dying sacrifice for that conviction of truth which, in the eyes of the worldly wise, was foolishness and frenzy. The question which Pilate put to Jesus stands there, on the page of Scripture, to this day and forever, as a representation of the attitude of worldly policy towards the greatest interest of man, the living and immortal soul. Far profounder was its significance in reality, and forever is so, than he who uttered it imagined, or we, who hear it, can well conceive. The common reading of the words hides from our view the mighty and momentous question which lies far under it, — no mere speculative question, but the great, practical question which the Spirit, the ever-living witness and judge, is continually pressing home upon all our hearts, amidst the distractions and delusions of life. The question is, unfortunately, crowded out by the superficial one, “What truth is there that we can be sure of, amidst the endless variety and antagonism of sects and parties and opinions?” and the sceptical one to which that leads, (or which leads to that,) “What is truth, but a glittering and sounding abstraction?” — but the first of these questions loses its power to delude our minds when we once feel the true meaning and moral of the sublime announcement of Jesus, as King of Truth and of the true, and learn that truth of *character* (not merely truth of *creed*) is the test of loyalty to his kingdom; and, when we once feel this, the second sophistical form of the question “what is truth?” falls to the ground, as we see that truth, in the Christian religion, is a thing not of the fancy

merely, but of the heart, out of which are "the issues of life." Undoubtedly, Christ came into the world to bear witness to certain great truths of fact, — truths for men to believe, in regard to God's government, and man's relations, duties, and destiny, which whoso comes to him *will* believe; but no man will come to him, as he himself said, who has not first the spirit of truth; and, to the prior importance and prime excellence of the truthful spirit, he testified, when he said, "Every one that is *of the truth* heareth my voice;" that is, every true man is the subject of my kingdom.

"What is truth?" askest thou, O Pilate! *This* is our answer to thee and to all who, like thee, in every age and nation, are repeating the question in their hearts and in their actions, or in their neglect of action: — Truth is the strongest, the only sure thing in the world or the universe; Truth is almighty, for it is God himself, infusing himself into the relations and laws of the universe, which is the emanation of his own being, the expression of his infinite thought. So far, therefore, as a man has, nay, so far as he seeks the truth, the strength of God is his. What though our creeds do but dimly and distantly suggest the actual truth of things? It is the truth as it dwells in the inward parts, — the truth informing our convictions and characters; in a word, the persuasion that there is such a thing as truth, and that it is the only thing we *can* live by and *should* live *for*; — this is the truth that we want, — this is the truth that really saves the soul, all the croakings of bigotry to the contrary notwithstanding.

ing. "What is truth?" dost thou ask? Truth is the foundation of right, and it is that which must prevail. "What is truth?" It is the light, the heat, the lightning, of the world of thought. The atmosphere of society is continually shaken by those thunders of passion, which the dwellers upon the surface of things now tremble at, and then despise; but the noiseless electricity of thought is, meanwhile, at work, cleansing the moral atmosphere, and smiting one after another of the branches of the giant poison-tree, which it will one day smite to the root with a mortal stroke.

But we are come to a state of affairs in which men seem very unwilling to trust to the simplicity and soberness of truth,—to cast in their lot with the plain truth,—to welcome and honor her wherever she may appear, and to desire nothing lovelier, nothing better. How rare and refreshing, whether in religion or in politics, to find the person, and still more the party, whose strongest and supreme attachment is to the truth, come whence it may and strike where it may! How few there are who do not seem to want something more palatable or stimulating, imposing or effective, than just what is true; as if the Apostle had written (*not* "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest"—and the like—but) whatsoever things will *tell*, whatsoever things will *take*, whatsoever things will make a sensation and carry your point,—“think of these things!” A vast proportion of people seem determined to believe what they choose, and to think with their passions rather than with their un-

derstandings; as if the only faculty of judgment committed to them by their Creator were (not the faculty to judge of the accordance of things with his truth, but) the prerogative of *judging* their fellow-men. It would really seem as if, with multitudes, truth were a thing to be invented rather than discovered. Surely, if our newspapers are to be universally taken as an exponent of the public health, (which Heaven forbid that we should be compelled to believe them!) it must be said that we are far from being that people described by the Prophet: "He said, these are my people, children that *will not lie*; so he was their Saviour." If this is the condition of salvation, then must it be owned that we, as a people, are yet far from that blessed state. We are far from being eminently a truth-loving, truth-seeking, truth-studying people. Our characteristic question is, not what is true, but what is politic, what is popular, what is safe. Consider to what a serious extent ridicule is made a test of truth. How much time and thought and talent are wasted in showing, not that a principle is wrong, but that, if adopted, it will lead to certain practical conclusions which, at present, can be easily made to look absurd in the eyes of the many. Instead of calmly and candidly meeting the simple question, are these things true or false? how very common it is to indulge in a vast deal of windy declamation, which, after all, amounts to something like this,—If you accept such things as true, are you prepared for the consequences, for the company into which your confession will bring you, for the reputation (to

say nothing worse) which you will get by it? Such is really the staple of a great deal of the stuff that calls itself argument at this day; and is, by many, respected as such, partly because it appears in print, greatly to the abuse of innocent types and paper. Then, too, how much is the question of the intrinsic merits of principles made, by multitudes, to hang upon that of the merits of persons and parties! Eighteen hundred years ago, it was said that the world could not receive the spirit of truth. Are we yet ready for it? Who of us is? "How can ye believe," said Jesus to his generation, (and does not his spirit say the same to ours?) — "how *can* ye believe, which receive honor one of another and seek not that honor which cometh from God only?"

But does any worldly heart still ask, with something of the spirit of Pilate, "What is truth — this truth of which you talk so much? Do you set up your opinion, or your party's or sect's opinion, as the standard of truth?" The answer is: Truth, as here intended, is not a mere opinion, nor is it a public thing, nor anything which one man or body of men, however great and imposing, is to dictate to another. Truth, as the term is here used, and according to the best use of it, is a private and personal matter. In speaking of the power of the truth, we do not mean merely what *we* or any number of men may have decided to be true, and that *that* is to do the great work of the truth, in whatever manner and spirit it may be put forward and carried forward. It is not the thunder of declamation, but the lightning of

conviction, and, still more, the potent, though quiet, *sunlight* of persuasion, that is destined to reform and redeem the world, the heart of society.

Let us go back for a moment to the meaning of words. A celebrated philosopher says, that the word truth (or troth, as it used often to be written) is derived from *troweth*, the old English for *thinketh*, — implying that what a man troweth or thinketh to be true, to him *is* true. Whether this be the real etymology of the word, or whether it originated at a period when it was taken for granted that a man's thought would be the truth of his heart — the principle is surely a sound one, namely, that nothing is true to any man, that truth has for him no existence, except so far as it is alive in his own convictions. “Dangerous doctrine!” does any one cry? “Where, then, is our security? We are all afloat, without pole-star or rudder, on a sea of uncertainty!” Be not hastily alarmed. The real danger of scepticism (or rather of infidelity) comes not from the doctrine that every one must think out his own truth, but (little as it may be considered) from the very doctrine that he should have it thought out for him by others. This is the doctrine that kills faith, and leaves it a mere ghost — a mere name. It is a dangerous doctrine to say that, whatever a man *wishes* to have true, that *is* true; but to say that, what a man really *thinks* and *believes* to be true, that, and that alone, for him and for the time, is true; so far from being a dangerous doctrine, *this* is the very doctrine of salvation. Supposing no two do agree in thought, (though, in truth, the more freedom, the more

real agreement,)—what then? Does the absolute truth of God any the less live on, because we do not yet apprehend it? Are we to despair because we have not yet attained? Is there no satisfaction, no blessing in the honest search and striving after worthier and worthier conceptions of the Infinite?

“What, then, is truth?” do ye ask, O worldly men, of whom Pilate is the representative;—we answer, truth is honesty, truth is candor; and this is the truth which you first and most need, to live by,—this is the truth which Jesus, by his faithful life and his fearless death, most sacredly exhorts you to maintain, to buy at any price, and sell at none. Truth of character has been, too generally, in the world, and even in the church, made secondary to truth of creed; but, in the kingdom of heaven, truthfulness of character, the simplicity of Christ, of the divine childhood, transcends unspeakably all other charms and glories. And where this is, it goes far towards making a heaven on earth. Where truth dwells on the lips, in the heart, and in the whole intercourse, *there* is a lively foretaste of the peace and satisfaction of the heavenly society. Need it be said how far we are now from that blessed consummation? With all the pious frauds in religion, and the party frauds in politics, and the polite frauds in society, (by which few are deceived, but many corrupted,) and the tricks of trade in business, and the numerous little deceptions, acted lies, without which many suppose it impossible to keep a place in society or get a living in the world,—a little clipping of the truth here and a little stretching of it there,—who can tell how

much, in these and so many other ways, the integrity of manhood is eaten away at the core ?

In regard to truth, indeed, as in regard to so many other good things, there is a law of proportion and *perspective*, not to be forgotten. Objectively, all truths are not equally important at all times, — literal accuracy is not to be put in comparison with the truth-telling spirit. And a man might become so nice in calculating his words, as to lose all living utterance. But this is not the special fault, by any means, in our day and country. *We* need to remember that, though not objectively, yet subjectively, — that is, in reference to our own consciences, — all truth is truth and equally significant, and that it is hardly a tautology to repeat what an apostle says, “No lie is of the truth.” Here the word holds: “He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.” When great earthly interests are at stake, or great truths and principles are to be carried forward, we are easily seduced into thinking that a little exaggeration here, or a little keeping back of the truth there, can do no harm ; we become so impatient of the slowness and slackness of the Lord, that we are reluctant to trust the truth, and feel as if its arm needed lengthening or strengthening ; in the heat of dispute or the sweep of declamation, we suffer ourselves to lose sight of the fair proportions and true coloring of truth ; and what was said in haste is defended at leisure, — making the last error worse than the first. Self-love, and the fear of man which bringeth a snare, and a mixture of good and bad motives, aggravate the evil and increase the snarl, —

till, at last, the warfare becomes quite a carnal one, and we fight as those who beat the air. All this comes from our once entertaining the presumptuous wish that there could be some surer or shorter way to success than He has ordained whose law upholds the universe, — the way of truth and righteousness; — from our forgetting, even for a moment, that falsehood is weakness, that truth alone is strong, that truth is almighty, — being the spirit and arm of God himself. Sadly, indeed, does the world cry for truth, in the sense of intellectual light, and still more of moral wisdom, but most of all for fidelity to the truth which, — at least since Jesus lived and died a martyr to the truth of human brotherhood, not to say since God answered the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” — has been shining on in the consciences of men. Argument, and all kinds of manly appeal, are wanted, — and the truth groans for deliverance from thousands of minds and mouths in which it is yet imprisoned, — groans for air and light and liberty; — but there is a still higher duty we owe it, a higher service we can render it. The truth requires not only to be spoken, but to be *done*. The world cries for light, and especially for the light which comes from the example of those truly independent souls that, instead of making prosperity the test of truth, look to truth and lean upon truth as the only hope of real prosperity.

II.

A REVIVAL OF KNOWLEDGE NEEDED.

AND THIS I PRAY, THAT YOUR LOVE MAY ABOUND YET MORE AND MORE
' IN KNOWLEDGE AND IN ALL JUDGMENT; THAT YE MAY APPROVE
THINGS THAT ARE EXCELLENT.—Philippians, i. 9, 10.

SOME would render this latter clause, “that ye may *prove* things that *differ*,” — as Paul himself says elsewhere, “Prove all things,” — and, strictly speaking, indeed, we must *prove* before we can *approve*, — and in some cases the words mean about the same thing, as where the Apostle speaks of Jesus as a man *approved* by signs and wonders, and (which is still more to the present point) where he says, “There must needs be heresies (or divisions) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest;” — still, as the only christian, the only sensible, ultimate object of proving things or persons, of *trying the spirits*, opinions, ways of men, is that we may find out and “hold fast that which is good” and true, the phrase in question, though not perhaps quite accurately rendered, may, as it stands in our common version, be regarded, with this explanation, as expressing very well the Apostle’s idea; and the whole, taken together, seems to inculcate about what he represents, in still another

place, to be the influence communicated by the Christian Religion, — namely, “the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

A sound mind. This, which seems to be the point of the climax in that passage, indicates the main purpose for which I have chosen, as my text, the passage before us, in which the Apostle prays that his brethren’s love (of all good things) may abound yet more and more in *knowledge* and in all *judgment*, — prays, in short, that they may have what Solomon so expressively calls “a wise and understanding heart.”

I regard the text as particularly valuable, just at this time, for its showing, on such high authority, in opposition to the extremes into which people are prone to run, that not only may knowledge and judgment abound without causing love (whether you mean by it zeal or charity) to abound any the *less*, but that knowledge and judgment are highly important as constituting the conditions under which such love may most favorably grow up and do its work.

And there is no prayer, it seems to me, which a thoughtful, christian man can more appropriately offer, and make the presiding spirit of his labors, at the very day we live in, in view of the wants of the church and the community, than this, — that men might come to a true *understanding* in the things of religion; that they might really, and not merely in form and phrase, *know* the truths, the beings, and the powers, of the world to come, — that world, and that kingdom, which is ready to come even now in

the soul that shall be ready for its recognition and reception.

In the discourse of last Sunday morning, from those words of the Prophet Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," I made some preparation for a practical treatment and present application of this great subject, by calling your attention, in quotation and reference, to the vast amount of Scripture testimony in relation to it, and submitting to you a key, by which the apparent variations of that testimony (much fewer than some seem to have imagined) may all be harmonized. I maintained that the great mass of Bible expressions on the subject — a mightier array than most of us, perhaps, are aware — go not only to recommend knowledge as a pleasant and precious thing, but to urge it home as something needful and vital to all the great interests of man. I contended that, according to the doctrine of Scripture, we never can have too much knowledge, if it is of the highest and deepest kind, and that there is no such thing as our seeking it too ardently, if we do it on the right track, in the right spirit, and for the right end, namely, when the road on which we pursue it is life, the spirit in which we pursue it is humility, and the end for which we pursue it is love.

And now, in passing on to make a practical use of this vast subject, in some of its present bearings, I do not hesitate to say, (always keeping in mind the discrimination which we have shown to be required by Revelation and by reason,) that the most crying want of this age is the want of knowledge.

I do not mean that knowledge which is set before the senses, (and which is all that knowledge means to a great many,) but knowledge in the soul itself. In regard to this kind of knowledge, I will not here insist upon the Prophet's word and say that the people are *destroyed* for the lack of it; I simply say that it is for the want of it, that they are kept from growing in, and growing *into*, that true life of man which is at once peace and progress.

It is to be feared that there are few, comparatively, who can say, as Paul did, that they *know* in whom they have believed, few who do really know in what they now believe; for the tendency of this age to draw or drive men's thoughts onward and outward seriously interferes with the self-collection, the self-control, the self-examination necessary to the possession of this knowledge. It is not without some considerable effort that most men can, in an age (not to say a world) like this, truly know where they stand, what they are doing, whither they are going.

And yet how often it is said, or implied, (with a significant allusion to the amount of schooling, and preaching, and printing, and the extraordinary activity of what is called the "diffusion of knowledge," in these days,) that, if the people are destroyed nowadays,—if they destroy themselves,—it cannot be for the *lack* of knowledge,—it is more likely to be from the excess of knowledge,—*at least of the means of knowledge*. Yes, but this saving clause—this "at least"—contains the gist of the whole question. Do you point to the schools, and presses, and pulpits, that are multiplying throughout the land, as a proof

that we are not suffering for the lack of knowledge? These are *means* of knowledge; but to have the means and to use them are two things. Admitting that most of what floats about in books and newspapers, and so many other forms of communication, could be called knowledge, can you say confidently that any great proportion becomes knowledge in men's minds? Does any one suppose that mere words, the memory of which used to be, and still is too much, regarded as the process of education, are going to save the soul, to form the character? Are we not assured on high authority that one may be "ever *learning* and never coming to the *knowledge* of the truth?" The simple reason of which is, that knowledge results only from the reaction of the individual mind on the stores of thought and fact with which learning furnishes and fills the memory; and he who, with the greatest supply of such material, has no power and no will to make it his own, by reflecting and reasoning on it, is, in the highest sense, ignorant.

And when (as the scripture quotation just made reminds us to do) we pass from the school, and the wide school of the world, to the Church, which is designed, indeed, to be also the school of adult children in the matter of religious instruction and spiritual life, do we not find the distinction upon which we have been insisting still to hold good, between that knowledge (so called) which is only a phantasm, and that which is knowledge in reality? It is often said, indeed, that men know enough, if they would only do what they know. A more correct statement

would be, that they *might* know something of religion, (know enough to make them continually want to know more,) if they would only follow their holiest presentiments, the deep movings of the spirit within them. I fear we are apt to assume too much knowledge of religious truths, both on our own part, as a ground of complacency, and on the part of others, as a ground of condemnation. Does any man know a thing to be true, merely because I tell him that it is true? And because I repeat my assertion of it, and re-repeat it, and thunder it in his ears, does he any the more know it, for all that? Knowledge is not to be poured or discharged from one mind into another; it can be communicated from one to another, only by the waking up of those affections and faculties in that other which, acting voluntarily and independently, (I mean independently of man,) shall lay hold of that truth which is the food of the soul and assimilate it to its own nature by inward digestion. To cram the ear with assertions, dogmatically and dictatorially made, is not to fill the mind with knowledge,—may be only to inflate it with presumptuous ignorance. Because a man has heard, for years, the Gospel (or what some fallible man or body of men pronounces the Gospel) proclaimed and declaimed ever so energetically and unmistakably, it by no means follows that he has a knowledge of the Gospel itself. That depends upon whether he has used his own mental, moral, and spiritual faculties on the subject,—on the great matter which has thus been appealing to him,—whether experimental study has gained him the knowledge of experience,—

whether he has tried the word and found it *not* wanting in evidence to his highest faculties and affections, and in quickening and purifying power over his life.

We often talk in a vague way of the power of the *truth*. "Great is the truth," we often hear men say,— "Truth is great and will prevail," — when, so far as their conviction or comprehension of what they say is tested by their showing practically their allegiance to truth, their determination to live it, they might almost as well have been crying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" How is truth to prevail except through individual action? There is a mode, not uncommon, of quoting only half of some of the great statements of Scripture; and one of the grandest of our Master's assertions would seem to be often silently appealed to in this imperfect form. One would think men remembered, often, his having declared, "the truth shall make you free," and forgot the other and vitally important clause which precedes it, "ye shall *know* the truth."

"He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,"

it has been rightly said; but him only *does* the truth make free, in the inner world, who *knows* it; and he only can know it who makes this knowledge his by his own earnest study, effort, and conflict. No higher or stronger word has ever been uttered upon the necessity of knowledge than that memorable one of the Great Teacher, "Ye shall know the truth, *and* (i. e. as a consequence of your knowing it) the truth shall make you free."

Not even the reading of the Scriptures will avail for knowledge, without this internal activity of which I speak. Jesus found fault with the Jews that they searched the Scriptures, thinking that "in them" they had eternal life deposited for them, while they had not God's word, as he says, abiding *within themselves*, and would not listen to the voice of his spirit, speaking to their hearts, and struggling to gain a lodgment there, in the active convictions of their nature.

And to this day, the great want is of that knowledge which men can acquire only by a thoughtful study of the truth and of themselves. If we expect to have saving knowledge given to us, without our working for it, we may wait life-long, but we shall wait in vain.

It is often said that our Unitarian discourses (and the remonstrance has sometimes been made with regard to those delivered from this pulpit) appeal too much to the reason, and too little to the feelings. But I remember with what clear and conclusive majesty of statement the great preacher who, twenty-one years ago, gave me the charge on taking this ministry, and who being dead, yet speaketh, exhorted me to "put confidence in the power of pure, unsophisticated truth," — to "be willing to seem cold, rather than 'o'erstep the modesty' of truth," — how he cautioned me "against distrust of simple truth," "against artificial processes," "against straining for effect," insisting that "in the long run, nothing is so strong as simplicity." "Truth is the power," he said, "which is to conquer the world; and

you cannot toil too much to give clear perceptions of it. I may seem to waste words," he added, "on so plain a point; but I apprehend, that few ministers understand the importance of helping men to see religious truth distinctly. No truth, I fear, is so faintly apprehended. On the subject of religion, most men walk in a mist." And never shall I forget the emphasis with which he turned to me and said, "My brother, help men to *see*." I believe I have always had the spirit of this exhortation about me in all my efforts to promote the great object of the gospel ministry, not because it was the exhortation of a man, even one so spiritually gifted, but because my whole soul told me, and every year's reflection has confirmed me in the conviction, that he uttered the very word of truth and soberness.

I do not think that we have, by any means, entirely recovered yet from the grievous injury which has been done to our religious interests by the disparagement of individual judgment in the matter of religion. There are, indeed, two extremes against which Christian simplicity requires us to be on our guard,—the stoical pride of rationalism on the one hand, and the insidious Epicureanism of sentimentality on the other. I know no better way of securing the safe middle course, than by recognizing and following the doctrine that reason is the foundation of religion; but, at the same time, that this is no ground for idle self-complacency, because reason is the light of God in the soul, and, therefore, instead of a self-exalting, the consciousness of this should be a self-humbling, and yet quickening, sentiment to one

who will see how that light strikes on his own character.

There are some who seem as if they could never hear of religion's great appeal being to man as a rational nature, without persisting in misunderstanding you; as if, in referring to reason, you meant merely a speculative, negative principle; as if reason were only a faculty which disproves, and denies, and throws away error; or as if you were foisting into the sphere of religion a faculty which was meant merely to guide man in the secular affairs of life. They will not see that this equally modest and sacred faculty of reason is that in man which not merely disproves what is to be disbelieved, but proves what is to be believed, and revered, and obeyed; which lays the foundation of that faith, that religion, which alone glorifies God and benefits man; and especially will they not see that one of reason's best offices is to do away that unworthy distinction between holy duties and common duties, which has ever been one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of religious belief and life.

I know, too, that there are many to whom it would seem an unseasonable and ungracious course, at the very moment when there is understood to be, and no doubt to some extent is, an unusual awakening of religious feeling or attention to the forms and signs of religion, around us and amongst us, to be urging the importance of knowledge and of that thought and study, that exercise of reason and that self-inquiry, which lead to knowledge. There are some, no doubt, who would designate this as nothing less than a

standing out against the manifest pleasure of the Spirit — a setting up of our will against the Divine will, — if not a quenching of the spirit of charity. To my mind, however, there is no unfitness, but a peculiar propriety, in presenting the subject which I have chosen, just now.

When many are running to and fro to meet the spirit, is the very time, it seems to me, for those who believe that the spirit of the ever-present and omnipresent One, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, is always striving and struggling with our spirits, always knocking at the door of our hearts, in every vicissitude of life, and even in that dullness which seems like death, — it is the very time for those who believe this, to say so. When many are running to and fro to seek religious feelings, then is the time for those who believe that, after all, individual thought alone can make feeling genuinely and practically religious, to say so. When many are crying, Lo here! and lo there! then is the time for those who believe, and are impressed with the importance of the truth, that the fountain of peace and purification is within, to say so, humbly, indeed, but honestly.

Undoubtedly the spirit of God is moving over the face of the waters now, as it always is, whether the waters are stormy or stagnant; but the cry of the spirit still is, "Let there be light!" only it is not, as of old, to material elements, but to moral and intelligent beings, to whom God has left it in a measure, to us indefinite, to say *how far there shall be light*, and order, and peace, and prosperity, and beauty, and beneficence, in this lower world, or at least how

far they will receive, and enjoy, and help to diffuse it.

The simple ground I take is, that any stir in the community, in the name of religion, ought, even without any reference to its immediate cause, or its actual character, to remind every sect and every soul that respects religion, of the necessity, not now only, but from this time forth and always, of a real revival of religion; and that no sect or soul is excusable, that is not doing something, in its own way, whatever it may be, towards bringing on that devoutly to be desired consummation, when religion shall be not merely a tradition or a machinery, but a spirit and a life.

I repeat, therefore, that I regard the subject of the need, the nature, the conditions of genuine knowledge in religious things as peculiarly important even now. I would fain do my part and help lead you to do yours towards making sure that there shall be not a temporary but a permanent awakening of that true religion, which has been defined to be "the life of God in the soul of man." One of the best signs of an awakening is the having of the eye open to the light. Warmth of feeling is well, but what is of more practical importance is clearness of vision, that clearness of the mind's and whole spirit's perceptions — that singleness and steadiness of the inner eye — which ancient moralists called the *virtue of the intellect*, and which deserves even a higher distinction — which, for instance, enables us to discern the significance, in the formation and testing of the evangelical spirit within us, of those common,

seemingly little, every-day matters, which, in the glow and whirl of highly stimulated feeling, are too apt to be overlooked or practically despised. The calmness I plead for is not coldness, — far from it, — it is the calmness of “a wise and understanding heart.” It is desirable, indeed, that earnestness of purpose should be accompanied with warmth of feeling, and it will be ; but it is all-essential that we should each reflect soberly upon the occasions or subjects by which the feelings are or should be aroused. The mind, and not the impulses, must, after all, hold the reins in a rightly ordered nature.

There is surely enough in the truth we profess, in the times we live in, and in our own consciences, to call for a revival of religion. We need to take it home to ourselves, that religion is our “*reasonable* service” — and as a preparation for this, or rather as an important part of this, that reason is a religious faculty, and that a faithful use of it *is* divine service. One of our noblest minds has said : “ Make men rational and you make them religious.” I believe this heartily. While, therefore, others are crying, “ Get religion,” I would echo that venerable call of Solomon, as illustrated and enforced by Christ and his Apostles, “ Get wisdom ; and, with all thy gettings, get understanding.”

Certainly I should not be so irrational as to deny that religion is a social matter, but I simply say that it *is* a spiritual matter, not a formal or mechanical thing. Certainly if, in old time, “ they that *feared* the Lord spake often one to another,” they that love the Lord may well be expected to do so. But this

may be done in the thoughtful hour of quiet intercourse as well as in the hour and the place at which, called by the bell, men meet with the deliberate intention, "Now we are going to talk religiously." I believe that whenever and wherever *two or three* are met in the faith of Christ, as his disciples, (for that I understand the phrase "in his name" to mean,) then and there the holy spirit of Christ and the Father is in the midst of them, and it is not at all necessary that there should be *two or three hundred*. One of the greatest dangers attending these general movements on the subject of religion, is the tendency to estimate the growth of the kingdom of heaven by outward statistics; by the quantity of the fruits rather than its quality; by the superscription of the coin rather than the fineness of the metal; by show, and sound, and swell of numbers. Thus one of the newspapers, the other day, objected to the alleged revival in this place, and seemed disposed to speak slightly of it on the ground that only a few at that time responded to the call of the bell to social worship. As if truth had not as often been found in minorities as in majorities! But what has the question of numbers to do with the case? The great question is, whether the *few* "find," whether they *seek*, "the strait and narrow way." And this is the great question for all — for each of us. The knowing and judging faculty is too much frittered away in the criticism of other men's methods and motives. Love does *not* abound in such knowledge and judgment, either love for them, or for the truth, or for the common Master. The chief question we

have to settle is, not what will others do or say, but what are *we* doing — what ought we to be doing — how can we in our sphere, with our aptitudes, best honor our Maker and Master — best do our human work — best serve our fellow-creatures ?

I end, as I began, with echoing the prayer of the Apostle, (extracted from an Epistle, the whole of which I recommend to you as one of the very best circular letters for a season of revival I can think of,) “and this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge and judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

III.

DOING AND BELIEVING.

A CERTAIN MAN HAD TWO SONS; AND HE CAME TO THE FIRST AND SAID, SON, GO WORK TO-DAY IN MY VINEYARD. HE ANSWERED AND SAID, I WILL NOT: BUT AFTERWARD HE REPENTED AND WENT. AND HE CAME TO THE SECOND AND SAID LIKEWISE. AND HE ANSWERED AND SAID, I GO, SIR, AND WENT NOT. — Matt. xxi. 28-30.

THEN SAID THEY UNTO HIM, WHAT SHALL WE DO, THAT WE MIGHT WORK THE WORKS OF GOD? JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO THEM, THIS IS THE WORK OF GOD, THAT YE BELIEVE ON HIM WHOM HE HATH SENT. — John vi. 28, 29.

By way of breaking up the narrowing, enslaving, and distracting influence which the old, time-hallowed way of building upon single texts of Scripture has upon the mind, it is well for us, occasionally, to deduce the doctrine, on which we are going to meditate in these hours, from several different parts of the record, comparing them with each other, and with the inner light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. By this course, we are tempted and assisted to rise out of the besetting tyranny of the letter and the form into the healthful and enduring religion of the spirit.

The two extracts from our Master's discoursings with the Jews, which I have drawn together to make the basis of my sermon, belong, as you perceive, to quite different occasions, originally, but still they

both bear upon the same great question, namely, what Christ, in the name of the Father, calls man to do; and they are, in such manner, supplements to each other, that whoso will read and reflect upon them in connection shall get a better impression of the word of Christ, as combining the liberal and the practical traits of a "law of liberty," than the readers of the written, and the hearers of the preached, word do generally receive.

There is a twofold propriety in our considering together, as one consecutive narration, the separate portions of Scripture I have presented to you; for, in the first place, the second explains the nature of that work of God, or work *for* God, which the first enjoins; and, in the next place, the opposition and evasion with which the parable, in the former part, represents men as treating God's message, arise, after all, in no small measure, from misrepresentation and misconception of the simplicity of the service which, as Jesus intimates, in the latter part, our Heavenly Father really requires of his children.

I spoke of the second part of our text as a supplement to the first. Strictly speaking, however, I think we might pronounce it almost a repetition, in a more distinct and proverbial form, of a truth which, in the application he makes of the parable we have prefixed to it, our Saviour, I think, strongly intimates. For, if you will take notice, when Jesus comes to show how the vineyard represents the kingdom of heaven, into which he was sent to call men, he makes the distinction between the penitent publicans and the pretending Pharisees consist in

the former's believing and the latter's not believing. The belief is the obedience, and the disbelief is the disobedience. "John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward that *ye* might believe him."

At all events, there is *this* natural transition from the parabolic to the preceptive part of our text: If, under the preparatory dispensation of the Baptist, which, while requiring spirituality as a qualification for the kingdom, did not fully reveal that heaven consisted in spirituality, — if, even then, really believing in the Messenger (or believing him) was considered as virtually obeying his message, how much more might he who came spiritually to fulfil the dispensations, — not a servant only, but the Son, of the Father's house, sent to give all men power to become sons of God, — how peculiarly and emphatically might he say, "this *is* the work of God, that ye believe on him whom He hath sent."

In short, the words of Jesus which we have brought together from different connections, different moments of his ministry, combine to teach and strikingly to impress upon us the double doctrine, simple, however, to the truth-seeking spirit, that in the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of faith, doing is believing and believing is doing. I call this a double doctrine, for it does serve the double purpose of affording us a plain test by which to judge whether our belief is a reality, and at the same time enabling us to try whether our

works are dead works, or the live works of the spirit.

“What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” said a sceptical, superstitious, and mercenary generation, supposing, I doubt not, that there were some distinct works of form and penance, independent of the daily work of life, by which they might ingratiate themselves with the King of Heaven, and be finally admitted to the felicity of which they so dimly and sensuously dreamed. And have not we, at this day, a practical interest in the manner in which Jesus answered their question? Our Maker and Father continues to call his children, bidding them, I will not say to *go*, for we are taught that he is everywhere, but to *come* and work for him and with him in his vineyard. In the life and teachings and death of Jesus; in all the institutions and influences that have sprung from his words and labors; in the silent appeals of conscience through the frequent mortification of pride and selfishness, and the unsatisfactoriness of their triumph when they seem to be successful; in all the sacred voices of life and death and eternity, He, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, invites us to take his yoke upon us and enter into the service and into the joy of our Lord. And there can hardly be one of us, I conceive, upon whose heart that urgent call is not often pressing, even if there are many to whose conscious thought it seldom distinctly shapes itself. And I will add that there are probably few who dare or desire outright to refuse obedience or acceptance to the call of Heaven; yet it must be said that

there are still many, and yet not deceivers, perhaps, except in the sense of deceiving their own selves, who are, virtually, all the time saying, "I go, Lord," and go not, but are always *going* to go; trying, it would seem, to flatter themselves that postponement is progress. But what is really the difficulty in the case of such? What is it that weighs so heavily upon their spirits and makes life, and, most of all, that part of it which they profess to spend nearest to God, the blessed and the benignant, a burdensome, a barren, and an unblest thing? Is not *this* the trouble with a great proportion of them, that while they feel that the so-called religious works they already perform are dead works of custom and fear and eye-service, they still labor under the idea that what God requires of them is, nevertheless, some more and some other just such kind of works, that is, works not lovely and desirable in themselves, but only good, as the "filthy lucre" of earth is, for what they will bring. It is certainly a remarkable fact that what has been and is, to this day, too commonly, in the religious community, made to mean entering into the Lord's vineyard, is the multiplying of those eye-services and lip-services which are, essentially, precisely what Jesus reprov'd in the Pharisees as equivalent to saying, "we go," and not going.

Plainly, what we need, still, to a great extent, is to hear and understand and inwardly digest the counsel Jesus gave, out of the riches of his simplicity, to a class of men who were perhaps thinking more of great works than of good works, and less of

the good spirit than of either, when he replied to their inquiry what works they should do for God, "This is the work of God: that ye believe in him whom he hath sent." Have we truly entered into the heart of this oracle? Have we reflected upon and realized the divine and practical philosophy which it contains? The Jews talked of *works*, and so do the uneasy souls of men still haggle with conscience about *works*; what works must we do, when, how often? Christ ends all this dreary and hopeless self-torment with the simple and gracious decision: there is but one work God requires, this is *the* work which swallows up all works, the work of believing. With what reason, with what hope of satisfaction can you ask respecting the works you have to do for God, when you do not yet really believe in God, — for if you did, you would believe in one whose works show that he is the Son of God, and whose life and spirit are the image of the Father.

There are three senses in which belief may be called the work of God; first, because it is the work man has to do in divine things; secondly, because, as Paul reminds us, the faith which saves is God working in the soul; and thirdly, just as, according to a Hebrew idiom, the great trees of the forest are called the trees of the Lord, so faith may be called the work of God, because it is the grand work of all works.

In either or in all of these senses, the wisdom of our Master's declaration justifies itself to every considerate mind, every truth-seeking heart.

It is easy to repeat sanctimoniously the confession that we are nothing and can do nothing; but we have to do a great deal before we can really so renounce self as to believe that of God and through him and to him are all things. "What shall we do for God?" formalism and superstition ask. "You can do nothing for him," the simplicity of Christ answers, "except to let him work in you."

"What services must I perform, — what are those good and perfect and acceptable works of God?" asks the distracted spirit, perplexed, it may be, by the cry of Lo here! and lo there! and again the simplicity of Christ answers, "Call home your wandering thoughts. Really to believe in my Father and in me is what you want. Where there is a belief there is a will, and where there is a will there is a way."

"What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" the disheartened spirit sighs, at the entrance of a long and lengthening vista of duties rising like mountains behind mountains, — "how shall we ever accomplish this endless succession of labors?" And once again the spirit of grace in Christ makes answer: "Yes, it is endless, this life of religion, because it is the life of God. But be not dismayed by that multitude of details which an imagination uncontrolled by faith conjures up before thee, nor indulge the desperate hope of finding peace only at the end of an endless series of tasks. In reality there are not many works, — there is but *one* work for thee; and, when that is done, and just in proportion as that is done, all is done. Only

believe; all things are possible to him that believeth."

There is one other way in which I would lead you to feel the force of our Saviour's saying, that believing is the work of God, the great work of man, and that is, by comparing his position in this matter, as regarded the Jewish multitude, with that of his great forerunner on a similar occasion. To John, also, when *his* pungent words and his austere and august appearance in the wilderness impressed the people with his divine authority, they came with the question, "What shall we do, then?" And what was *his* reply? Very different, I conceive, from what the crowd was led to expect by the solemn trumpet strain of preparation. Surely, they must have thought, he will announce to us some great and mighty work of penance and purification to fit us for being ushered into this glorious kingdom! If they did, greatly must they have been astonished, when this mysterious messenger of Heaven replied that he had no special and separate penances or performances to require of them in God's name and in the name of the coming Messiah, but simply that they should continue in their several present spheres of labor, only doing all in the fear of God and in the love of man.

And did not John, in the spirit of this answer, truly anticipate the spirit of the answer which the great spiritual King he came to herald made, near the end of his ministry, when another multitude, roused to the same expectation of the approaching kingdom, put to him the selfsame question, "What

shall we do?" Did not he, too, say in substance, I have no new scheme of ceremonial service to announce to you; I only call upon you in the name of God, to have that spirit of faith which shall give a new meaning to the old and homely relations of life, — a new meaning to that everlasting law of interdependence and mutual membership which God has written upon the hearts of his children?

This, then, I would say: that to believe is the work of *God*, because it is the spirit of God *working in* all our works to make them be clean and satisfying and successful, all religious works, outgoings of a devout and divine life. And it is *the* work of *man* — his one great work — because he is called upon to do it; because the distractions and delusions of the world make it a hard thing for many to take upon them even the yoke that is, in itself, light and easy; and finally, because, this work once done, all is done; that is to say, duty no longer is drudgery, toil is no longer torment, the work of life is felt to be the work of the Lord, and the work of the Lord not the affair of days and months and times merely, but the great business of man's being.

It is true, then, however much the creeds may have misrepresented the doctrine, that man's great work is to *believe*, in the Father and in the Son and in the Spirit, or to believe in the Son, which implies all; because any one who really believes in him, believes in his spirit, which is of the Father. One who believes in Christ, believes in the principles which he taught and lived, believes in the disposition he displayed, in the beauty and desirableness

and efficacy and final victory of the spirit of self-sacrifice which he incarnated. This is why the Gospel says, from first to last, Believe; not that blind assent to an unintelligible formula is a meritorious or a magical act of violence to pride of reason; not that professing and trying to believe what one cannot comprehend or even conceive, is a penance to which the reward of future salvation has been affixed by an arbitrary enactment of Heaven; nothing of all this, — but simply that what a man *believes*, that (as the very word might teach us) is *beloved* by him; not that faith, like a certificate held by a foreigner to the language in which it is written, is a passport admitting into a future heaven the man who has it about him, whether or not he has the spirit of heaven in his heart, — but, on the contrary, because faith is a key, not to the gate of the celestial city, but to the language of its blessed inhabitants; because faith *does* understand divine things; because faith *now* works *from* insight, *by* love; because, in short, believing is now the saving of the soul, and chiefly from the misery of looking on this world and living in it, as if it were left, even for a moment, to the will of Satan; as if it could be doubtful, in a world of the Father's making, which is fated to conquer, evil or good. He who truly believes in Christ, lives in Christ; he who, with him and through him, believes in God, does, with him and through him, live in God.

Yes, it is verily the great thing to believe; and it is, in a world like this, a great *work* to believe in the pure, elevated, and enlarged principles of Jesus.

The very fact that belief has been so much misrepresented, of itself tends to make the work of cherishing the faith a hard one. The pressure of the atmosphere of worldliness, which we do not really feel till we begin to try to rise above it,—the tide of fashion and formality, of which we are often quite insensible till we set ourselves against it,—these influences make the work of getting faith still harder. I am not speaking of professing belief, but of having it.

How are we to have it? Will it be said that faith cometh by hearing? This is the principal way in which it would seem that a great proportion of men expect, if ever, it will come to them. But it is not, let such be assured, the hearing of the ear that is ever going to exert that mighty power; only the inward listening to that word of God which never was written and never was spoken in human language, can achieve such a result. Whether he will listen or not to this voice, to this preaching, depends on the hearer's own mind.

When, therefore, God calls us, as he does again to-day and every day, "work to-day in my vineyard," the first and last work for us is to have that faith in God, in the universal presence and the perpetual providence of the Father, which shall make us feel our Saviour's word, that "the field is the world," that the vineyard is everywhere, that life is the day of service and of satisfaction. It is not here alone or specially, not in the Church, technically so called, that we are doing divine service. Not here alone or chiefly are we working in the

Lord's vineyard, though here the voice may be emphatically heard calling us to enter it, and here the wilful heart is saying, "I go not," and the weak heart, "I go, Lord."

But it is, or should be, the design of our Sabbath-keepings and public services to awaken and establish in us that faith which is the one thing needful. Once believe in Christ, and you will not be asking "What *must* I do?" but "what *can* I do?"

In conclusion, I would revert to the matter of getting this faith which is so essential. It does not come by what is called hearing, the hearing of custom or curiosity; it comes only by meditation, by study, by practice, and by prayer. We must fix our minds on the appeal which comes to us out of the life of Christ; we must see and judge for ourselves what he teaches and what he requires; we must look into ourselves and consider whether God is or is not speaking to us in the revelation and the example here presented; and above all, we must maintain a spirit that is neither too indolent nor too timid nor too time-serving to really desire truth more than anything else.

But just here is the great trouble — is and always has been; it was, under the Jewish dispensation, it is, under the Christian; we want to be saved in some easier way than by thinking for ourselves, wrestling with ourselves, watching and ruling over ourselves. We want to be carried into Heaven passively, rather than to make an effort for it. On the wing of a Sabbath dream, on the soft pillow of a Sabbath melody, by the storm of persuasion, or

terror, or sympathy, we would fain be borne into the kingdom of faith, anyhow but by calmly considering and embracing the truth as it is in Jesus. But the admonition comes to us as to them of old, "strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life;" it is not the beaten way of custom, not the thronged way of fashion, but the way the Master trod, — the road of independent reliance upon God, of patient continuance in believing.

IV.

RELIGION AS A HARMONIZER.

“THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.”—2 Cor. v. 18.

THIS ministry of reconciliation, so magnified by the Apostles, is not merely an external or human work,—it is a broader and deeper thing than those whose principal teachers are custom, creed, and ceremony, are likely to imagine. This is that *atonement* work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, which has been so much misrepresented in the churches; that God, in Christ, was reconciling *the world unto Himself*, and, in the Holy Spirit, sent to take the place of a personal Christ, is, at this hour, still preaching to the deluded and reluctant hearts of men the word of reconciliation.

Reconciliation — this is the simple meaning of that word, atonement, which, though but once used in the New Testament, has been so often repeated, and in a tone so significant of mystery, that one might suppose the volume was full of it,—which has been so long and so persistently misinterpreted, that, not only in theology but in common speech, it has come to be almost inseparably connected with

the idea of some expiation, satisfaction, or compensation, — but which, in reality, expresses nothing of the kind, signifying simply the restoring of *oneness* between persons or things that had been previously out of harmony.

The Christian doctrine of atonement, or reconciliation, is, I fear, very narrowly and superficially understood, yet, among us. Between dogmatism and formalism, — the one darkening it with metaphysical subtleties, and the other degrading it to a magical or mechanical operation, — the spirit and practical philosophy of the great gospel truth have hard work to make themselves appreciated. The *atonement process* being treated as a past fact, and a thing foreign to the soul of man, something which he is simply to believe in, rather than himself to pass through, so far as he is out of harmony, — in consequence of this, the word of reconciliation has been too generally transformed, so far as any practical effect on the spiritual life is concerned, into a dead letter. Controversy has tended to resolve the grand, characteristic conception of Christianity into a nice point of textual criticism, or a thorny point of sectarian warfare, and the very word of reconciliation has been too often a word of recrimination and division.

I wish to lead you to a more comprehensive, profound, spiritual, practical, idea of the atoning, the reconciling, the harmonizing efficacy of the Christian faith; an idea which we are already prepared to receive, when we once take notice of the fact (so extensively ignored indeed) that it was not God but man who needed the atonement, and still more

when we understand that not merely the death of Christ, but his life also, and his life emphatically, was and is the reconciling power. God was and is, in the world, reconciling it *unto himself*, not requiring to be reconciled to his own creatures and children, and in his very nature not willing, I might say not able, to be reconciled to sinners, while sinners; never hating their souls, however, but only their sins; demanding, therefore, no sacrifice to appease himself except the sacrifice of their evil inclinations, but offering, as a motive to appease their alienated and distracted natures, the sacrifice of a precious life. The alienation was and is on the part of man, — man therefore needed and needs the reconciliation. No breach needed or needs to be healed — no jar to be quieted — in the bosom of that Being who is without variableness or shadow of turning, “over all, God blessed forever.” No conflict between his attributes could there ever be, calling for mediation and compromise. It was in *man's idea* of God that the breach existed, — it was among the faculties and feelings of human nature the discord arose which has not yet subsided. God being the unclouded sun of the spiritual world, the sea of human passion is the fitful mirror which breaks that glorious unity into a thousand images of superstition, or the element which generates the clouds that hide or distort the perfect orb.

Therefore the Sun of Divine Love drew nearer and shone down upon the world with its fullest and most direct effulgence in Jesus Christ, seeking to dispel the clouds of error and allay the waters of strife, and

melt the hearts of its children together in fraternal and filial affection. Jesus Christ, the express image of the Father, was sent to teach men, by his very disposition, that it was not the Almighty (whom they were ever seeking to propitiate by their penances and subterfuges) that needed to be reconciled to them, but they who needed to be reconciled to him, to themselves, to one another. In other words, he came to accomplish the ministry of atonement, of reconciliation.

And this he does, not merely by the event of his death, especially when it is considered as a separate article of faith, but by his whole life, and by his dying, regarded as one, the crowning, passage in his life; and so, after all, by his life, (including both his teachings and his example,) made immortal on the quickening page of inspiration, and renewed in the lives of all his true disciples.

Man needed, and needs, to be reconciled to God, by being reconciled to godliness; not by having one to do his work for him, but by having one who shall instruct and inspire him to do it for himself, one who shall, like the Lamb of God, take away the sins of the world, by a winning exhibition of the beauty of holiness, the majesty of rectitude, and the blessedness of obedience.

In a word, the gospel atonement is a work wrought upon man's character, and "the ministry of reconciliation" expresses the harmonizing influence of the spirit of true religion; and it is with reference to the grand but much traduced idea of Religion that I have chosen these words for my text.

I make no apology for dwelling so much and so often on this matter of Religion. The subject presents itself or is presented generally in such a fragmentary and desultory shape, under the form of the doctrines and duties of religion, that we lose, unless we put forth a more than ordinary effort of continuous and connected reflection, the vital conception of religion itself, as a principle, in its centrality and its completeness. Distracted with a rapid shifting of the attention from one point to another of faith or practice, from one question to another of creed or casuistry, the essential thing that lies under all is too apt to escape us, and we wander on without the guiding light or the motive-power of an interior ideal. We are forever crying, Lo here, and lo there, is the truth! because we do not look for the truth where it must be found, by the various lights of reason, conscience, and revelation, within us.

And the truth of what I am here saying is made more palpable and seen to be more pertinent, when we consider, what I have so often reminded you of, that religion, by its very name, denotes a bond of unity, of harmony, and implies, where it is present and effectual, a wholeness in the character of man, and in his conception of the truth. An English preacher, in a sermon on the Christian Mission, has, incidentally, a paragraph pointing towards the great truth which it is my object in this discourse to unfold. He says, "The great difficulty of the preacher and the moralist, a difficulty only to be overcome by the coöperation of those to whom his exhortations are addressed, is, that men so often either mistake their

vocation, or deny that they have one at all. *This last is the negation of the religious principle*, whatever be the professed faith and practised forms of the individual; a worse negation of it than any form of speculative unbelief. *There is no religion in him who considers not himself as part of a whole*, and bound to act in relation to that whole. It is not religion, without regard of others, to think of working out, or believing out, our own salvation; that salvation being a future life of selfish gratification to follow a life of useless mortification or useless performances here. *Religion is the link which binds all beings together*; the visible and the invisible, the rich and the poor, the sound-hearted and the broken-hearted, the prisoner and the free. If Christ knew his own mission, this is Christianity."

Religion is that in the soul of man which attracts and binds him to a divine whole. Its end is that God may be to him "all in all." Its language is :

"How longs each gulf within the weary soul
To taste the life of this benignant hour,
To be at one with Thine untroubled Whole,
And in itself to know Thy hushing power!"

"In One, who walked on earth, a man of woe,
Was holier peace than e'en this hour inspires;
From Him to me let inward quiet flow,
And give the might my failing will requires!

So this great All around, so He, and Thou,
The central source and awful bound of things,
May fill my heart with rest as deep as now,
To land and sea and air Thy presence brings!"

My scope forbids dwelling further, here, on the idea that religion is the sense of the Divine Omni-

presence — the omnipresence of the divine law of love. To reveal this law to the mind of man and reënthrone it in his heart, was and is the end of the ministry of reconciliation.

The New Testament abounds in expressions which have been greatly slighted in theological systems, going to show that the atonement was meant to reconcile man not to his Maker only, but to his fellow-man; that the Prince of Martyrs sacrificed his life to fill up a breach in humanity itself. Paul reminds us of this most emphatically, and virtually rebukes the narrow expositions which creed-makers have given of the atonement, when he says of Christ, "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; . . . for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

And when we turn to the Evangelists, to learn from the record of Christ's life, what kind of a ministry of reconciliation he exercised, as well as what kind of an atonement he preached, how much less, how exceedingly little, do we find to give the smallest appearance of countenance to the confined theory of the scheme of redemption which has so long held such a sway in the Church! Jesus never alludes to his death as an article of faith, but simply as an event which will have a moral, spiritual, attractive influence on the hearts of men. He dies, according to his own account, to magnify the love of God, to bear witness to the truth, to draw all men unto him,

to reclaim the stray sheep into the fold, and gather into one the children of God that are scattered abroad. Faithful, tender, and disinterested shepherd, he bleeds and bleeds to death, in tearing his way through the thorns and flinty rocks of a world's hardness to rescue that which was lost! Read his discourses, his conversations, his scattered precepts. Hear how *he* preaches the atonement by making love—to God and to man—the end and essence of the commandments! Mark how in the solemn description of the great judgment, this kind of atonement is the only one which he authorizes men to build their hopes upon, the sacrifice of selfishness on the altar of humanity! Would you learn from the highest source, Christ himself, what are the essential, saving, atoning things in the Christian life? They are none of those dry and thorny dogmas which sectarianism and bigotry have made so prominent, but they are the vital sentiments and practical principles of honesty, humility, charity, justice,—these are, ye creed-enforcers and creed-worshippers! the fundamental tenets of *Evangelical religion*,—*the truth as it is in Jesus*.

And this point leads me to a third aspect of the great Christian atonement, to which I have already and all along alluded, but which demands a more distinct presentation. When Christ came, as now, man was at variance, not only with his Maker, not only with his neighbor, but with his own self. He was, as an expression in the parable of the Prodigal so touchingly intimates, *beside himself*. He was *distracted*. Christ came, the good physician, to bind

up and make whole the deranged and dismembered human soul,— to restore unity, harmony, and tranquillity to man's self-contradictory views and feelings with regard to the spiritual world. He came to bring about an atonement, to exercise a ministry of reconciliation, in the world of thoughts and motives enclosed within each human breast. He came to simplify, and so to vitalize and energize, men's ideas of their relations to the unseen world. He found what was deemed spirituality divorced from humanity,— a chasm made between the claims of the two great commandments of the law. And this, because the radical law in the heart was not recognized. He saw the Pharisee withholding his due to humanity and even to the common claims of nature, on the ground of *corban*, the claim of the temple. He, accordingly, announced most emphatically, that what was given to God's poor was given to God—that love to man was love to God—the service of man the service of God—and, in a word, that humanity was piety. And we may remark here, how strikingly in accordance, in this respect, with the genius of Christ's own preaching it was when his Apostle, at a later day, taught his flock, who were tempted, as has so often happened since, to let formal religion disparage quiet devotion to duty, that a woman was in the way of *working out her salvation*, in the very training up of her children to goodness and sobriety. Again, Jesus saw that the spiritual pride of his day made light of the sacred claims of the physical man to relief and culture, and so he devoted a great proportion of his early

ministry to the curing of men's bodies, and the intimating, at the same time, of a close connection between the vices of the body and the sins of the soul. And thus, too, did not only his doctrine, but his practice, preach the word of reconciliation; and the so frequent and emphatic use of the phrase *made whole*, to express a state of health, is an interesting intimation to a thoughtful mind, of the degree in which the reëstablishment of harmony in man's nature entered into our Saviour's ministry of reconciliation.

In a word, Jesus taught, and by his spirit still teaches, that there are not two religions; that religion, like its object and inspirer, is one; that it is the one threefold cord which binds the soul of man into unity with its Father, its fellow-spirits, and itself; and that in whichever of these relations the sentiment is really exercised, it is virtually exercised in all. This definition and description of religion may sound to some like a truism, but certainly there is much in men's actual ideas and habits which shows that it is far from being realized.

The Church needs the ministry of reconciliation, and the world needs it, that both may see, the one for the sake of being kept from spiritual pride and sanctimonious selfishness, and the other for the sake of being brought to a sense of its responsibility, the unity of the principle of religion as a common bond between them. How is it now? On the one hand we have professors of religion, those who think they are regenerate, elect, and holy, regarding, or at least treating, the world as if there were no common

ground of reasoning between it and themselves, (and there is not, if their idea of religion is true, and all are utterly unsound who have not been through an experience like theirs, and arrived at their conclusions,) — and on the other hand, we find the men of the world, or the so-considered disciples of reason, virtually admitting the assumption of the bigot, by holding to their reason in a self-complacent, undevout way, which seems to say that it is not with them a deep, lofty, and binding thing; that it is not, in short, a religion. But both are wrong. Religion is one thing; and it is just as much manifested in devotedness to truth, justice, and humanity, as in devoutness at the house and hour of what is usually called divine service. Let the religionist assume what he will, let the rationalist allow what he may, — Christ being judge, both are amenable to one and the same law, a law behind all written law, to which the written, however, bears repeated and emphatic testimony; a law variously magnified in Scripture, as the *perfect law*, the *law of liberty*, the *law of truth*, the *law of the spirit of life*, and the like, — the law of reason *and* of religion. Shall man fold around him the mantle of orthodoxy, and virtually say: I cannot throw that which is holy to the dogs, by undertaking to reason with men whose very reason and conscience are depraved, (as even the great but greatly mistaken Luther once said, “ I do not *argue*, I *assert*, and call on you to *believe* what I assert;”) shall frail man assume this position, when even the Lord himself says to the sinner, “ Come, now, and let us reason together ?”

This, then, do I hold to be a part, yes, and no small part, of the ministry of reconciliation, as wrought out by the spirit of religion, — to show, to convince men of, and convert them to, the reality of a divine harmony between the religion of faith and the religion of reason. How can reason, indeed, proceed without faith? Reason, certainly in the highest sense, and the proper sense of the word, cannot reign in a man, without his being, by that very fact, a man of faith; for reason leads and links the mind to something beyond the region of the senses, to certain first principles, which are an expression of the law and mind of God, and so “the undevout astronomer,” and the undevout votary of science, physical or metaphysical, in any department, certainly are “mad,” not to see that they are occupied in the sphere of religion, as much as any priest set apart by human ordination to the service of the temple made with hands.

It is not then, I affirm, heresy but Christianity, to say, *cultivate reason and you cultivate religion.*

The Gospel is a ministry of reconciliation, again, in mediating between *the religion of scripture* and *the religion of nature*, or what are not very philosophically distinguished as natural and revealed religion. Once possessed of, and with, the true idea of the identity of the principle of religion, we shall not be misled, as men have too often been, by the quibbling distinctions which have been set up in relation to these matters. We shall understand that a man may be drawn to the religion of nature, without his meaning to assert a theology of nature, as if

nature could teach him originally about God, without, in short, intending to take nature for his tutor, still less for his God. The religion of nature, as we shall then understand it, consists not in the worship *of* nature, but simply in worshipping *with* nature, in catching from nature a sublime and soul-stirring hint of that fidelity to the divine law, which in whatever form, when cherished by intelligent beings, constitutes religion, — in imbibing a new spirit of reverence from her bending trees, of gratitude from her opening flowers, of integrity from her mountains and her strong foundations, (which one of the prophets so eloquently and strikingly appeals to as a *jury* in the great action of the Lord against his people,) of faithfulness from her suns and stars, yes, and a lesson of confirmation too, at least, in the unity of theology, when

“From grains and motes, to spheres uncounted,
From deep beneath, to suns above,
Man’s gaze with awe and joy has mounted,
And found in all One ordering love.”

Once more, the principle of true religion, as exhibited in Christ, shows itself a ministering spirit of reconciliation, by infusing into the soul of man that simplicity which renders the transition no violent one, that a mysterious providence so often calls man to make, from the cares of this world to the concerns of another; from the contemplation of life to the contemplation of death, or rather, of that immortality in which death is swallowed up; from the first life, which is natural, to the second life, which is spiritual, and into which the much mis-

understood process of regeneration introduces the soul. The true philosophy of religion forbids us to suppose in such case a change of nature necessary. Religion does not break a man's experience, but fulfils the poet's wish, that his days on earth might be

"Bound each to each by natural piety."

But I find, again, as I have so often before found, that this great theme grows upon me, and seems to soar and stretch and sink beyond my reach, as I fancy myself advancing into it. One impression, however, I always receive more and more strongly from every new study of these broad, central truths of Christianity, that they are in reality as practical as they are profound and comprehensive, and that general as they may seem, ("general truths" we call them,) they are very particular truths in many points to each one of us. And should the preacher be asked, *if these truths are common, why seem they so particular to thee?* there are times and moods in which he feels as if the only answer he could make would be to refer the hearers to their own several experiences and consciences.

We shall best vindicate our claim to the name of *Unitarians* by so studying the subject that has now been just opened to you as to gain (what we never shall but *by* study) a conviction of the unity and identity of all religion, religion of thought, religion of speech, religion of temper, religion of belief, religion of confession, religion of communion, religion of enjoyment, religion of employment,—the union and identification of all these forms of religion, so

often and painfully sundered by man, in that "true piety," which, as has been admirably said, "is not the distinct work of a distinct faculty of the mind, but the upward direction of all its faculties, and the perfection thereby of all its thoughts, emotions, and pursuits."

V.

THE STUDY OF CHRIST'S LIFE.

THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO. THEREFORE MANY OF THEM BELIEVED. — Acts xvii. 11, 12.

THE emphatic word in this account to which I wish to draw your particular attention, is the word “therefore.” The persons referred to believed *because* they searched. They looked into the subject — the question presented to them, with their own eyes and minds, and the result was that they found things to be so as the preacher had represented them; and the next thing and the necessary thing for single-hearted and true-souled men and women, as, according to the narrative, they were, was to *accept* the word which they had already, as we are told, *received*, — to accept it as God’s word, as the truth, — that is, to believe it. This was the way in which the people here spoken of came to have Christian faith. First they girded up the loins of their minds and prepared their hearts by yielding to the spirit of truth, and placed themselves in *readiness* to follow whithersoever the light should lead them; then they went to the best directory they had in divine things, to the law and to the testimony, and

searched out the matter in their old Scriptures, — and finally they came to a conviction of the truth and *believed*. This was *their* way to light and life, and, essentially, I am convinced, it is the way for all.

It seems strange that, in this age of the world, which, if it claims any character, claims that of a *thinking* age, it should be needful to assert and repeat and reiterate so plain a proposition as that belief must come from examination, from inquiry, from study. But so it is. For, indeed, men too often *think they are thinking*, when they are really not using, not applying their minds, not actively engaged at all with the *mental muscle* (so to speak) of the inner man, but only driven or drifted to and fro on a sea of what should scarcely be called even ideas, but only fragments of ideas, broken images of fancy and opinion, with but a feeble, if any, hold of the helm of reason, or eye to the pole-star of central principle, or to the chart of a higher wisdom. We flatter ourselves that we are thinking, that we are really not neglecting that first and last responsibility of an immortal being, while we are, at least, putting off the great duty, from day to day, as if it were a drudgery instead of a deliverance. And meanwhile, for the present, (which means with too many, *life-long*,) we let any power or authority that may, from one or another cause, chance to be in the ascendant, — public opinion or private prejudice, sympathy or antipathy, selfish wishes or superstitious fears, hereditary habit or the force of fashion, anything but our own calm and independent judgment,

make up for us those opinions which do so much to color our whole atmosphere, and shape the whole current of our real life. Does not this *commend* itself, as hardly an exaggerated *manifestation of the truth, to every man's conscience, in the sight of God?*

And not least (to speak moderately) does this picture of popular indifference apply to the nature of men's opinion and belief in regard to the doctrines and duties of religion, especially as a matter of revelation and record.

It may not be deemed or felt actually an ignoble thing, but I fear it is not regarded as a specially *noble* trait in man or woman, now, to search the Scriptures and to search themselves, with a childlike and reverent solicitude to get the key-word by which God would have their tempers controlled and their lives guided and inspired. I fear the popular tendency is to make people far more sensitive to the question, what is likely to be taking, effective, and, in a worldly way, convenient and gratifying, than to the question what is the very truth of God, the very ground-reality of a true man's life. And to such an extent am I constrained to believe this true, that I am apprehensive there are many congregations of Gospel-hearers throughout Christendom, (whether this is one, your own consciences and conduct only can answer,) of which, if a historian as faithful as Luke should give his testimony, it would have to read in a way very different from his eulogium on the Bereans: "These were not ready to receive the word; they counted it neither a noble nor an honorable thing to sit as children on the bench of instruc-

tion; they cared not to search the Scriptures to see how things stood with the truth and with themselves; therefore not many of them believed; of women there were some devout and honorable exceptions; but of men, few."

If these things are so, — if this is a true picture, — (and no one can have a stronger desire to find it false than I have,) then it is well and wholesome to hold up before this generation and this congregation the example to which the text refers us, which, if we will reflect upon it, may lead us to some profitable and practical results not only in thought, but in actual life.

We are told in the history that, at the last place where Paul had been preaching before coming to Berea, namely, at Thessalonica, the unbelieving Jews had raised a great tumult by insinuating that he had come to turn the world upside down with the doctrine that Jesus was the true and only King of men. But at Berea the new doctrine and its preachers were treated with more soberness and magnanimity. There the people, instead of stopping their ears and opening wide their mouths against the Apostle, took the opposite course, and looked into the subject and the Scriptures, to see whether, after all, it might not be true that there *was* only one King, one Lord and Lawgiver to the conscience of man in all his relations, public or private, social or political, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And how beautifully does the case our text refers to, thus connected with the history immediately pre-

ceding, fulfil those memorable words of the Saviour himself, who, when Pilate said to him, "*Art thou a King, then?*" answered, "Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." [In other words, I am the King of martyrs, the purple of martyrdom is my purple of royalty.] And "Every one that is of the truth" [every one that owns allegiance to the truth] "heareth my voice," [and becomes the subject of my kingdom.] The men of Berea were men of truth, not like the Thessalonians, of prejudice and passion. They felt that there could be no true gain or glory for them, unless based on truth; and therefore, instead of drowning the voice of reason, they opened their ears and their eyes to receive the divine word, however different it might be from their hitherto entertained opinions, and however unhallowed by earthly fashion or ecclesiastical formality might be the means and method through which it had been brought to their convictions.

You may need to be reminded, but cannot need to be informed, that "the Scriptures" which these Bereans so diligently searched to find out the truth about Jesus, were the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for the simple and sufficient reason that the New Testament did not yet exist in the form of scripture, but only in the formlessness of the spoken word. And that, probably, explains, in great part, the reason why we read only that "many of them" believed, and not *all*. In another place, Paul speaks of the Old Testament as able to make one wise

unto salvation *through faith in Christ Jesus*. Having that key, one readily finds his way through its mysteries, at least to a practical satisfaction. But that it could furnish, of itself, the key, to even an honest mind, and even after a long search, the case of the Ethiopian eunuch and that of some of these Bereans may well make us doubt.

The Scriptures which *we* are invited and summoned to search, however, for the confirmation of our faith in Christ, are not the gorgeous Oriental prefigurings of men who, though *moved* by the Holy Ghost, were either not so *enlightened* by the spirit of revelation as to see the veritable truth of the Gospel, or else were not enabled to set it forth, by reason, perhaps, of the unprepared state of the people, except in dark or dazzling parables, under a drapery of imposing carnal pomp and circumstance; — but our Scriptures are the records of a coming of Christ which has actually taken place, actually begun at least, first in the flesh, then in the spirit, and in both is the presence of a living, impersonated word — the word of God made man. With the *New Testament* in his hands, no man needs to be in the perplexity of that Ethiopian nobleman, and to inquire, when he reads the Evangelists touching the passion of Christ, “I pray thee, of whom speaketh” the writer “this? of himself, or of some other man?” For us and to us, Jesus, the Christ himself, speaks in his own simple and sublime tone and spirit, — speaks, not only in his recorded and immortal words of wisdom, of power and of healing virtue, but in the very record, the silent record of

his deeds of truth and mercy, the authors of which, in this their simple story, give us the express image and impress of their and our Master.

The word which we are exhorted to receive with all readiness of mind, and to search the Scriptures daily and diligently, that we may receive, is the *Word made flesh*; by which is meant no such mystery as has too generally been made out of it, but simply the truth that, henceforth and forever, the Eternal Wisdom, the Ineffable Beauty, the Beauty of Holiness, speaks to us, to the very eye of the soul as well as to the ear of conscience, out of the recorded life of One who was, at once, a Son of Man and a Son of God; especially, when we approach the record under the influence of the spirit which his translated life breathes into the heart of a sincere seeker of God. This, plainly, is John's own explanation of the doctrine of the Word incarnate when he writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life; (for the Life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness and show unto you that eternal Life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you."

But, if our Scripture is so plain, it may be asked, why is it so necessary that we should search and study it? I answer, that, plain as it is in itself, to him that understandeth, (and a man must *attend* before he *can* understand the plainest things of a

life so opposite to much of our most enchaining occupation,) the religion of creed and ceremony, conspiring with the worldly habits which make men averse to all religion, has so inveterate a power to interpose a veil between the soul and the simple life presented for its salvation, that, with many, it demands a strenuous effort even to *look* fully and fairly at the simple and actual Gospel (to say nothing of searching and studying it); to bring one's self into the mental and moral posture of a seeker and scholar, with respect to the great pattern of life and godliness, requires with many, if not most of us, something of conflict, and victory over indolence, or indifference, or at least over a disinclination based upon some unworthy or irrelevant pretext.

The prevailing want of interest in the study of those gospel records, which, to say nothing of their religious importance, present the most striking phenomenon in the history of literature, and recite the most wonderful train of events in all history, would seem to need strong reasons or motives to account for it. Something of the reluctance referred to, more or less, is ascribable, clearly, to the false and unpleasing associations which have been thrown around the Scriptures by hard and unspiritual dogmas respecting the origin, the contents, and the claims of the sacred volume; something to the want of a sufficiently cultivated moral taste, or to an actual distaste for delineations of the beauty of holiness, aggravated by the fear of meeting, face to face, in the perfect mirror of divine purity, an image of one's own defects and deformities of character.

But, inasmuch as it is not easy for the conscience to contemplate comfortably these excuses alone, a variety of other reasons, many of them inconsistent with each other, are put forward into the front ground, like the skirmishers in an army, to keep at bay the forces of truth, and take off the brunt of their charge. Thus, it is alleged, at one time or in one quarter, that the Scriptures are too plain to require study, at least minute study; and yet, again, that they are so dark and difficult as to discourage the attempt to sound their meaning. At one time, it is pretended that there is Christian truth enough in men's knowledge to save them, if they will use it; and yet, at another time, it is said, that the rival and wrangling sects have so confused the Scriptures, that it is next to impossible to tell where lies the path of Bible truth. At one time, it is said that we have a class of men appointed and educated expressly for the purpose of telling us what the Bible does say and mean; and yet, at another time, you will hear, that to urge upon Protestants the duty of searching the Scriptures, is a work of supererogation. But, leaving such apologies to confront and correct each other, we will glance for a moment at what probably, in these days, is the most common and potent excuse for the neglect of exercising the Protestant right in regard to the Scriptures. There is a popular feeling, which expresses itself in various ways, from time to time, that the exploration of the old records of our religion is becoming less and less necessary, because what we want more and more, and what humanity is more and more earnestly and

emphatically crying for, is the spirit and the practice of Christianity. But is it not also made more and more plain continually, that, for want of settling certain preliminary questions in regard to the contents, and even the composition and claims of the Bible, this very question, what *is* the substance and spirit and practical point of the Gospel, is itself a vexed question, and one upon which honest men, more honest than wise, often deviate from each other somewhat widely? Shall we assume infallibility for our own interpretation and application of Christ's words, and say that because *we* know exactly and entirely what he teaches, therefore there is no further need of encouraging the study of his life? Even supposing *we had* mounted, by the ladder of the word, to the heights of the spirit, shall we say, let the ladder be thrown away, there is no more use for it? But is the mere knowing of the meaning of Christ's words all? May there not possibly be something, nay much, of the fine combination and balance and harmony of his character and spirit, which we are far from having yet appreciated?

Yes, the spirit and the practice of the Gospel are, indeed, what we want, and what the world wants, this very day and hour; but for the very purpose of having these, we want the *truth* of the Gospel. "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." It is the truth of Christ that is needed to purify the morals, to rectify the spirits, and save the souls of men. It is idle to plead that that truth is in the world. It is not in the *convictions of men*, generally; where it must be, to do its work. It is not

even in their understandings. Having but a vague and feeble hold of any Christian truth, and none perhaps on the characteristic truth of Christ's gospel, men easily fall a prey to the sharp arrows of doubt, the insinuating and incessant assaults of error and of sin. If society is to be armed for defence and victory by the Gospel, this is to come about by each individual man's and woman's drawing from the Gospel, by individual study, the pure and practical truth of it: not by the mere name of a gospel; not by the Sunday's preaching of its authority; not by such a sentimental or self-willed religion as may be constructed out of men's heated fancies or passions.

Yes, the practical essence of the Gospel is, indeed, what we need, and that was what the persons spoken of in the text were after, when they searched the Scriptures. It was something that was going, if true, to revolutionize souls and societies. It was to enthrone a new King, "one Jesus," over the delusions of the fancy and the passions of the heart. It was, in an important sense, to "turn the world upside down," for, to the unbeliever, the world was inverted. And how is it with us? May it not be — is it not quite likely — that many of us would find, if we should come to examine the Scriptures intelligently and independently, that we had been deserting our rightful King, and worshipping, as our sovereign, either that Diana of the modern Ephesians, Fashion, or that ruler of the darkness of this world, Mammon, or that hard master, Custom, or that many-headed idol, the Multitude, — any and every false and fleeting shape of superstition, rather than

the Maker and the Master of men, in whose name Jesus came, and still, in the spirit, comes to his brethren, the Shepherd-King of souls?

I have been speaking of the weakness of the excuses men give for neglecting to study the great model set before them in the Gospel. But, why dwell on these negative questions? We all do know full well, in our hearts and consciences, that the recorded life of Jesus is the grand directory and dispensary for us in the most intimate and vital matters of *our* lives. And every right mind must be secretly ashamed that it should be necessary to argue *against* reasons for *not* being willing to study that life,—a life which every human soul ought to feel it a blessed privilege to have for a guide and an inspiration.

Much is said, and justly said, of the value of having good and great pictures of the masters accessible to all the people, as an element in the education of that taste for the beautiful and the harmonious, which is so noble an ally to wisdom and virtue. But, in the four Gospels, we have a picture which the spirit of the great Master of Life has impressed upon the souls and records of his choice pupils, and which is hung up forever in the gallery of the ages, nay, which is multiplied indefinitely, and placed within the reach of all, in the hands of all, to study, and to impress upon *their* memories and sympathies, and copy in their life and temper and conversation. Shall we not (I will not say merely bring our children, but) come ourselves, as children, to the contemplation and examination

of this picture, at once a picture and a reality, a picture and a power — to elevate, to instruct, and to inspire our souls, and prepare them for the tasks and the trials of life ?

I seem to have seen or felt, of late, the promise, at least, of a renewed interest amongst us of this congregation, in the social study of those records of our common faith, by which that faith, if not first communicated or awakened, must, at all events, be revived, in order to be an internal conviction adequate to the satisfaction of our own souls, and to the work God has for us to do in the world, as real, and not merely nominal Christians. If any words, or any efforts of mine can help kindle the smoking embers of such interest into a clear flame of love for the truth as it is in Jesus, and of zeal for the possession of that truth by the study of the life which embodied it, I shall feel that the frequent reiteration of my own ideas and convictions on this subject under different forms, though to myself sometimes wearisome, chiefly from an apprehension of wearying others, is not without its reward. To urge upon you a privilege (for I will not call it a duty) which seems to me so important, I feel that "necessity is laid upon me." I was struck with the recent remark of a Methodist brother, that, according to their idea, "it takes the whole Church to preach the truth." It certainly takes the whole Church to practise it.

I conclude by saying that, in my historical reading and reflections, I find three principal ways through which Christians have sought access to the truth. The Protestants have made the Word to be

the way, confining that term, however, to the written word of Scripture; the Transcendentalists have held to the sufficiency of the Spirit, meaning by it, however, the sufficiency of private and solitary self-communion; and the Roman Catholic has set up the Church as the dispenser of the Word and the Spirit. But there is a true catholicity which resolves these three into one, and finds the Church, the Word, *and* the Spirit in a union of believers and inquirers, earnestly and devoutly bent upon studying together, by mutual comparison of convictions, the records of the life of the common Master, in order, *through* the letter, to penetrate to the life-giving spirit, to find the Lord, the lawgiver and life-giver, the way, the truth, and the life, for the sake of walking in that way, realizing that truth, and having that life in themselves more and more abundantly.

May this ideal of a Church rise more and more clearly and fully and attractively before our vision, and before the vision of all souls and societies that profess to believe in Christ, till we shall be ashamed, not of ignorance, but only of indifference, and become what the apostle longed to have all men, "fellow-helpers to the truth," — "fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God."

VI.

CHRISTIANITY TO BE LEARNED OF CHRIST.

LEARN OF ME. — Matt. xi. 29.

CHRISTIANITY is to be learned of Christ: whose would understand the religion of Jesus must apply to Jesus himself. But is not this a truism? It certainly would seem so to one who consulted only his own reason, and conscience, and common sense. But the misfortune is that, in the din of sectarian and scholastic wrangling, the calm voice of our better judgment is so seldom heard, and, in the mist of speculation and the heat of passion, the simple and quiet countenance of sober truth is so seldom seen. How often, when men of the best temper, but of opposite opinions about Christ, reason together concerning him, it comes to pass, as it did with those two disciples of old, who were walking along and talking so earnestly about him that Sunday evening, that, although Jesus himself, in the still, small voice of his Gospel, comes and mingles in their conversation, their eyes are so holden by the bandage of prejudice or the cloud of speculation, that they do not know him, and their ears are so preoccupied with each other's arguments that they do not hear

his majestic and commanding tones. A great cloud overshadows them, *darkening counsel by words without knowledge*, and they do not hear the divine oracle which comes even from that cloud of controversy, and, calling the heated and bewildered disputants away from the traditions and systems of the scholars to the inspirations of the Master, says, " 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him.' " Not only to the open and blaspheming deniers of the truth of the Gospel, (of whom there are few extant,) not only to the indolent, procrastinating, and practically indifferent ones, fancying they receive it, (who are too numerous,) not to these only, dead in sin or slothfulness, but to those also whose thoughts are busied, and whose zeal is kept active, by the watchwords and war-cries around which they have been trained to rally, yet whose hearts are dried up because there is no nourishment in the dead firewood of old, decayed creeds and systems, — to such the spirit of Jesus still cries, as of old, in sorrowful rebuke, " Ye will not come to *me*, that ye might have life."

Whoever looks over the history and condition of Christendom, — still, to so sad an extent, a camp and a kingdom divided against itself, — and considers to what armories the leaders and legions of this singularly militant church are so apt to go for the weapons of their internal controversy, — will find that, however much of a tautology it may seem to a thoughtful spirit to say, "*Christianity must be learned of Christ,*" there are multitudes of nominal Christians, (to say nothing of the outside world,) who need to have even so plain a proposition asserted

and reasserted and presented in many different lights, before it will strike them in such a way as to produce a living conviction. It would seem amazing, if there were not so many other things in the history of our religion so much more amazing, that its professed disciples should have persisted, as they have, in forgetting, when the question was about the character or contents of Christianity, to appeal first and last to Christ, and to "hear him." But the crowning wonder is that those systems of doctrine whose builders comparatively slight the Evangelic records in laying their foundation, depending much more on what is said of Christ by others than on what he says of himself, should coolly appropriate and monopolize the name of Evangelical Religion. One would think that *that* was preëminently the Evangelic, the Gospel method, which goes first of all, and comes back after all, to Christ as he lives in the gospel history, to learn the vital, essential, and saving doctrines of his religion, — which consults him first and finally upon the great question, what relation he bears to his fellow-men in the momentous matter of their salvation. I do not say that the systems which have so long possessed the exclusive title of Orthodox and Evangelical, absolutely neglect to consider Christ's own testimony concerning himself and his works, and his relations to God and man, and man's redemption; but I do say that they *comparatively* neglect it, that they are far from giving it anything like the priority and finality which he himself claims for it, who said, "One is your master, even Christ," and which even the very apostle,

upon whose writings they draw so much more largely than upon the Master's words for their building materials, himself acknowledges so often and so emphatically, — as, for instance, where he remands the Corinthian sectaries to Christ as the only foundation of doctrine, of whom Apollos and even Paul are only ministers and not *their* masters, — and which is strongly implied, at least, in what he writes to those of Ephesus, “But ye have not so learned Christ: if so be that ye have heard him and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.” These admonitions alone would be enough, if we needed any human authority or license in such a matter, to make us turn to the great Master himself, where most surely we shall find him, namely, in his recorded life, or rather in our own hearts and consciences, by which the meaning of that life is interpreted, and there, in our own sympathizing and self-communing souls, learn for ourselves what Christ is to us and for us, and what, as believers in him, we have to believe and have to do. But the truth is, in a question like this, not even apostolic authority is necessary or pertinent. In fact we are to judge the apostle by the Master, and not the Master by the apostle. If Peter is to be blamed, if Paul is in any respect to be corrected, or, at least, if his interpreters are, plainly Jesus, whose mind we, too, have or may have, in the Gospel, enables us to reprove the spirit of the one, and to set right the errors of the other. There is no arrogance in this; simple duty to our Master, and the responsibility of individual judgment, which he recognizes, require us so to do. If

Jesus is *our* Master also, then it is not only our right but our duty, in all questions of creed or of conduct, to turn to him, just as Paul himself did, saying, "Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?"

Now, I do affirm that the councils and creed-makers of Christendom, for almost as many centuries as Christianity has been in the world, have practically overlooked these simple, but important things. They have not sent us first and last to the simple Christ of the gospel records, as the main foundation of Christian theology; they have perplexed and plagued the church and the world with a complicated, metaphysical system, dependent preëminently on the writings of an apostle, in whom even a contemporary found many things hard to be understood, but who, at any rate, is not our *great* authority, though the long-prevalent dogmas of the churches might lead one of *their* disciples to think that he was. The deity of Christ, the depravity of human nature, the imputation of Adam's sin and of Christ's righteousness, the vicarious atonement, — is it likely that these doctrines, which form the most barren and bewildering part of the old and not yet obsolete theology, would have stood their ground so long, even if they had ever gained it, had Christians all and always agreed in making Christ their great Master in divinity, leaving all others, even apostles, where these latter, certainly, prefer to sit, on the lower seats? Paul was a wise master-builder, but even he never thought of laying any other foundation than that already laid, which was Jesus Christ; and even on that foundation warned every man to

take heed how he builded ; what would he have said of systems of doctrine which made him (Paul) the chief stone of the corner ? I think he would have said, "Ye have not so learned Christ."

How much wrangling and heart-burning and persecution and fraternal war the Church might have been spared, how much scandal to the cause of Christian truth have been avoided, if the terms of salvation and the tests of salvation and the truths essential to salvation had been always sought by communion with the Master himself ! If his words, interpreted by his life, his life as an exponent of his spirit, had always held the preëminence that rightfully belongs to them in shaping the creed and course of every man and every church ! Could there ever have been so much doubt and dispute as to the mode of believing *on* the Lord Jesus Christ, if men had simply *believed* the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, received, with due appreciation, what he himself says ? The Law was a schoolmaster to lead the world forward to Christ ; the apostles, by their own showing, are monitors to lead men back to Christ ; both prophets and apostles are instructive and inspiring guides and monitors ; but when it comes to settling the great, vital questions of Christian faith and life, why need we go elsewhere than to him who *has the words of eternal life* ? Is any one anxious to know what he shall do to be saved ? Why should he go to Paul, still less to any interpreter of Paul, and let his mind be perplexed and tormented with explanations of what it means and what it does not mean to have faith in Christ, when

Christ himself, with his own lips, in his own life, still answers the question for every human being, as he answered it over and over again to high and low, rich and poor, wise and simple, when he labored to convert a people whose nature was precisely our own? Shall it be said that the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount, and the parables of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son and the great judgment are vitally defective, if appealed to, as showing what is essential to human salvation? Shall it be said that the great Teacher and Saviour kept back, to the very last, certain of the most important truths of his religion? He himself said, when his end drew nigh, "To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth, (i. e. willing to be its subject,) *heareth my voice.*" And yet are we to believe, in the face of this, that he omitted in his testimony truths which every man must know or "perish everlastingly,"—leaving them for his apostles and the Church to announce as fundamental articles, and arrange into evangelical systems of faith? Yes, the Roman Catholic Church, holding to continued inspiration and miracles,—which are true enough, if rightly understood,—that church and others, which really, though not so openly, build on the same foundation of church authority,—they with tolerable consistency do maintain that the gospel, and a man's private reason and conscience to interpret and apply it, are not enough,—that he must, first and last, "hear the Church." Such, however, is not a consistent course for Protestants; their

motto is, "hear Christ," he is the author and *finisher* of our faith. The *finisher* — what can that expression mean, except that in Christ we can find all that is absolutely needful to know and do in order to be set right with God, that by studying him alone we may become *accomplished* Christians? So far as other men, the wise and good, show us how to study him and how to serve him, we may well gratefully accept their counsel; but he is the Master. The Roman Catholics and extreme High Churchmen and all those inconsistent and degenerate Protestants, who, frightened, perhaps, by the dangers of liberty, account it presumptuous or too troublesome to think for one's self in matters of religious belief, and prefer that a man should receive his doctrines from his Church, — these tell us that, after all, we have received through the Church, by tradition, these very gospels, which, I have contended, contain the creed of the Christian. But it is one thing to receive a *fact* on testimony, and another thing to receive an opinion from tradition. The gospel story is a historical, or, if you will, a spiritual fact, and for the evidence of it we look backward, indeed, though even here our faith rests greatly on internal evidence, but for the meaning, the application of this great fact to our life, we look not backward, but inward and upward; here we appeal not to tradition, but to reason, and our own moral sense enlightened by reason and revelation. It is a matter of every-day experience that we gratefully receive testimony to fact from men, whose inferences from such fact we respectfully decline.

The theme of this discourse has been suggested by some recent movements in the theological world, which give it a new and peculiar interest and importance. You are aware that the tendency of all sects to subdivide into minor parties, — a tendency which may be called the safety-valve of Protestantism, and which has already created in almost all religious bodies, even among the Friends themselves, distinctions like that of Old School and New School, — this tendency has not left even the so-called Liberal denominations untouched. In the early history of Unitarianism in this country, the first tendency to subdivision was seen in the distinction between those, who, according to their respective opinions in regard to the birth and preëxistence of Christ, and perhaps his place in the scale of being, were called Arians and Humanitarians. But this distinction was always, and still is, accounted comparatively and practically an unimportant one. Channing was of the former class. The English Unitarians are, I think, mostly of the latter. Then came, not many years ago, an agitation which proved much more serious, arraying against each other the so-called Transcendentalist, Rationalist, or Spiritualist, as he was variously called, on one side, and the adherent of Historical Christianity, so called by its opponents, on the other. This controversy turned upon the relation of the Scriptures to the soul, and of miracles to faith and reason, and was settled, so far as it has been settled, by the parties' agreeing to differ where they must and harmonize where they can, — a rule which it will be well when

the different denominations can adopt among themselves.

But now, somewhat more recently, a third internal movement has begun amongst us, no less earnest, but less virulent, it is to be hoped, and, at present, more limited than the one last noticed; a movement in favor of partially reconciling liberal and orthodox Christians upon the basis of scripture phraseology, mystically interpreted. The ground of communion on the one hand, and of controversy on the other, is just now, as those of you are well aware who see the papers and periodicals of our denomination, the doctrine of the Atonement, upon which the new movement men hold that our body, generally, have failed to do justice to a large class of scripture testimonies which orthodoxy has recognized, particularly those which relate to the sacrificial character of our Saviour's death. Now, I am not about to discuss the merits of the whole controversy, which neither subject nor space permits me to do. What I intended was simply to remark upon one point, in which the controversy, thus far, is very instructive, namely, that almost all the difficulty, all the mystery, all the perplexity, all the anxiety and doubt and distress, that have been conjured up and set forth in regard to the death of Christ and its relation to our faith and life and salvation, turn not upon what is said *by* Christ, who is our great teacher, but upon what is said *of* him. It is not so strange that men trained in the orthodox creeds, but it is strange that men habituated to liberal methods and principles should forget, while marvelling over the frequency and fervor with which

the apostles dwell upon the sacrifice of Christ, that Jesus himself scarcely alludes to himself in that light, under that figure, at all, and where he does so most strongly, it is simply as the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep, — one of the commonest and best understood figures of language. This, and the idea of his giving his life a ransom for many, — which also is a simple, common, and intelligible figure, — constitute about all that Jesus says about his own death, beyond such plain declarations of its moral meaning and spiritual efficacy as: — “and I, if I be lifted up,” (i. e. on the cross,) “will draw all men unto me.” When will Christians get to the heart of that significant saying of the great Apostle of christian liberty? Poring and disputing over all that has been said and written about Christ, they grope about with a vail upon their hearts, — “but,” says Paul, “when it shall turn to the Lord,” let them once go to Christ himself, “the vail shall be taken away.”

The Church has gone behind Christ and below Christ — to prophets and apostles, and apostolic fathers and early age councils and middle age metaphysics — to learn about Christ and Christianity, — but how has Christ himself, the living Christ of the Evangelists, Christ formed in a soul instructed and inspired by reading them, been slighted in the comparison! Our Puritan fathers, revolting from a Church which found its authority in the ages after Christ, went away back and found their favorite authorities and examples in an anterior dispensation, appearing to have acted upon a notion which is far

from being yet extinct, that because the Old Testament is placed first within the sacred covers, it is first in importance. Macaulay says of a distinguished Covenanter in the time of William and Mary, "It is a circumstance strikingly characteristic of the man and of the school in which he had been trained, that, in all the mass of his writing which has come down to us, there is not a single word indicating that he had ever in his life heard of the New Testament." This reminds us of those disciples, spoken of in the Book of Acts, who had not so much as heard of *there being any holy spirit*.

The conclusion to which this discourse has tended is this, that, in all questions of doctrine or duty, we should begin with the Christ of the Gospels, start from that high central ground to survey the field of truth, and let the light of the plain revelation illustrate what is obscure; whereas the opposite course is too generally taken, men magnify a few obscurities, by holding them close to their eyes, and let a speck of darkness hide a heaven of light. Hardly any thing has kept back the cause of truth in the church, and I may add, of righteousness in society, so much as this habit of going somewhere else for authority more than to the spirit of Christ himself. Christ, the word, the life, the spirit of Christ, is our great, decisive example in all matters of creed and of conduct.

But let no man comfort himself with the fancy that he has lightened his responsibility by thus reducing his creed to the limits of the Gospel. Let no man say lightly, as I fear some do say it, "the four

Gospels contain all the religion I need." *All* the religion! Is it, then, so easy a matter to do — even to believe — the Sermon on the Mount — to pray with the heart the Lord's Prayer — to deny one's self — to take up the cross and follow Christ daily — to love God with the whole soul, and your neighbor as yourself, and to do unto others as you would that they should do unto you? This is all that the Lord requires of you, — but is the thought of this flattering to careless self-complacency? You may well congratulate yourself if you are delivered from the burden and bewilderment and bondage of human creeds and dead traditions, but there still remains a more obstinate and wily enemy, named, variously, the love of the world, the fear of the world, the care of the world, and to meet and overcome him in the simplicity of Christ will cost your best thought, your strongest faith, your highest courage, and your whole life.

VII.

THE UNITARIAN IDEA.

TO US THERE IS BUT ONE GOD, THE FATHER.—1 Cor. viii. 6.

FOR several years, at all our great gatherings,* three questions have, under one or another name and form, more or less distinctly, always, I think, more deeply than any others, exercised the mind and heart of our denomination; and well may they do so, in my opinion, until we come to comprehend and feel, far more vividly than we yet do, the vantage-ground and place of responsibility, at once, which we hold before God and in relation to our fellow-men, by virtue of the simple and sublime, the soul-stirring and soul-satisfying faith committed to our branch of the Church of Christ.

The first of these three questions I am about to call your attention to is a question of name; the second a question of form; and the third and greatest of all is a question of idea. The first asks whether we who belong to what is popularly known as the Liberal Wing of the Church militant should call ourselves, or let ourselves be called, *Unitarians*;

* Preached as a review of the May Meeting of the American Unitarian Association in 1859.

whether it is not time to drop that name as a thing outgrown and obsolete: the second, whether it is desirable, convenient, consistent for us to be organized as a distinct body: and the third,—which seems to me almost to swallow up the other two questions, and of which we seem hitherto to have strangely overlooked the relative importance, but give signs every year of coming nearer to a right appreciation,—is the question, whether there is not some one great religious idea which is committed to us as really Unitarians, (whatever called or calling ourselves,) which distinguishes or should distinguish us from the so-called Orthodox communions, because, however their heart and flesh may cry out or secretly yearn for such an idea, their imposed or inherited creeds will not allow it,—an idea, in short, which, so far as we truly cherish and value it, must long keep us a peculiar people, in fact, in form, and in name.

In comparison with this third question, the one first mentioned, whether we will adhere, or answer, to the name Unitarians, is, in every sense, a merely nominal one; and equally idle, as it seems to me, were it to discuss the question whether we should remain organized into one body. Our great idea, if it is verily a living idea, organizes us, of itself, into one church, one family, one body of believers.

Now I think, as has been already intimated, that it is coming to be more and more a settled conviction with the representatives of our churches, as they assemble year after year, to read together the signs of the times, and give and receive mutual

cheer and counsel,— and both the intense and insidious efforts of sectarianism around us, and the occasional wavering of some spirit amongst us, less capable of enduring that hardness which a good soldiery in the Unitarian cause requires, combine to draw us the more strongly to the ground of union upon this point,— that we have and ought to hold and hold up a religious idea, which, once distinctly seen and felt in its whole application to theology and humanity, will make the name Unitarian to be no longer the representative of an abstract, barren, scholastic, sectarian notion, but an expression rich in suggestion of truth, which the soul of man everywhere darkly yearns to reach and to realize.

There is a recreant tendency in this age, growing partly out of men's weariness with mere verbal quibbling and sectarian subtilty, to set up the mystical and sentimental elements of our nature above thought and judgment; to say, "Come, as we cannot be of the same mind, let us be of the same *mouth*, let us fall back upon the *form of sound words*, (which I fear means, or would mean, rather the *sound of formal words*,) let us rest in the sacred utterances of the Scripture, and in the holy emotions they awaken, and thus realize again the blessed unity of the household of the faith." Plausible as this sounds, flattering as it is to weak or weary minds, it is not faithful to the wants of our age, it is not just to the spirit of truth. The idea that, precisely in that department of life which is the most important, we are to abjure and stifle that faculty of reason which is the highest thing in man, and

meant to rule the whole man, will not bear to be looked at, must be seen, at least, through a mist, to produce any other effect than a repelling one, on the minds of men. And the idea that any safer, surer, worthier union of Christian men is effected by merely consenting to confine our religious expression to certain sanctified forms and phrases, and holding in with a bridle the mouth of every question that instinctively rises, as to what we mean by them, than by simply and manfully owning that we do differ in our thought, and that therefore no *language* can fix the *final* expression and embodiment of our ever-growing theology,—shows a sad want of the liberty wherewith Paul told his brethren, so many centuries ago, that Christ makes his followers free.

It is not, indeed, on the one hand, a mere speculation, but neither is it, on the other, a mere sentiment, that is to make a sound basis for a living, healthy, active Church of Christ and humanity. If there has been excess in the way of speculation in religion, the cure is not to make sentiment the creed, the confession, the character. Every church must be built upon an idea. Of course, when I say idea, I do not mean merely a notion, nor merely an image of truth; I mean a conviction of the mind, a judgment of the reason; I mean, too, something which includes feeling; only, in this case, the feeling springs from faith, whereas, in the case of religious sentimentalism, the faith is a creature of feeling and fancy.

Now, then, what is this grand idea, this mighty source of the best feeling and the best works, if we

truly have and believe it, this idea towards which the heart of humanity struggles, but which the prevailing creed of Christendom does so much to confuse, and obstruct, and keep in the background? The very name *Unitarian* expresses it; Paul expresses it in our text. Interpret the name by the text. You will perceive that it designates no such narrow notion as those who have assailed, and perhaps many who have *assumed* it, have sometimes ascribed to it. Unitarianism means not merely the doctrine of the *unity*, but of the *unities*. It declares not merely the oneness of the Godhead, in the controversy touching the Divine existence, but, in the greater, moral question, the harmony and identity of so many sacred things which God has united, or rather which *in God are united*, but which man has put asunder.

Of course the primary, and, historically, the principal idea expressed by the term Unitarian is the idea that there is and can be only one Being who is the Supreme God, and that that Being is the Father, (not the Son also, not the Spirit also, but the Father only,) dwelling in the Son, working as a Spirit in him and in all His true children, and in Christ's true Church. And the time is far from having come when, even in this sense, the unity of God no longer needs to be defended, developed, diffused, and strenuously insisted upon. For we hear it distinctly said, almost in express words, and it is evident enough, the feeling is widely waking in the community, "we must be sure of our faith in the Divine and Supreme *Three*, at all events, and how and whether we can

afterward make out for ourselves a unity of the Godhead, is a secondary question." While this is so, how can any man allow himself to think of compromise in this matter? How can any one argue that, because, philosophically, a trinity of *manifestations* may be conceived of, therefore, it is time for liberal men to lay aside the ungenerous imputation which the term Unitarian implies? It implies no such imputation. It implies simply that we recognize a unity beneath, above, beyond all trinities, all diversities, and toward that would ever look, and labor, and call our fellow-men.

In establishing this Unity of God, or rather establishing ourselves upon it, we do also, at the same time, virtually reduce to unity another discord which has been created, in the personality of Christ, finding him to be a simple and not a double being, and this, again, gives a unity to the Gospel, as a picture of Christ, and lifts from the heart that cloud of distressing perplexity, which the constant uncertainty with which of the two persons in Christ we are talking introduces into the mind.

The Son and the Father are more truly one with each other in the doctrine of the Unitarian than in a creed which, virtually at least, makes the paternal nature the exacting, and the filial the interposing. Surely a far deeper unity is made out through an exact moral resemblance, than by a hard and slippery idea of Two in One, with which only the subtlest metaphysics can grapple.

I say, a *moral* unity of the Son and the Father, — and this brings me to say, in general, that the Uni-

tarian idea, the doctrine of the Oneness of God, the Father, contains in itself an element, which the heart of humanity craves and cries to have brought out and brought home to it more than any theory with regard to the *mode* of the Divine *existence*, however great a hindrance confused and inconsistent notions about that subject may be to the peace and prosperity of the spiritual life,—and that peculiar and precious element is the assertion of the Oneness of God's almighty, all-wise, and all-gracious parental providence, one everywhere, one always, drawing good from seeming evil, and overcoming evil with good. In one word, the idea of the unity of God's disposition, and not merely that of the unity of his person, is what, to my ear and mind and heart and whole nature, makes the name of Unitarian most dear and inspiring. When Unitarian polemics have repeated the sublime declaration, "To us there is but One God, the Father," and when Trinitarian polemics, with a strange hardihood, have set up the counter-assertion, "To us there is One God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit,"—too often—so often that I suppose, to this day, our text with many makes that for its first and leading impression—the word Father has awakened merely or mainly the idea of official rank and title—denoting rather a relation among the Divine Beings, than a relation of Heaven to Earth. The Father has been spoken of in speculative and controversial theology with hardly more feeling of the tender meaning the name should have for the affections than if it had been Creator or King. In calling him the Father, have we always

felt that He was *even* a father, in the best human sense of the word?

Who can imagine that Paul let the hallowed name pass his lips or his pen, with any such formal and superficial association? What real Christian can ever do it?

To say that the Father is our one God is to say that parental love, in perfection, reigns through the universe,—it is the Unitarianism which asserts a perfect unity among all the attributes of the Godhead, between justice and mercy, between holiness and love. It is fatal to the blighting dogma of everlasting reprobation. If God can ever cease to deal as a father with his children, if he can ever disown them,—the moment we admit the possibility of such a time's coming, we give up our faith in the truth that to us there is one God, the Father. And He whom no change of worlds can change, is without variableness here.

Bewildering, indeed, is it to the mind and heart,—“reason stands aghast and faith itself is half confounded,”—when we are required to acknowledge three supreme objects of worship;—but even this, however distracting and distressing, is a far smaller evil than the practical polytheism in which the slaves of sense and passion cringe and burn incense before the “gods many and lords many,” which the superstition of worldliness sets up, simultaneously or successively, in the place of the true God and Father of the spirit. Luck and chance, fate and fortune, custom and opinion, power, wealth, and fashion, such are some of the gods against which the revelation

of One God, the Father, has to be held up before the eyes and hearts of men.

When the heart is once established in the faith of the unity of God, the Father, a beautiful and blessed unity will follow in that life which, under the One Father's Providence, man is called to live. In the expressive language of the apostle, he will be enabled to "wait upon the Lord without distraction." If the consciousness of imperfection — if conscience of sin — makes his heart sink within him, — if the cloud of sorrow settles down coldly and heavily on his heart's hopes, — still, under all this heaviness, he will be able to rejoice in the good tidings from Heaven, that the hand which chastens him, is the hand of the one impartial, unchangeable Father.

Here, my friends, and not merely in any speculative or controversial ingenuity, lies the best criterion of the depth and value of our Unitarianism. Do we thus practically worship the One God and Father in the soberness of a life equally removed from gloom and giddiness, — rendering a cheerful, hopeful, thoughtful homage to the overruling Providence, — proving our faith by our hope and our charity, our contentment, and our disposition to recognize every angel of wisdom and mercy under the darkest disguise?

Need I say to you, friends of this church and congregation, that the train of thought into which I have led you is one to which the holy spirit of our Father is leading us in these days, to-day and this hour? I came home from our high and happy meditations and communings on the blessed doc-

trine of God's Fatherhood, I came through scenes of nature sparkling in paradisiacal purity, I came to hear tidings of sorrow which, for a moment, flung a black pall over all the beauty of the opening summer, and turned the song of birds into a general dirge. I see no other real cure or comfort for such woes than the conviction that all these forms of beauty are but the signs and shadows of an inner and everlasting world of spiritual realities,—no cure or comfort but the faith which sees God in all and all in God,—which feels that Heaven is around us, that its foundations are within us, because we live and move and have our being in God. What other refuge or relief is there? Will you tell me of the healing virtue of time? "Sad cure!" which cures only by killing the tenderest and holiest part of our sorrow! Poor, negative solace! The heart and soul cry out for a positive compensation. Such a compensation is not to be found where the children of this world would find it, in the gradual deadening of thought, but in the quickening of thought to the meaning of those high and holy and healing lessons, which God teaches his children through the ministrations of grief and pain.

When, in the very heart of all the bloom and glow of this season of promise, the dearest hopes of earth are blasted,—when childhood in its purity and womanhood in its mature and serene beauty, are snatched from our eyes, and we are tempted to feel "an enemy hath done this,"—what shall prepare our hearts to take home to themselves the better lessons of such events? The practical answer of

the hearts and lives of the majority, I fear, to such questions is, that about all we can do is to let grief have its way, and then to let time take *its* course, and the bright and busy world resume, in due time, its power. But who can really and calmly believe it to be the meaning and will of God, that this one only certain thing about life, this change that awaits all, should break, as it does, into the midst of our enjoyments and expectations, only to depress us with a temporary heaviness, to benumb and bewilder the spirit for a while, and then send it back with no higher and holier purposes to the intercourse and business of life? What we need, and what Providence, by these sudden and startling events, would teach us, is to *think* of these sad things, which, for a time, we feel so keenly and so bitterly, — to look at them in such a light that, at last, we can learn to see them as a harmonious part of the holy plan of Divine love, — can come to say from the heart and by the whole tone of our life, that “to us there is but One God, the Father,” — one Lord of Life and of Death, to whom all the elements of the moral, as of the material world, are alike subject, — One God, the Father, who can never cease to be a Father — can never cast off the least or the worst of his children.

You will see, of course, that I cannot have had any idea of exhausting even the outlines of the great Unitarian idea in a single discourse. It would take hours and volumes to tell all that Paul says when he says, “To us there is One God, the Father.” The doctrine of the Divine Unity is virtually the

doctrine of the Atonement, that glorious truth which has been so mournfully belittled in the creeds and controversies of Christendom, — the Atonement, the bringing into one of what had been at discord in human thought, feeling, and practice, — the reconciling and harmonizing of the Divine attributes in the soul of man, the reconciliation of man to his Maker, to his brother, and to himself.

Finally, there is one aspect of the text to which before leaving the whole subject with you, I must briefly allude. The doctrine of the Divine Unity is the doctrine of the oneness of humanity. The expression, "To *us* there is One God, the Father," means not merely to each of us, but to all of us, one and the same Father. Sectarian or social influences may make us feel or live as if we really had different origins and destinies, but reason and revelation assure us with combined utterance, that we are all the offspring of one and the same Being, "of whom and through whom and to whom are all things."

God, the Father, is one, and in Him we are one, members one of another. The loss or gain, the degradation or elevation, the distress or deliverance of one, is the affair of all. In a thousand ways men ignore this profound fact, judging instead of helping each other; coldly and sternly they go on their way, serving their several private gods, Chance, Power, or whatever the idol may be they darkly worship, but they only punish themselves by thus banishing themselves from the presence of the all-loving Father into the wintry land of selfishness;

and daily one sees the curse written on many a hard and haggard brow, in many a stolid, stony eye, on many a sullen, envious lip.

I have given you a glimpse, an impression, perhaps, of what I call the great Christian revelation of the Unities, of the Unitarian idea, in a word, concerning the highest matters of religion. It gives us unity in our theology; unity between theology and humanity; unity in the upper world; unity between that world and this lower and preparatory one, — the unity realized in the true Church-life.

To-day* again we confess One who invites men to come to Him and find rest for their souls, — rest from the confusion of self-contradictory speculations; rest from the heavy burdens thus laid upon the mind; rest from the heavier burdens the dreary and desperate demands of self-idolizing passion lay upon the heart; rest in the bosom of the Father whose love he images, — the rest of conscious and confiding oneness with the “great Parent-mind” that made and governs the universe, — that rest which remaineth for the people of God, who through faith and patience seek to inherit the promises. Let us come to Him and partake in the great atonement I have endeavored to describe and commend.

* Communion Sunday.

VIII.

THE CONSISTENT UNITARIAN BELIEVER.

THOU BELIEVEST THAT THERE IS ONE GOD; THOU DOEST WELL: THE DEMONS ALSO BELIEVE AND TREMBLE. — James ii. 19.

THE word in our common version is “devils”; but that is a wrong rendering; and the one which I have substituted is not, as might at first be imagined, merely a more polite way of saying the same thing. The class of beings called demons differs from those called devils (whether either are real, or only imaginary, I do not now inquire) in this respect: that the demons are simply disembodied spirits; according to the Jews, they were for the most part the ghosts of dead men; in the Pagan mythology they were deities; and they might be either good demons or evil demons,—and which they were, in any given case, would depend on the connection in which the word was used. The demon of Socrates was a good genius. Paul, in his address to the Athenians on the Areopagus, begins, as we find by consulting the original, with giving them credit for being *more than commonly reverential toward the demons*. This is the idea contained in the word rendered “too superstitious.” In the passage from James before us, the fact that the spirits

are represented as trembling, or shivering, as the original seems literally to imply, would appear to indicate that they belong to the tribe of dark spirits, though perhaps not necessarily totally depraved ones.

So much for the meaning of the word. As to the question, whether these demons have any actual existence, or were only the creatures of the popular imagination, and with Jesus and his apostles figures of speech, the settlement of this question is not essential to James's argument. My own opinion is, that the demons that were supposed to possess men in former ages were diseases, and not devils nor ghosts. As to the heathen deities, although it seems often to be supposed that there is scriptural authority for believing that the idols and oracles were really devils, Paul says expressly, "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one." And, I think, we may say something of the same kind with regard to the demons of the old Jewish mythology, that they were *nothing in the world*, except the figments of a crazed brain, a troubled conscience, or a superstitious fancy.

But this does not at all affect the practical purpose of the Apostle's argument in the case before us; certainly it does not, if we suppose him to be reasoning with those who believed in the actual existence of a race called demons, and it does not prevent that argument's having a significance for us, who may not acknowledge the reality of any precisely such beings.

For what is the argument? The Apostle is meet-

ing the case of those who fancy that they have a faith that is going to save them, though it is a faith which has now no other effect upon them than to fill them with this notion. He takes, then, the first and fundamental article of Jewish faith and of all religious faith, and says: you tell me, for instance, that you believe in the unity of God [for this is the exact force of the original, "thou believest that God is one;"] so far, so good; but the demons also, of whom you read in your sacred writings, believe as much and *they tremble*. This confession and consternation of the demons every reader of the Gospels will remember as there repeatedly described, and it suits equally well the consistency of the Evangelist's narrative, and the requirements of the Apostle's argument, whether it was the demons, or the man possessed with them, or with the notion of them, who, being beside himself, cried out, "Let *us* alone, what have *we* to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God,"—though I think the confusion of persons in some of these utterances favors the conclusion, that it was properly the demoniacs who believed and trembled.

But the practical point with the Apostle was, that these dark and troubled spirits, whether in the body or out of the body, believed and confessed the same truth which these nominal children of Abraham and disciples of Moses and Jesus *professed* to hold by, without giving any proof of it in their practice, and that *it was lawful for them to learn a lesson even from an enemy*. These darkened or depraved

spirits, whichever they were, recognized the true Unitarian faith; they testified that there was one God, and addressed Jesus as the Son and Messenger of that Supreme Being. And they showed their faith by their works so far as this, at least, that their faith wrought *upon* them, and that, believing in the Deity, they at least trembled at his power and his holiness, which was more than, as would appear, many of those did to whom James addressed this plain-spoken Epistle, and, on the other hand, was far less than they ought to do, if any of them did even so much.

I have said, that it was not essential to the Apostle's argument, whether we understood the confession of faith referred to to come from disembodied spirits or from men whom they were supposed to possess. Only, if evil and incurable spirits were meant, a different tone and turn would have to be given to the text, and it should be read,—in merely believing that God is one, thou doest something, but *no more* than the demons do, for they *believe and tremble*;—whereas, upon the other supposition, the milder one, the reading would be,—thou doest something, but not so much as they do, for they *believe and tremble*.

Whichever way we read and regard it, our text reminds a reflecting person, that there are three kinds, or perhaps we should say degrees, of belief in religious matters; the belief of logic, the belief of terror, and the belief of love. The first of these is a name, the second is a dream, the third only is a wakeful and living reality. The first two of these stages, as

we might call them, in the progress of the principle of faith, from a shadowy to a substantial existence, are recognized by the Apostle as existing even among the worldly and the wicked;—the third is implied by him, as the one which marks and makes the true Christian, the true Israelite and friend of God.

The man with whom the Apostle supposes himself arguing has no faith, in strict reality. Faith has a name to live, on his tongue and in his brain, but it is dead. He is a dead Unitarian. The question is not as to the case of a man who *has* faith and not works, but it refers to one who merely *says* he has faith. Can faith save *him*? the Apostle asks. No, for the simple reason that he has not got it. He professes to believe that God is one, and in a certain sense he does believe it, that is, his reason teaches him, that, *if there is a God*, He must be single, for the idea of more than one supreme Lord and first cause of all things would contradict the only principle upon which he can trust his own intellectual faculties. But this does not imply that the belief of the head has gone down into the heart, or will go out into the life. So long as it remains in this state, so far from necessarily making him less proud, less selfish, it may only aggravate his pride and his selfishness. Rather than continue in such a condition of mere nominal faith, well would it be for a man to exchange places with the trembling slave of superstition, who, at least, believes in something higher than himself, than his own understanding, and has within him a susceptibility to the true light and the true life.

A distinguished commentator on the Epistles contends, that, when James says that "Faith without works is dead," he does not mean to deny that it is a real faith. And the reason he gives for this opinion is, that, "as the faith of the devils is a real conviction, and is shown to be real by their trembling, when they think of God's holiness and power, so a man may have a real conviction of the truth of the Gospel, who is not habitually influenced thereby." This I believe, however, to be a great mistake, although a common one. If the truth of the Gospel meant merely the terrors of the Gospel, or rather the terrors of the Law, then, perhaps, that would be more reason for saying that a man might be convinced and convicted without being converted thereby, though, even then, a real belief would influence the inner man, at least, and the real life, so long as it lasted and so far as it went. And thus the very trembling of the devils, especially coupled with their confession, showed the working of the law of faith on their natures, although it did not and could not lead them to repentance, because it was not a holy horror at sin, but only a cringing before superior power. But the truth of the Gospel means a great deal more than the revelation of power and holiness and justice, it means more especially the doctrine of fatherly love. This, indeed, *is* the Gospel proper, the glad tidings of reconciliation. And the question is, can a man have a real conviction of the Gospel in this sense, the only true and full one, and not show it in his life, and that, too, by something better than trembling, namely, by trust? One might

as well say that because rain, without sunshine, cannot raise your corn from the ground, the thing is beyond the power of nature. Let the sun shine out, and test whether the corn is alive or dead. Let the sun of gospel truth and love shine through the firmament of faith into the heart, and see whether the graces and the virtues of a gospel life will not attest its presence and its power. Would you say that any one really had *charity*, who should merely *say* to the destitute and the desolate sons and daughters of poverty and affliction, "be comfortable and happy," without doing anything to help them? Why, then, should you say that anybody could really have faith, who merely professed a doctrine which he did not practise? The truth is, this idea that there can be a *real* faith which yet is not a *live* faith, makes a distinction without a difference, and, more than that, it is a hurtful delusion. Let no one comfort himself with the notion that he has any such thing as faith, if it does not work in him and through him, — if it does not affect his spirit and his life. What does James's saying to his man, "*Show me thy faith without thy works,*" mean, but this: *Prove to me that you have any faith?* And, what is this confident challenge but a virtual denial of the man's fancied possession?

The reproof of James, then, in our text, is directed against a nominal faith, and particularly against a lifeless Unitarianism. He says, Thou believest that God is one: thou doest well not to believe that He is more than one, not to confuse thy mind with the attempt to believe in two, three, or more gods,

simultaneously or alternately controlling the destinies of the world. But thou doest not well, if professing to believe that God is one, thou dost not really so much as believe that God *is*, and provest thy disbelief, or, at least, *unbelief* in this vital truth, by living as if thine own will and pleasure were to be supremely consulted, as if thou wert born not to minister but to be ministered unto, as if thou wert absolutely thine own master, as if, in short, God were a mere name to keep the world in awe, and constrain it into an outward peace. And to every one who, professing to believe in the one God of the Gospel, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, entertains, at best, only an intermittent and cringing conviction in reality, as if the language of the heart to itself were “I am *afraid* there is a God,” — to such an one the Apostle says, the very demons (the devils, if you will) have this belief of terror; and shall a man think that he knows, not to say believes, the Christian’s God, the tender, holy, and gracious Father, who has no better faith than this?

In a word, the Apostle reminds us what should and would be the power of a true Unitarian faith. And to this let us now direct our attention.

Unfortunately, too much of the professed Unitarianism extant concerns itself with the Divine nature as something quite disconnected with the nature of the inquirer himself. It contemplates and discusses the Supreme as coolly and distantly as if it were mere fiction that in Him we live and move and have our being. I do not mean to say that Trinitarian-

ism and all formalisms do not fall under the same reproach; I simply mean that Unitarianism ought, by its theory, to be peculiarly free from it,—ought to keep alive in a peculiar manner the sense of the Divine Omnipresence, and constant spiritual nearness, and particular and perpetual providence.

Do we believe that there is one God, and only one? Then see what practical consequences must follow. Then we believe that there is one and only one religion; if there is “one Lord,” then “one faith, one baptism,”—namely, the faith which works by love, and the baptism of the temper into the spirit of holiness and charity. There may be many forms of religion, but there can be only one religion; there may be many manifestations, but there can be only one spirit. There may be various theologies, but there can be only one religion; and that religion consists in the allegiance of the soul, under the fear of the Lord, to the principles of truth and rectitude and honesty, and its devotedness to the work which conscience calls it to do. If there is only one God, there is only one religion,—godliness. The true Unitarian will be a true Catholic.

If there is one and only one God, He is the Almighty; and if that one, almighty God is love, then no rival can divide or dispute with him the government of the universe; no spirit inconsistent with love can cast its shadow upon the Infinite Benignity, and no dispensation, however seemingly inconsistent with love, can be permitted, except as it may tend to swell the triumph and glory of the Divine Grace. The true Unitarian, relieved of all

lingering superstition about a conflict among the divine attributes, imputing no such weakness or variability to the almighty and all-wise Father, will ever cherish a calm faith in the omnipotence of goodness, and will show his faith by casting in his lot with that holy cause.

If there is one and only one God, who reigns on the throne of the universe, he who truly believes this and believes in Him, will possess his own soul's inner world in the peace of unity, having his passions free from all anarchy, sweetly submissive to the one authority of God's will.

If there is only one God, then, to the believer, life is one harmonious expression. Having but one God, he has but one grand object before him, to which all others are secondary and subservient, — to serve, please, and resemble Him; in a word, to glorify his name. As, in his faith, there is no discord among the elements of the Divine nature, so in his life is there nothing of that continual, gnawing, and fretting collision between the various calls of propensity and circumstance, which make this world to the faithless a scene of so much discomfort and so little spiritual growth.

If there is but one God, then all intelligent beings in earth as well as in heaven compose but one family, of which He is the Father. If there is but one God, then all men, of every clime, condition, complexion, character, are His children, and we all are brethren. He who believes that there is one God, believes that that one is the God of all, without respect of persons, equally just to all, equally merci-

ful ; and so believing, he will be irresistibly impelled to exercise in his own limited sphere the same justice and mercy.

If there is but one God, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. He who ages ago wrought his wonders in the heavens and on the earth, is still with us and passing before us in the daily mercies and miracles of his providence. We worship not, if we rightly worship, the name or the memory of a God that *was*, but *in* the name and strength of a God who now is.

In a word, if there is one living and true God, then, emphatically, faith without works is dead, for He, we are told, worketh in us to will and to do ; and if we are not working with Him, then there is no vital union between Him and us, in short, no real faith.

I know what will be said to all this, what the heart at least will say, namely, if you try the reality of our faith by such tests, where can you find a true believer ? But still the question comes back, are not the tests fair ones ?

There is said to be joy and peace in believing. The devils believe that there is one God, and tremble. The angels believe and *know* that there is one God, because they dwell in Him, and they also tremble—with *joy*, in His presence. There is terror in believing only so much of the Gospel as the slaves of sin and superstition do believe,—but how small a part of it that is ! If the Gospel were what some creeds called Christian represent it, well might one who should truly believe it, believe and tremble.

If the awakening, conversion, and salvation of our souls depended on the arbitrary will of a Being, concerning whom there were any doubt whether his disposition towards us were that same parental love which we all understand by its ideal in our own nature,—if all we could know were that His nature is *called* love, without knowing that it might not have willed our everlasting misery,—who could really take such a creed home to his heart, and yet find joy and peace in believing it? A man might *say* that he believed such a representation of the Deity, in whose hands were the destinies of the fellow-creatures he was bound to love and pity, and he might almost make himself *believe that he believed* it, but if he did believe it, he must be either miserable, or else a monster or a maniac.

According to our view, the Gospel of Jesus involves no such terrible alternative. We are come, if we are true to our profession,

“ Where milder words declare His will,
And spread His love abroad.”

To us, indeed, comes the admonition, “ If ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in *fear* ;” but the fear enjoined upon us, as reasonable beings, is a reverential fear of offending against the Divine purity. We are invited by the doctrine we profess, to cherish that generous faith which, instead of freezing and numbing the natural affections, enlarges and purifies them, and extends them to the height of piety

and the breadth of charity. The genius of our large and lofty creed, if it is suffered to possess our hearts, will lift our ideas and impressions of the spiritual above that region of the spectral or sepulchral, in which those of a lamentably large proportion of the religious world seem still to linger.

In the Unitarian controversy, as it figures in church history, the chief question has related to the Personality of the Divine Being. But there is another question, another controversy, constantly agitating the hearts of men, though not yet brought out as it should be and is to be before their consciousness, pointing to a deeper, a more practical Unitarianism, and that is, whether our God is really one, not merely in his person, but in his disposition. Until our Unitarianism and Trinitarianism come out clear on this great matter, they are having but a preliminary skirmish. What would it matter to a man whether the form of government he lived under were a monarchy or an oligarchy, in comparison with the question, what is the *spirit* of the government? All Christians agree that there is but one God, whether he exist in one person or in three. But the question is, what is the spirit of the Godhead that governs the universe? Is it a kind spirit, eternally and invariably so, or is it an arbitrary, a capricious, a changeable one?

“Thou believest that there is one God;” dost thou really believe this in the only sense in which thy belief amounts to anything more than a phrase or a notion, namely, that there is one will presiding over all things in earth and heaven, and whatso-

ever other darker world there may be, and that that will is good-will towards men,—a will that means their good only and continually? Acknowledging this belief, well may we tremble at our inconsistency and indifference, when we think of our inconstant, fitful, and fluctuating lives.

IX.

THE REIGN OF THE FATHER.

“—THAT GOD MAY BE ALL IN ALL.”—1 Cor. xv. 28.

THIS text, as you well remember, forms part of the solemn language with which the Church hallows her service for the dead. And it is not always easy, sometimes it may seem ungracious, to take any part of such language from that tender connection for the purpose of showing that the words of consolation spoken over the dead contain instruction and quickening for the living, and that phrases heard mostly in the subdued hours of sorrow and resignation express truth that needs to be repeated and reflected upon, in order to be acted upon, in the bright, busy, bustling seasons and scenes of active life, in all its employments and enjoyments, in all its eager pursuit of practical objects, and in all its most sharp and spirited conflicts. And yet the great Apostle, even in the midst of his thrilling disclosures of the future, even in the midst of his prophetic picture of the resurrection of the dead, pauses to sound the gospel trump for the resurrection of the living, admonishing them to “awake to righteousness,” and reproving them that “some have not the knowledge of God.”

I wish, then, to bring out to view so much as time and strength may permit of the treasure of meaning, to think upon and to live upon, which lies concealed from the slaves of custom, but ready to reveal itself to the eye of the free spirit, under the phrase which represents God as *all in all*. I shall first ask you to consider what it meant and what it means in the connection in which Paul uses it, and then what it expresses as an absolute statement of Christian faith. For I believe, and shall maintain, that this text has a mighty bearing both on theology, in manifold respects, and on practical religion; that, though in its first and immediate purpose it had a prophetic character, it also had, and has now and forever, a most pressing application to the present world, to the things and the thoughts of each passing day and hour; that while it appears, on the surface, to be describing only what is to be in the consummations of a remote futurity, it really tells a mind that enters into it what are now, in some important respects, the thoughts and purposes of God, the relations of God to Christ and humanity, and what ought therefore to be the feelings and the dealings of man.

But let us, as was proposed, take these things in order. I need hardly remind you that our text, in its original and immediate reference, points forward to a time in the far future, (how far off Paul may have conceived it in his day, it is difficult, if possible, for any one now to tell,) when, everything that is contrary being subdued and submissive, God alone shall reign throughout the universe with an undi-

vided, undisputed, undelegated sway. Let us consider what this implies, and see whether it does not strike at the root of some hoary errors which have too long overshadowed the fair garden of the Christian faith. The time, we are told, will certainly come, however slowly, (and our own reason and the best feelings of our nature echo the declaration, in view of the nature of God as an almighty and all-wise Father,) when *all* God's enemies shall be put under His feet. But let us not try to satisfy our souls with the cold, hard, cruel interpretation of this language which has been, and is, so common. It is the language of strong figure. Let us, in the spirit of our Christian faith, in the spirit of the Gospel, the good news which Christ has brought us from the Father, seek to enter into the heart of the statement. The popular idea of it, as embodied in so much of the creed and temper of Christendom, implies that God, the omniscient Maker and all-wise Father of the universe, is subject to the infirmities and limitations of finite creatures. According to this idea, the great and glorious consummation which is to console Christian hearts in their sorrows by the prospect of its coming, the blessed event for which they are to look and reach forward in eager hope, will have been brought about, even though many souls to which God's love was the original cause of existence shall have been subdued and silenced only by being smothered in the penal fires of eternal torment. Is this the way in which eternal love and wisdom overcomes its enemies? Is this coarse and cruel system of subjugation the best which is known

to the Father of Jesus? We know how the kings and conquerors of this world put down their enemies,—they who, in the language of the old Roman historian, “make a solitude and call it peace.” We know how much, or rather how little, that submission amounts to, as regards the real gain and glory of manhood, when the foot of the conqueror is on the neck of his prostrate foe. A recent writer, undertaking to reconcile eternal punishment with reason and the love of God, represents Him as virtually saying, “I will not trouble you any longer with the visitations of my Spirit; I will simply place you where you may have your own way, and where you can no longer disturb me and my friends.” But what a mockery of the idea of a triumph of the blessed Spirit of Christ and of God over all enemies is it, to represent a large portion of these enemies as given over even by the Infinite Father, as having exhausted all the resources of his grace, and as being now left to gnash their teeth in unreconciled agony forever! O no! no such mere show of a victory meets the idea of the final reign of God over his creatures. What and where are the real enemies of God? They are not outward ones that can literally be trodden under foot—that can be said to be subdued when they are rendered incapable of making any further outward demonstration;—the enemies of the Spiritual One are the thoughts and tempers that love not to know Him, or that know Him only to hate Him. How then can God be said to have prevailed over all his enemies while these deep, dark powers lie nursing an inveterate re-

sentment? It cannot be said, to the satisfaction of any save those who make God altogether such a one as themselves. Who and what, I repeat, are the enemies of the Father? "The last enemy that shall be destroyed," the Apostle says, "is Death." But think of this, I pray you, and see what it involves. How is death destroyed? Let the Apostle himself answer: "The sting of death is sin." Destroy sin, and then, and then only, you destroy death. Then, and then only, "Death is swallowed up in victory." How is death destroyed? — let *him* answer who represents Christ as having come to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil. In other words, the destruction of death implies the end of all evil. It implies the time when *hell itself* shall be cast into the lake of fire, when in other words there shall be no such thing in the universe. If this is not the meaning of the Apostle's grand announcement, I can only say that he has not reached the heart of the religion of his Master. But I am satisfied that he *has* reached it. I am satisfied that he anticipates the time when God's enemies shall be subdued by being turned into his friends; when his love shall have melted the hardest foe into penitence; when every thought of every heart shall be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; when all the spirits in prison shall be found clothed and in their right mind in the palace of the Father of Mercies, and God shall be all in all.

Long and hard and sore may be the way for many before this glorious and blessed goal is reached. And here I would say that the common objection to

this doctrine of the final restoration and salvation of all men, namely, that it relaxes the law of holiness, is based upon the false assumption, that the doctrine implies men are to be made happy even without having to go through the hard and humbling way of repentance. On the contrary, the doctrine simply teaches that sooner or later all *will* repent, will submit to the discipline, however bitter it may be. It represents the Heavenly Father as virtually saying to his most wayward and rebellious child: "You *will* one day take this bitter medicine which I offer you for your own good,— why will you, by refusing, only make a still more bitter draught needful." It is, therefore, as Paul himself says, a *slandorous report* of this great doctrine that it teaches men to say, "let us do evil that good may come."

But there is one other old dogma that has wrought, and is still working, confusion in the faith of men, which our text also refutes. The doctrine that the time is ever coming when God shall be all in all, because not only all His enemies shall have been subdued by Christ, but Christ himself shall render up to Him the keys of authority, and be simply a son among the innumerable multitude of brethren, lays the axe at the root of that exaggerated idea of Christ, so contrary to his own representations and so confounding to the simplicity of faith in him and in his and our Father.

It may, however, be said: Yes, hereafter, in that far-off future of the next world, the time may come when God shall be all in all; but, for the present, *Christ* must be all in all. This is, indeed, a very

plausible, but a superficial and sophistical reasoning. Consult Christ himself. Hear him say, "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me but on Him that sent me." Ask yourselves calmly, to whom did Christ ascribe the glory? You will say at once, to his Father. His only desire was that the Father might be glorified in the Son — that God might be all in all.

And what is, or should be, meant (it might be asked) by making Christ all in all? A great deal is said about magnifying Christ, about loving Christ, which has very little depth of meaning. The love which Christ desires is, that we should *love the things which he loves*; a practical sympathy in the great object he lived for and died for, and not a mere sentimental expression of personal attachment, is what his generous heart yearns for, on the part of his human brethren. "Ye are my friends," he says, "if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Besides, there is another way of looking at this subject. The time is coming, says the Apostle, and every Christian echoes the teaching, when God *will* be all in all. But can He, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, be at any future time other or more, in himself, than he now is? And if, as Paul certainly and repeatedly implies throughout his Epistles, a believer in Christ and in immortality has his faith so much the substance of things hoped for that to him death is already abolished, the enemies and the enmity already destroyed through the power and promises of the Gospel — surely, to him, then, God *is* all in all.

And is not this the great end for which Christ came into the world, and for which he still continues in the world, spiritually, to teach us to know God as He is, that is, of course, as He is to us, the universal, everlasting, unchangeable, and ever-present Father? Did not Jesus glorify Him, to show us how we should glorify Him on the earth? This is what the Spirit of Christ in our hearts yearns to bring about, "that God may be all in all."

And so we come to the recognition of the fact that in these words the great Apostle of the religion of humanity announces boldly the truth which we may denominate Christian pantheism, which, in opposition to atheism, polytheism, and cold monotheism, declares not only that there is a God, but that He is *all that there is* except by sufferance; which, by declaring Him to be the *all*, saves itself at once from the looseness of polytheistic and the limitation of monotheistic idolatries, and, by adding that He is *in all*, dignifies itself as the true pantheism of Christian faith, instead of degenerating into that of a pagan philosophy. It is the pantheism of the Poet of the "Seasons," who begins that majestic hymn :

"These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
Are but the varied God. The rolling year
Is full of thee."

It is the pantheism of that fervent faith which dictated the expression in the Epistle to the Romans : "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." It is the pantheism of every one who, being a believer in Jesus, believes in the omnipresence

and perpetual, pervading providence of the universal Father.

But what is the practical conclusion of the whole matter? It is this. If the time is coming when God *will* be all in all,—if, in a certain sense, in the absolute sense, He *is* all in all,—then it surely follows that to us, in our faith, in our feelings, in our conduct, God *should* be all in all. And this means, in other words, that Godliness should be all in all to us — that religion should be the grand, the constant, the all-inspiring, and all-comprehending occupation, as it is the all-absorbing interest of our being. Even as we may say of God that if He is to us a partial, a limited God He is no God, so of religion we may say that if anything it must be everything — if it is not everywhere it is nowhere. For religion, if it really exists, is at the centre of a man's heart and life. It is the *spring*, in both senses of the word, the motive-spring, and the spring of refreshing and inspiration. It is impossible that we should truly have God in our sorrows, unless we have Him in our joys; that we should truly have Him in our prayers, unless we have Him in our conversation; that we should truly have Him in the church, unless we have Him in the street, the counting-room and the market-place, — we are not truly doing anything to His glory, unless we are doing *all to the glory of God*. We do not make God all in all — we do not really recognize Him to be all in all — we are not preparing our hearts for the time of His being revealed as all in all, — so long as we presume to *limit*, as we do, in various ways, the *Holy One of Israel* — nay, the

universal Father of Christ,—so long as we mark off the world and life, private or public, into districts, and say to piety, stay thou there! and to morality, and thou there! and to conscience, thus far and no farther! We do not make God all in all; on the contrary, we set his authority at naught, when we put asunder what God hath joined together—the work of the world and the work of the Lord—religion and reason—freedom and reverence—piety and humanity—the special form of divine service and the general and habitual temper of the mind. The Almighty will not be thus divided. As well might we think to shut out the sunlight by glass walls, as, by such means, to shut off from any one department of our life the authority of the Divine Spirit and Law.

The teaching of our text, if really taken home to our convictions, ought to settle for us forever those old questions in regard to Divine Providence which have so perplexed the minds of men, as whether that Providence is only general or is ever special. If God is all in all, then His providence is both special *and* universal,—not merely general but universal,—because extending to every particular in the universe. It is atheism to say that anything can take place without being either produced or permitted by God.

And yet, within this range, man, in the mysterious constitution and conditions of his being, has a certain, though not an absolute, freedom. But the perfection of his freedom lies in his yielding up his whole nature to the free flow of the holy and

heavenly spirit, in working *out* what God works *in* him.

What our text teaches is, therefore, no lazy, listless, Mahometan fatalism; if it does that, it is only half received and believed. He who really feels the truth that God is in all things, and that all things, all that man wants, are in God, will prove it to be not only a consoling but a quickening faith. To him religion will be no mere superstition, alternate smoke and flame, gloom and glory, but a steadily burning and shining light. It will be a sun that shall not go down, diffusing a serene and sober cheerfulness through his inner world.

It may be said that this is a picture of what the next world may realize for saints in glory, but not of what can be in this. But there have been those who so lived by faith in that world which knows no past nor future, that to them death was abolished, and they were already raised up to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. At all events, this is the great end of our living, to build us up in that Divine life which alone is happiness, because it alone is harmony; and the sooner and the more strenuously we begin to seek this life, the happier for us.

X.

MAN, GOD'S OFFSPRING.

FORASMUCH THEN AS WE ARE THE OFFSPRING OF GOD.— Acts xvii. 29.

WHAT *then?*—Paul goes on to draw a negative inference as to what man, the child of God, ought *not* to think in regard to the nature of his Heavenly Father; but beyond this there lies a vast field of inferences from his doctrine — as to what man *should* think of God, and of *himself*, and what he should *do*, if that great doctrine is true, — which the Apostle had not occasion or time to enter upon, which we, however, as thoughtful believers in his word, ought always to have springing up in our minds and quickening our hearts and bearing fruit in our lives, as often as that word sounds in the ear of memory and conscience, and to some of which we may this evening profitably attend.

The particular and negative inference which Paul draws from the admission that we are all the offspring of God, namely, that we ought *not* to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, is one upon which *we* need not particularly dwell, inasmuch as the error is one to which we in this age, or in this

quarter of the world, are not specially liable. The times of that ignorance which made men imagine that they got any worthy idea of the power that presided over the universe by representations in metal, or even in breathing marble, have long gone by in the civilized and Christianized regions of the globe; they were fast going by, when Paul showed the absurdity of such a supposition. Cicero had said, a century before, that it was wonderful how the priests could look in each others' faces without laughing, and still more so, that those philosophers could keep a grave countenance among themselves, who undertook to maintain that the gods existed in a sort of bodily form. And at the time when Paul lifted up his voice at Athens, there can be little doubt that a great portion, if not proportion, of the Pagans were held to the old idolatry full as much, to say the least, by those motives of expediency and worldly interest, which actuated the town-clerk and silversmiths of Ephesus in what they did and said, when Paul pronounced them no gods which were made with hands, as by any lingering sense of the old religion, — that old religion which, to be sure, in those who first practised this image-worship, was undoubtedly sincere, though superstitious. But whether there were or were not many who fancied that they really represented and revered the Godhead in the popular mode of worship — whose idolatry was pure ignorance, their error is to us a mere matter of historical interest; idolatry with us is of a different kind from that of theirs — it is wilful — it is not merely a thought of the mind, but a thought of the heart.

Men do not, in Christian lands, make their gods of gold, but they do very often make gold their god, and the fine gold their confidence, and worship it as devoutly as the old Sabeans did the moon, walking in brightness. The hand-idolatry of the multitudes that magnified the Ephesian Diana is to us merely a curious relic of the past; but the heart-idolatry of Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen, with whom the head and front of Paul's offending seemed to be that if Diana should fall their business must come down too, *that* is still extant. None amongst us pay superstitious homage to silver shrines or statues, but many do to that of which they are made.

There is no occasion, then, now and here, that the Apostle should repeat in our ears, what, indeed, was called for in Athens, and tell us "we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device," because we, none of us, think any such thing. We have other and worse idolatries and iniquities than this to repent of and forsake. And therefore have I taken for my text, simply, the great truth which forms the preamble of Paul's admonition, omitting the particular deduction he makes from it, as to what men ought *not* to think, and meaning, instead, to remind you presently, in the light of that great truth, what we ought to think, and believe, and feel, and do.

I shall ask your attention, then, in the present discourse, to some of the principal doctrinal and practical consequences that follow from the fact that we are the offspring of God. First, however, let us dwell a few moments on the fact itself, as admitted

by the pagan poets and philosophers, as asserted by Paul, and as confirmed by the testimony of human nature.

It is very evident, to my mind, that the framers of the popular creeds have either not believed or not understood, or, at all events, not considered the statement of Paul which forms our subject at this time. There are only two ways that I can imagine of pretending to evade its force. One is, to say that the statement is not properly, not originally his own, but only one which he takes out of the mouths of his adversaries, for the sake of turning against them their own weapons; and the other is, to interpret the word *offspring* in some loose and general sense, so as to make it mean little more than that God is the author of our existence. To dispose of the latter evasion first, our alleged relationship to God as his offspring must mean something stronger and more intimate than that of creature to creator, for that God is the Maker of all things and all men the Apostle had before declared, and then proceeded to bring Him still nearer to us, by asserting that we have our existence not only *from* Him, but *in* Him; and now he completes the climax by affirming and bringing their own poets to witness the truth, a truth, indeed, fatal at once to the polytheistic character of their faith, and the idolatrous character of their worship, that "we are also *His* OFFSPRING."

And then, as to the other alternative, of supposing that Paul, making himself "all things to all men," merely admitted, for the sake of the argument, the truth of the sentiment quoted from their own litera-

ture, winking at one piece of extravagance, the self-idolatry of poets and philosophers, in order, by thus humoring them, to get a hearing for his rebuke of another error, the image-worship of the populace, — to this there are two objections; one is, that, though what is called the *argumentum ad hominem* is apparently sometimes used even by the sacred writers, it is hardly credible that at the height of so grave an argument Paul would resort to a rhetorical manœuvre; and the other is, that if the sentiment quoted from their poets was false, such a glorification of humanity were a sort of idolatry, more dangerous, and demanding more to be condemned by the Apostle in such a man-worshipping nation, than the mere adoration of images supposed to represent superior beings, on the part of the multitude.

I am brought to the conclusion, therefore, that the Apostle admits in good faith and earnest, and reaffirms, on the strength of his apostolic inspiration, that truth which in many other parts of Scripture is at least pointedly implied, that we are, all, that all men are, God's offspring — of Divine descent — of celestial origin.

The form of words in which Paul so happily expresses this idea is, indeed, adopted from some pagan writer, probably from Aratus, a Greek poet, a native of the same country with himself, from whom Cicero quotes largely in his treatise on the "Nature of the Gods." The same sentiment, in nearly the same words, is found in other ancient poets, particularly of the Stoic school; and it is not improbable that it was some poet or poets of this school, also, of

which some of the philosophers were in his audience and must have found much to approve in his train of thought, that the Apostle had in his mind. The Stoics maintained the existence of a Divine mind and providence throughout the universe — a soul of the world — but rather failed to supply a personal deity; the Epicureans, on the contrary, were very distinct as to the personality of the gods, but denied them any interference or interest in the affairs of this lower world. Epicureanism, and, indeed, the same may be said of the popular pagan mind generally, rather made God the creature of man, than man the creature of God. Cicero, in the treatise already referred to, says he does not understand why Epicurus should prefer to say that the gods are like men, rather than that men are like the gods. We ought, rather, says he, to say that our form is divine, than to say that their form is human. “But that as you please,” he continues, “I should like to know how men suddenly sprang up in the form of gods? Shall we suppose that the seed of gods fell from heaven to earth, and so men existed like their fathers? I wish you would say so; I should be glad to acknowledge the relationship of gods. But you say no such thing; you say, it came by chance, that we are like the gods. And now, must we seek arguments to refute this. O that it were as easy to find out what is true as to refute what is false!”

We find many similar expressions, not only in Cicero, but in other pagan philosophers, of the want of some one to declare the Godhead they ignorantly worshipped, and to declare to them the origin, the

destiny, and the duty of man himself. And Paul, while he answers the great questions, reminds us how often it is the case, that what had been lost out of the notions of the people, and reasoned out of the system of the philosophers, lives in the breathings of the poet's soul. That great truth of the unity and paternity of God, which Christianity came to bring out into full light and fair proportions, had never ceased to haunt the hearts of men, as a vague impression, though, in the midst of a multitudinous mythology that so contradicted it, and contradicted itself, the impression could not struggle into the shape of a settled belief.

The Apostle, in declaring God to man, declares man to himself—out of the heart of man, as revealed in the poetry of natural piety, he declares him—inviting men to think highly of themselves, (not *more* highly indeed than they *ought* to think, but *as* highly as they ought,) and so of their Maker and Father. He argues to the idolaters around him that if we are indeed the offspring of God, and if we are living souls, then the Being from whom we spring must himself be a living Spirit, and these images of gold, silver, and stone must fail even to represent him in the all-essential particular, the spiritual attribute of his nature. Better, however, it must be said, if men will make their divinity altogether such a one as themselves—far better were it, like the old Pagan idolaters, to have only a metallic or a marble god, shaped after the most beautiful model of external humanity, or like the Epicurean to worship Fortune, and regard the deities as entirely

wrapped up in their own concerns, or like the Stoic to worship Fate and iron Destiny, than to have such an idea of God as men have sometimes had in ages called Christian, imputing to him not indeed the beauty of the fairest human form, but the ugliness of the worst human passions—an arbitrary, jealous, vindictive, partial tyrant, tantalizing and tormenting the victims of his capricious cruelty with show of reason and of justice. Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought to ascribe to God those affections and sentiments which, according to the calm and prevailing testimony of the human heart in its sober moments and moods, constitute the crowning grace and glory of the character of an earthly friend and father—those affections and sentiments which belong to our very selves, and which, when we *come to ourselves*, bestir themselves and go forth into action. It is true, as I may be reminded, that God was represented of old as angry with a certain generation, because they *thought that He was altogether such an one as themselves*. But that was a generation of sinners and hypocrites, of slanderers and blasphemers, and the charge brought against them really was that they acted the thought of God's being like them, when they were in these perverted and degraded states of character. The blasphemy consisted in attributing to that High and Holy One the traits of a corrupted humanity—the same deadness and indifference with regard to moral distinctions into which they had let themselves down—the same mercenary and corruptible character which they had contracted—capable of conniving at

fraud and flattery — of being bought off from doing justice by promises of gain or glory — in short, in making their God a deification of man's worst vices and crimes.

The sin did not lie in the shaping of the conception of God after the suggestions of humanity, as such, — after the hints which human nature in its legitimate condition furnishes. Man always has judged of God by himself, and always will and must do so; so far is there from being any presumption in this, it is the true and only way for man to form an idea of God, to gather up in his thought what humanity in its highest moods and holiest moments experiences, expresses, and approves, and imagine that raised to the infinite power, enthroned beyond the reach of accident, exercised in unhindered freedom, and expanded without any bounds save those which are set by perfect wisdom and impartial love. Thus, among men, is the idea of an upright judge always and deservedly held in the highest reverence? God is the judge who not only is incapable of the least stain or shadow of partiality or prejudice, but who, unlike the best and wisest earthly judge, has perfect knowledge of all the secret sins and secret temptations of the human heart. And above all, and including all other human relations, is the idea of the parent the one which calls up, in the tenderest and noblest cluster, those qualities which man instinctively most loves and venerates? We abstract in our minds all the excellences of the best and wisest parents we have known or heard of or dreamed of, separating them from every fault and frailty, and thus

form an idea of one universal and perfect parent, God. And then this should be our reasoning: Earthly parents may cast off their children and earthly children disown their parents, and there *may* be cases where such treatment shall almost seem to be a dictate of necessity. But can we possibly conceive of the Heavenly Father, infinite in resources of knowledge, wisdom and power, being bound by any such law of necessity? The earthly parent gave not being to the mind of his child. God is the Father of Spirits. He says, "all souls are mine." How is it possible, supposable, that such a Being should ever, under any provocation, any pressure, (gloss it over as we may with specious and imposing phrases in our hard system of theology,) cast off forever, and give over to eternal destruction as henceforth good for nothing, any child that His own power, directly or indirectly, brought into being? The idea is monstrous, and would be universally seen and felt to be so, had not a false religion so bewildered the perceptions and benumbed the sensibilities that right and wrong are confounded in men's minds too often, in some degree too generally, the moment questions of humanity are brought to the bar of ecclesiastical inquisition.

What a cloud of false and oppressive dogmas would roll off from the heart of Christendom, if men could once come to see that the very point of the old reproof, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," requires them really to reason as to God's attributes and dealings by what their own better selves teach them, and that only by

doing this can they escape the alternative of dishonoring their Maker. What an effect, in short, would it have on our whole theology, once to admit the admission which Paul accepted from the very heathen, and reasserted as a Christian, that "we are all God's offspring." The dogmas of total depravity, of eternal torment, of partial election, and all others that imply discord in the Divine nature, and produce pride, alienation, hypocrisy, and discord in the hearts of men, would disappear, and Love and Light would reign together in man's world, as they do in the Heaven of the Father.

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, I say, as we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto silver or gold, so neither ought we think it like unto ice or iron. There is a sacred tenderness in the thought of man in his most truly tranquil and thoughtful seasons, which images the best part of the idea that reason and revelation combine to convey of the Heavenly Father.

Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought to reject instantly and utterly the idea that it is possible such a Being should create, or suffer to be created, a being with a guilty nature. Something within us, something in the worst of men at times, bears witness to the fact that we are by nature God's offspring and image. Successful wickedness or worldliness brings no sufficient peace to the soul. Genuine happiness is found or foretasted only in generous devotion to the will of God, the improvement of our characters, the good of our

race. The uneasy and hollow feeling which haunts the worldling, bears witness, the witness of the spirit, that he is the child of God. The prodigal son, when he comes to find himself feeding on husks, comes to himself, reflects on what he has been and what he might have been, and remembers and realizes that he is still his father's child. Although conscious of not being worthy to be called so, still he feels that he is such.

Forasmuch, then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought to believe it, and think highly of our nature. And the sense of guilt awakened by such a view of ourselves, unlike that produced by the feeling of native depravity, instead of keeping us in a passive, waiting state of mopish suspense, will awaken that true humility which does not benumb with its sting, but incites the soul to strive to gain by the grace of Heaven more than it had lost.

Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought to stand in awe before the mystery of iniquity, even while we abhor the guilt itself. For surely it is a mystery, an unfathomable mystery, that the child of God should consent to become a child of the devil, should sell himself to Satan—his celestial birthright for a mess of sin's pottage. We should stand in awe *of ourselves* and sin not. Whoso will observe and reflect on what he sees and feels, will find an instinct in the common heart of humanity which is right on this subject. There is a sort of holy horror in the feeling with which men regard the

criminal, that testifies to their sense of the unnaturalness of crime in one who is the offspring and image of God.

Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, and while we ought not, therefore, to think the Godhead like unto silver or gold, we ought, on the other hand, to account a man as being in the sight of God more precious than gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Forasmuch as he is the offspring of a holy parentage, we ought not to look upon him as one born reprobate or fit only to be made a tool of policy, a beast of burden, or an article of merchandise. "What God hath chosen" — nay, what he hath created — that are we not to call common or unclean. It may be hard for us, as we go about among our fellow-beings, to acknowledge and discern in every one of them a divine lineage, — but it does not make it any easier for us to do so, if we begin by refusing to own the revealed fact that one Being is the Maker and Father of us all. It may seem like a dreadful piece of mockery to apply the poet's expression, "the human face divine," to the poor victims of vice that are seen almost everywhere. But there — even in the midst of all that sin and misery — there still exists, unbroken, the link that connects man with his Maker; and the very desperation of the struggle which it costs the sinner to avoid that awaking of conscience which is the recognition of his high allegiance and relationship, only confirms the declaration that man is the offspring of God, and shows that God's spirit ceaseth not to strive with the spirit of his most depraved and

deluded child. Forasmuch then as we are all the offspring of God, let us honor all men for their origin and their capacity, and never cease to hope for our race. God will never forsake nor forget his offspring. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." The slave of sense and sin may so far forget himself as to wander off into that far country which lies in the shadow of death; but the very desolateness of his condition shall prove that a faithful father's chastening love hath not forgotten nor abandoned him, and the deepening wintriness of his feelings may only indicate, as at the winter solstice of the natural year, that the sun of divine mercy is drawing nearer to him, though *he* is yet a great way off.

Forasmuch then, in fine, as we are the offspring of God, we ought to walk with God in that habitual mood of mingling love and fear which the sense of such a relation is fitted to inspire. Then as we walk thoughtfully beneath the starry heavens, which God has formed man upright that he may admire and all but worship, we shall hear deep answering unto deep, the upper deep of immensity to the inner deep of the spiritual realm, the Spirit testifying with our spirits, that we *are* the children of God. As we walk among men, we shall read it on those human faces, every one of which is a volume of history, mysterious in other respects it may be, but speaking one thing plainly to the eye of spiritual sympathy, the consciousness of a nature which no

selfish life, however successful, can wholly satisfy. We shall feel this sacred relationship in those moods and moments when, earthly pride and greed for a while suspended, our attention is arrested by life's startling vicissitudes and by the dread mystery of death.

XI.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

ARE NOT TWO SPARROWS SOLD FOR A FARTHING? AND ONE OF THEM SHALL NOT FALL ON THE GROUND WITHOUT YOUR FATHER. — Matt. x. 29.

IN these words, I understand Jesus to teach a doctrine concerning God's providence very different from the one which is even now commonly received. *Your Father*, he says to his disciples, the father of those who are chosen to do his highest work, is also and equally the father of the sparrow. The creature that is most insignificant in the sight of man, has God for its father. And the words of David find in the doctrine of Jesus, when one goes to the heart of it, a new and spiritual meaning, when he cries out, "Yea the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God." For the earth itself is consecrated by the genius of Christian faith and piety and philosophy to be not merely the footstool but the altar of God, and the swallow, unconsciously, no less than the royal priest on set purpose, builds a house to the praise of the Maker. Jesus goes on, indeed, to say that man is of more value

than many sparrows. Any and every man is, as wearing the image of his Maker, and emphatically they who are chosen to be the vehicles of his truth and the recipients of his spirit. This, however, was said, not so as to imply the least detraction from the preciousness of the sparrow or any correspondingly minute creature in the sight of its Creator, but simply as an encouragement to the disciples to believe that He who took such thought for what was least, would not fail to care proportionately for what was greater. The intention, undoubtedly, was to say that all creatures, great and small, are comprehended in one and the same great circle of Divine Providence; that to all alike He is a Father; and, indeed, who can conceive of a Being such as reason and revelation combine to set before us under the name of God, as creating idly and carelessly any thing, least of all any living thing, in regard to which he should become even comparatively indifferent. Undoubtedly, it must be confessed and lamented that certain common ideas or impressions of the Divine Being do imply or favor some such conclusion, but, as evidently, such a conclusion is revolting to every mind that really, rationally, and profoundly believes in the God of that spiritual religion which Christ inaugurates. It is not that he regards the sparrow less, but man more; this is the feeling respecting their Maker Jesus would awaken in his disciples. The very fall of the sparrow dead on the ground indicates not its desertion by the Father. The same fatherly eye watches, the same fatherly mind wills its extinction, that

watched and sustained the, first fluttering of the feeble fledgeling, when it ventured from the parent's nest.

Unless, then, this language of Jesus is mere empty rhetoric or sentimental rhapsody,—if it is really the language of truth and soberness, it certainly overturns a popular and long prevalent, though loosely entertained, notion respecting God's agency in the affairs of the universe. It certainly pronounces utterly void some distinctions which have been taken for granted, and writes upon their tombstone the epitaph, "words, words, words!" It teaches us that the God of nature and the God of grace are one and the same Being; or, perhaps, one should say, it teaches us that the common mode of divorcing grace from nature is unwarranted by a Christian philosophy; that the kingdoms of nature, of spirit, and of providence are, after all, but different, and yet not entirely distinct provinces of one vast Divine Empire, administered throughout, simultaneously and equally by the same indivisible and impartial spirit of love, that is of grace,—which, in relation to God, is simply what love means. The doctrine of Jesus in the text does away, also, the old and yet vague idea of different sorts of Divine Providence, a general one over all, and a particular one concerning itself with individuals, or a general one running on through ordinary times, and a special one exercised on special occasions in the way of interposition. Whoever is imbued with the spirit of Christ's doctrine, will feel that the idea of such interposition is essentially atheistic. For it implies that, in the

general course of things, it has not been the Lord who was working, but some other power that had assumed, or to which he had left, the conduct of affairs,—a plausible theory, but one that will not bear a calm, Christian looking into, and that, in fact, we must fear, is chargeable with not inconsiderably aggravating the practical godlessness which looks upon this mighty maze of universal life as a vast piece of self-running clock-work, possibly wound up, at most, in some immemorial if not infinitely distant period, by a mysterious and unknown power. Superstition and atheism,—I mean by this virtual atheism,—do, in fact, thus provoke and produce each other. Too generally, the piety which finds God only or chiefly in special interpositions, and the philosophy which denies them, agree in throwing a slight on the common run and range of creation and life, as manifesting the very present and ever-present Deity. The example which Jesus chooses is only one out of many equally to the point and purpose of his argument. He might have taken a straw as well as a sparrow, so far as it concerned the illustration of God's wisdom and power in the ordinary processes of creation. The principle that lies under his illustration is, that the world is under God's care and government; that "of him and through him and to him are all things;" that there is no such thing as chance; that it is no explanation of anything to call it a matter of course; that everything shows the presence of a superhuman and mysterious power.

And, indeed, what does Jesus herein but repeat

and reaffirm the poetry and piety of prophet and psalmist to be simple and sober truth? One of the most striking characteristics of the Hebrew Scripture is the manner in which, on its living pages, everything is ascribed to the direct agency of Jehovah. "I the Lord do all these things." Every sound of nature is the Lord's voice. The roar of wind and wave is the voice of the Lord upon the waters. The thunder is the voice of his majesty. The lightning is the glance of his eye from one end of the heavens to the other. When the tall cedars of Lebanon crack and crash in the tempest and the thunder, it is the voice of the Lord that breaketh the cedars. Then the prophet calls upon his soul and all that is within him to hear attentively the sound that goeth out from the Lord's mouth. The air is the very breath of God. "By the breath of God frost is given and the breadth of the waters is straitened." And when in spring the streams gush forth again to gladden the wilderness, it is the breath of the Lord that melts winter's icy chains. It is the Almighty that "maketh small the drops of water;" and when the sun shines out again and drinks up the mist from the mountain-sides, behold, exclaims the psalmist, "He toucheth the hills, and they smoke!"

It may be said, indeed, that it is a different matter when we pass to the agency of Jehovah in the affairs of human history, because the Jews were a chosen people under the special schooling of Divine Providence. But if this means that they alone stood in such a relation to Him who says, "all souls are mine," such a narrow assumption, however common,

is entirely gratuitous. And one of the objects of Christ's coming was to do away that idea of favoritism on the part of the universal and impartial Father. Just as miracles are wrought to awaken the dull and drowsy sense of man to the truth that God is in all events and phenomena of nature and history, so one nation is singled out, and God's dealings with it sacredly recorded, to remind men that he is the moral governor of all nations.

The spirit of Jesus in the text, teaches any one who will, in childlike simplicity, follow whither it leads him, that God has not left the dominion and destiny of the universe in any part of its extent or period of its duration to the will of any rival power or any self-blinded creature. The great objection to the common views of God's sovereignty — to the pietistic doctrine of predestination and the philosophic doctrine of necessity, is not that they ascribe too much power and control to the Almighty, but that they "limit the holy one of Israel;" they do not make the great doctrine of his supremacy sufficiently comprehensive and flexible. They teach a partial providence in opposition to Christ's doctrine of a universal one. They fall short of recognizing a Providence which accompanies man out of this world through all eternity. They deny, in fact, that the Divine Providence is that of an Almighty Father, a righteous Father, a perfect Father, an impartial and universal Father, infinite in power, in wisdom, in goodness, and in all possible resources for accomplishing his purposes of benevolence. The objector to the ideal theory, who proposes to test

your doctrine that there is no external reality in matter by laying the weight of his staff on your head, is no more illogical than is the objector to necessarianism, who thinks to refute it by the workings of conscience. The answer of the old Stoic to his slave, who thought to escape a beating on his master's own principle, by pleading "I was fated to steal," — "yes, and to be whipped for it," — has generally been treated as an ingenious piece of pleasantry, but it seems to me to foreshadow a profound view of the manner in which the necessarian doctrine, when any one would abuse it to a wrong purpose, corrects and cures itself. And when we come down to Christian times, I think we find good reason for calling Universalism "Calvinism improved." It is a vast, I might say an infinite, improvement, instead of saying that Divine Providence has provided for the final redemption of a portion of the human race, to say that it has provided for that of all. It saves the character of God from being that of an arbitrary and capricious tyrant, and presents it as that of a perfect and equal Father. What earthly parent would not, if he could, finally correct and cure his child's follies? An earthly parent does not always foreknow what will be the effect of his discipline, — foreknows it less than an earthly physician does what will be that of his medicine; but shall we deem that the infinite Father and physician needs to experiment upon his cases? Far from us be the thought! If it could be said of the Son of God in regard to a disciple, "This he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he

would do," shall we ascribe less discernment to the Father, the Lord of Heaven and earth, in *His* dealings with his children?

It amazes one to see how slow men are, even in this age, to appreciate the Christian doctrine of the Universal Father. Only this last week I was reading a sermon by one of the most eminent Orthodox preachers, the object of which was to show that reason and humanity could bring just as valid reasons for disbelieving Noah's flood as for denying eternal punishment. Even waiving the question, whether that flood was absolutely a universal one and did destroy all living creatures, but those the ark held, everywhere,—how amazing that any man should not see that the difference between the cases is infinite,—that to reason from temporal to endless death, from the destruction of the body to the damnation of the soul, is a most reckless proceeding! There is no analogy in the cases. And there was no need of resorting to anything on such a scale. The outcry of reason and humanity is not against the idea of a million souls', but against even a single soul's being created with a possibility of being eternally and irremediably tormented.

We are often warned against being wise above what is written. But we are also told that the letter killeth. What *is* written and where written? is the question. Do we not read, both in the Old Testament and the New, as a description of the new Christian dispensation, the dispensation of the spirit,—“The days come,” saith the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with them, when I will

put my laws in their mind, and write them in their hearts"? And what says the law in our hearts with regard to the doctrines of partial predestination, never-ending punishment of incurable spirits, and generally of a limited providence of God?

It is very true, indeed, that the great end of Revelation is not to solve metaphysical problems, but to teach moral truths; and of course the great motive with a Christian, for this criticism of false human theories, will simply be to clear the way for the pure light and unobstructed power of the truth as it is in Jesus, to flow into the heart and over the life. In exercising such criticism we do not sit in judgment on the Almighty, as is sometimes strongly asserted, but simply on other men's judgments respecting his word and ways.

We are taught, indeed, by Christ as well as by conscience, to fear the Lord; but no less emphatically does Jesus bid us trust him. The word is for all; "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." But it is equally true that, to a certain extent, of which the limit is known to God only, he has seen fit to make us free and to intrust us with a power of choice and place us in a position of accountability.

In short, it is for us to endeavor that the Being and Presence and Providence and all the revealed attributes of God shall be to us practically, whatever theories our minds may entertain about them, the guiding and governing principles of our hearts and lives. And who that reflects upon the matter can fail to perceive how important is the sense of God's

presence and providence, as the supreme moral governor, to the peace and the purity of our thoughts and lives? All sin is essentially, for the time at least, atheistic and idolatrous. The sinner, for the time, is an unbeliever; he denies the true God, he worships false gods, he bows down to them and serves them. He saith to gold, "Thou art my god," and to the fine gold, "thou art my confidence"; or he saith to glory or to power, "Thou art my god," and he listens to the voice of the people as to God's voice,—or in some form or other he says, "The Holy One is not my God,—it is not in Him that I believe and trust."

There may be comparatively few with whom this is the constant language of the heart;—but are there not too many of us who have learned to feel as if God came down to visit and inspect and hear us only on certain special and solemn occasions, and to whom, for the rest of the time, if ever the thought of consulting him importunes our hearts, a mocking *false* prophet is always ready to repeat those withering words, "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking with somebody, or he is engaged in the chase, or making a journey to some other part of the earth, or peradventure he is asleep and needeth to be awakened." But shall we then live, act, feel, as if we really supposed that the Omnipresent Witness and Judge of human spirits were ever absent or asleep? Shall we not rather fear lest the power of custom should put us to sleep, so far as regards the most important realities of our being, and especially that most momentous reality, the presence of God?

Does it not seem, sometimes, as if we could hardly look around us and see with our eyes, without feeling and almost perceiving the immediate presence of God? Verily "the pure in heart *shall* see God"; and it seems as if the reason why we fail to see him, if we do so, must be, that we want the purity of the filial disposition, that the eye of the soul is clouded, and its perceptions, generally, dulled by sensuality, sluggishness, and sin. Why do not these spheres over our heads and under our feet rush wildly from their orbits, or rather why do they move at all, unless their language is not only "the hand that made us," but "the hand that *moves* us, is divine"? Who holds the clouds balanced in mid-heaven? "Dost thou know," says the Book of Job, "the balancings of the clouds?" and "whereupon are the foundations of the earth fastened?" The pillars of Heaven, those invisible, magnetic pillars, which tremble at His reproof, what upholds them but His own hand? Why do not these walls of wood that enclose us, — why do not these walls of flesh that entabernacle our spirits, fly asunder and crumble to dust? In the lecture-room of philosophy we might deem it enough to stop at chemical and cohesive forces, — to talk of gravitation and other attractions, — but in the temple of religion we must "look through Nature up to Nature's God." We must own and feel that all these so-called natural forces are but the power of the present Deity, — that *it is the Lord who doeth all these things.*

If universal Nature reveals the present Deity, human nature ought especially to bring him before us.

It is because familiarity keeps us on the surface of things, that the face of man does not suggest the Divine Presence as well as the face of the heavens. Through human eyes the infinite looks into the finite. Men are to each other embodied consciences. These things may sound paradoxical to the thoughtless, but they will not to the lowly seeker of truth and God. God comes near to us in the person of infancy. The brow of manhood, on which godlike majesty should sit throned, and where the cloud of care or of conscience bespeaks the majesty of a self-avenging nature,—the brow and the eye of man, eloquent with infinite and unutterable apprehensions, memories and yearnings, proclaim the presence of His spirit who dwells in the human body as in a temple, and who will not cease to strive with man till that temple is made pure and clean and holy.

We live and move among the tokens of the perpetual presence of a God of majesty and of mercy. "He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought; that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; the Lord, the God of Hosts, is his name," and for us he has a still higher and holier name,—*"The Father."* Let his name be hallowed by us, and his kingdom come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

XII.

“WHAT IS THE USE OF PRAYING?”

YOUR FATHER KNOWETH WHAT THINGS YE HAVE NEED OF, BEFORE
YE ASK HIM. — Matt. vi. 8.

WHY, then, ask? the question may naturally arise here in a thoughtful mind; it *has* arisen in many a mind, and it does not necessarily imply a captious scepticism, but may be, and, I believe, has often been, prompted by the purest piety;—if our Heavenly Father does know what we need without our asking him, what need is there of our asking him at all? It is said afterward, in this same Sermon on the Mount, that even the imperfect and sinful parents of earth will not refuse to give their children what they need and ask; how much less the perfectly good and wise and rich and mighty Father in Heaven! But were it not doing feeble justice to the spirit of Jesus to stop at the mere letter of his intimation? Does not the illustration he makes use of suggest to a thinking mind and a feeling heart a great deal more than it expressly states? Do even human parents wait for their children to *say* what they want before they supply it? Do they not anticipate the necessities of the ignorant and impul-

sive creatures God's providence has made dependent upon them? Certainly they do; instinctively they do it; they who have scarcely any other virtue or grace, will have *this* left, to show that they are men and not monsters. "Worse than an infidel," yes, and lower than a brute, were he who should neglect to appease the hunger or shelter the nakedness of his infant, because it could not articulate its wants, not being indeed, as yet, distinctly conscious of them. And are there not multitudes of grown-up children in God's great family, who are like infants in respect to the things of the spirit, so far as this, at least, that they not only cannot express, but do not understand what they most need? Multitudes, not only infants, but, according to Krummacher's touching parable of Abraham's and Isaac's visit to that afflicted family, idiot children in this great house of the Father, who know not his face nor his smile? Plainly there are, though, possibly, few grow up to maturity without, at times, vague and strong sensations of their want of something the outer world has not to give them; yet how mighty and constant an influence the distractions and delusions of this world have, to confuse the soul's conceptions, to dislocate the spiritual consciousness, and prevent men from having a clear and connected apprehension of what it is their innermost being really craves!

Now, if even ordinary, not to say exemplary, earthly parents apprehend and anticipate the inarticulate wants which cry to their natural sympathies in the very looks and gestures of their offspring,

how much more — must we not conclude ? — shall He who hath created both parents and children and impressed this instinct, doubtless an image of himself, on the parental heart, watch and provide for those deeper wants of *the hidden man of the heart*, whose inarticulate sighings can be heard and interpreted only by his “all-discerning ear.”

In short, to come back to our question and to our text, if we have a Father who knows all our possible wants from the beginning, because he is omniscient, and who can supply all our possible wants, because he is almighty, — and if this all-wise and almighty one who has created, cares for us, as the very doctrine of his being a perfect Father implies, then why, (reasons the thoughtful mind,) why, (asks the submissive soul,) should his children pray to him for anything ? why not simply and gratefully and contentedly receive, enjoy, and use what he, in his infinite wisdom, sees fit to bestow, taking for granted, once for all, that all his dealings will be ordered in perfect goodness, that they will and must be for the best ? Does not his requiring to be supplicated seem to imply that, though not needing to be informed or convinced of what his creatures want, he *does* need to be persuaded, to be moved, or, at least, to be reminded ?

Now, it must be admitted, that this question is a wholesome one to ask, in consideration of what prayer has too often been. When we think how, under that name, men have taken occasion to advise, exhort, command the Lord, discussing, with a painful familiarity, the grounds on which he should

act, and, in fact, proceeding as if the Sovereign of the Universe were merely an executive minister, well may we allow, and more than allow, the cautionary question to stand on the door of the oratory, "Doth God need to be advised or awakened?"

Yes, and the question is *always* a timely and a salutary one, in so far as it is fitted to remind us what prayer, in the light of the spiritual religion of the Gospel, should be, and what it should not be. The admonition that God knows what *things* we have need of without our asking him, may well teach us that *specific things* are not the proper, certainly not the peculiar and characteristic, objects of Christian prayer; that scarcely outward events are, but far rather those inner goods and graces which are called "the kingdom of God and his righteousness"; these are to be sought first, and it is promised that then those other incidental things, so far as they are seen to be needful, will be added. The things, the kind of things, which we are comparatively to take no *thought* for, certainly should not enter into the heart of our prayers.

But more than this. The Saviour's declaration that our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him, and the question which we have recognized as growing out of it,—why, then, ask anything of him?—even if the *things* alluded to meant also the things of the spirit, might still, I go on to say, not improperly, not unprofitably, be kept together before our minds, as a wholesome reminder, not only of what we should chiefly pray for,

but of the mood and attitude of spirit in which Christian prayer places us.

For have you ever thought of *this*,—that the reason our Saviour assigns why we should not be anxious about the necessaries of life, namely, that our Heavenly Father knows that they are necessary, applies just as forcibly (you will acknowledge, though you may not have thought of it) to our not asking, in a spirit to imply any need of our persuading him, those provisions for the inner life which he also just as well knows to be the only ones absolutely necessary to the proper prosperity of his spiritual offspring.

But I have not yet directly and distinctly *met* the question with which we started, namely, whether it follows from our Father's knowing what things we have need of, before we ask him, that it is not proper or necessary to ask anything at his hands? I think we are prepared to say, after the thoughts that have been suggested, that this question cannot be absolutely answered in the affirmative, and yet I think we must allow it to have so much force as this,—that it should considerably modify and correct certain common and superficial ideas respecting prayer. It certainly should not deter or discourage us from expressing (though we cannot, without going back to childish thinking, call it *making known*) our wants to God; but it should admonish us that there can be no analogy, in effects, between our asking favors of men, who need to be instructed or persuaded, and our asking good things of that God who is our Maker, and infinite Father, and everlasting Friend. Not only the formal repetitions of the

heathen and the hypocrite, but also the fervid importunities of the fanatic and the enthusiast, are reproved by him who reminds us that the Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him. It is true that, in impressing on his disciples the injunction, that they should never faint nor flag in their devotion, Jesus resorts to certain homely illustrations, (I refer to the woman's appeal to the unjust judge, and the man's begging bread of his neighbor at midnight,) which, literally, would imply that the Father and Judge of all the earth may be actually *wearied* into granting the requests of his children; but these parables, based upon the idea of human dependence, must not be perverted to the imputing of human imperfection to the Almighty Father.

No: Jesus teaches us, in the text, that the Omniscient Providence does not need even to be reminded, by any prayer of ours, what things we have need of; and the alternative is the simple conclusion to which, indeed, we are led by our Master's general revelation of the divine perfection, and which an examination into the composition of the model he gives us confirms, — that it is *we* who need to be reminded, even by our very prayers, of our real and greatest want, and of the mighty and ever-pressing claims of that life of active meditation, charity, self-denial, and self-discipline, in short that spiritual devotedness in all things, through which God has ordained that the end of our devotions shall be accomplished.

I have said, that this view of the effect of prayer is confirmed by an inspection of the brief abstract

of prayer which Jesus left with his disciples ; and, indeed, it is as introductory to the Lord's Prayer, and as illustrated thereby, that the words of my text have for us their highest interest. Although we call this a prayer, yet it seems as if we might almost as truly call it, in the main, the meditative soliloquy of a soul simply conscious of being overheard by Heaven and earth. If prayer means simply asking what is to come from another being to the suppliant, it would seem as if other elements must be added to the idea to make the word perfectly applicable here. As the first clause, "Our Father, who art in Heaven," expresses, to the thoughtful mind entering into the mind of Christ, the purpose of the soul as much to remind itself of its relation to God's human family, as of its relation to God himself, so the first clause, following, which has the sound of a petition, "Hallowed be thy name," seems, after all, when we reflect upon it, less a prayer to God that he would hallow his own name than the language of a soul calling upon itself and all within it and around it, to hallow the name of him of whom David spoke in a similar manner, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name." "Thy kingdom come." This may, indeed, be regarded as a request to God,—but it may also be regarded as a command from the soul of man to its own thoughts, and an exhortation to all creatures, as in the presence of Him who sitteth from everlasting to everlasting upon the throne of the universe, reverently and gratefully to recognize his reign, and to receive the messages of his sovereign will and wis-

dom and goodness. "Thy will be done." This clause, also, may as naturally be understood to express a desire to coöperate in doing God's will, and a willingness to resign one's self to its being done, as a prayer that the Lord *would* do his will, (which, indeed, seems to border upon tautology.) "Give us this day our daily bread," is, indeed, a direct petition, — a prayer proper; and yet when we consider that this, the first pure request that occurs in the prayer, relates to that very class of things which Jesus at the end of the chapter pronounces secondary, we are prompted to consider this also as rather an expression of contentment, of acquiescence, or at least, the breathing out of a desire for that grace, than as a special petition for even life, still less any comfort of life. The clause, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," especially when we read in connection with it our Saviour's comment, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father *will* also forgive you," — (that is to say, not for your prayer, but for your practice,) — this clause, thus interpreted by our Lord himself, surely, if it is a petition for anything, is for grace to exercise forgiveness ourselves; but it sounds, with that echo of the divine comment, quite as much like the conscience of a man admonishing him in the presence of the just Father what he must do, if he would share in the divine forgiveness. In like manner the clause, "Lead us not into temptation," when we consider, in conjunction with it, the assertion of an apostle, that God *tempteth not any man*, is almost equivalent to a vow that, with the help of God, we will not run

into temptation wantonly, by entering into any path, in which we cannot look up and say, "Bless me herein, O my Father!" And so we come at last to the only clause, and that the conclusion of the original prayer, which is purely and plainly and positively a supplication, the petition for deliverance from evil, which, however, we must add, is implied, if all the previously expressed desires or determinations of the soul are fulfilled.

I have thus ventured to add one more to the numerous expositions and paraphrases of the Lord's Prayer, which, for centuries, have been, from time to time, attempted; but I am not aware of any one, which has thus analyzed the whole prayer in harmony with the declaration which introduces it, that the Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him, and which has expounded it as being, in its spirit and structure, an illustration of that sentiment. I dare not affirm positively that my exposition is the right one. I submit, however, with considerable confidence, to such as are thoughtful and inquiring in spiritual things, and who care, more than for aught else, to see and feel their way into the heart of the truth as it is in Jesus,—whether this bequest of our Lord is not given us for an example of the simplicity, spirituality and submissiveness of a Christian's religion generally, as truly as of his prayers in special. To me, what is called the Lord's Prayer, next to the precious sacredness it derives from early and tender associations, commends itself by *this*, as its chief beauty, that it is a meditative summary of topics of prayer, fruitful enough to

expand themselves through the universe and through eternity. That thought of one of the old Fathers in reference to the Saviour cannot be too often repeated, that *his devotion instructs in doctrine, no less than his doctrine inspires devotion*; and surely of the devout breathing and meditation that has now again passed in review before us, the saying is preëminently true. It is no less a *sermon* than a prayer,—a sermon, the text of which is the text of our own imperfect attempt to treat its subject, “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” In accordance with this sentiment, I would say, that the Lord’s Prayer seems to me not so much an asking, as a grateful and reverent acknowledging, that God is ready to give all that man is ready to receive.

And as to prayer in general, I think, that sentiment of Jesus around which our thoughts have clustered, though it may well excite scepticism as to the worth and fitness of many prayers which human lips have uttered, cannot damp the interest of any soul in prayer itself, rightly conceived of,—namely, as a devout, grateful, submissive, and aspiring recognition of God to be what He is, and an humble sense of man’s being what he is, in all his weakness and all his capacity, in his infinite wants and his immortal destiny.

A vast proportion of the scepticism that exists in relation to prayer, would, I believe, vanish the moment one should cease to think of it as the mere act, whether by mouth or mind, of asking favors of a Being apart from the soul of the suppliant, and

should come to apprehend and believe the truth, that He whom, in prayer, we seek is the One in whom we live and move and have our being; and, furthermore, that he is already and always yearning to fill with his spirit the souls his presence encompasses; that he is perfectly wise to discern, perfectly able and perfectly willing to satisfy the wants of the souls that are his offspring, and that he has himself put that spirit into the heart of his child which moves him to yearn towards the invisible and infinite purity; and that true prayer is simply a breathing out of what was breathed into the soul by its Father.

The view of prayer I have been presenting has, indeed, been derided, as a theory which resolves the holy thing into a process of self-magnetizing. But this is a mere caricature, utterly unworthy of a mind capable of the least sympathy for those who, in a sceptical and unspiritual time, (not to say world,) feel themselves called to blend discernment with devoutness. The view I have implied of the great and sacred subject that has been commended to you, is the one, in my opinion, which most honors the perfections of God. And it is also, it seems to me, the one best fitted to keep alive in us a sense of the vital connection between prayer and practice. But I chiefly cherish it, because I think the spirit of Christ's religion teaches it, and it is sustained by the word of truth and soberness.

If, then, any doubting or shrinking soul should question with itself: Why should I ask of God, seeing that he knows what I need, infinitely better than I can, before I ask him; the reply is threefold:

First, because God has so made us,—such is our relation to him and his universe,—that when we live up to our nature, when we act according to the truth of things,—even as the flower yearns upward and opens its little leaves to the influences of heaven, even as the hart panteth after the water-brooks,—the soul will yearn for the Father of Spirits; in its struggles for holiness will and must seek rest and refreshment in the thought and in the felt presence of Him who is the source and sum of holiness; and in its struggles after the truth, will feel its need of repeated and continued communion with the Spirit of Truth. But, secondly, because asking, in the specific sense the word bears in these earthly relations, is very far from being all of prayer. Prayer is more than supplication — it is submission. It is contemplation, confession, communion. Perhaps the most expressive phrase ever used to designate it is “waiting upon the Lord.” Prayer is the thought of one’s self in the all-surrounding, all-penetrating presence of the pure and perfect One. It is the soul losing itself, only to find itself truly in the all-revealing light of the Father’s countenance. It is the spirit musing till the fire burns, and the tongue is loosed. And, thirdly, we need to put our prayer into words, not for the sake of its reaching the ear, or the mind or the heart of God, but because what we express thoughtfully we thereby *impress* upon our own convictions; and prayer, which moves not the Maker of the universe, does become, according to his own eternal appointment, a channel through which his best blessing comes down to the soul. In fine, when we under-

take to sever prayer and life from each other, we spoil both.

How much, in this heated, impatient, flitting age, when men are in such a hurry to prove all things that they can hardly hold fast, for a moment or two, that which is good, — when we break up the fairest mansions of peace to build bridges over toward the air-castle of that ever-flying to-morrow, — when people call it enjoying themselves that they are forever hiding *from* themselves, — how much we need the true philosophy of piety, how much we need the composure, and the quickening, the elevation and serenity, that would come from entering, with all the heart and mind, into the reason of prayer, the meditation upon our real, innermost life and its laws, of which prayer would be the necessary out-going — prayer,

“ A stream that, from the fountain of the heart,
Issuing however feebly, nowhere flows,
But with access of unexpected strength.”

That this may be the spirit of our whole life, is the great end of all this church-going and sermon-hearing and form-observing ; and it is hard to conceive of more impressive lessons in regard to our need of this spirit than the lessons of life and death which these days are holding up to us.

XIII.

WHAT AND WHERE IS THE CHRISTIAN HEAVEN ?

AND NO MAN HATH ASCENDED UP TO HEAVEN, BUT HE THAT CAME
DOWN FROM HEAVEN, EVEN THE SON OF MAN WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.
— *John iii. 13.*

I NEED hardly say that, to the natural man, there is a self-contradiction in this verse. Of course, to any one who should hear or read it only with a carnal sense, — which, indeed, it seems hardly possible that any one at this day should do, — it would be a perfect puzzle. As it is, with the local ideas of heaven, which too generally govern us, such language as this of Jesus does not come to us quite free from perplexity; and when to these local ideas of heaven are added the literal ideas of the things of Christ, which prevailing creeds have brought to bear upon the subject, sanctifying but not solving the riddle, confusion is worse confounded. Says the latest commentator on the Gospels: “ There is something paradoxical in this language — ‘ No one has gone up, but he that came down, even he who is at once both up and down ! ’ Doubtless it was intended to startle and constrain his auditor to think that there

must be mysterious elements in his person." The doctrine is, you know, that in Jesus there were two natures, or rather two persons, the human and the divine, and that while, as man, he was on earth talking with Nicodemus, he was, at the same moment, as God, on his throne in heaven. But see how this explanation, instead of clearing up any difficulty, only deepens the darkness and aggravates the bewilderment of the seeker after truth. The person who is in heaven, according to his own statement, is not the Divine Being, as the creed requires, but the human being,—it is "the *Son of Man* who is in heaven." This doctrine of a double personality in our Master is not, surely, a part of what Paul calls "the simplicity of Christ." It cannot but bring a double-mindedness into men's faith, which must make it unstable and unsatisfactory in all its ways and workings. And it would be painful to see, were there not the hope that minds may be roused to think and reason on the subject, which had hitherto been indifferent, with what earnestness and ingenuity the defenders of the deity of Jesus are everywhere laboring to prop up the frail theory of his bipersonality; and in regard to such passages as the one now before us for examination, it is almost amazing that, at this day, when so many signs are inviting and constraining us to recognize the spiritual nature of the Christian religion, those who set themselves up to be its expounders should take the very texts by which that quality of our faith is most eloquently expressed, and make them the buttresses of just that kind of mechanical religion which Jesus came to do away.

When Jesus said to Nicodemus, by way of assuring him of the reliableness of the communications he was making to him, that no man had ever gone up to heaven but he who came down from heaven, even he himself, the Son of Man, who was then and always in heaven, he made use of one of those paradoxical forms of expression, not uncommon in the Scriptures, which awaken in the thoughtful mind a lively sense of the spirituality of the things of the unseen world and the Divine Nature. If the phrases *going up to heaven*, and *coming down from heaven*, would, of themselves, have been liable to encourage a materialistic idea, then the additional assurance that he who had been up and come down was still in heaven, was precisely calculated, by the very impossibility of its being received in any literal and local sense, to startle the hearer into at least the presentiment of another, higher, broader ground of conception and belief. To a Jew, to a Pharisee, such an argument might not have been so readily appreciable; but to one who has the words of Christ continually before him for study and meditation as we have, and the opportunity of comparing scripture with scripture, and all the light on the spiritual meaning and purpose of the Gospel which we enjoy, the spiritual import of such passages as our text ought surely to reveal itself upon a moment's calm reflection, although to take home to ourselves the whole extent of their application, may well require, as it will well repay, a longer study.

The object of this whole conversation was to impress upon the man of worldly ideas that he must

be born again, born from above, born into a world of spiritual realities, in order to see, or to see *into*, the kingdom of heaven. That state of honor and of happiness was not far off, either in place or in time. It was ever at hand. It was ever present and everywhere present in God, the all-pervading Spirit. It was present in *his* person, as the Son of God. It was here on the earth in the hearts of all his true disciples. But as yet there were none who understood it or him. None had, as yet, of all the saints and sages, fully and clearly attained to this spiritual conception and communion ; but he, God's holy child, had been raised to that intimacy with the Father, out of which he was now communicating to men such spiritual blessings, an intimacy which was not merely occasional, as with priests and prophets of old, but habitual, and an intimacy which, though hitherto it had not been granted to man, henceforward would be shared by others ; for he would give power to them that should believe in him to become themselves the sons of God, partakers of the divine nature and the heavenly kingdom ; and I would suggest whether that use of the plural, "*We* speak that we do know and testify that we have seen," does not shadow forth this very idea that he who was taken up into the heavenly secrets, was to take up others with him ?

So far, then, from inviting or repelling, by any enigmatical allusions to anything peculiarly mysterious about the person of the speaker, the text, when looked at in its whole connection, calls us away from metaphysical distinctions of personality to the sim-

plicity of moral and spiritual truth. Undoubtedly there is mystery — there is paradox in the nature of Jesus, as in what nature, human or other, is there not? — but there is nothing to justify the intrusion of any such idea here. The connection makes it evident that to *ascend into heaven* means here to receive communications from the higher world; to *descend from heaven* means to bring these communications to men; and *to be in heaven* means to be constantly in communication with the Father, ever with the Father by a mutual indwelling through the spirit, constantly mediating between God and men. Jesus had just said to Nicodemus, “If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, — how shall ye believe, (i. e. how can it be expected that you will believe,) if I tell you of heavenly things?” And then the text which immediately follows gives the reason *why* it was not to be expected, because no human being had as yet ascended the height of holy contemplation and communion, necessary to the attaining of the simple and spiritual truth.

This interpretation is confirmed by a remarkable passage in the Book of Proverbs, which illustrates the Oriental use of the peculiar phraseology employed in our text, and which I think it probable that Jesus had in mind. I refer to the words which in the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs, Agur (the one who breathed that memorable prayer for competence and contentment — “Give me neither poverty nor riches” —) is represented as prophesying to Ithiel and Ucal, two disciples, perhaps, or opponents, who had tried him with some high and hard question.

Whether it was irony or humility that dictated his beginning, we read that "the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal, Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven [that is to acquire such knowledge] or descended [to deliver it]? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" In other words, "I have never heard of any such man."

If I am right in supposing that Jesus did take the suggestion of the shape of his thought in the text from the old Scripture, we may, perhaps, regard the fact as implying that the knowledge of heavenly things which he had come into the world to communicate was not of that high and hard kind which old Agur's contemporaries affected; that it was to be born not of speculative strife, the soaring and straining of the intellect, but of the still and steady sympathy of spiritual life.

At all events, (and this is the point in which the words of our Saviour practically concern us,) no one who meditates upon them in the light of his whole manifestation, can fail to find in them a memorable expression of that sense of the Father's presence and providence and inspiration, which, as it was in him the very breath of life, so in every meek and lowly follower of his and believer in him and in his God and Father, will also be realized just in propor-

tion to the degree of his faith and fidelity, as he himself has so emphatically promised in his conversation with his disciples near the close of his earthly ministry. He there assures them, and all who shall hereafter believe on him through their word, that if they keep his commandments, he and his Father will come and abide with them.

Jesus, while on earth, speaks of himself as being already in heaven. His whole life and language are those of one who feels himself to be, and is, always there. And we learn from this that heaven is essentially a state, and not a place. How strikingly was this also intimated in that last interview with his disciples, when he said to them, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know;" and they said to him, "Master, we know not whither thou goest, and how, then, can we know the way?" and then Jesus (as if he had said in so many words, "The way I speak of is not anything local, but something spiritual,") replied, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life,*" and presently declared to them his communion with God to be so intimate that whoso had seen him had seen the Father also,—thus teaching them that the way to God and to heaven, the home of God, was not off through space, but inward, through the invisible paths of the spirit; that that other mansion to which he alluded was no farther from them than the God in whom they lived and moved and had their being,—that the partition which separated them from it was only the thinnest veil, the frailest film of flesh, through which he was about to pass, going away from them in form, that they might be nearer

to him in spirit, *having their conversation* (as one of their number afterwards expressed it) *in heaven*.

Jesus, while on earth, speaks of himself as being already in heaven. Then there may be such a thing as heaven on earth. The Christ-like, filial spirit realizes it. The pure in heart see God, they walk with God; and as the child of nature beholds in the sunlight the smile of the Great Spirit, so does the child of grace feel in the smile of the Father of Spirits the sunshine of heaven.

When Jesus, being on the earth, declares himself in heaven, he reminds us how his religion is the culmination and consummation of the Bible teaching concerning the inspiring truth of the presence and providence of God in the world. We open the Bible, the great record-book of the gradual unfolding of religion from form and letter to spirit and substance, and of the gradual training of man to receive the successive developments, and we find that in the Old Testament the doctrine of the divine presence and agency is, with some exceptions, set forth under materialistic limitations. At one time the Lord himself is represented as passing from one part of his dominions to another; at another time the eyes of the Lord run to and fro in the earth; at one time it is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth; at another he is represented as asking, *Do I not fill heaven and earth?* — but the representation is generally one that appeals to the eye of the imagination at least, — and it is only when we come to the New Testament, when we come to God in Christ, that the Divine Omnipresence ceases

to be represented as if it were a matter of motion or measurement, and is treated as purely a spiritual fact. The material idea of the subject fades before the spiritual idea. The notion of a deity existing under the conditions of space or other form pertaining to the finite mind, is discovered to be superstition. If He fills heaven and earth, it is, as Augustine says, by containing them, not by being contained in them; but heaven and earth are not to be thought of as separate from Him; they are the outshinings, the outgoings of the infinite and inscrutable One.

When the Son of Man, being on earth, speaks of himself as being at the same time in heaven, he reminds us of the power and privilege offered to every son of man, of participating in that consolation, that inspiration and that blessedness. In proportion as any one practises the spirit of the beatitudes, his earthly life becomes a heavenly one. If it cannot be said that he is in heaven, it can be said that heaven, or what makes it to be heaven, is in him. Outwardly, he may have, and he must expect, tribulation; but inwardly, in Christ, he has peace. "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

As there is no presumption in any human being's aspiring after this participation in the Son of Man's heavenly state while on earth, so neither does it imply any selfishness, any indifference to the sins which stain and sadden and madden the world. Jesus, who lived in heaven while here, yet bore the sorrows and the sins of humanity in his generous bosom. Paul, who said, "our conversation is in heaven," yet felt

so keenly all the afflictions of his brethren, that he could say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" And He whose pity and care for his children are incessant, are infinite, is "God, blessed forever." The heaven into which, even here, the spirit of Jesus invites us to enter, is the heaven of disinterested, divine charity.

He who, while on earth, is thus, by the power of Christian faith, in heaven, has an object in life capable of affording a sufficient solace in trial and an ample security against the temptations that beset the faithless. Beholding, with the eye of faith, God everywhere, continually manifested in the bright and blissful activity of creation,—feeling the presence and providence of the Maker and Preserver in the processes of his own complex life,—impressed thus with the sacredness and majesty of existence, he will find a never-failing interest in the labors of his earthly allotment.

To him who, while here on earth, dwells in heaven, the comforts as well as the sorrows of life will be holy and heavenly. Cheerfulness will be as much an expression of religion as sadness. Gloom, so often made the exclusive or especial sign of godliness, will be utterly banished, as unbecoming the soul that believes in a God of perfect and almighty goodness. The free play of innocent and worthy fancies and feelings, will be held, in its place, no less divine than the grave work of life or the solemnities of worship.

To him who, while on earth, is in heaven, God's providence will reveal itself as extending to every

particular of universal life. Miracles will be only unusual events of that providence, designed to awaken the mind of man to a perception of the power which passes before him daily in a constant procession of wonders. He will see God in all things. The multiplication and preservation of life will be no less a sign of God's working than the restoration of life to the dead.

A poet has said that "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." But just so far as we retain or recover the childlike feeling, especially in proportion as we grow into that holy childhood which comes from the simplicity of Christian discipleship, heaven will still be realized as all around us. Even as the earth though to the natural eye heaven is far above it, is in reality in the bosom of the heavens, so when the spiritual sense is corrected and cleansed, will this earthly life be seen and felt to be in heaven, because in the all-encompassing presence of the Father.

The Son of Man, who, when on earth, was in heaven, proved even in the last dark hours of his earthly life, that what he had said of himself in the beginning of his ministry still held true. Who does not feel, that he who said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me but weep for yourselves and for your children;" and, when they were nailing him to the cross, prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" who does not feel that he whose heart was so occupied was indeed in heaven?

"The mind is its own place, and, in itself,
Can make a heaven of hell."

Though infernal powers and passions were breathing

hotly around him in the darkness, in his soul was the mild air of heaven.

It was one of his last prayers, before leaving this world, that, as he and his Father were one, even so his disciples might be one with him and with his Father; that where he was, there they also might be. And, after his departure, we hear one of his apostles praising God, who has raised them up to sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus.

And this blessedness is offered us. But let us understand it aright. It is not merely to sit in places where, from the place itself, by some mysterious process, a holy virtue shall flow into us, and imbue our characters without any effort of our own. By a true and living and working faith, we shall not only, wherever we abide, sit in heavenly places, but wherever we walk, walk in heavenly paths, in Christ Jesus.

For, once more, and this is the last thing I have to say, the oneness with the Father which enabled the Son of Man to say he was in heaven, was the oneness of an active harmony of spirit, purpose, and work. It is not by any mere sentimental dreaming, or sanctimonious sighing, or speculative soaring, that any one of us is to realize that happy state called being in heaven; only a pure, spiritual, generous purpose which raises us above ourselves, above the world, can ensure that condition, and such a purpose is set before us in the life and religion of the Son of Man.

XIV.

THE MORAL RESURRECTION.

IF, BY ANY MEANS, I MIGHT ATTAIN UNTO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. — Philippians, iii. 11.

THERE is a strong and striking emphasis on the word *attain*, here. The resurrection of the dead (which we are accustomed to speak of as an arbitrary appointment and a universal destiny) is here represented as a matter of individual acquisition, apprehension, and conquest. It is more than possible that our familiarity with this oft-recited part of Scripture prevents our being impressed with the intensity, the cumulative force of figure and feeling, with which this truth is expressed and enforced. Observe carefully the vividness and variety of the images with which the idea is illustrated, that the attainment of the resurrection of the dead demands and deserves a man's highest and continual effort, aspiration, ambition and solicitude. This resurrection is the goal, the Apostle says, which he has always in his eye, the prize which, in the liveliness of his faith and the earnestness of his purpose, he not only runs but reaches forward to lay hold of. Himself apprehended, through Christ, by this per-

fect ideal, he burns to apprehend the reality which it promises. In the condensed expressiveness of the original, to which our common translation fails to do justice, he *throws everything overboard* (counting the costliest freight of earthly gain or glory as dross and dung in comparison, and especially in competition, with even the promise of this heavenly treasure); he counts it all as not only so much loss, but so much encumbrance, and more than willingly lets it go, that he may lighten his ship and ride safely and successfully through the narrows of earthly temptation and tribulation into the high port of this divine achievement of the resurrection. He lavishes the wealth of his imagination upon this point with more than his usual profuseness, inasmuch that to one who so studies him and sympathizes with him as to take the natural impression of the figurative element that pervades his language, the very sentence in which he expresses his anxiety to reach the consummation seems to labor and climb towards its conclusion: "If—by any means—I might attain (in the original *find my way*) unto the resurrection of the dead."

But what I wish particularly to keep before your minds is the paradox (for such I think it would be to most readers or hearers of the Scriptures who should suddenly be startled into thinking of these things which are now, with so many, little more than a solemn sound) that the resurrection of the dead, or (what is equivalent) *from* the dead, is not something to be inherited, but something to be attained; not something which is to come to us by the mere

lapse of time, but something to which we are to find our way and fight our way; not something toward which the mere flow of these earthly years is to waft us, but something toward which we are to strive and struggle; stemming, with holy resolution, the tide, not of time merely, but of the times, the tide of habit and fashion and worldliness, and steering onward by the star of the cross into the haven of spiritual victory.

Unfortunately we hear so much Scripture publicly read or quoted, before we begin to think, if we ever do, of its meaning, authority, and application, — it is such a long way with too many of us, from the outer ear to the ear of thought and of faith, and that avenue is so much clogged by earthliness, — so hard or rare a thing is it for us, therefore, really to know what we do hear from the sacred volume, that I doubt whether the question would be generally thought to have any point, and yet it seems to me a very pertinent and profitable question to ask ourselves, how it would strike us, were we to hear now for the first time a man with whom we had associated apostolic pretensions, express himself so modestly and anxiously about attaining what we had been accustomed to suppose that every man not only will but must come to, whether he seeks it or not, something which is as sure as fate, as certain as that other event which is “appointed unto all men.” Would not this thought come over us: is it possible that such a spiritual man as Paul should doubt whether he was to share in a resurrection which all men besides, just and unjust, are surely

moving on to meet; or have we been wrong in supposing that there *is* to be a resurrection of the dead without reference to character?

In a word, there is something about the Apostle's distrustful expression which calls for a more penetrating look from us than it is apt to receive, either in our secular or in our sanctimonious moods. If any regard the man who calls himself Christ's and God's Apostle as a fanatical declaimer, to such it will be a mere matter of curiosity to know what he means by what he says; but whoso believes that he knew what he said and said what he knew, will incline to treat this also as one of those "words of truth and soberness," and will have not merely the Athenian curiosity which asks "what will this babler say?" but the sacred curiosity which craves to know what the Spirit of Truth says through him to each living soul.

Nor is this a question which touches (to refer to a distinction that has become somewhat prominent in modern criticism) merely *Pauline Christianity*. It is one that concerns no less the Christianity of Paul's Master and ours. It is recorded that, on a certain occasion when the Sadducees, who were materialists and denied the resurrection, thought to puzzle Jesus by a casuistical question based upon the assumed formal continuance, in the higher world, of the relations of this, the great Teacher made the memorable reply, that they who should be counted *worthy to obtain* that world and *the resurrection from the dead*, being the children of the resurrection and partakers of the Divine nature, should no longer be

subject to the laws of flesh and blood; expressly implying, you observe, the very idea Paul presents us, that the resurrection of the dead is a *prize*, given to those who are worthy of it. Here there was high authority for Paul's idea of men's having to *attain* the resurrection of the dead, his Master himself having spoken of it as something to be obtained.

But what was this resurrection? What is it? Although, in his peculiar position, beset by the materialistic Sadducee on the one hand and the spiritualistic Pharisee on the other, our Lord, in his wisdom, chose, for the sake of conquering by dividing, to accept, to some extent, the phraseology of the party that came the nearer to the truth, and to speak of the spiritual world as if it did not begin till after death, (as, indeed, it would not, till then, be fully manifested,) yet at the same time numerous expressions of Jesus, and the whole spirit of his teachings imply — what his Apostles well understood and present very prominently in their writings — that the eternal life revealed by the Gospel is not merely something to be waited for in the future, but something waiting to be entered into now. That Paul did not understand by it anything that could not in the nature of things be at all realized till after death, is clear to my mind from his disclaimer, “not as though I had already attained,” — for if the thing in question were what a man must die in order to attain, why should he speak so modestly about it, and say, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended?” And, in fact, when he adds to the phrase, “not as though I had already attained,” the clause, “either

were already perfect," — is not this as much as to say that the resurrection he speaks of is not a physiological fact, but a moral and spiritual principle, a principle of perpetual progression, a life which, though not yet ripe, was continually ripening within him. And there is a significant ellipsis in one of the most memorable of these verses from the midst of which our text comes, that does not appear in our common version, but is easily made to by dropping the words inserted there in italics by the translators, and then it reads, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but one thing — forgetting those things which are behind I press toward the mark . . ." Is it a forced thought to read this as if the Apostle meant to say he *had* apprehended one thing, namely, the idea and the purpose of never-yielding effort; and what was this but the spiritual, the eternal life, the life of the resurrection, begun even here?

Paul, certainly, had not the idea that it was necessary to wait for this material body to crumble into dust before the Christian doctrine, the Gospel doctrine of the resurrection, could take effect. Paul did not feel as if he must be literally taken out of the flesh in order to live the life of the spirit. On the contrary he says, that the life *he now lives in the flesh*, he lives *by the faith of the Son of God*, and yet, without any inconsistency, he tells his brethren, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you;" and again, "If the spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead

shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His spirit that dwelleth in you."

"Shall quicken your mortal bodies." Whatever we may think of the resurrection of the body in a future world, there is certainly a sense in which the bodily senses may experience, and are, in multitudes of cases, trying to experience, a resurrection even here. False views of salvation and of spirituality may disguise from us this fact, making it appear as if the body were necessarily a hindrance to the soul's being saved, at least preventing our appreciating the possibility and the providential design that the physical organs themselves should, when raised up by the spirit to the freedom and dignity of serving its high uses, actually assist in the accomplishment of the heavenly character.

In short, the great conflict through which man is to fight his way toward the resurrection is not the conflict of the soul against the body, but the joint warfare of the soul and the body, in a manly religion, against the evil which each works when it separates itself from the other and tyrannizes over it, either the flesh over the spirit or the spirit over the flesh. And the fact that the soul and senses must work together in the things of the higher life is one of which the prevalence in the Scriptures of that figurative language on which we have dwelt so much should admonish every thoughtful mind. It is a popular impression that the figurative element in language is a mere ornament, addressed only to the fancy. The connection of the imagination with faith, conscience, and life, is a subject too little understood.

The truth is that figurative language, so far from being fit only for a parade-dress of thought, may be the service-dress and armor in which earnest thought shall show most truly its inner quality, do its most effective work, and fight its noblest battles. The spirit of truth loves to speak in figures, because so it can most livingly express its very self. In other words these figures of speech have a nearer relation to the reality of things than an inattentive mind is apt to suspect. There is a vast deal of profound meaning covered up under the old, familiar images of Scripture, meaning for the mind, for the conscience, and for the practical purposes of life, which we lose, from the habit of gliding over them without reflection. These figures of speech which we learn to pass over so lightly, are, to a thoughtful mind, the hints by which it passes to and fro between the large and lofty truths of the spiritual world and those (seemingly) little details of the world in which a man's life has now to manifest itself. They preserve the large idea of the spiritual truth, and at the same time prevent it from becoming vague and visionary. When the Bible represents the Christian life as a walk, as a race, as a battle, — when it bids man ponder the path of his feet, not turn his eyes to the right hand nor to the left, but tread the strait and narrow way, — when it bids him seek those things which are above, — of these and multitudes of other constantly recurring forms of expression we say, “here is something to be understood figuratively, not literally.” But are we not apt, thus, to dismiss the matter too summarily? For instance, life is called a warfare.

We say this is a figure, but is it not a fact? So much so that, to him who will live above the world, life becomes not only a moral, but almost a physical fight. Let any one who has ever known what it is to put a spur into the side of his own indolence, to tighten the check-rein of his own passions, to hold his mouth with a bridle when the temptation to turn his tongue to wicked or wanton uses pressed hard upon him, and to close the very ear of his heart against the snaky whisper of detraction, — let him who has ever thus struggled to keep his nature “upright, and innocent of the great transgression,” — let him who has ever set his face against the shallow smile of the world’s conceit, — let him who has ever set his feet to stand by the simple and sober truth through desertion and unpopularity, and to walk in the lonely road of independence, — let him who has had to do perhaps the hardest work of all, namely, to summon up his *will* against his own *wilfulness*, and break his own spirit into the service of the spirit of grace and holiness, — let such answer whether it is a mere figure to call life a conflict.

Let then the figurative character of the language of the Scripture and the spirit generally, admonish us of the magnitude and moment of these truths, to which no prose speech could have done justice. Let especially the glowing imagery of the fervid yet practical Paul, which *we* are in no danger of exaggerating in any mystic or monastic literalism, but which we are in great danger of practically treating as mere rhapsody, — and particularly let all that peculiar accumulation of images with which the Apostle

labors to picture a man agonizing after the resurrection to eternal life, impress us with the truth that that resurrection is a reality that invites us now to apprehend it,—to apprehend not merely the idea but the thing itself. Let it help set us free from the delusion, so common and so insidious, of feeling as if we might

“ read our title clear
To mansions in the skies,”

while we not only have not, but care not supremely to have, the clearness of the skies, the atmosphere of heaven, the serenity of the heavenly temper, pervading our very souls and approving us children of the resurrection. If we are dreaming that our souls may somehow be saved, while we are not seeking to work out the salvation, and to glorify God with our very bodily senses and organs,—if the eye that was made for the soul to look out from and receive and reflect the light of truth and beauty and of God’s lofty and loving face, is made to give back from its glossy or filmy surface only the image of this world’s vanity and pride,—if the brow on which the serenity of a higher world should sit enthroned, is the camping ground of sullen and rebellious passions,—if the ear which was made to listen to the music of creation is occupied with hearing, and the tongue, “ the glory of” man’s “ frame,” with uttering, the whispers of detraction, the traitor-song of flattery, and the thousand evil communications that corrupt the soul, then for us is there a meaning, which not the mere faint sigh or fervid fancy of an hour snatched for

holy musing out of a week of unholy living can satisfy, in that trumpet-call of the Apostle, "Awake, thou that sleepest and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!"

I have brought together these thoughts upon the Scripture and the spiritual life, under a heavy sense of inadequacy to do anything like justice to the simple and sober harmony of that truth which the very Spirit of truth furnishes to us with such calm majesty in the silent lessons of life, and death, and immortality. "To-day, if ye shall hear *His* voice, harden not your hearts." That voice comes from the quiet dust below and from the tranquil heavens above, at once to chasten and to quicken us, to chasten the fever of earthly hankerings and to quicken the languid wing of religious aspiration. It steals into the midst of our distractions and diversions, it casts a shadow over the summer noon of gayety, not to fill us with a momentary gloom, only to be succeeded by the old giddiness, but on the contrary to guard us against that gloom which follows upon the steps of frivolity, and to substitute for a faithless and hollow excitement misnamed happiness, that innocent gladness which is at once the child and the parent of virtue, that true piety which is the perennial fountain of joy undefiled and everlasting.

XV.

THE THREE PARABLES OF THE JUDGMENT.

MATTHEW XXV. 1-46.

THE twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew contains three parables, all bearing upon one subject, — the judgment of the Jewish nation, of all nations and souls, by the law of the Divine kingdom, as revealed by Jesus Christ. These parables, of the ten virgins, the ten talents, and the division of the sheep and the goats, are so familiar to every one, from childhood, by public and private reading and reference, that the mere name and number of the chapter which comprises them will always be enough, upon a moment's reflection, to bring those impressive pictures of momentous truth, which have so often awakened curiosity, if not conscience, back again to the mind's eye, and home to every heart in which this world's anxieties or amusements have left any place for sober, spiritual thought. Those wonderful and mighty foreshadowings of the issues of life and death, thrown by the hand of a master, of *the* Master, upon the curtain of futurity, upon the veil which mysteriously separates us from a world that any mo-

ment may reveal and every moment holds in its bosom, — those sublimely simple narrations of the deeds and the doom of the wise and the foolish virgins, of the faithful and the slothful servants, and of the humane and the inhuman sons and brethren of the holy King's family, — those emblems of the most soul-thrilling realities, that win by their imaginative beauty, while they warn by their conscience-searching fidelity, invented, as they were, by the Lord's wisdom to strike the fancy, to stir the curiosity, to fasten upon the memory, and quicken the moral and religious sensibilities of a generation of disciples, who were as children in the school of this newly revived religion of the Spirit, — how well they have justified, in all generations, the wisdom that originated them, by the early and lasting hold they have always taken of the mind of childhood; while the stream of fiction, gliding over the solid ground of eternal truth, that charmed and chained the wandering eye of the child's mind to the pictured surface of the narrative, has invited, by its transparency, the mature thought of manhood, tried and quickened by life's temptations and sorrows, to penetrate the thin veil of the parabolic imagery and to recognize reverently a foundation of truth, which no experience can ever exhaust, and no exposition can ever express.

I have spoken of the three divisions of this memorable chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew as being all parables. The last portion, I know, has not been generally so regarded and classified, as you will see by the heading of the chapter in our com-

mon version of the Bible, which reads: "The parable of the ten virgins, and of the talents. Also the *description* of the last judgment." Nevertheless I am satisfied that that solemn representation of the great judgment to come ought also to be ranked among the parables, just as much as the scripture which narrates as a thing of the past the scene between the tormented rich man and Abraham in the world of retribution. It is no extenuation, on the contrary it is a magnifying, of the vital and practical truth, to say that both of these highly-wrought, oriental and scenic descriptions are parables. In saying so, we do no more nor less than acknowledge that such creations, through the cloud of mystery of their poetic and prophetic inspiration, charge the conscience with an electric truth, which is too vast and far-reaching for the mind fully to grasp.

In one sense, indeed, it might be said that the whole of the chapter which forms our subject is a description of the great, spiritual judgment, not only as a thing of the future, but as a thing of the past and of each passing age and hour. For who is there of us that has not already known by experience, who of us that has not felt, even if any of us have never reflected upon the nature and import of the feeling that darkly weighed upon us, that sense of the judgment of the soul's indwelling witness and judge upon its unfaithfulness to its calling, which was a foretaste of the sentence one day to be more clearly heard? When we read, or when we remember, what it needs no reading to recall, the images of those heedless bridesmaids who suffered

their lamps to go out and found themselves in the outer darkness, vainly crying to a Lord who knew them not,—the image of that disobedient and distrustful steward who presumptuously hid his Lord's money, also shut out into the dismal darkness from the feast of honor and congratulation, and gnashing his teeth to find that what his selfish hope had hoarded, was gone from his grasp,—and when, finally, we recall the disappointment and dismay of those mercenary subjects of the great King who had dreamed that ministering unto him personally and officially in an occasional and formal homage atoned for the sin of neglecting those brethren of his own royal family, whom, though ragged and wretched and reprobate, he cherished as his own flesh and blood, more dearly than his own life, how unutterably more than earthly reputation and flattering titles,—when these characters, living on the page of the Evangelist, pass in succession before us, in some hour of sober meditation, who of us is so “void of offence towards man and towards God,” so singularly faithful to the laws of purity, piety, and philanthropy, that it might not be said of us, as by the Pagan Poet,

“Change but the name, the fable speaks of thee?”

Nay, in this case, there is no need of so much as changing the name. The selfish, the unspiritual man, he who waits upon fortune or drifts along with the tide of fashion,—he who suffers the light of reason which God has committed to him to be incrustated

with sloth, sensuality and selfishness, to be blown out by the gusts of passion, or die out in the heavy air of materialism, — he who finds the Sodom-apple of miserly greed crumble to ashes in the tightness of his grasp, — he whose life is one continued and desperate effort to comfort his conscience with the notion that he does not fail in reverence for the Most High, though, all the while, he makes religion a secondary and incidental, if not accidental thing, and that he does not hate his brother man, when he certainly does not love him, according to the Gospel standard, — all such, if they dare to look into the glass of the perfect and holy law, as framed in these last parables of the Gospel, will see, exactly and expressly described, what manner of persons they are, and what manner of persons they ought to be.

On the one side of the picture they will hear a voice saying, "Thou art the man," and on the other, "This is the man thou oughtest to be, the man that thou art called and empowered to become."

But my leading thought in selecting this chapter for my subject, was neither to retouch the threefold picture in your memory, which would be a superfluous task, nor, and still less, to indicate even the outlines of the life-applications of the three parables, a theme too vast for a single occasion. My first purpose was to call your attention to something in the arrangement of these parables which I do not think has generally been noticed, but which, in my view, has a curious and instructive interest. Vividly apprehended and fully appreciated, by the common

conscience of men, as each parable, separately taken, is, in its broad, strong, general moral, at least, excepting, perhaps, the one most striking point of the last, namely, that it is their *not doing* which condemns the hardhearted subjects of the Lord's displeasure, (a point which seems to have extensively escaped notice,) although, with this exception, each separate parable has not failed to be understood and taken home, at least, to the conscience, — there is a fitness and a felicity in the order by which these impressive parables follow each other, rising to a climax of moral significance, spiritual illumination, and Christian instructiveness, which I do not remember to have seen or heard remarked, but which I cannot help regarding as quite remarkable, and fitted, if thoughtfully considered, to give the whole subject of the judgment, as shadowed forth, I might say elaborated, by these successive delineations, a new impressiveness. It has been said of the discourses and sayings of Jesus by a keen analyst of the evangelic records, that they seem as if they had been rolled to and fro by the tide of tradition which left the narrative in its present form, and now stand here and there, like those geological monuments called bowlders, dislocated from the connection to which they originally belonged, and which it is often impossible for us now to guess. Every attentive reader of the first three Gospels, who has wished, as every Christian disciple, not to say every philosophical scholar, must, to understand the historical connection of what he read, will acknowledge, in regard to very many of the utterances of Jesus, the force of

this criticism. But in the case of the three parables composing the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, there is a beautiful order of growth in the thought from each to the next, a deepening and a broadening into the spiritual life as one reads onward, which gives assurance that the disciple did not put asunder what the Lord had joined together.

Let me endeavor to indicate, in a few words, the order and progress I refer to, as bearing the marks of *His* hand, who is "the way, the truth, and the life." Mark, then, how these parables complete each other. The parable of the ten virgins comes first, and sounds the key-note of the strain, the word "Watch!" It teaches the wisdom of waiting and watching for the coming of the Lord. It admonishes men to keep the lamps of faith and reason and conscience, and all the higher lights of the soul, trimmed and burning; in other words, it impresses a man with a sense of his duty to himself, to his own nature, and warns him that, if he slumbers on his post, if he wastes in the entrancing influences of the present the energies given to provide against the future, he does it at his own peril. But thus far the parable does not expressly intimate any other than a selfish end of life, and if we confined our attention to this aspect of things, as, indeed, in certain moods and seasons the subjects of religious anxiety are too apt to, we should not only fall far short of the full ideal of the manly and religious character, but miss the very, vital characteristic of the religion of Christ. Man is called not only to wait and watch patiently, but to watch and work patiently and faithfully. He

is not merely to stand on the defensive, but to go forward into the seed-field and the battle-field, to sow and strive, to reap and conquer. Or, according to that other familiar figure, of the house-servants, he has not only to guard the house against thieves and robbers by night, but to occupy and improve the farm by day, to cultivate the ground, that is, the powers his Maker and Master has committed to him; to work, in short, for the lord of the house and of the harvest, and not merely and selfishly wait for the reward. And this transition from watching to working is precisely the transition from the parable of the virgins to that of the talents. The former had closed with the warning that none can tell when the Son of Man cometh. But when he comes, why does he come? is the great practical question. He comes not merely as a bridegroom to feast with his friends, but as an employer to call his agents to account. And he asks not how carefully they have kept, but how faithfully they have used the talents intrusted to them. The narrow and niggardly spirit, that thinks its Master altogether such an one as itself, and watches not to serve Him but to save itself, wakes to feel itself lost and to bear the name and doom of the unprofitable servant. And this designation of "unprofitable" marks the next transition, the next movement onward, toward the heart of the Christian life and law, the connection between the parable of the talents and that of the sheep and the goats, or the grand announcement of the test of Christian character and the terms of Christian salvation. In the two previ-

ous ones man has been regarded first as living to save himself, and secondly as living to serve and glorify his Maker. But not yet have we reached the crowning, the characteristic element of the Gospel law. God desires no glory except that which consists in the growing manifestation and appreciation of his love. "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself?" asks the Book of Job, and subsequently answers its own question by saying, "Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." And so that word "unprofitable" applied to the servant of the one talent, reminds us that man, who cannot live to himself alone, cannot acceptably serve his Maker until he sees the Son of God and the Son of Man in every son of man, loves the Father in the brethren, and his neighbor as himself. The third and last of the parables, as related to its forerunner, reminds us that the greatest of all the talents intrusted to man is the opportunity of sacrificing self on the altar of humanity. In other words, to recur once more to the parable of the householder, between which and this chapter of parables there is a certain parallelism, the faithful servant is not merely he who guards the house, not merely he who keeps the property at a brisk interest, that farm and funds may make a goodly show on the return of the Master, but he, still more, who considers his fellow-servants, treats them with forbearance and fellow-feeling, and who remembers the poor at the gate, and honors his Master's name among the people, as a name that stands

for kindness and mercy. In that parable, indeed, sensuality and inhumanity on the part of the evil servant are what provokes the lord's displeasure, but in this of the Messiah's judgment, the inhumanity imputed is, on the face of the accusation, simply indifference, the crime simply the sin of omission. The King does not charge them upon his left hand with having eaten and drunk with the drunken, and smitten their fellow-servants, his and their brethren of the household; quite possibly, to say the least, they may, in some such positive way, have hurt the feelings, the fortune, or the fame of their King; quite possibly, too, the very disregard of humanity may have been only another phase of their self-pampering lust; but the one, sole count presented in the indictment, is the neglecting to do to others the works of mercy. It is not for perverting their talents to purposes of cruelty or self-aggrandizement that the Judge condemns them, but for not devoting them to noble and generous purposes; in short, for living unprofitable lives. What a singular union is there here of tender forbearance and searching faithfulness! Behold, as the Apostle says, the goodness and the severity of God! The Judge has so worded the preamble of his sentence as to make it, at once, as moderate as possible towards the guilty, as if it were, indeed, his "strange work" to condemn them, and yet so profound and comprehensive in its terms, (leaving no loophole for a mere negative piety,) as to show forth the faithfulness of that Father of Spirits, who loves the human soul too well to look with complacence on the least stain upon its purity, or flaw in its per-

fection, and corrects the child that it may be made a partaker of infinite holiness.

I have now performed, so far as time and strength permitted, the task I had proposed to myself, that of indicating the gradual development, from parable to parable, in the chapter which has been under consideration, of the great principle upon which man is judged by the law of Christ. The order is from self-scrutiny to self-sacrifice. The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom, but the end of the commandment, and the essence of the Christian commandment, is charity.

Purposely avoiding, on account of the limitations of my special subject and object, the many other interesting and important points suggested by the chapter and the general theme it comprises, I have aimed to draw forth into view the Divine wisdom here manifested in the order of our Master's teaching.

Paul has said, "Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men." How true this is of the method of the great Teacher, who is the pattern of all!

Finally, the conclusion of the whole matter, the real moral of the series of parables which the vision of judgment so solemnly and tenderly closes, is that perfect love, and that only, casteth out fear. The idea of never-ending punishment, as it is represented in the popular feeling and the prevailing creed, is a dark shadow projected by that superstition which is born of human sin. When men believe that Christ the Saviour is the express image of God, the Father and the Judge, when they unlearn the dreadful

delusion of imagining a human God to shield them from the inhuman God their own hard and dark and narrow hearts had created, then they will abjure the idea of any torment that is not designed to correct and restore. Believing in an Almighty Father, they will reject a dogma the very possibility of whose verification contemplates the final triumph of evil in the Universe; and when religion, ceasing to be a selfish anxiety and apprehension, becomes a self-surrender to the law of love, then will the world be far on the way towards an entrance into that kingdom which God has prepared for his children from the foundation of the world.

XVI.

THE WORDS OF CHRIST, SPIRIT AND LIFE.

MANY, THEREFORE, OF HIS DISCIPLES, WHEN THEY HAD HEARD THIS, SAID, THIS IS AN HARD SAYING; WHO CAN HEAR IT? WHEN JESUS KNEW IN HIMSELF THAT HIS DISCIPLES MURMURED AT IT, HE SAID UNTO THEM, BOTH THIS OFFEND YOU? WHAT AND IF YE SHALL SEE THE SON OF MAN ASCEND UP WHERE HE WAS BEFORE? IT IS THE SPIRIT THAT QUICKENETH; THE FLESH PROFITETH NOTHING: THE WORDS THAT I SPEAK UNTO YOU, THEY ARE SPIRIT, AND THEY ARE LIFE. BUT THERE ARE SOME OF YOU THAT BELIEVE NOT.—John vi. 60-64.

IN order to draw from this language the meaning that lies behind it for us to-day and at this hour, it is well to glance back, for a moment, at the occasion out of which it grew. What *was* the “hard saying” which made not only the Jewish multitude murmur, but the disciples themselves stumble, and many of them fall away? Plainly it was the assertion of Jesus, so pointedly reiterated, that whoever would have life in him must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man. Cardinal Wiseman, in the elaborate, ingenious, and imposing argument by which he attempts to prove that this was meant literally, (a formidable argument to those who adopt

the premises on which some great doctrines of Protestant orthodoxy are maintained,) admits that the first half of the discourse, in which Christ simply and generally represents himself as the living bread from heaven, is undoubtedly figurative and was so understood by his Jewish hearers, who murmured, thus far, only at the idea of this carpenter's son pretending to be the heaven-descended Messiah; but the moment he intimates that the bread is his very flesh, then, says the Cardinal, a new sensation at once manifests itself. Now they evidently understand him to be introducing a new and far more offensive doctrine. Having called himself the bread of life, without disturbing them by the figure, which they readily explain upon spiritual principles, now he announces (it is alleged) a mysterious and miraculous communication of his actual body and blood to the believer.

The theory is a plausible one, but is open to several fatal objections. We may remark beforehand how strange it should seem, if John has recorded here the doctrine of transubstantiation, that, when he comes to narrate the last supper, at which the sacrament of the Communion is supposed to have been instituted, he is wholly silent in relation to any such observance.

But Cardinal Wiseman lays great emphasis on the assertion that when the Jews implied their literal understanding of the new announcement by murmuring, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus did not, as in the case of Nicodemus, modify his statement, so as to show that he meant

it spiritually, but only repeated and re-repeated the offensive doctrine in still more specific terms.

It would seem amazing, if we did not know the power the human mind has, not to see what it cares not to see, that any one should say Jesus does not disclaim the literal sense of his words, in the face of these two explanations of his, first, when he says, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me," (a complete refutation of the Roman Catholic doctrine,) and secondly, when he tells his disciples, in referring to his discourse, "The flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you are spirit."

The truth is, there is no such abrupt turn in this discourse as the argument we are considering alleges. Slowly and steadily the Master gathers up his reasoning towards its mighty conclusion. Slowly and steadily that wave of thought swells, which, if it breaks, breaks only against the unbelief of those who "stumble at the word, being disobedient." So repulsive to the Jews was the idea of the Messiah's humiliation, and of their partaking in it, that it was needful for Jesus to hold the truth nakedly before their faces and turn it about in every position till they should see its full shape and reality. We must remember, too, what it was that gave immediate occasion to this whole discourse. It was the fact that the people were crowding after the wonder-worker for the sake of the loaves and fishes. To such he said virtually, "if you are to *live upon me*, it must be in a nearer and more vital sense than you suppose.

You must eat and drink, not things of my procuring, but my very self. My own life and lot, my own self and spirit, and not any of these things after which you are hankering, are what you truly need and what alone I can give." Thus we see, without resorting to the idea of a mysterious literality in his words, that there was a twofold object in our Saviour's insisting so on the necessity of men's eating his flesh and drinking his blood: the mortification of worldly pride, and the mortification of earthly desire; to impress it upon them that they must follow him, from a personal interest in his character, and an interest strong enough to overcome the discouragements of a life of self-denial and the terrors of death itself.

And when, turning from the people to his disciples, he said, "Doth this offend you? What if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?" according to my idea, Jesus simply meant, "are you so troubled and perplexed at the mere *mention and prediction* of my being taken away from you,— what will be your feelings when the hour actually *arrives* and you see me no more? Suffer not yourselves to be enslaved to these carnal conceptions and attachments. It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" [that is to say, except as a symbol of the spiritual].

In other words, Jesus anticipates the sad farewell that had to be taken only a month from the date with which we are now occupied, (though the arrangement of the chapters would make it seem longer,) when, as John also records, the Master said,

“But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter [more properly the *Monitor*] will not come unto you.”

In other words, so long as their mysterious Friend was personally present with them, they lingered or stumbled, as the case might be, at the mere form and figure of spiritual things, now beguiled and now bewildered by the shadows of the unseen realities, gazing like children at the painted windows of imagery, scarcely dreaming, or more than dreaming, of the infinite heavens of truth beyond. While Jesus was with them in the flesh, their dim and drowsy eyes could scarcely look beyond the fleshly veil. As yet they but faintly and distantly recognized the *Spirit* that, in him, dwelt with them and should one day dwell *within* them. The sensation of his external companionship hindered their communing with the mind in him which communed with the invisible Father, and the very images which he used to startle the souls of men *out* of the dream of measuring and monopolizing the infinite and invisible realm of the spiritual, seemed often, at first, only to confirm them in their formal and carnal tendency.

When, therefore, Jesus said, “The flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life,” he did, at once, reprove (if that could have been necessary) the coarseness

which, in a particular instance, could even pretend to interpret him so literally, and, in general, he asserted the necessity of a large and free spirit to the receiving and interpreting of his words. It is as if he had said: Flesh dies; forms change and pass away; spirit only is immortal and immutable; and the spirit of truth, which is to the word what the spirit of life is to the body and form, — this alone gives life to men's convictions, that life which belongs to the true believer. And the words of the author of the New Testament, which we have thus paraphrased, are (I hardly need say) closely related to that memorable saying of its greatest expounder, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

But those words of the Master have not only a historical, but a prophetic meaning, and (particularly when taken in connection with the discourse of his, and the state of mind in his hearers, upon which it was a comment) what he says of the unprofitableness of the fleshly and formal mind, in contradistinction to the conceptions of truth into which the Spirit of truth enters, finds a striking and sad verification in the history, not merely of the Papacy, but of that Protestantism which should have been an image of the perfect "law of liberty." Although I do not think that this highly wrought representation of the vital necessity of intimate communion between the Christian disciple and his Master, refers to any sacramental or commemorative observance, to suppose which would contradict the Saviour's own assertion of his spiritual meaning, yet the thoughtful reader may well be reminded by it of the almost

emblematic scene in which the great Luther, after having stood so manfully and fought so vigorously as our champion in the struggle for deliverance from the *law of works*, exhibited himself with such an obstinate inconsistency in the double character of despot and slave to the no less pernicious *law of words*, only substituting for the tyranny of the form the tyranny of the formula. Strange that when he who would seem to have been called to call men to liberty, to a faith founded upon thought, a religion harmonized with reason, had no answer for the remonstrances of his brother Protestants but to point to the ink-marks and say, I take what I read, there it stands in black and white, "This is my body," and you cannot drive me from it, — and when he was driven, in defence of his position, to the hair-splitting theory that, though the bread was not *trans*-substantiated into the body of the Lord, yet the two were *con*-substantially present in one and the same form, — how strange it seems that, if not in the heat of controversial zeal, at least in the cooler intervals of sober reflection, that language of the great Master should never have come home to him with reclaiming power, — language that might have seemed almost expressly framed to fit his case: "the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life!"

But I have called that passage in the great Reformer's life an *emblematic* one. For does it not foreshadow a fatal fault which has infected, more or less, all branches of our Protestant religion, a relig-

ion which, in denying a continued inspiration to the Church, and virtually giving it to the very translators of the Scripture, shutting it up, in short, within the covers of the sacred volume, set the word up as the master, rather than the servant, of the soul, and imposed upon its disciples that narrow, rigid, and stationary mode of receiving Christianity, under which, to this day, even in the most liberal portions of the Church, the life and spirit, the comfort and efficiency of faith are seriously affected?

When Simon Peter, shortly after the discourse our text relates to, apparently in the conversation following it, said to Jesus, "Thou hast the words of eternal life," he used a phrase of deeper import than he was probably himself aware of. The words of that wonderful Teacher were, and have been ever since proving themselves, words of *eternal life*, not merely in the sense that would be commonly attached to the assertion, namely, that they direct one how to attain eternal life hereafter, but because they are words full of eternal life, of perpetual and ever-fresh vitality, in themselves, and awaken him who reads them rightly, and believes them truly, to have life in himself, kindling in him something of the eternal life, even now. In other words, they not only speak of eternal life, but they speak forth *from* it,—they prove their inspiration by the inspiration they communicate.

But how sadly it has fared with these words too often, when they have been forced, these winged creatures of the spirit, to wear the yoke of narrow creeds and do the wearisome service of bigoted controversy!

It is from men's neglecting to attend to this grand declaration of our Master, that his words are spirit and life, not flesh and death, or from their not appreciating its bearings, — in other words, it is in consequence of the prosaic mood in which Christianity has been presented and received, that sectarianism and stagnation in Christendom have so sadly obstructed the two great characteristics of true religion: charity, and growth in grace.

If this word of Jesus had been read rightly, I think we should hardly have had that dead load laid upon the neck of the Church, the self-contradictory doctrine of *literal inspiration*. Statements may be literally *dictated*, and in that case literally interpreted, but not so is inspired truth communicated, not so is it to be apprehended.

It has been said of the Poet in reference to the facts of nature, and of life in general, out of which he coins his figurative language, that "in every word he speaks he rides on them as on the horses of thought." But unfortunately they become *wooden* horses (finally *hobbies*) to the prosaic expositor of the Poet's words. I need not remind you that the best parts of our sacred books, not only of the Old, but of the New Testament, are full of the highest poetry. "But," as has well been said, "the quality of the imagination is to flow and not to freeze. . . . Here is the difference between the Poet and the Mystic, that the last nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false."

But what work has been made of the words of

inspiration by dogmatizing and disputations minds! Witness the fate of the Apocalypse! Witness the fate of hundreds of the sublimest utterances of Seer and Psalmist, Apostle and Evangelist, at the hands of men assuming to enable dull, moping minds to catch poetry and piety and charity and all heavenly graces by mere dictionary and grammar! These are the men who, seizing upon the words in which an Apostle expresses the idea that time, in the eye of the Eternal, is nothing, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day," proceed coolly to precisely nullify its meaning by making an arithmetical fact of it, and applying it to the interpretation of the poetic traditions of Genesis, so as to prove that the world was, or has been, just six thousand years in creating. These are the men who, because Jesus says, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven," instead of inferring (what common sense would seem almost to compel one to conclude) that heaven is not a place but a state of the spirit, resort to the confounding explanation that he must be two persons in one, who can be at the same moment in heaven and on earth.

When it is said that we need a poetic mood to interpret the Scriptures rightly, many seem to get an impression from this, that one is speaking of some high and fine literary culture or philosophic training not to be expected of people immersed in the cares and labors of every-day life. But the simple amount of the assertion we make is, that the free and fervid

poetic utterances of Scripture to the mind, heart, and soul of man, are to be laid hold of *not* by science but by sympathy. There is a connection, I apprehend, between the two statements Jesus makes which is not generally recognized, when, having said that the words he utters are spirit and life, he adds, *but there are some of you that believe not.* Faith is the element wanted for the right, spiritual, effectual reception of the words of the spirit—faith, the principle that pierces through forms and figures to the invisible essence. Where the *spirit* of truth is, not merely the dead body of doctrine, there faith and imagination dwell together in a lively and life-giving harmony.

It is interesting, instructive, and edifying to study the provision made in the Scriptures for counteracting the tendency of earthly dulness to degrade and narrow the dimensions of heavenly truth. That very mixture of metaphors, and that very clashing of statements which would result from taking them literally, so palpable on the sacred pages, whereat a large portion of the Church has stumbled into the assertion of a faith that defies reason,—all this would lead a truly thoughtful mind beyond the changing and conflicting forms of speech to a harmonizing spirit. When Jesus calls himself, almost in one breath, the door to the sheepfold, the true shepherd to lead the sheep through the door, and then implies that the Father is his shepherd, or, what is so often said of him, that he is himself the Lamb of God, the tenderest and lowliest of the flock, and when, again, the Lamb, as in the Reve-

lations, appears as the Expositor of the Book, as the Leader of the Faithful, the Bridegroom of the Church, the King of the Saints, the Conqueror and Judge of their Enemies,— does not all this and the like variety of metaphor, compel a right mind to ascend at once to a spiritual reality of which all these shifting and conflicting representations are only the shadows?

And when, from words, titles, and descriptions, which, it is comparatively easy to admit, are palpably parabolic, we pass to quiet, solemn and deliberate annunciations of eternal things, how important it still is for us to remember, and yet how generally do men seem to forget, the saying of Jesus, that his words are spirit and life! Take that large class of impressive declarations, for instance, scattered through the pages of the Gospel, in relation to the great judgment. How strange it should seem to a thoughtful mind that the very inconsistency of these various declarations of Jesus taken literally, such as that the Father judgeth no man but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, and yet that the Son came *not* to judge the world, and many other statements which will recur to your memories,— that the very impossibility of reconciling these on the plane of the formal understanding— does not compel every mind at once to the conclusion, which, indeed, the Master, in one place, expressly teaches, that the word he hath spoken, the word witnessing in every man's own conscience, has the authority to judge (as an Apostle says it has the power to save) the soul.

I might go on with many more applications of the saying of Jesus to the interpreting of his own doctrines and those of his Apostles, but must leave the further following out of his great principle in that direction to your own minds. There is one application, prompted by the monthly festival to-day celebrated, which has been indirectly implied in some of the considerations I have presented, but invites a more distinct expression of thought. When He who gave his flesh for the life of the world told his disciples that the flesh was nothing, the spirit everything, and that the words he spake to them were spirit and life, living and spiritual words, I cannot refrain from suggesting that he said something which it is wholesome for us to remember in connection with those words which he spake to the little band shortly after, as they ate and drank together with him for the last time in earthly relations, and he said to them, "this do in remembrance of me." Has the church generally caught the "spirit and life" of these words? I more than doubt whether we have done anything like justice to their full bearing. I feel that superstition has given them a repelling power which by no means belongs to them, intrinsically, as they came from the lips and heart of the Son of Man. Hypocrisy and superstition, how have they combined to petrify by their stony look the spiritual and flowing words of Christ, to freeze into dead formulas, and magic or military watchwords, the free and fervid expressions of the Spirit of truth. Men have stood wrangling over the empty sepulchre of a dead letter or a dead work,

heedless of the voice from above, "He is not here, he is risen;" and while one class, superstitiously attached to forms and phrases, have made a mystery out of the plainest metaphors, an opposite class have manifested in their dread of forms an equal slavery, and in disowning the mystery, have disregarded the moral of Christ's weightiest words. I can readily admit, indeed I cannot well avoid the conviction, that when our Friend and Master thus uttered himself, he prophetically felt the presence of the great company of disciples of all ages and nations who should thereafter believe on him, and that what he said to that little group around him, he said in a sense to all. But I cannot satisfy myself that we get anything like the full import of that appeal of his, when we make it merely or mainly the institution of a single and separate rite. A most appropriate and salutary occasion, indeed, it is, but greatly would its efficacy, in my opinion, be enhanced, if it could only, in our thoughts and feelings and observance, be more naturally and livingly connected with our ordinary human life. Think of the Communion as it has too generally been observed,—a table guarded by the spectral shadows of superstition, or the bristling battlements of bigotry, a few souls sitting afar off with the veil heavy upon them, heavy as the shadow of spiritual death, as if the very Lord of life were dead, and only some mysterious virtue, transmitted through the magic memorials and through the hands of the consecrated and consecrating priest could make his place good! What a contrast to the days of the early simplicity, when they brake bread

from house to house, with gladness and singleness of heart! When those words recur to us, words which originally were so affectionate and winning, but have been invested by human perversions with so much more of authority and mystery, than of tenderness and privilege, "Do this in remembrance of me," does not the emphasis fall, in our minds, more upon the mere *doing* than upon the thought what *this* is and means, which we are entreated to do? I mean, do we properly consider of what this service was to be a memorial, not merely as regarded the life of the Master, but as regards our daily life? I do not believe that we at all get the real spirit and life of the words, "Do *this* in remembrance of me," until we associate with them those other words of the great apostle, "Do *all* in the name of the Lord Jesus." "Whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of" your Christian faith. Does not the spirit of our faith constrain us to regard this observance as a sacred link between the natural and the spiritual life? Why did Jesus choose for emblems the two most familiar articles of daily cheer and sustenance, but to impress vividly the idea that all our comforts should be sanctified by the grace of religion? Very far is this Communion service from having its perfect work, until, by its two chief characteristics, its simplicity and its sociality, it preaches, as no other service could, the two great virtues and blessings of charity and contentment. In short, I would say that it was not merely a monthly or a yearly or a weekly observance, but a daily and hearty obedience also, that our Saviour enjoined

when he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Let me recur, once more, to a fact already alluded to, because it seems to me to have a significance not yet fully brought out,—not against the communion service rightly regarded, but against the stiff and narrow ideas that have prevailed in relation to it,—I mean the fact that John makes no mention of Christ's request that the disciples would remember him by this sacrament, but, instead, represents him as simply enjoining it upon them to love one another as he has loved them. Does not his very silence teach us that he felt the Master's meaning to be: "Do *this* in remembrance of me," namely, live out the spirit of mutual service and self-sacrifice which I, in these emblems, foreshadow?

I have labored, this morning, in the cause of the doctrine of spirituality. There are two ways, unhappily, in which that doctrine is defeated: on the one hand, indeed, by the tendency to resolve religion into single acts disconnected with life as a whole, and on the other hand, by the danger of dissolving and evaporating our faith in generalization of idea and sentiment. Let us not forget, because the law of liberty introduces us into a circle whose circumference is nowhere, that its centre is, however, everywhere. Here and now, at any moment, in any place, religion comes home to us with its admonitions and its invitations. Whoso would live, says Eternal wisdom in Christ, let him now come to me and have life.

XVII.

THE CHURCH.

UNTO THE CHURCH OF GOD WHICH IS AT CORINTH, TO THEM THAT ARE SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST JESUS, CALLED TO BE SAINTS, WITH ALL THAT IN EVERY PLACE CALL UPON THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, BOTH THEIRS AND OURS. — 1 Cor. i. 2.

SUCH is the large, emphatic, and explicit dedication with which this letter of Paul's to the Corinthian Christians is commended by him to all Christians in every place, and, virtually, in every age. I say, virtually to every age his words address themselves; for, although most of the errors, dangers, and controversies which occasioned his writing, have, at least in the specific forms in which he found them, long since grown antiquated and obsolete, the great spiritual truths and practical principles which form the basis of his injunctions and arguments are as valuable and as vital at this day and hour as they were when he so nobly applied them; — yes, and I think it might be shown that many of the very doubts and difficulties and dangers with which Paul had to grapple, do, in their spirit and essence, still exist. Well is it, therefore, that the counsels which were given originally to three or four Churches, were

bound up with the Gospel and handed down for the use of all the churches to the end of time.

But what I propose to use, at this time, for our enlightenment or admonition, is simply the address of this epistle, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth."

To-day we observe in this church a festival, — it may sound to some almost like a mockery to give to so familiar and slighted an observance the imposing and attractive name of festival, — we keep a feast in which the small proportion of the congregation who participate are commonly considered as the only ones in the society who *belong to the church*. Now, I regard this as a very unsatisfactory and altogether an unchristian view of the matter; nor do I see how any person of thoughtfulness and sensibility can see such an error kept up as this continues to be, even in churches called liberal, without a deep discontent.

What, then, is the church, — or rather *who are* the church? For one of the chief obstacles in the way of the true, spiritual, and catholic idea on this subject, is the old, inherited notion that the church is a thing, an edifice or an institution, rather than a live power, — that it is something made *for* man and imposed upon him, instead of being, as it is, made out of men and, as Jesus said of the kingdom of heaven (which means the true church), having its real existence *in them*. It may seem like a forced and fanciful idea, but I have no doubt of its being a true one, that not a little of the stiffness and formality of our church ideas comes from that confounding of figure with fact which led so long ago to calling

the meeting-house of Christians the church. The Scriptures call the church the *house of God*, meaning, however, the household of the faithful, just as the phrase "Abraham and all his house" means "and all *in* his house." But, so sure and subtle is the reaction of words upon our feelings and notions, in process of time, as the true church faith and feeling declined and died out under the influence of worldliness, the church became a place and a form, instead of a spirit and a reality; people began to mean, when they talked of *going to church*, having their bodies go and place themselves in certain consecrated seats, instead of going, in heart and soul, to meet and mingle with other hearts and souls, not only with visible, but with invisible beings, in spiritual communion; and so that wooden, stony rigidity came over the popular idea of the church and everything relating to it, against which the simple, spiritual, and comprehensive truth has, at this day, so hard a struggle.

And when, to this materializing of the spiritual idea of the church, you add the consideration, how soon after Jesus and the Apostles left the earth, it began to be narrowed down by spiritual pride and worldly power, — here, one man saying, "I am the church," and there, a body of men saying, "We are the church," — when you reflect how the very name of the church, which should have been a watchword of union, has been a watchword of separation and exclusiveness, you can hardly wonder, though you must mourn, if you care for truth and righteousness, that the present generations should

look at everything relating to the church, or listen to any appeal for it, with a veil upon their hearts.

“Nevertheless,” says the same Apostle who wrote our text, “when it shall turn to the Lord,” (when the heart of man shall,) “the veil shall be taken away.” (The veil of prejudice and superstition and formality shall melt away before the Sun of Righteousness.) For “the Lord is that Spirit” (of life, whereof he had been speaking): “and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” What we all need, in regard to the great subjects of the church and Christianity, is the power so steadfastly to *look to the end of that which is abolished*, that that which cannot be abolished, the immutable and everlasting reality of the spiritual life, may remain, as a precious treasure, to our affections and our faith.

Now when we turn from the misconceptions and misrepresentations of centuries to the apostolic simplicity, when we return to our text to examine it more attentively, we find that Paul, here, in his very salutation to the church of Corinth, lays down, as distinctly and carefully as if we had put our question to him and he had answered it, repeating himself in three several forms of expression, a definition of what a church is, or of who are the church, and a definition (it is interesting to remark) exactly answering to the meaning of the original Greek word. Our English word church, while it is derived, as you may not have been aware, from a Greek word signifying *that which belongs to the Lord*, translates, where it is used in Scripture, a different word, also rendered *assembly*, but literally denoting

those who are called out, and, in its Christian application, those who are called out from the world into the kingdom of Christ. So that, originally, the leading element in the idea of the church is the *calling*. Observe, now, how Paul, in the very titles which he gives to the Christians of Corinth, the phrases he employs as equivalent to the word church, bears out our etymological explanation of the term. First, he calls them "the church of God which is at Corinth;" then he repeats the idea by calling them the "sanctified;" then he explains this by designating them as persons "called to be saints;" or, as Wicliffe and others read it, *called saints*; or, as Tyndale has it, *sanctes by callynge*; and finally, extending his greeting to all Christians everywhere, he describes them as those who *call upon the name of the Lord*; but the general opinion of the best critics is, that the phrase means those who call that name *upon themselves*,—in other words, who call themselves or are called by the name of Christ, as the disciples were first at Antioch.

It is evident, then, that in speaking of the members of the church as *sanctified*, Paul does not mean they are *made saints*, in the modern sense of the word, morally holy persons, for then he would not have added that they were *called* to be saints; not to say that this would contradict the very showing of the whole epistle, which was written to rebuke things in them *unworthy* of saints. They were sanctified, in the sense in which God is represented as sanctifying the seventh day,—that is, set apart for holy purposes.

Now, from this account of the church, two things follow. In the first place it follows that no sanctimonious pretension is necessarily involved in church-membership. No one who views the matter rightly, means to say, by participating in any church service, "I profess to be holy;" the most that such a one may fairly be presumed to mean is, "I know that I *ought* to be holy." And therefore no false modesty or spurious humility should keep any one back from doing what conscience dictates, and, perhaps, the heart demands.

But, secondly, if our idea of the church is true, that it means all who are *called* to be holy, it further follows that, however much the many may try to deceive themselves in this matter by not acknowledging their church-membership, they do not thus do away the fact, nor the responsibility growing out of it; they do not thus avoid the obligation to Christ, of gratitude, confession, and obedience. As none of us are shut out from the privileges, so none of us are released from the duties of the Christian profession. Will you candidly read the New Testament on the subject, and then say that the little handful of people who, in our congregations, are compelled to represent, in their several little solitudes, the *communion of saints*,—that these are all you really believe to *belong to the church*? I am confident that, in our hearts and consciences, we all know better than this. How childish it is to say, "*I may* do this [mean or frivolous thing], and I need not do that [righteous and generous act,] because I do not belong to the church; my neighbor,

who belongs to the church, is required to be more exact about these things!" It is a pernicious sophistry. You, who hear the gospel, do all belong to the church. You *are* the church. The Christian congregation is the Christian church, and our earlier English translators of Scripture had the true apostolic spirit when they put the word congregation where our version says church. The church is not so narrow as spiritual arrogance assumes, superstitious timidity confesses, or worldly laxity desires. There may be few that are chosen, but many are called, and they that are called are the church,—on earth, at least. Christ has bought all he has paid for. But for whom did he pay the price of his life? "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us." If, then, Christ's blood purchased the church, and it was for sinners he died, we might as truly say that sinners constitute the church, as that saints constitute it. But the truth is, humanity is Christ's church. The parable of the Gospel net, and that of the tares of the field, (the field being called at one time the world, and at another the kingdom of God,) show that the church is humanity. But without approaching the borders of paradox, we certainly may and must affirm that Christian congregations, however they may choose to veil the fact from their own eyes by the circumlocution of "religious societies," are really churches, and parts of the one church. Who shall say that the voice of

God in the conscience, the hand of God upon the heart, the solemn call of Providence, the story of Christ's ministry and martyrdom, are less binding upon a man than the sprinkling of a little water on his brow by a human hand, or that the signing of his name to a human covenant is more solemn and sacred than his having had the highest and holiest name and law written "with the spirit of the living God" upon the tables of his heart? All of us have been called, not once only, but again and again, and are continually called, as those who are in the kingdom of God and church of Christ, to be worthy subjects of that kingdom, and, in the church, to live as becometh saints. Our very birth in a Christian land is a calling. The presence of the Gospel is a call. Life, with all its vicissitudes, with the bitterness of its disappointments, and the hollowness and heaviness of its very successes and triumphs, Death, with its mysteries and its solemnities, and Eternity, with its manifold shinings and soundings into the realm of the finite, — all these are mighty calls from God, saying to every one, whatever his earthly vocation, "Be thou holy, for I, thy Father and thy Judge, am holy." And shall we flatter ourselves that we gain anything by undertaking to drown this call, this cry of the soul, with the empty plea that we have never experienced a special and effectual calling?

There is, undoubtedly, a secondary sense of the word *call* in the New Testament, in which it refers to the case where people *recognize* and *acknowledge* God's call and claim upon them (whence the phrase "effectual calling"), just as there is a secondary

sense of the word *church*, in which it means especially those, not only called, but chosen ones, who belong, not by obligation only, but by character, to the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, and whose treasures and hearts are there. But I have had occasion, in this discourse, to dwell upon these terms only in their primary and most comprehensive sense; and, indeed, when you consider that even those who are the most emphatically designated as the called and the chosen, are admonished to make their calling and election sure, and that if perfection were the test of saintship, we could hardly believe in the existence of a church human, on earth at least, you will admit, I think, that the safest way for us is to fall back upon that view of the church I have been presenting, which makes the characteristic element in the meaning of the word to be that men are called to be saints and to live as actual saints would do.

I have thus spent more time than my own sense of the manifest truth of the proposition would have dictated, but not more, perhaps, than the indisposition to see some of the plainest truths demands, in maintaining that the church means all for whom Christ died, and especially all whom he calls to virtue and to glory.

But the question what is the church, or who are the church, leads to another and a still more important question, namely, to what is this church, this congregation, (which we have described as including all who are called by Christ,) — to what is it called? We saw, in the beginning, that all people in Chris-

tian society and societies are called saints, and called to be saints. This is the end of the church, with all its means and motives, all its ordinances and instrumentalities, to make men saintly. Saintly, not sanctimonious. The immediate business of the church is not merely to *be* somewhat, still less to *appear* somewhat, but it is to *do* something. God has not set Christians apart, that they may stand apart and say, "Stand off, for I am holier than thou." Christ died, not to purify unto himself a people peculiar only by having a mystical experience about them, known to no others, but to purify unto himself a people peculiar in this respect, that they are "zealous of good works." This declaration of the Apostle has been but feebly appreciated. Church-membership and saintship have been too generally regarded as some mystical mark on men, distinguishing them from their fellows in some way quite aside from the working out of manly and generous virtue, if not independent of it. It is not yet too late to affirm that there can be no such creature as a selfish saint, a mean saint, a malignant saint, or even an indolent, indifferent saint. A man may be ever so careful and fastidious otherwise to preserve the purity of his saintly skirts, but if he lives supremely for self, supremely anxious for his own comfort and reputation, his own outward standing and dignity, if he does not cherish, as the object of his deepest desire, the welfare of that human brotherhood, which is the great church he belongs to, which his Master lived and died to redeem, then is this neglect, this insensibility, a seri-

ous stain upon the saintship, the holiness, of his character.

It is of little avail to cry Lord, Lord, or call ourselves his, ever so solemnly, to have ever so sound a faith or saintly a demeanor, unless we are willing to do the things which he commands us, and care more for the realities of the moral and spiritual law and life than for the most august pomp of phrase and ceremony, — little can our church-life do for us, unless we feel for the Christ and the church hidden in a burdened, bruised, and bleeding humanity.

There has been a lamentable propensity in the church, (by which I mean in the congregations,) to substitute for real Christianity that nominal Christianity which thinks it enough to hear good words and confess their truth, as if this were confessing Christ. The delusion has become inveterate, of dreaming that one can *be* something without *doing* anything, — that Christian goodness is to be imbibed from without, rather than worked out from within.

Our people have just been commemorating again the birth of their political independence. And to-day, in many of the churches, is commemorated the death which, to the Christian, was the birth of that spiritual liberty without which all civil liberties are of little account. And it is good that we should thus show forth the Lord's death. It is a service which belongs to us as a Christian congregation. And, to my mind, there would be plainly just as much propriety in having the hymns of the church sung by the choir and the prayers offered by the minister, in the absence of the congregation, (they

satisfied, meanwhile, that all things pertaining to salvation were being done decently and in order) as there is in leaving the communion of the saints and the commemoration of the Saviour to the few, called, by a gross abuse of language, the church. This is a grievous drawback to the interests of real Christianity.

And yet even this, serious as it is, is but a secondary matter. The chief confessing of Christ is to be done, not in the church, (I mean what is called the church,) but in the world. We often hear Christians complain that the great and good causes of public morality and philanthropy are so much prejudiced and desecrated by being in the hands of weak, foolish, or base men. I confess I cannot find it in my heart to join very strongly in this lamentation, when I look around me, and look backward, and consider how little faithful the church (mark me, I do not mean merely the few calling themselves, or called, the church, but the many who profess to own Christ's authority) have been and are to the spirit of his life and the truths and principles for which he toiled and suffered and died. When I read the vehement appeals of some of our radical reformers, while I deplore the savage bitterness, the scurrility, and profanity which occasionally, in the heat of indignation, they suffer to stain their pages, I still cannot let their sins of taste or temper blind me to the mass of truth which lies behind them. *Their faults, I say, are no excuse for other men's neglect.* And the reflection will force itself upon me: If one tenth of the truth these men recognize and start

from had been calmly and firmly looked at and spoken out *in time* by those who could and should have done it in good taste and temper, who were bound to do it by their Christian profession, the occasion of this complaining would probably scarcely have existed. And I remember how it is written, that “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.”

To acknowledge whatever is just and true wherever we find it, candidly and cordially, undisturbed by that swarm of nicknames which fills the atmosphere of modern society, and scares so many from speaking the truth or doing their duty, — to value character more than reputation, — to respect principles more than persons, — to “prove all things and hold fast that which is good,” — this is one of the greatest works, if not the great work, which the church has to do in the present age, and which we have to do, who, whether we confess it or not, in this or that form, really belong to the church.

XVIII.

THE COMMUNION.

WHO HATH MADE BOTH ONE, AND HATH BROKEN DOWN THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION BETWEEN US; HAVING ABOLISHED IN HIS FLESH THE ENMITY, EVEN THE LAW OF COMMANDMENTS CONTAINED IN ORDINANCES. — Ephesians ii. 14, 15.

AMONG the other revivals which are going on, or needed, around and amongst us in these days,* there is a peculiar want, it seems to me, of a revival (I fear one might say, in regard to most of us, a *beginning*) of thoughtful feeling, as well as earnest, enlightened, and independent action, in relation to a simple, significant, but long-perverted memorial of our religion, which, though nominally observed once a month *in* this church, is really *observed* in a very unsatisfactory sense of the word and in a very distant manner *by* this church, and which to-day, again, makes its mute but touching appeal to our minds and hearts.

It is a long time, perhaps too long, I may almost say *years*, since I made a practice of directly pressing this subject upon your attention. There have been times when, for many months together, I hardly let a

* 1857-8.

month pass without making an argument, or appeal, or both, in behalf of an observance (let me rather say *offer*) of Christianity, which, ever since I began really to think about it, has always seemed to me equally natural in its original intention, wholesome in its just acceptance, mournfully misrepresented and misused in the creed and practice of Christendom.

My comparative silence, of late years, on this very special, and yet very comprehensive or suggestive, topic, that is, my abstinence from expressly insisting upon it, has not arisen from any abatement of my sense of its importance, of my conviction of the real majesty and worth of the festival which commemorates Christ's sufferings and sacrifice, or of my sorrow at knowing, and being monthly reminded in a most depressing manner, how this beautiful and affecting symbol of self-abnegation, victorious meekness, sin-forgiving and death-conquering charity, is misunderstood, abused, and neglected.

On the contrary, it has been rather the deepening and intensifying, than any diminution, of interest in this matter, a growing rather than a dying away of reverence for the meaning of this testimonial, that has held me back from continuing so much direct urging of it upon your attention. I had found, or feared, that the prejudice, the superstition, rooted in our minds in relation to a subject, perplexed rather than perplexing, was so inveterate, I might almost say *innate*, that it seemed next to impossible, or at least past my wisdom, to do justice at once to the truth and the error, without, in effect, though not de-

signedly, exaggerating the relative importance of what, after all, is only one of the means and expressions of Christian life, and confirming the delusion which makes that service the end rather than the means of a Christian experience, the master rather than the minister of our faith, and so appearing to narrow the idea of the Christian salvation, while really wishing to exalt and enlarge it, or else, in trying to avoid this extreme, falling into the other, and by aiming to make what had so long been regarded as a mystery and monopoly appear *common*, in the noble Christian sense of the word, as Peter was taught to use it, when the Spirit completed his conversion from Judaism, succeed only in getting the congregation to treat the Communion as *common*, in the degenerate sense of the word, that is to say, as something of very little real account.

However, as Solomon says, there is a time for all things, a time to keep silence and a time to break silence. And I have been induced to take up the subject of the Communion once more to-day, partly by the fact that it is so long since I have done it, partly by the fact that the new awakening of attention to religious questions turns many minds (all, more or less) in this direction also, partly by the signs which have lately come to my knowledge of a fast ripening desire for reform (I mean in the sense of John the Baptist and of Jesus) in the very idea and use of these forms on the part both of ministers and of parishes, and particularly by a noble book just published by a brother minister and classmate of my own, the motto of which is a part of that eloquent

language of Paul's, from which I have taken my text.

From the time when the minister of one of our oldest churches in Boston left his pulpit and profession, because the Communion, even in the *comparatively* free form in which our so-called Liberal churches understand and observe it, seemed to him singularly to misrepresent the spirituality, universality, and freedom of Christ, down to this day, when the minister of another of the oldest churches in that same city has just uttered (the love of Christ and souls constraining him) his earnest and eloquent "Plea for the Unity of Church and Congregation," — throughout these thirty years there has, I doubt not, been a growing feeling, all through our part of the Christian church, of the awkwardness and inconsistency of the manner in which the observance of one request of our common Master, singled out from so many other precepts and injunctions, is made a distinguishing mark by which a mere handful of the society, (a society which being formed and united for Christian worship ought, as a whole, to be called a Christian Church,) a meagre proportion of one in ten or twenty, as the case may be, is recognized as alone invested with the privilege (or responsibility, whichever way you regard it) of Christian discipleship, church-membership, and have to bear the name (which I can confidently say they do not covet) of being somehow the *only* representatives of Christ in the whole congregation, though nobody can precisely see how or why. Was it not to the intensity of his whole soul's aversion to this incubus

upon our Congregational, and especially our Unitarian, instinct that the manly heart of our translated brother Judd gave his earthly life a sacrifice? Whereby he now preaches and works amongst us more effectually, I doubt not, for Christ and liberty and spirituality and unity, than he could ever have done in the flesh. He, being dead, yet speaketh, in his honest, hearty, guile-scorning words and spirit, exhorting us to listen to the word of Christ's spirit, and to heed, and *not* "hide" from ourselves,

"The struggling pangs of conscious truth,"

or of conscious want, in our own hearts, to cherish the discontent our consciences awaken in us with the unworthiness of our existing representations of the new covenant, until, turned fully upon the Lord, we shall find the veil taken away in Christ, and, seeing to the end of that which is abolished, shall be able to rest all the more confidently in the things which remain, to use all the more gratefully and unreservedly all the means of spiritual life held out to us, when we come to feel that they *are* means to so glorious an end, and not themselves externally the end and essence of religion, and shall enter the more cheerfully into the service of Christ, when we feel that in and through it we are called unto liberty.

I am persuaded that "He who has begun this good work" in our Unitarian congregations, "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" shall stand above us in noonday revelation,—that it must go on till (the new life grafting itself into the old forms, or making new forms of its own new modi-

fications, at least, of the old) the *partitions* and restrictions that have *stood over* from an obsolete age and an outworn dispensation shall disappear, and that all-believing, all-loving, all-embracing spirit shall reign, which alone has the right to reign in the churches and in the hearts of men.

And the allusion just made to "partitions" brings me at length to the words from which the scripture of the day and the text of the discourse have been selected,— the words of the great Apostle of Christian liberty and liberality,— in which, as we have read, he describes how those who had been formerly "far off" have now been "made nigh" by the blood of Christ. At his death (just as the veil *within* the temple was rent in twain, signifying that henceforth nothing was to be esteemed *holier* than what was simply *holy*, and that there was no mystery for priests only to look upon, being too sacred for the people, so in the courts around the temple) the partition-wall emblematically fell down which divided Jew from Gentile, a priestly nation from the profane world, and both those who had been treated as far off, and those who had thought themselves peculiarly near to God in favor, were taught that they were equally near to the impartial Father's heart, and equally near to the kingdom, if they cherished the spirit of Christ. His death was the "atonement," taking away by the abolition of the law of ordinances the "enmity" which had existed between nations, races or classes of men, that had said to each other, "Stand off, I am holier than thou,"— the enmity which had filled man's bosom against a God

whom he knew not truly, and which had been thought to be cherished by that God himself against his blinded creatures, — the enmity, finally, and contradiction which the “law of ordinances” had introduced into the very heart and life of man, resolving his existence into a scene of miserable perplexity and haggling between the claims of things sacred and things secular upon his time, his thought, and his affections. In all these respects, the death of Christ, and the life which that death closed and crowned, or rather the life which it introduced, began a reconciliation — a harmonizing — in the light of the newly revealed spirituality of the Divine law and the identity of all obedience, under whatever external form.

All this is represented in emblem or by suggestion under the figure of taking away that partition-wall between Jew and Gentile. Let it not be said that all this language relates to what is wholly passed away, to errors in which we, to-day, have no interest. Reflection will show us, what the writings of the Apostles and the words of the Master often imply, that the distinction, as made by human pride or superstition, between Jew and Gentile, Pharisee and Publican, clean and unclean, righteous and sinners, elect and non-elect, predestined favorites of the kingdom and outside barbarians, answers to something in human nature’s tendencies which is limited to no age or race, which has passed down from the synagogue to the church, and, to this day, obstructs, hardly less than any other obstacle, the growth of the religion of Jesus.

But what is more particularly to my present purpose to say is, that the delusion and distraction referred to, have been kept alive by the very ordinance of the Lord's Supper, as it has been generally understood and observed in the churches, and particularly as regarded in the light of a dividing line, and the one standing and leading line of demarcation, between the *congregation* and the *church*. It seems to me that, as things are and are understood, this distinction is a perpetual source of mystification, and a serious hindrance to real progress in (I might almost say *towards*) the Christian life as revealed in Jesus. I would even go farther in some sense than the author of the recent book on the subject, and suggest that he might have made his title not merely "a Plea for the Unity of Church and Congregation," but "an *argument* for the *identity* of church and congregation." In other words, I would say not only that they *ought* to be one, but that they *are* one. That is to say, I hold that in the light of common sense, common conscience, and the common humanity, as well as in the light of the New Testament, in the light of that Gospel which Jesus taught and lived, which John expounds in its spiritual, James in its practical, and Paul in its universal character, by their united testimony, the congregation of Christian worshippers is a Christian church; for the church visible is nothing more nor less than the whole congregation of those who are called by God in Christ to believe and to do the things taught by him, not those who *are* saints, but simply those who are called to be; and the church invisible, certainly, can no

more be identified with the comparative handful of those technically called communicants, than with the great company of gentle, generous, just, and honest souls that have taken upon themselves no such badge in the eyes of men, but whose names charity leads us to believe are written in the *Lamb's* book of life. In either case the confusion created, the fallacy implied, by the existing mode of treating the subject of the distinction between church and congregation, is equally manifest.

But what then, — you may ask, — is not this, after all, a mere question of names and forms? I answer, no; it is something that touches practical feeling and the vital working of our faith. For if the church on earth means no more and no less than all who are called to be one body in Christ, — and if communion with Christ is not any more mysterious or sacred than communion with God in prayer, — then surely no decent reason can be given why it should be taken for granted, as it seems to be, that while all the congregation are to unite in the worship of the Father, only two or three are to join in the commemoration of his Son.

There is surely nothing in the words of Jesus, — and there is nothing in the teachings or practice of the Apostles, rightly interpreted and applied in pursuance of the great spiritual principles of Paul and of Jesus, — to countenance the assumption that an expression of reverence for the Lord and of one's need of his aid in the struggle and strife against self and sense and sin, made in the way now under consideration, presupposes, any more than any other

expression of allegiance in daily life to the precepts and principles of his religion, that one must in some way have become enrolled or initiated as a member of what is called the church but after all only represents a part of the church, which the congregation itself also does.

But the truth is, the difficulty, the delusion, the self-deception lies deeper than the region of forms. The secret source of the chief trouble in this matter of the Communion lies just here, — in the idea or feeling that our duty and our privilege are measured by our professions and pretensions in the sight of men, instead of being measured by what our consciences show us to be in the sight of God. In one word, pride, handed down to us from the old Pharisee, (not to say from the old Adam himself, — to go no farther back,) — pride, keeping us always comparing ourselves among ourselves, — pride, making men's expectations and not God's requirements the great object of our dread and apprehension, — pride, leading us to ask, not what am I before God, but how do I appear before men, — this is the power that produces so much mystification in regard to a simple dictate of the spirit of our common faith, and makes us follow the world and walk in darkness, when by following Jesus we might have the light of life.

There is a feeling that the Lord's Supper belongs to the professors of Christianity; and one may say, (as many no doubt do in their hearts,) "I am not ready to profess yet, because I am not ready to practise, so high and holy a religion." But is not this very plea a profession, or what is practically equiva-

lent, a *confession* before God that we know and feel the claim of this religion on every thoughtful soul, and that our sense of the power and majesty of the law gives it a claim upon us already, which an outward observance might appropriately attest, but no observance could possibly make stronger than it already is ?

Besides, how, and how far is it true that the partaking of the Communion implies profession ? Turn away a moment from the traditions and inventions of men, and look to Jesus, and listen to him, and say, where do you find any trace of the intention of making this simple and touching celebration any such test or trap as it has been actually made for ages by bigotry and superstition ? And when you pass on to the Apostles, what do you read there ? “ So often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye show forth ” — what ? your own sanctity, your own claim to the title of saints, — no, but simply “ ye show forth *the Lord's death* till he come.” Listen also to the testimony of Paul in his letter to Titus, where he says that Christ died to “ purify unto himself a *peculiar* people,” (which, however, simply means a people of *his own*,) but what was to be their peculiarity ? — “ a peculiar people, *zealous of good works.*”

I must protest against the amount of precious time and opportunity wasted in a state of listless and morbid suspense, under the influence of the notion that, until we can feel ourselves good enough to *join the church*, we are neither required, nor permitted, to commemorate the Saviour, — just as if he died for saints only, and not for sinners ! Let *this* rather be

our feeling, that the commemoration of the Redeemer is one of the means, just as prayer and praise and preaching are, of *helping* us join the church,—the true “church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven.”

I think I feel as much as any one (I am sure I have reason to) the desire that church life should be greatly increased amongst us, as expressed by church communion and church action, and that, so far as it would promote this end, all who are in spirit with our little nucleus of enrolled members should be of us and with us in form also; but, after all, what we all want, what our Maker and Master demand and our own nature craves, is not the mere word, but the deed,—not the mere shadow, but the substance,—not promises, but performances. And, applying this to the case before us, (which, to be sure, is only one of its applications, but happens to be a significant one)—I should be greatly misunderstood if I were thought to mean any indifference to what are called the ordinances of our religion; few and simple as they are. On the contrary, it is because I value them as helps that I would not have them become hindrances to our spiritual growth. It is the *law* of ordinances, as contradistinguished from the law of the living spirit, against which, with Paul, I contend; and I do so, because, when once free from that law, and not till we are, I believe we shall begin to find the ordinances themselves our ministers, instead of our masters, and feel that the sacraments, like the Sabbath, are made for man, and not man for them.

I know not how I can more appropriately conclude than in the words of the same Apostle, with whom we began, “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men ;” . . . “not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.”

XIX.

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

AND THEY, CONTINUING DAILY WITH ONE ACCORD IN THE TEMPLE, AND BREAKING BREAD FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, DID EAT THEIR MEAT WITH GLADNESS AND SINGLENESS OF HEART. — Acts ii. 46.

I SUPPOSE there is no subject connected with Christianity, in regard to which it is harder to get the church back to the simplicity of Christ, than the festival which we, in common with many other companies of his nominal followers, celebrate to-day, and which is known by the various names of the Sacrament, the Communion, and the Lord's Supper.

I call it a festival, and one which *we* keep, — for although so meagre a proportion of the worshippers in our Protestant churches do formally observe it, and perhaps fewer still feelingly, very few certainly with festive and solemn gladness, yet surely all who meet to worship in the name of Christ and who have the smallest sense of personal relation to him, must feel that this, as well as the other parts of the public service, concerns them, belongs to them, judges them, (their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else ex-

cusing one another,) and may be said, therefore, in some sense to keep, with a distant eye-service, at least, the feast, which a few, thus unwillingly made conspicuous (though, it is to be hoped, not unwillingly reminded of their Master's loneliness,) keep in the name of the whole.

We may say what we will, — we may pretend what we will to ourselves, — we may try to persuade ourselves as much as we will of what our diffidence or our indolence, — our superstitious fears on the one hand, or our worldly inclinations on the other, or both, mingling or alternating, may make us wish to believe, — but, after all, the sober voice of reason and conscience must, will, and does admonish each of us that the observance which commemorates the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ concerns us no less than the day which memorizes the resurrection of Christ, or the prayers and praises and preachings which are this day attended in the name of Christ, — concerns us whether we are worthy or unworthy, and the less worthy we are or feel ourselves, concerns us all the more.

Is this an ordinance of the church, especially? Be it so. But we, the congregation, are the church. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that he who paid the price of his blood to buy himself a church of humble hearts, died to save sinners, — came to call sinners, not the righteous, to repentance.

And so, then, in speaking of this homely, but spiritually suggestive, as well as historically significant subject, I can say, not merely “Hear me for

my cause," — but "Hear me for *your own* cause." It is not an affair of the preacher, of the priest peculiarly, — certainly not in a Protestant, least of all in a Liberal body, — but an affair of the people. It is their interest, — and he, set to watch for their spiritual interests, not for the privileges of one or a few, but for the truth that belongs to many — yea, all — is their servant for Christ's sake.

To-day, therefore, I hold up before you that beautiful picture from the early Christian times, historically so interesting to the heart, and practically so home-coming to the conscience, — "And they, continuing daily, with one accord, in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart."

Observe how emphatic is almost every word — every clause at least — in this expressive and impressive description. They continued *daily* in their service of communion and commemoration — *with one accord* they engaged in the grateful duty — not only in the temple, but *from house to house*, breaking bread in the name and spirit of their Master, — and they partook of their daily bread and of that better bread from heaven, with *gladness* and with *singleness of heart*.

When shall a scene like this be, spiritually, for of course it cannot literally, again presented by the Christian church and community to a well-pleased God and an admiring world? When shall the church, — truly a brotherhood, — thus, once more, acceptably praise God, by the very spectacle of its consistency, and find favor with all the people? And

the question comes back to our own hearts, When will *ye* cease to hinder,—when will ye be doing your part to help on the devoutly-to-be-desired consummation ?

What a disheartening contrast is presented, when we turn from the glimpses which the closing hours of Christ's life and the opening days of his church afford us of the origin and early use of the feast of Communion, and think what that simple festival has been for so many centuries, and what, to this day and hour, so extensively, it still is ! First meant for a bond of fellowship, it has been made a wedge of division and a signal of strife ; originally designed as a memorial of spiritual deliverance and freedom, it has been perverted to the narrowing of the mind and the enslaving of the spirit ; originally intended and used as an occasion of devout joy and sweet society and sympathy, it has been so interpreted and so observed and so enforced and so guarded as to be made a benumbing element amidst the ministrations of a tender and gracious and generous religion ; emblem of redemption from a yoke and a burden, it has itself been made a yoke and a burden to the soul ; emblem of redemption from the law of the letter that killeth, from the law of dead works, from the impositions and inquisitions of spiritual arrogance, it has been degraded to a dead work, to a magic rite, fenced round with thorny points of creed and controversy, guarded with the sword of priestly authority and the flame of ghostly terror ; and the sacred remembrances which should gather into one the children of God that were scattered abroad, into

the fold of the one Shepherd, who gave his life in bringing home, amidst the teeth of wild beasts, the errant sheep, — alas, how often has it been the occasion of deepening the unhallowed feelings that divide sect from sect, even as the first disciples of our Lord, precisely at the moment when his foreboding spirit pointed to the shadow of his coming doom, took especial occasion to press upon him their worldly and selfish desires and ambitions; and even at that last passover, when the question who it was that should betray him, who it was that should do this disgraceful thing, was hardly out of their mouths, almost in the same breath, began to stir again the question of strife, which of them should be accounted the greatest!

From all these and many other like abuses, and glaring misconceptions, of the truth as it is in Jesus, and from all the less gross and glaring, but perhaps not less injurious, because insinuating, misrepresentations which we allow to occupy our minds and damp our interest in the things that are true and pure and lovely, it is wholesome for us to recur again and again to the original, simple, spiritual idea of the Christian passover, so far as we may be able to gather it from the record of Christ's life and from the first acts of his Apostles, when their eyes were opened to the unearthly import of the new religion, and it had burst upon their minds what their Master had meant when he said it was expedient for them that he personally should be taken away, for otherwise the Comforter (or rather the strengthener) the Holy Spirit, could not come to them and take possession of their hearts.

It is a fact worthy of notice, that while the first three of the Evangelists each record the act of our Saviour which has been commonly called the *institution* of the Lord's Supper, John, who, excepting Matthew, was the only one of them present, omits it from his account altogether. How happened this, or why was it? Was it *because* the others had already given such full accounts of it? But, then, in some other particulars, less impressive, John does repeat what his predecessors had narrated before him. Was it because, in his day, this incident in our Saviour's ministry had become so familiar in the continually recurring observance that brought it to mind? But so was the resurrection itself brought to mind by each returning first day, at least, and yet that event John records very fully. Was it, then, because John was, of all the inspired writers, preëminently the spiritual one, and concerned himself less with the form of religion and more with its essence and inner working and realization? But, then, observe, that this very, spiritual John is the only one who mentions, which he does in full detail, the incident, at that same supper, of our Master's washing his disciples' feet.

The true explanation, in my opinion, is simply this: of the two symbolic acts, John, or the spirit of truth and wisdom that dwelt in him and guided him, selected that one which was the less liable to be misconstrued into the injunction of a sacramental ordinance of magic efficacy; and while his pages breathe and burn with the spirit of self-sacrificing love, he is suffered to forget or omit the words of

Christ, which the Holy Spirit foresaw would be fastened upon as the occasion of perverting that remembrance which should keep alive a large and all-embracing sympathy, to the end of fettering and freezing the sensibilities under the dominion of a mysterious dogma and a rite of supposed magic virtue.

It is true, indeed, that even the ceremony of the feet-washing, which would seem so manifestly meant not to be copied ritually, but only practically in the humility and hospitality of a charitable life, and of a heart ever ready for the homeliest acts of kindness, came, after a while, to have its original beauty sadly obscured by being made part of the imposing show-service of a pompous worldly church; this, however, in the Protestant church, has not yet been the case and is not likely to be; but the pagan perversion of the ordinance of communion the papal church has transmitted to the Protestant, where it has a hold to this moment.

Hence it seems to me a wholesome statement for us to consider, which is made by the writer of a somewhat notorious book, called "New Themes for the Protestant Clergy," (though I doubt whether he wrote it at quite the point of view at which I read it and would have you read it,) that the ordinance of washing the disciples' feet "is as clearly enjoined as the Lord's Supper." What I mean to say is, that this assertion has a vital truth in it, as opposed to the too common idea of the institution of the Christian ordinances, but is chiefly valuable to us as reminding us that that idea is not the true one.

I must say, then, that the silence of John in regard to that part of the last supper which has been made in the church the ground of so much darkening of counsel by words without knowledge,—so much deadening of the life of truth and destroying of the liberty of souls by imposing mystifications,—declares to my mind as plainly as words could, that Jesus did not *command* and *ordain* the observance of the last supper as a form to be copied by all Christians through all time on the ground of obedience, just as they do or should do right, on the ground of obedience to God. The true basis on which to rest the claim of this simple feast to the respect and practical attention of all Christian worshippers, and the only one on which it can rest, is the threefold basis of its being recommended by early Christian and apostolic example, of its intrinsic naturalness, as an expression of gratitude, and of its healing virtue to the soul and life, through its power to awaken the conscience and the tender and holy affections.

And when, to this expressive silence of John in relation to the Communion as a required observance, coupled with his full and fervid inculcations, in his Master's name and his own name, of spiritual communion, (for instance, his dwelling so much on the declaration of Jesus that whoso should not eat his flesh and drink his blood could not have life in him,) we add the evidence which is afforded by the scattered expressions and records that stand as fragments of the bridge which restores itself in a thoughtful mind between the first suggestion on the

part of Jesus of the passover bread and wine's being made a memorial of his spiritual relation to the disciples, and the final ripening of that suggestion into a stated symbolic service, — we are then quite prepared to take that view of the Lord's Supper in its natural relations on the one side, as well as in its supernatural relations on the other, which alone can render it what it should be, and all that it should be to our faith and affections.

Let me remind you, then, that Luke, the author of the book from which our text is taken, had recorded in the last chapter of his previous book the touching incidents of that walk of the risen Jesus with his two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and how, as he sat at meat with them, he was known to them *in breaking of bread*. We return with them to Jerusalem, and there, not many days after, when their number is swelled to several thousands, we read of them, that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and *in breaking of bread* and in prayers," and that "they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and *breaking bread from house to house*, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." The commentators confess they do not know whether this breaking of bread, in which the disciples are said to have steadfastly continued, doing it habitually, if not daily, was the observance of the Lord's Supper, or the partaking of a love feast, or the sharing of their ordinary meals. And it seems to me this honest confession has a significance for us, as hinting to us that free and spiritual concep-

tion of the original idea and the perpetual import of the Supper, which I have, throughout this discourse, desired to suggest. When we learn that the service, called the Lord's Supper, commonly took place in the early church in connection with a social meal; that it was so much a social thing, indeed, as to have been made the occasion of excess in that direction, — and when here, in our text, we seem to see it partaken indiscriminately in the temple and in household gatherings, we have glimpses, I think, of an idea much nearer, in some important and characteristic aspects, to the mind of Christ, than is anywhere embodied in our modern observances. I feel as if those first disciples, in the simplicity of their fresh, fervent faith, must have felt that Jesus, when he blessed the bread and the wine, those two simplest articles of the daily life around him, and said "eat this in remembrance of me," and again, "this do, *as oft as ye drink it*, in remembrance of me," had a natural as well as a mystical meaning; at all events, that the spirit of the Father and the voice of his good Providence would indicate hereby the sacred relation which faith reveals between the services and enjoyments of the world of spirits and the services and enjoyments of our earthly life. A similar train of remark might be made on another similar and similarly suggestive doubt of the critics respecting the salutations which are sent, in the Epistles, to the *church* in one or another *house*, namely, whether the expression refers to formal church meetings, or implies that in early Christian times the family was a church, as well as the

church a family. This doubt should also, I think, go to the benefit of a free and generous idea of Christian communion.

There is, indeed, a special and a solemn meaning, on the side of the unseen world and its mysteries, in the observance by which we expressly commemorate the sacrifice of Christ. It appeals to something higher and deeper than our social emotions, to those principles of our nature which impel us to go alone, or oblige us to go alone, making us feel that none but the Father of Spirits is with us, can understand us, or help us; but, at the same time, if this service is doing its legitimate work for our souls, it must be bringing on the time when not here alone, in these formal observances, but equally in many a familiar season and scene of domestic and neighborly communion, we shall feel that *one* had been always in the midst of us, whom we had not always known, and when our daily bread, and not alone these consecrated elements, shall remind us of the bread which cometh down from heaven, and is the life of our souls.

The passage from the Acts of the Apostles which has suggested the train of meditation we have been pursuing, turns our thoughts to a more cheerful and wholesome aspect of the Lord's Supper than we are apt, I suspect, to recognize. Paul said of a certain class of believers in his day, that when Moses was read, the veil was upon their hearts, so that they could not see to the end of that which was abolished, the law of ordinances. And we may say of multitudes that that veil remains to this day "un-

taken away" when they look towards holy things, holy subjects, holy occasions. They are slaves to the form. Theirs is the spirit of bondage unto fear. How obstinately does that benumbing influence cling to the religious atmosphere we live in, with which, so many ages ago, Pagan and Pharisaic and Papal elements successively or simultaneously charged it, sending the shock down through generation after generation to this hour!

When it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. The Sun of Righteousness shall melt this veil of superstition. The first Christians, those converts of Pentecost, *had* turned to the Lord and found this freedom and joy. No longer seeking the living among the dead, but finding the life of the spirit in the death of selfishness, — even while they broke together the bread which reminded them of a crucified Master, they remembered his sufferings only to realize the glory into which he had now ascended, and they themselves were consciously raised up by the power of their faith to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus.

I said in the beginning, that it would not be reasonable to expect that the winning picture of early church-life and Christian brotherhood the text sets before us is ever again to be literally any more than locally realized on earth. All christendom, even if it should be again *of one accord*, could never more be *in one place*, unless you call the round earth one place. But it is a spiritual and not a literal fulfilment of the text that all christendom and all creation groan and travail together in pain to see brought about.

Paul tells the Corinthians, "When ye come together into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's Supper." In other words, nearness of space is not nearness of spirit. *They* partake that holy feast together, "new in the kingdom of God," as Jesus expresses it, who, wherever they may be, nourish their convictions of truth and their purposes of duty, their aspirations after holiness and their yearnings of charity, with the memory of the common Lord, "and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;" who hear in their souls the voice which cries from the scene of his agony, howsoever it be represented or wheresoever remembered, "as I have died for you, die ye for one another, to all manner of selfishness, and live that only true life which is love."

Nor may *we* be daily in the temple, that is, in the temple made with hands; but there is a temple which, wherever we go, goes with us, and wherever we abide, spreads its roof over us — even God's world, and there we are continually called to keep bright the memory of Christ's sacrifice, by ourselves sacrificing in his spirit on the omnipresent altar of charity. In the spirit of the ancient bishop who commanded the church-plate to be sold and given to the church's poor, it becomes us ever to remember that, according to the true Christian idea, the form is nothing except as it tends to express or awaken the faith and the feeling, — in other words, that "the end of the commandment is charity;" only we must not forget to add, "out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned."

This is the use and the only justification of forms, — to keep alive the faith out of which charity must grow.

Finally, then, let the Lord's Supper remind us, as an emblem, how the religion which it represents reconciles, in the simplicity of Christ, the loftiest mysteries of the heavenly life with the homeliest relations of the earthly; and may the faith which is in Him who transfigures death into the cradle of life, and transmutes the sharpness of sorrow into the sweetness of submission, harmonize all the aspects of our changeful lot in a sober serenity, and inspire us, like those first disciples of whom we have read and spoken, to continue daily and steadfastly in the temple of trust, to break the bread of heaven in our homes, not forgetting to do good and to communicate, which is, in the sight of God the most acceptable sacrifice; and thus, free from the distract-edness of eye-servers, doing all his commands and receiving all his allotments with *gladness*, because with *singleness*, of heart.

My desire, in these remarks, is, that that superstitious idea of a simple memorial which, exaggerating its mystical significance, has led one class of minds to abuse and still leads so large a class to neglect it, should give way, under the influence of Scripture study and spiritual sympathy, to that humane and practical view of the observance which the spirit of Christ would peculiarly dictate. "Have I been so long time with you," he seems to say, "and yet have ye not known me?" "He that cometh to me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

XX.

THE TIME OF REFORMATION.

WHICH WAS A FIGURE FOR THE TIME THEN PRESENT, IN WHICH WERE OFFERED BOTH GIFTS AND SACRIFICES, THAT COULD NOT MAKE HIM THAT DID THE SERVICE PERFECT, AS PERTAINING TO THE CONSCIENCE; WHICH STOOD ONLY IN MEATS AND DRINKS, AND DIVERS WASHINGS, AND CARNAL ORDINANCES, IMPOSED ON THEM UNTIL THE TIME OF REFORMATION. BUT CHRIST BEING COME, AN HIGH PRIEST OF GOOD THINGS TO COME HOW MUCH MORE SHALL THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, WHO, THROUGH THE ETERNAL SPIRIT, OFFERED HIMSELF WITHOUT SPOT TO GOD, PURGE YOUR CONSCIENCE FROM DEAD WORKS TO SERVE THE LIVING GOD! — Heb. ix. 9-14.

AFTER a winter of unusually close confinement to the routine of weekly preparation for the service which I have come again to-day to perform, an opportunity has lately * been given me to pause for a week or two and lift myself out from this rushing or lapsing tide of regularly and rapidly recurring Sundays and other stated occasions, to step out on the bank, and draw a longer breath and take a larger vision.

I know not so well how it may be with hearers, but I can answer for one preacher, at least, that it is very desirable, if not necessary to a man's individuality and even reality of spiritual life, that he should, now and then, be thus taken out bodily from that

* Preached after the " May Meetings," 1858.

mill of habit and custom, in which one so easily becomes not only a tender of the machinery, but a part of a great machine himself, and be assisted to realize for himself his independent responsibility,—which meditation, indeed, will enable one, in a measure, to do anywhere, but never so thoroughly as when the whole man, mind and body, is withdrawn from the round and repetition of familiar occupations. It is one of the most familiar of proverbs, that “Habit” (like so many other of our best blessings) “is a good servant, but a bad master;” or if this is not a proverb it deserves to be one, as regards the things of faith and spirituality,—of religion, in the highest and proper sense of the word. The picture of blind Samson grinding in the mill is an emblem of a too common case, especially if we add that in the sphere of sanctified words and works, formulas and formalities, the inner man of the soul, who should be the strong man and judge, is so often made blind *by* his grinding. Habit draws a film over the eye, so that it “cannot see afar off,” and often ceases to see beyond the surface of what is nearest. I have therefore often wondered how so discerning and discriminative a thinker as the essayist, John Foster, could say that whereas in most matters habit is a greater plague than any that infested Egypt, in religion it is a grand felicity. It is a grand *facility*, but that is far from being synonymous with a grand *felicity*. To my mind he would have been nearer the truth, if he had just reversed his antithesis and said, that in spiritual things the mastery of that useful servant, habit, was to be particularly watched.

But I should not dwell upon these thoughts at such length, were it not that, instead of being merely introductory, they also connect themselves vitally with the proper subject of my discourse, which I am presently to show you how the text indicates.

I have been led to a subject so central and comprehensive as that which our text opens to us, not only by the special occasion to-day brings round to us, reminding us of the great end for which Christ came into this world and went out of it as he did,— the great end and essence of Christianity,— not only by the wide stirring that has lately taken place, of the surface, if not the depths of religious ideas,— partly indeed by these causes, but also by the fact, already alluded to, of my recent absence from this scene of quiet but absorbing cares and labors, during which I have mingled somewhat in the great world, so called, and looked over the field of the Church, by listening, at least, to the voices and taking counsel with the representatives that came up from different quarters of the world of thought and trial, not only in our own, but in other denominations. What I have heard and seen in these short but crowded weeks has left thoughts and impressions in my mind which I should vainly hope to shape into any unity before you, least of all in a single sermon, but which so possess my mind as to make it difficult for me to come before you with any topic into which the influence of them shall not largely enter. As, when a stone is cast into the water, it sends out a succession of ever enlarging circular wakes, so the effect of this experience, of

these contemplations and communings has been to send my mind out into successive circles of widening survey and sympathy, with a yearning for that catholic circle which should include religion and life in a concentric harmony, at the same time referring the meditative mind from each circle to the grand, common centre of all.

At the meetings of our brethren of the so-called liberal denominations, I have heard and thought a great deal during the recent, as well as former, anniversaries, upon the question, What does the voice of God's providence seem especially to enjoin upon us, as a sect of Christian worshippers and workers, cut off, not by our own will, but by the necessity of our convictions, from so large a proportion of our fellow-Christians, as to outward and formal communion and coöperation — what is the word that comes to us and should come from us in these times? Some speakers were eloquent on the subject of our need of a more clear and consistent policy, of our showing the full front of our liberal force in opposition to the organized encroachment of enslaving dogmas, — others were equally eloquent on our mission to present a reformed theology, — and others, still, in maintaining that we are called to embody our new or revived truth in a new ritual, — to me it seemed, and has long seemed, and seems so to-day, notwithstanding all warnings against rationalism and radicalism, that the most urgent and emphatic call from on high still made upon us, is that made so long ago through the great Apostle, to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us, at least,

has offered to make us, free, — to hold fast the great idea of the Christian religion's being the Law of Liberty, — and, whatever may become of forms and names and fair shows in the flesh, and imposing arrays of numbers and triumphant appeals to statistics, on no account whatever to desert the great central principle of Christ's religion, which is, that religion is a thing that actually exists only just so far as it lives in the convictions of individual souls; that the degree of its prevalence is not to be estimated by extent of surface merely, but as much, if not more, by depth of penetration, not by the patches of color which diversify the maps of the earth's religious condition, not by quantity of profession, but by quality of practice; not, in short, by the outward appearance, but by the internal reality.

And this is the great principle, the grand characteristic of the religion we are in the habit of calling *our* religion, of which I have taken the text to remind you. I say to *remind* you, because I am not quite sure whether the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews himself had quite attained to the perfect idea of the new spiritual dispensation — quite disencumbered himself of the last lingering traditions and influences of that Jewish system which he himself, to be sure, speaks of as old and obsolete. It is uncertain who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. The name of Paul is attached to it in our common English version. In my opinion, the balance of evidence, internal and external, is against the conclusion of its being the production of that Apostle. I say this merely in anticipation of any one's possibly feeling

that my remarks make light of Apostolic authority. Whoever was the author of the book, and whatever his precise idea may have been of the Christian religion as compared with the Jewish, — and he uses many expressions which look as if he was speaking only in a figure when he set forth the death of Christ in a manner which has so generally been taken for granted as implying his faith in it as a vicarious sacrifice, — I say his words, at least, whatever he may have meant by them, afford a happy expression of an idea of the Gospel far more in harmony than the Calvinistic doctrine is, with the simple religion which we learn from the lips and life of Jesus Christ himself.

For let us now examine a little more closely those words which we have selected for our present subject and the present occasion, and understand what idea of the new, as contrasted with the old religion, they naturally suggest to one coming to them from the practical gospel of Christ and the spiritual Christianity of Paul. He says that the old, outward services and sacrifices of the law could not give perfect relief to the conscience. But may we not ask him or his interpreters, can the sacrifice of Christ himself, of this perfect victim, give perfect relief to the conscience, so long as this also is supposed to have merely a magical efficacy? Can anything heal the wounds of an old conscience of sin except the possession, through active and imitative faith in Christ and Christ's teachings, spirit, life and Father, of a new and good conscience? Can any other being in the universe, or in the realm of possibility, actually

assume our individual conscience? He may by imputation; but it will be a mere, a false imputation, a complete contradiction, if the idea is that I cease to be the person that did the things my conscience tells me I did, and another not only says that he did them, but really becomes the one who did them; and this is what the vicarious relief of our conscience must mean, if it is anything more than a tormenting riddle, if it is really going to reach the secret of the disorder.

No — if the forms of Judaism could not meet the wants of the human soul, neither can the formulas of Calvinism. It is not the memory, chiefly, that cries to be purged, as regards the past, the irreversible past; it is the conscience that craves this purgation, as regards the present. It is not the miracle, the contradiction, of undoing what is done for once and forever, that Christ bled to perform; it is the present, the ever pressing appeal of the Holy Spirit to our spirits for the recognition and reception of that influence through which, and through which alone, we can enter upon and enter *into* a new life, and through shame of our old dead works, bring forth new, living ones that shall shame the old in their turn, and so make us partakers in the healing life of God himself; — this is the great purpose for which Christ offered himself to God, and God offers Christ to us.

We cannot understand what the writer to the Hebrews, I will not say meant, but ought to have meant, at all events, until we feel that the emphasis in our text lies upon the word *conscience*, and upon the antithesis between *dead* works and the *living*

God. Here lies the great distinction, which Jesus and Paul labored to impress upon men, between the old, outward, effete religion, and the only acceptable service of God. The former was sought as affording or promising something which a man could fall back upon, as a security, a certificate, a passport, a claim upon heaven; whereas the true religion which Christ and his Apostles inculcated identified holiness with heaven, taught them to forget the things behind, to let the dead bury their dead, and to live for the present and each next future, but chiefly for the present call and claim of duty, of charity, of piety, each day and hour, in the actual and active world. Whatever the writer to the Hebrews may have meant by his words, the spirit of his Master speaking through them to us says: as Christ offered himself without spot to God, so do ye aspire to offer yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, and be quickened by his blood, by the life which flowed out in it, by the spirit which gave it, to a feeling of the deadness of all works which are done in the service of any idol, of fear, formality, or fashion, and not in the hearty service of the one living and true God.

Is it not too true, even up to this day and hour, that what is called religion is a dead work, and that its God is a dead God, being a defective one, an idol of superstition, made after the image of a part and that not the noblest of man's nature,—a dead Deity, because conceived of only as an outward one, and not as inwardly and vitally united with the soul of the worshipper? The church has unlearned,

in a great degree, the idea of God's being worshipped by men's *hands*, as if He needed anything *at* their hands; but is the idea unlearned, that He, the source and sustainer of all, *needs anything* from his creatures, in any way, to make him cognizant of their wants and weaknesses, or propitious to their sinfulness? Perhaps the world is outgrowing the Pharisaical and Papal principle of the magic power of a form of works; but has not our Protestantism retained, in a degree very obstructive to the simplicity and efficiency of the religion of Jesus, the essential evil of that old principle, by attaching a similar magical and saving virtue to forms of words, and only substituting ear-service for eye-service.

I may be asked, "Is there any special danger of *our* being led astray by a religion of form? Do we need any caution on this score, who have so very few forms, and are so afraid of the few simple ones we have?" I answer, in the first place, this very fear betrays a lurking, superstitious idea that the form is the substance, the law, the authority, instead of being simply the sign, expression, and guide; it looks as if we deified and so dreaded the very shadow itself; and this is the very essence of superstition. And then, as to the fewness of our forms, the history of that body of Christians which began with the idea of dropping all forms, and in which the very denial of form became itself a formality, may well remind us that it is not the number of forms that necessarily makes religion a mere form, but the worship of the form and the neglect of the practical and spiritual. And I have often thought that a slavish

and superstitious dread of form may be proved just as truly by the excuses many make for neglecting it, as by the eagerness with which others cling around it.

Our text speaks of a "time of reformation," until which this old, formalistic religion might be expected to continue by a sort of Divine Providence. It becomes an interesting and important question what time the writer meant. When was this good time to come? Evidently, it had already come when he wrote; for, referring as far back as the days of Isaiah, and quoting what the prophet had said about a new covenant, he adds: "In that he saith a *new* covenant, he hath made the first *old*. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." It was at hand, then, even in the age of Isaiah. But it had come, when John, and immediately after him Jesus, went forth calling the people to reform, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand; to come out of the old, crumbling house of the law into the free realm of the spirit. That time of reformation had to be preached again by Paul, when, enlightened by Jesus, he stood forth to protest against those degenerate disciples who would entangle the new faith again in the yoke of the old bondage. And again and again in the history of the church has that time of reformation needed to be proclaimed, before and since the hour when Luther so bravely renounced the ceremonial law, and left his name to a church which is notable for its adoration of forms and formulas.

And now again has come a time which is asserted

to be a time of reformation and refreshing from the presence of the Lord. That it has been such to many, and will yet prove such to many more, I do not doubt, and will hope that it may appear to have been the harbinger of the greatest reformation the world has known since the new religion came on earth bringing peace and a sword. But in order to be such, in order to be such a reformation as the present crisis in humanity calls for, it must go to the root of that religion which worships the form and the letter, and revolutionize that by substituting the religion of the spirit.

I fear that too many who began in the school of the free spirit are beginning to draw back and fall away. I hear a cry, "Let us hold fast the form of sound words, and not dispute about their meaning," — a cry which, in this age, makes me fear that what is really meant is the *formality of sounding* words. I hear whispers, growing louder and clearer, about "denying the pride of our own reason;" but I seem to recognize in the tone, that its real meaning is the willingness of a faint heart and a faithless soul to *disown the troublesome responsibility of thinking for itself*. I see many depressing proofs everywhere how true it is that names govern the world, and how hard it is for the spirit of truth to dwell in such a world; how, like birds in the Dead Sea's atmosphere, a free thought, a generous sentiment, can, in so many quarters, hardly breathe, hardly lift its wing. I am made aware of so much that would seem as if, instead of reading the noble old Scripture, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things

are honest," and so on, men read it through some strangely metamorphosing glasses which made it say, "Whatsoever things are easy, whatsoever things are comfortable, whatsoever things are convenient, whatsoever things, whether in themselves just and lovely or not, are in good repute, think of these things." In a word, I see and feel that so much is to be done before the old and inveterate religion of name and form and habit will be broken up, and the clouds of prejudice and the walls of partiality will let through the pure light of truth and reason, that it sometimes seems as if the work were hardly begun.

We call to mind to-day, in a special service, one who was born and lived and died that he might bear witness to the *truth*; who was to send, as the comforter, to those deprived of his personal presence, the Spirit of Truth; who taught us in his last prayers, as well as in his first preachings, that *truth* — truth alone — understood, believed, incorporated into the very life of the soul, can be the soul's deliverance and sanctification; whose death was the doom of the old system of a ceremonial religion of incantations and penances, — which, in the strong figure of Paul, he nailed to the very cross on which he suffered, bidding us, in the light of majestic truth that beams around it, look to the end of that which is abolished, and learn that mercy and truth and righteousness and devotion to the cause of humanity are the sacrifice which God desires. From the cross of Christ, rightly contemplated, comes a power to rend the veil which superstition hangs over the eyes and

the heart. Its language is as simple as it is holy and august. It seems to say: O my brothers, this, which, to all earthly appearance, is the end of my life-long warfare with the powers of darkness, is in reality only the beginning of its renewal, in a broader field, by the spirit which I leave in human hearts. Look hither and learn the sacredness of fidelity to the truth. Let nothing deter or delude you from seeing and saying the truth, however little in a worldly way, it may promise; though its only earthly reward be the mortification and crucifixion of those feelings which look to earthly show or lean on human sympathy. Cleave to the truth—cling to it—though it be as a sword piercing through the heart and as a fire in the bones. Seek not by any pleasant process of self-mystification to disguise from yourselves its simple and severe beauty. Stupify not your sober judgment by any of those opiates which would prevent your tasting the wholesome bitterness of the herb of grace. Seek not to stain with the cunning aid of fancy the pure glass of truth, so as to see the world in those false colors which cheat and charm the eye of folly. Trust in the truth; for in it is the power, the wisdom, the goodness, and the saving health of God. Resisting, with clear mind and manly will, every temptation, in whatever refined shape of doctrine or example it may come, in whatever winning or warning guise, which would seduce you to rely upon anything as a substitute for personal, actual, and active religiousness; accepting everything as a stimulus to that, but nothing as a substitute for it, whether creed or ceremony; keep-

ing your mind and heart wakefully open to the meaning of the cross of Christ, as regards your practical and earthly duty, so appropriate his life as well as his lessons, that the blood of Him who, animated by the Eternal Spirit, gave himself without spot to God, may, whatever has been the imperfection or iniquity of your past works, begin now, henceforth, to purge your conscience from the works of death and of deadness, and initiate you into the whole and hearty service of the living God, the loving Father, whose service alone is freedom, satisfaction, and hope.

XXI.

LOVE TO MAN AND LOVE TO GOD.

HE THAT LOVETH NOT HIS BROTHER WHOM HE HATH SEEN, HOW CAN HE LOVE GOD WHOM HE HATH NOT SEEN? 1 John iv. 20.

How long this question has been standing on the sacred page,—how long it has been sounding in the ears of Christendom,—and yet how little does the meaning (to say nothing of the moral) of the question seem to have dawned on the hearts of men even in the midst of the light of the Gospel! How little do we appear (I will not say, to appreciate the full spirit and practical application, but) to apprehend the idea of this passage, though it is one of the most familiar in all Scripture! We have a strong and sharp impression, coupled with a general and *gross* idea (if I may say so) of what the Apostle meant, and of what the Spirit that spoke through him means, by this homely and searching challenge; but how much have we reflected on the deep philosophy wrapped up in it, the practical theology, the insight into the laws of our own nature, the wisdom it contains for spiritual life?

We do great injustice to the memorable question

before us, if we regard it exclusively either from a dogmatic or from a pragmatic point of view. Although, undoubtedly, as it came from John's pen, it conveyed a pointed rebuke to a certain class of bigots and dreamers who endangered the simplicity of Christ, yet we do not, by any means, get its full force and significance, so long as we consider it by itself alone, not until we regard it as part and parcel of the great and beautiful representation of the philosophy of the Gospel which runs through this epistle of one who stands preëminent among the sacred writers for the manner in which he merges and blends the theological and the moral aspects of Christianity in the spiritual.

Not merely for the condemnation of presumptuous and proud speculatists, if I rightly read it, certainly not for the purpose of diminishing men's interest in unseen things and fixing their attention upon visible and superficial matters, did John, in the climax of his profound and sublime enunciation of the new theology of the spirit, turn upon his readers, in a manner which seems a little abrupt at first sight, with the blunt assertion from which our text is taken. It was not for having gone too deeply, but for not having gone down deeply enough into divine things, that this pious expounder of the Christian philosophy reproved the enthusiasts, dogmatists, and sentimentalist of his time.

Although, therefore, upon the face of it, our text, or rather the passage containing it, has the appearance of being intended merely, in a negative way, to expose the hollowness of the foundation

on which the hypocrisy of ungodly men rested, yet, to a thoughtful student, this is but a small part, but the beginning, of its meaning; its design being really and positively to give instruction in the way of godliness, to lead inquiring minds to the true foundation, and the true fountain, of spiritual life.

It may not have occurred to you, when this old and familiar passage has been brought to your remembrance, as it often must be, not by the pulpit only, but by the Providence of God, that the question it proposes and the doctrine implied in that question may mean either of two things, and (for so I think) does mean both, namely, in the first place, that love to man is a necessary *proof* of love to God; and, secondly, that love to man is a necessary *preparation* for the true love to God. A little real reflection must convince any one that these two senses of our text are not only not inconsistent with each other, but do in fact both belong to it.

The first and most obvious idea suggested to us by the Apostle's asking how a man who does not love his brother man *can* love his heavenly Father, is this: that if he did love God, he would love God's children, and God's commandments, one of which commandments is, that every man should love his neighbor as himself; consequently, if any one fails to do this, he shows that the love of the Father is not in him.

This was, undoubtedly, the first and foremost application the writer himself intended of his doctrine. It is as if he had said, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, and whom we see,

how *can it be* that he really loves, notwithstanding his professions, that God whom no one hath seen nor can see ?”

But when we look a little further and deeper, I see not how we can avoid the conclusion that, in that little expression, “How *can* he,” there resides a more profound significance, a thought referring not merely to the present state of the man’s mind, but to the question of his spiritual prospects and the possibility of things. In other words, we pass on from a particular case of fact and question of evidence, to a great principle and law of the spiritual life, and of the very nature of man. We pass from the consideration of love to man as an expression and evidence of love to God, already cherished, to the consideration how the former of these sentiments is the way and the means of attaining the latter. In this light we should understand the Apostle as asking, How can he who does not love man *learn* to love God? If he does not think enough, if he is too thoughtless, indolent, or selfish, to cultivate the love of what is good in man, whom he daily sees and continually meets and converses with, how can it be expected that he should, (still less believed that he already does,) love One whom he does not and cannot see, excepting with the eye of faith and purity and spiritual sympathy, of whose presence there is no articulate voice, no sensible touch, no definite face, form or feature, no speaking eye, to help him conceive?

In propounding the question, “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love

God whom he hath not seen?" the Apostle points to a law and a lesson which Divine Providence, in the appointed order of his natural life, has always been striving to persuade man to learn. These earthly relations of our life, the domestic, the neighborly, the social, the human, are the frame on which the Author of our being meant that the delicate tendrils of the soul's affections should climb and creep upward into the broad sunlight of piety. Our earthly parents represent and reveal to us the Divine Parent, and our trust in them trains us up to trust in Him. Our earthly friends, through their love for us and our love for them, are providentially educating us for the communion of that heavenly Friend who is the one object for supreme affection. Our earthly benefactors are the instruments for raising our thoughts toward the Source of every blessing and of every benevolent inspiration. And as we go onward and outward, and the base broadens, the superstructure rises, till philanthropy culminates in piety.

This view of the education of our spirits conflicts indeed with the dogma of man's radical depravity, and may seem to with the Christian doctrine of conversion and regeneration. It is proper to say, therefore, that man must coöperate with the Holy Spirit in the process we have indicated, otherwise the heavy atmosphere of fleshly and worldly influence will check the aspiration of the soul towards that higher life. It is when the growth of the human affections reaches a point where they excite presentiments of that higher principle for which

they are the basis, then it is that the seed of the new birth emphatically falls into the soul; but even then the test question of the spirit still is, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" When the natural affection has so far done its higher work as to suggest the necessity of the spiritual affection, still the love of our human kind, itself subjected to the test of the new light that has dawned upon our consciousness, is the building-ground to which God's voice calls us back ever and again as the only sure foundation of a heavenly character, hope, and life.

The question, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" assumes a peculiar force, when we consider, in accordance with the teaching, so clearly and felicitously put, that precedes it, what God is and how He is to be apprehended. The speculative intellect may form an idea of a God, but that idea will be only a personification of one or more of the Divine attributes divorced from the rest. Not by speculation, even sentimental speculation, can one know the living and loving Father. Only by sympathy, by actual coöperation in his blessed work of charity, his disinterested and unceasing devotion to the welfare of the creature, can a human soul know Him who is a spirit, and a spirit of ever-active benevolence. His disposition must be *tasted* before it can be truly known. If we are required to taste in order to *see* that the Lord is gracious, how much more emphatically must we taste in order to *feel* what *He* is, whose name and

nature are Love! How, then, can we even know God, much less love Him, until we know what the love is which he feels for his human children; and how can we know *that* in reality, excepting in the degree that we cherish a like love to them ourselves? We may know the name of it, and be ever so skilful in praising it, but we cannot know the thing.

It is true that the Apostle himself, in the verse that follows our text and closes the chapter, says something which may seem to conflict a little with the doctrine we have drawn from his language, when he reminds us of its being the command of God, that whoso loveth Him should love his brother also,— a statement which, one might say, implied the possibility of a man's loving God first, and then having to be admonished to love his brother. But in reality, he does not, in any such absurd way, contradict himself. The meaning of this supplementary statement is, that God has so made man, that *if* he loves his heavenly Father, he *must* love his human brother; in other words, that the first and second commandments cannot, in practice, be separated. But the very necessity of any defence of the Apostle on this point would, perhaps, have been prevented, if our translators had only rendered the statement in question literally: "This commandment have we from him, that he who loves God *loves* his brother also."

And when we pass into the next chapter, which has been unreasonably separated from this, (the author of the division probably thinking, very erroneously as I conceive, that John therein changed the

subject from our human to our Christian brethren.) we find there, also, another assertion which may seem to contradict our view of the Apostle's argument, but in reality confirms it. How, it may be asked, can he, who had just said, that the love of the brother whom we have seen is a test of our love for the God whom we have not seen, say, almost in the next breath, "*By this we know* that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments?" Is not this precisely reversing the criterion, and making our love for God the test of our love for man? Again I answer, not at all. Our love for man leads upward, outward, and inward, to the love of God, and then this higher affection reflects a searching light on the one which prepared the way for it, and shows whether it is pure and profound as it should be. It is like the pupil, grateful for his instructor's teachings and guidance, teaching him in return. It is like the child, that has been translated to the upper world, coming as an angel to bless its earthly parent with a heavenly ministry of light and love. In a word, the two forms of love,—for, after all, it is but one principle in different manifestations,—act and react on each other. The question, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" if followed out into the conclusions it must suggest to a thoughtful mind, settles the old dispute between the pietists and the moralists, by resolving all goodness into godliness. It confirms the assertion of a writer, that "true piety is not the distinct work of a distinct faculty of the mind, but the up-

ward direction of all its faculties, and the perfection, thereby, of all its thoughts, emotions, and pursuits." And still more emphatically does it confirm what a still more recent writer so admirably says of the grace of charity in the Christian system: "It is not religion evaporated into benevolence, but benevolence taken up into religion. It is the practical exemplification of the two great characteristics of Christianity,—the union of God with man, the union of religion with morality; love to man for the sake of love to God; love to God showing itself in love to man." Our doctrine meets a want of the human heart—a want which, imperfectly understood, has given rise to low and narrow theories of Divine incarnation, and, in practice, to a cumbrous mediatorial system of substitutions and sacrifices. Job expressed the yearning, thousands of years ago, when he said, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I could come even to His seat!" The question which Job asked, Jesus and John have answered. No man hath seen or can see God at any time, but whoso loveth and serveth his brother, God dwelleth in him and he in God. He has his being in the luminous sea of Divine love, which Augustine so beautifully says, " filleth by containing " the soul. He no longer needs to see God—no longer asks to see Him. He realizes the spiritual idea of the Christian religion.

But, after all, in this exposition of the great law which underlies the question in our text, we have not yet quite touched, or, at least, we have not recognized, as it must be recognized, a peculiarity,

the most practical and home-coming of all in the Apostle's, or rather I should say, in his and our Master's doctrine of love to man as the proof of love to God,—a principle particularly urged upon our convictions, though not expressly stated, in John's enforcement of the law of love, and the one which gives to the whole appeal its chief point for our consciences, and yet one which all the commentators, so far as I can remember, fail to notice.

I reminded you, in the beginning, how long the question had been before our eyes and in our ears, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" And now I ask, is there no reply that the human heart ever makes to this question? And I answer there are two replies, one or the other of which the worldly heart is always virtually making as an apology for itself. Either it will say, *I do not say* that I love God—I do not make any professions or pretensions of the kind, and therefore I am not the inconsistent one whom the Apostle's argument touches; or it will say, I do not hate my brother, and therefore I am not the one "having no hope and without God in the world," whom your doctrine exposes.

To the former alternative the reply is: "You may not say to the world that you love God, you may not wish to love the idea of God which many a man or body of men sets up as the true one, and which your heart and reason alike tell you is false, but you do not know yourself, if you fancy you really and absolutely are indifferent in regard to

the great Being on whose goodness you live. You are grossly self-deceived if you fancy you have no interest in Him, no care to please him, to secure his favor, to be in communion with him. You flatter yourself with the hope that at last, in some other way, if not the strait and narrow one, to reach Heaven, and therefore you *are* concerned to know the best and only way of gaining that end.

But, taking the other alternative, a man may say: "I cannot love mankind, *because* I have seen them and seen too much that is unlovely to permit me honestly to profess or try to love all men, — and yet I trust I hate no one." And here precisely is the great issue between the majority of worldly hearts and the Christian law, and here is the point to which I wish to draw your attention. And in order to do so, I ask you to observe, first, how John, in the passage from which our text is taken, makes the not loving of our brother synonymous with the hating of him, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; *for* he that *loveth not* his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" And then I ask you to let your thoughts run over the whole Epistle and see how, throughout the whole of this close reasoning and wrestling with the nominally Christian community, he evidently assumes that not loving is practically, in the eye of the heart-searching law of Christ, equivalent to hating. He recognizes no other alternative. He allows indifference not a hair's breadth of ground to stand on. "Do you love me or do you hate me?" is the question which

the spirit of grace seems to utter, as it rises from the sacred and simple pages of this faithful disciple and teacher, that still, after so many ages, speak with such a power of silent, yet searching eloquence to our hearts. Critics often tell us that this sharp way of putting the alternative is a peculiarity of the Hebrew style; but may it not be, as the critic of critics in our consciences whispers, that the Hebrew genius, in this respect, was rather nearer to the genius of the sober truth as it is in Jesus, than some of our more self-complacent interpretations are? Besides, I do not see that a worldly, self-excusing spirit is at all countenanced by this explanation. If, when Christ commands us to follow him and hate even our nearest relations when they would stand in the way of our doing it, he simply means, as he undoubtedly does, that we should disregard them practically in our devotion to the right, — it should seem that where the Apostle of Jesus calls it a sin to hate our brother when God commands us to love him, the indifference under the name of which misanthropy would take refuge, is itself virtually hatred. At all events, if such indifference were a possible thing, it would be a sin in the sight of Him who searches the heart, and according to the standard set up by Him, whose religion makes negative obedience positive disobedience to the command that says, “Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect.” When we remember the words that

‘ Man’s inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn,’

we must remember also that man's (so called) indifference to man is a part, and a huge part, of the great sum of inhumanity which oppresses the world, and hangs like a cold cloud over the heart of society. The Apostle, in the epistle from which our subject is taken, quotes the case of Cain, and draws from it the moral that blood-thirstiness is not necessary to make a man a murderer,—that envy and hatred constitute him such. There is one expression of Cain's which, though not referred to by John, is forcibly recalled to our minds by John's own reasoning, and that is the question by which the violation of the law of love, thinking to shelter itself, at worst, under the cloak of indifference, has been ever since extenuating its guilt, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The very least that could be said would be that to love man is the only security against the sin of hating him. The ages have immortalized the sentiment of the Roman historian, that "men hate those whom they wrong;" but surely there are few ways in which men more grievously wrong each other than by (assumed) indifference. There is a problem which a large proportion of mankind are ever tormenting themselves with vain attempts to settle, because they will not take that way of divine wisdom which a poet has so finely expressed :

"O human heart! that which thou wouldst not hate,
Yet canst not from thy thoughts eradicate,—
No third alternative remains to thee
But this,—to love and love it sacredly."

To remind you fairly and fully in what this love of our brother consists, which is the test of love to

God, and how it is manifested, — to expound the operation of charity, showing how the true idea of it transcends the prevailing ones, — to exhibit the divine quality in all the delicate shades of its manifestation in human intercourse, not only in relation to the condition, but in relation to the character of men, — this would require and abundantly repay, even at this day, a separate discussion. In the present discourse I have been obliged to confine myself to one aspect only of the practical bearing of this morning's disquisition, and with one more glance at this, in the light of Christ's own standard, I will, for the present, leave the subject to your own reflections.

The religion which this world sets up in opposition to that of Christ, would satisfy its disciples with the negative consolation of not meaning to do their neighbor any harm; the true religion of Christ and of conscience sweeps away all such poor comfort, when, in the Sermon on the Mount, it identifies and condemns with the workers of iniquity, "Who-soever heareth these sayings of mine and *doeth them not*," and still more solemnly when, from another mount, not of instruction merely, but of judgment, before which all nations and generations and souls pass in review, it announces, as the ground of condemnation, not what men have done, but what they have *neglected* to do, and says, "Inasmuch as ye did it *not* to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me."

Often, perhaps too often, has that impressive and awakening picture of the great judgment been held

up before men for the purpose of exciting a vague terror; how seldom, or at least how feebly, has the most searching trait of the picture been brought home or taken home to the sober convictions of the heart in the daily intercourse of life, namely, that it is not the selfish, however sanctimoniously disguised, seeking to save ourselves, that can build us up in the true life and blessedness, but the impulse and inspiration to subordinate and sacrifice self-love to the love of man, and of God as revealed in man.

Let the light of that tribunal, which Christ has shadowed forth to us, fall upon those words of his beloved disciple which we have been considering, and make them read, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, and shows that he does not by practical indifference to his human brotherhood, how can he love God whom he hath not seen, hath not felt in the stirrings and strivings of a spiritual brotherly affection, and how can he look for that heaven where love to God is the bliss of the saints, and

‘The smile of the Lord is the light of the soul?’ ”

XXII.

THE WINTER SOLSTICE.

— THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH HATH VISITED US, TO GIVE LIGHT TO THEM THAT SIT IN DARKNESS AND IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH, TO GUIDE OUR FEET INTO THE WAY OF PEACE.— Luke i. 78, 79.

THE beginning of a New Year is an anniversary which all, in some way, notice, if only by hanging up a new almanac on the wall. But there is another anniversary which it implies, that is noticed very little; being to some too familiar for them to make much account of it, and for others too remote to be thought of. There is a *Christian* New Year's Day, which is Christmas; there is a *civil* New Year's Day, which was yesterday; but there is also what we may call a *celestial* New Year's Day of the natural world. This last is fixed by an event which, not without its emblematic lessons for the spiritual life of man, has, within a few days, been quietly consummated. Quietly and noiselessly it has transpired, (and this is its first symbolic lesson,) like so many other great occurrences both in the moral and material world, reminding us of the beautiful expression of an old writer, that "God fills the universe silently and without noise." He is speaking

of the manner in which true joy fills the soul ; but what he says is emphatically true of the element of light, which is God's noblest emblem, and equally true of that harmony of the spheres and of the seasons, which the contemplation of their circuits makes audible to the sense of the beholding and listening mind. Is it not a striking and reproofing thought, and one which it would be well for us to entertain oftener than we do, that while man, here on this little earth, in this little day of his earthly existence, keeps up such a tumult and turmoil of strife about the petty objects of his pride and selfishness, that he can hardly hear himself think, for the din of his own passions ; in the heavens, meanwhile, — almost without attracting one thought of reverent wonder and gratitude, except on the part of here and there a mind which has sufficient love of wisdom to pause in the rush of worldly cares and cravings, — *there* are going on, “in solemn silence, all” those mighty revolutions, without which this little life itself would come to a stand-still, and all these flowers and fountains of pleasure, which pride and greed so often profane and poison, would utterly wither ?

I am reminding you that, since we last assembled here, the great transition has been made, which implies that the earth, on which we live and with which we move, has accomplished its mighty annual journey — its hundred and ninety millions of miles — around the sun, and has returned again, “according to its circuits,” as the Scripture expresses it, to the place where it was a year ago — I was going to say — but I correct myself ; for modern science has

learned that even here, too, is progress ; that even in this material universe, things do not return to precisely any former position ; but that the sun itself, with its whole attendant system, is moving towards a fixed star, (called *fixed* for the present,) in a remote constellation, which one day may prove to be itself revolving, in a yet uncalculated curve, around some still more distant sun in this infinite universe, of which it has been said, *the centre is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere.*

Thus, already, has the simple phenomenon of the year's revolution revealed to us two of its life-lessons ; impressing a thoughtful mind first with the peacefulness, and now, secondly, with the progressiveness, (if I may use so hard a word to express it,) of the kingdom of nature. Thus, with this twofold voice, does the occasion (even at this first, mere outside glance at it) speak to the soul with its providential inculcation of heavenly wisdom.

But there is further, deeper, higher wisdom, even in what may be called this astronomical view of our subject, well worth our following out. We, too, are called upon, at such a time as this, to "stand still and consider the wondrous works of God," which surely are not the less wondrous for having been so long appealing to our attention, and so often in vain ; for even the God of Nature might say, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known me ?" It cannot, I think, be regarded as a forced or eccentric turn to give the occasion which the beginning of a new year presents to us if, following the hint which that expression of our text

furnishes, — “the *dayspring* from on high,” — we reflect upon some of the analogies between natural and spiritual things, which certain of the simplest facts in the science of the material heavens, particularly at this annual epoch, urge upon our notice.

It would be pleasant, on some accounts, if the beginning of the civil and that of the Christian year coincided; for the *year of our Lord* should seem to begin, consistently with Christian faith or feeling, on Christmas, the day received as the anniversary of the Lord's birth. Meanwhile, this slight confusion, occasioned by beginning the year of the Lord, as it were, a week after the birth of the Lord, may serve, as a sort of spiritual *obliquity of the ecliptic*, to stand for a *memento* of the fact, that earthly and heavenly affairs are not yet moving in the same plane of orbit; that man has not yet learned to harmonize all his secular life's doings and interests into one great sphere with the principles of religion; that the church and the world are not yet one; that civilization is not yet identical with Christianity.

It is, however, interesting, that both the Christmas festival, and New Year's Day, which may be regarded as a second and secular side of Christmas, should fall so near the moment which ancient Paganism, true, in this respect, to its light, religiously celebrated as the date of the revival and return of the “solar deity.” “The winter solstice was a season of religious pomp.” “The ancient nations,” it has been said, “saw with uneasiness that king, that divinity, as they styled the sun, receding from them farther and farther, rising later to his task and retir-

ing earlier from it, like a giant wearied in his course, and leaving the night to encroach, by insensible degrees, on his dominion. And when he stopped in that fearful retreat, when he directed towards them again his beneficent way, they marked that period with festival and rejoicing." And it has been thought, with strong reason, that the early Christians took their hint from this, when they moved forward the celebration of the nativity, which had previously come a week *after* the beginning of the year, and placed it a week *before* the same; for the moment when the sun "begins to return to our hemisphere, bringing with him a gradually increasing length of the daylight, adding to it, it may be, only a single minute, but that minute," as has been said, "the promise of summer-time," might well seem, in the absence of historical certainty, a fitting period to commemorate the return of the spiritual sun, "the dayspring from on high," the loving look of a *seemingly* long alienated Father's face, to visit and bless a benighted world.

I say *seemingly* alienated; for in reality, as the Gospel teaches us, the alienation was on the part of man. It was man who was alienated from the life and the love of God. And this is another truth which is imaged for us in the movements and appearances of the heavens. It is because the earth, in consequence of the obliquity of her axis, turns one hemisphere away from the sun's direct influence, that so large a portion of her children, at this period, have to pass through a season of wintry suspense, and feel the beams of the great heat-giver fall

upon them coldly and askance. And this becomes the more striking and spiritually significant, when we add that, all this time, the sun is really nearer to the earth than ever, when, to the natural sense and feeling, he would seem to be the farthest off; just as, (to draw still another illustration of the spiritual from this natural storehouse,) man will often feel himself the farthest from God, when God is the nearest to him; even as the penitent prodigal, at the very moment when his sensibilities awoke to the dreary distance at which he had left his father's house behind him, proved really, by the feeling of anguish which prompted the resolution, "I will arise and go to my father," that in spirit that father, or, at least, which is particularly to our purpose, his *heavenly* Father, was nearer to him, if possible, than ever before.

And this train of thought brings us in sight of yet another point in the analogy which, under the suggestion of our text and the occasion, we have begun to study. We have come to that period of the year when men repeat the old saying:—

"When the days begin to lengthen,
Then the cold begins to strengthen,"

which (though it presents its moral in an inverted form) may be considered as equivalent to that other proverb from our old German homestead:—

"When the need is the severest,
Then the help is also nearest,"

which, again, has been condensed into the pithy saying, that "it is always darkest just before morning."

It *was* when darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the nations; when the gloom was like the shadow of death, that light sprang up and the day-spring from on high touched the hill-tops, and visited the homes and hearts of benighted and bewildered men, to cheer, to guide, and to bless. And when the sun, which that day-spring heralded, had seemingly set forever, it was at the sad hour of their return home, so bowed and broken with disappointment as not to recognize their very Redeemer, as he walked with them and talked with them by the way, that his resurrection was about to be revealed to those two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and the prophecy verified, "At even time it shall be light."

I am as well aware as any of my hearers can be that the groundwork of natural facts and superstructure of moral applications which I am presenting to you, by way of New Year's sermon, would serve equally well for an astronomical lecture, with a scripture text. Names and uses, however, do not affect the truth of things. Truth is truth, from whatever quarter it comes; and, as the poet Cowper says, —

" All truth is from the sempiternal source
Of light divine."

And one might add that all *light* is the light of truth, whether it be the ray of the material sun or the light of reason and revelation. It is, all, the

"Bright effluence of bright essence increate."

On the first *Sunday* of a new year — *our first day of the Sun* — commemorating for us, as it does, at

once the rising of the Sun of Grace upon a world of darkness, the return of that sun to a world of spiritual wintriness, and the rising *again* of the Sun of Righteousness out of the temporary eclipse of the cross and the sepulchre, there is something in this combination of reminiscences which draws the thoughtful mind and grateful heart, as with a "threefold cord," to dwell on those analogies which the Scriptures, and our very household language, (the word *heaven* itself, for instance,) intimate, between the two great hemispheres of truth, the visible and the invisible.

Those broad facts of natural science which I have interpreted the entrance upon a new year as commemorating, in their relation to great spiritual realities, are such, indeed, as every schoolboy knows, but their spiritual suggestions are such as it would be instructive and awakening for the grown-up children of superstition and spiritual narrowness and *theological darkness* often to meditate. A curious and instructive parallel might be traced between the world's astronomical and its theological errors. It is remarkable how, in both of these departments of inquiry, the truth of things (the mental perspective, so to speak,) was so long inverted. Secular science has outgrown its childish thought faster than sacred science; men have learned in the natural world, that the sun does not go away or turn away from them, but the reverse: but in spiritual matters how many are still under the influence of the old idea of a changeable Deity, a Father who needs to be propitiated, a Spirit of Life and of light that withdraws from its children, when, in truth, it is they that withdraw from him.

“Speak to the earth,” says the old book of Job, “and it shall teach thee.” The earth *is* teaching to-day those who will listen to its voice. We are at the *turning-point*, not only of the civil year and the Christian year, but of the natural year also, when the sun appears to stand still and look back, and begin to come back towards us, simply because the earth has heard the voice, “Thus far and no farther!” and has begun to incline itself toward the great source of light and heat. And one might say — it would be hardly an extravagant figure — that the trees of the field and the springs of the mountains have heard the Lord’s call and the earth’s silent answer. The promise and prophecy which the earth’s conversion has mutely pronounced thrills through the frost-bound woods and waters as an earnest of inevitable spring-time. The turning-point is past. We may say the *conversion* of the planet has taken place, though its regeneration is not yet manifested to the eyes and ears of men. The word has gone forth that shall not return void.

And now what does this say to man? Does it not say, what the Scripture says to them who are waiting in their wintry exile from God’s face and favor, for some miracle to turn the Almighty towards them, “Draw near unto God and He will draw near unto you!” Does it not say, “Deceive not thyself, O man; God changes not. Return thou, and be reconciled to God by returning to godliness, and reconciling thyself to bear and do the will of Him who is infinitely wiser than thou, who beckons thee in the homeliest, lowliest and it may

be loneliest, ways towards the land of uprightness and peace and plenty, the home from which thou hast exiled thyself in thy pride, thy selfishness, and thy recklessness, the home of thy Father, the bosom of thy Eternal Friend! Winter may be said to be with most of us, a waiting season, a period of "chill suspense." When shall the *spiritual solstice* come for us — the turning-point in the winter of our practical indifference? for surely every state of the soul deserves to be called indifference, in regard to such truth as the Gospel, which is anything less than a wakeful, earnest, all-transcending, all-comprehending devotion of the whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, to the study and the doing of it. When shall *our* conversion be? Whenever it is, whenever our faces and feet are set heavenward, thenceforward the long-sealed fountains of gratitude and happiness, though they may not at once gush forth in the music of a spiritual spring-time, will have heard and felt the summons which is one day to break their icy chains, and let them pour forth songs of gladness and streams of contentment and charity. But *when* is this to be? It cannot be, so long as we refuse to acknowledge the power God has intrusted to us over our own fortune, so long as we will not take earnest communion and counsel with the spirit within us, but sit looking for our salvation to the hills and the multitude of mountains, — that is to say, to some great outward sensation and influence. The earth and the heavens indeed have no power to move otherwise than as they do. Blindly and passively they obey the will of the Omnipotent. But it

is the pleasure of God in regard to man, and it is man's privilege and glory, that he should serve the Lord as a man and not as a machine, as a free man and not as a slave. How little we appreciate this!

There is, therefore, an emphasis which, I apprehend, is not apt to be thought of, in those expressions of our text which represent the Sun of Righteousness as having risen to enlighten them that *sit* in darkness and guide their *feet* into the way of peace. The light from on high summons us to *arise* — to “arise and shine” ourselves, by looking towards it and so reflecting it from our countenances, and by opening our hearts to let it shine *through* us, as those who live to the glory of God. That light which we to-day commemorate, the light which, in the beginning, at the creation of the world, shone out of darkness, and, at the new creation in Christ, beamed from his face to give the light of the knowledge of God's highest glory, that light which continues to this day and forevermore to stream forth from the open sepulchre and the open heavens — that light shines not for us to sit and stare at it in barren wonder — it summons us to stand upon our feet and to walk as children of the light and of the day — as children of the day to be sober, having our loins girded about with truth, and our brows clothed with the serenity of that hope which can come only from a steadfast continuance in such principles and pursuits as imply the harmonious activity of our whole divinely constituted nature. Unhappily too many of us live as if we still really believed a dogma which we say or think we have outgrown. “You

proceed in the idea," said one of our preachers, who has since gone to the company of the first-born, "that nothing in a religious way is to be expected of you until you have been converted. But that sort of conversion the men and women here to-day will never reach, go where you will and hear whatever preaching you may, for the reason that in your own minds you do not and cannot be made to accept the dogma on which it rests. No, you will go on just as you are now doing, through life, from this to your dying day, with the light of evangelical truth shining full upon you, but with your feet at the same time cumbered with the miry clay of error and prejudice, unless by some immediate, vigorous, and, as it were, revolutionary decision you break the spell that binds you." Says the same plain and pungent writer, "If your child runs into the street, and you send for him to come back, does it content you that he replies, 'when I am converted I will go back'? You send him to school, and he plays truant, and wanders down to the river. When one speaks to him and urges him to return to school, shall he take refuge in the same preposterous reply? And yet that reply is no whit less absurd in respect of religious duties than it is in the cases just supposed." A light has come into the world — it has visited those who sit in darkness, even in the darkness of such self-delusions as this, and it offers to guide our feet into the way of peace. But the very idea of its being a guide implies that we are to accept and follow its leading. "Turn ye, turn ye," is the call of the scripture and of the Spirit. Shall we refuse to walk

forth into the light and by the light of the natural sun, which to-day shines so gloriously, because we cannot yet solve the problem *how* the mind, through the will, operates on the bodily organs? No man but a hypochondriac is so foolish as that. Why, then, should any mysteries which lie behind, or hover distantly about, the subject of the inner life and walk, prevent our putting forth the power God has given us to follow Christ and the sunlight of the spiritual world?

How long we have waited, many of us — all of us, in some respects — for the revolution of years to bring us round where we ought to be, and, if we know ourselves, really want to be! We feel, somehow, as if the multitude of years would, at last, not only teach wisdom, but compel us to use it. But man is, after all, not a machine, not a clod. There is a spirit in man, by virtue of which he becomes an accountable vicegerent in this lower sphere. And there is no real peace for him until he confesses to himself, and in his life, this great truth.

The best wisdom the days and years teach, as they steal away so swiftly, is that we are not to depend upon them to bring us the practical wisdom we most need. Not the golden sand of that Divine wisdom do the ebbing waters of time leave behind them as a deposit on the shores of life; that wisdom which maketh wise unto salvation cometh only from above, and from within, from the fountains that are supplied from above, out of the everlasting hills of God.

XXIII.

EASTER.

THAT WHICH THOU SOWEST IS NOT QUICKENED, EXCEPT IT DIE: AND THAT WHICH THOU SOWEST, THOU SOWEST NOT THAT BODY THAT SHALL BE, BUT BARE GRAIN, IT MAY CHANCE OF WHEAT OR OF SOME OTHER GRAIN: BUT GOD GIVETH IT A BODY AS IT HATH PLEASSED HIM, AND TO EVERY SEED HIS OWN BODY. — 1 Cor. xv. 36-38.

THERE is certainly a beautiful appropriateness, — indeed, one may say, a twofold appropriateness, — and the text I have chosen recognizes, or at least implies it, — in the fact, (and whether we should be warranted or not in supposing that Divine Providence contemplated the fact, every Christian heart must surely feel it to be a significant and sacred coincidence,) that the anniversary of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the festival devoted to the thought of man's immortality, should occur just at the time of the natural year's resurrection from its death-like winter-sleep. In one sense, of course, we can hardly attribute this correspondence to a direct design of God, because there is a large portion of the world which knows not our alternation of the seasons; but for us, at all events, the Spirit of Wisdom may well have a meaning in this conjuncture of the natural and the spiritual, by which, at the moment

when the earth is preparing, with the music of bird and bud and brooklet, to hail the fulfilment of the promise which (as we saw on a former occasion) was given in the very solstice of winter, the church also is called to put on her garments of gladness to greet her risen Master, to hail the second advent, the full and final rising into the spiritual firmament, of that Sun of Righteousness, whose first appearing above this earthly horizon the Christmas season had commemorated.

It is true, with us, in the crude and sluggish spring-times of our New England climate, where the cold earth is as slow to blossom into vernal beauty as the heart of man is to show forth praise and gratitude, — (but with more reason, for the natural sunshine is not steady, like the smile of Heaven's mercy,) — in this region the harmony of festivals, to which we have alluded, in the secular and sacred calendars, is often but faintly perceptible to the senses, and requires, for its appreciation, considerable help from fancy and from faith. While, however, to the outward sense only a feeble and flickering presentiment, it may be, is awakened within us of dawning summer by the greenness of the meadow and the roadside, and the intermittent tenderness in the look of the heavens, there is another suggestion of the season, which even the

“ Chill suspense and slow delay ”

of our backward spring-time are fitted to impress only the more deeply on the thoughtful mind, as a help to faith in that Christian doctrine and promise

of immortality which religious usage invites us to study.

I refer to the fact, that this is not only the resurrection-time of the year, (as we have called it,) but the time of the burial of the seed. With each returning spring, and *by* each returning spring, is illustrated not only that power of God, which clothes with new bodies and new beauty the seeds and stalks that had lain dead or dormant through the winter, but that faith of man, which says to him, in the language of our text, "That which thou sowest, O man! is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or some other grain: but God giveth it a body, as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed its own body." I call the instinctive feeling of assurance with which man, at this season, buries his seed-grain in the ground, *faith*. And it *is* faith — faith in God. He may attempt to disguise it under the phrases, reliance on nature, belief in his senses, trusting to experience, confidence in the uniformity of the connection between cause and effect; but, after all, it resolves itself into faith, — into a principle which simply *believes*, — in the morning sowing its seed, and in the evening withholding not its hand, because it *knoweth not* whether shall prosper either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

What I simply meant to say, however, at this moment was, how fitting a season it is, when the natural man, with such faith in the Lord of Nature, deposits his seed in the ground to die, expecting its

resurrection in beauty and abundance, for the Christian man to behold in emblem, and have renewed within him, *his* faith that the spiritual seed which he bears about with him in this dying body, which God, at his birth, sowed in this corruptible mortality, shall, by God's power and grace, be clothed upon with a new and spiritual body of its own, in that world of promise; and that, in return for the precious seed which, perhaps, at this very season of earthly hope and promise, he has borne forth weeping, God, smiling on the burial-sod which his tears have watered, shall one day call him to come again, bringing his sheaves with him to the harvest-home of heaven.

Let us, then, amidst the associations of this season and hour, give our thoughts to the consideration of a part of Scripture which, so long as man is mortal, and yet feels omens of immortality within him, can never cease to be regarded with deep sensation.

It is an interesting question, and one which, if properly considered, might possibly have moderated a little the minute and vehement contentiousness with which Christians have so often speculated and striven about the precise meaning and bearing of some of Paul's expressions in this memorable chapter, — to ask, whence did the Apostle derive the explicit information he here gives us in regard to the resurrection; from a special revelation, or from the working of his own spirit upon the hints which were furnished him by the words and personal transfigurations of his Master, with the aid brought to

his comprehensive genius by the analogies of nature. This much we know, that while he claims, in some cases, a direct revelation from the Lord, in other cases, he professes to speak only in the exercise of his own reason; and while, indeed, in regard to the grand truths and laws of the spiritual world, we have the best ground for confidently receiving his declarations, as to the comparatively non-essential matters of time and place and form, we may not readily condemn any who should be disposed to differ from us, or even from him. I doubt, myself, whether *they* rightly understand him who ascribe to him a belief that the coming of Christ, in the form of the earth's destruction and the general resurrection to judgment, would take place in the lifetime of some then on the stage of existence; and I certainly do not agree with the conclusion which seems to have been so extensively assumed, that he teaches literally the resurrection of the very dust into which the body had been dissolved in the grave. But what I would say is, that, in regard to all such matters, it would have been much more for the interests of our faith if Christians had freely and reverently exercised their own judgment, feeling that such questions were, after all, not the vital ones, and did not call for a special revelation, or an infallible scripture, or an infallible interpreter of scripture; and remembering always to fall back upon the great central realities of the spiritual law and of the prophetic conscience.

It is a significant and an instructive fact, how little our Master himself, — He who came down from

heaven and ascended up into heaven, the Son of Man who was ever *in* heaven, — had to say, in the way of gratifying even what might be called a sacred curiosity ; how little, except what concerned moral relations, of the state of man after death ; how little he countenanced speculation about the circumstances of the next world. When he does refer to such things, it is almost exclusively for the purpose of putting a negative upon some incongruous assumption. And in justice to Paul it should be said, that, certainly in the chapter from which our text is taken, he will be found, upon a just view of his language, to discuss the physiology of the resurrection much more for the sake of showing the baselessness of scepticism, and of making matter itself a refutation of materialism than for any other purpose ; and that he gives far less of positive information as to the secret things of the after-world, or the under-world, or the upper-world, than, from the tone of those who have talked and written about his doctrine, one would infer.

We find, among the recorded expressions of Jesus, one remarkable utterance, which fell from him, as that seemingly ignominious end approached, which he called his glorification, and his earthly life was about to be swallowed up by immortality ; and we may well remember it at this season, and all the more as it may well have suggested the analogy Paul notices in our Easter text. “ Verily, verily I say unto you,” said Jesus, on the occasion referred to, “ except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" — beautifully teaching them and us (I would remark here in passing) that the *unproductive* life is a *lonely* life, and that the life of self-forgetfulness and self-devotion is the only life of salvation. And this was said by the Saviour, at once for his own comfort and for the admonition of his disciples.

Paul, who uses the same illustration for a controversial purpose primarily, answering by it the objection of sceptical philosophers, has occasion to look into it with more of physiological minuteness. The principal opposition *Jesus* encountered came from a class of men who believed already in the resurrection of the body, and that in too gross a sense; and what he had occasion chiefly to dwell on, was the moral aspect of the resurrection. Nor does Paul, by any means, neglect to lay all the stress which it deserves on the moral resurrection, as may be seen by eloquent and well-known chapters in his letters to the Romans and to the Philippians. Nay, in the indignant preamble with which he introduces the sceptical question he uses the illustration of the seed to answer, he shows plainly that his great and ultimate object is to awaken the scepticism of the sensual and frivolous to the need of that resurrection of which conscience, and not chemistry, is the expounder; which flesh and blood, and the corrupt passions that live thereby, cannot inherit, and which he himself dies daily in order to attain.

But let us look now at Paul's doctrine of the resur-

rection of humanity, and see how much he does teach. And here the first thing that strikes us is, when we recur to his language and place side by side with it, in our minds, the old doctrine of the resurrection of the body, — that the very gist of the Apostle's whole argument, as drawn from the analogy of the burial of the seed, consists in the fact, that the thing buried is not the body that shall be, but that the future body is one which the God of nature shall provide. It is true the Apostle says the seed itself is quickened, and that God gives each seed its own body, and it may seem to follow from this, that there is at least a germ or nucleus of material in the buried form, from which a body is developed or on which it is superinduced. All that our animal chemistry, however, can say in regard to the seed is, to suggest to us that some law inheres in it, in accordance with which the various elements combine to create its new body, — but when we come to the question, by what spiritual chemistry corruption can be made even the crucible for generating that which is incorruptible, we come to a question not only not to be answered, but rather not to be asked. A human body, to make it such, requires three things, — substance, form, and organization; now, supposing, for the moment, that Paul means by a spiritual body a something that has shape and organism, still a just appreciation of the analogy he institutes would seem to require us to understand, by the seed which is to take that body, the spirit, which is the man, and not the flesh or anything connected with the flesh. As I understand the Apostle, what he means

to teach by the analogy of the seed simply is that, as, in fact, you do not know where the plant was or how it existed, which springs up on the ruins of the seed you deposited, neither do you know, or need to know, how or whence the heavenly man comes, who rises on the ruins of the earthly man. And the words, "*It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body,*" might equally well have been rendered, and then they would have ceased to suggest the materialistic idea, "There is sown a natural body; there is raised a spiritual body."

It has been very ingeniously said, by one who would reconcile the two ideas, that the future body is to be the same as the present one and yet different, that "it will really be the same body, whether its flesh be made of the matter which composed the body laid in the grave, or of any other matter; or whether it be of a contexture more rare or more dense. For every one knows," he says, "that our present body is justly reckoned the same body in all the different stages of our life, on account of the continued similarity of its members to themselves, and of the whole body to itself, notwithstanding the matter of which it is composed be continually changing; and notwithstanding the bulk and strength of its members, and the appearance of the countenance, gradually alter in the progress of the body from its birth to manhood, and from manhood to old age."

But may it not be, after all, an unwarranted assumption that the spiritual body, which Paul announces, bears any analogy to this fleshly one? The illustration he draws from a comparison of the seed

and the plant would lead us to think so. A great deal, I doubt not, has been ascribed to him, which existed only in the minds of his interpreters. Strictly speaking, a spiritual body need not mean anything else than simply a spiritual being. I do not find, indeed, in the connection of the words *spiritual body*, any such self-contradiction as some have fancied. For I do not, certainly, conceive the word spiritual to imply the material of which the body is made, any more than the phrases *muscular power* and *mental power* imply that the force in the one case consists of flesh, and in the other case of spirit, — but simply that there is a body, or a something, through which the spirit continues to be manifested, as there is a body here for the animal soul. Nor, on the other hand, does it seem to me inconceivable that the spirit should exist and act and make its presence felt, without a visible form. I can, therefore, well conceive that there may be a deep truth in those beautiful lines :

“ How shall we know them — the holy dead,
Whom we left alone in their narrow bed ?

* * * * *

“ How shall we know *him* — the one who died,
Like a shock of corn in autumn pride ;
Her, whom we knew by her pallid cheek,
By sickness blighted, by grief made weak ?
Not by the gleam of their silver hair,
Not by the traces of time and care ;
But by the feelings, more deeply shined,
The feelings that dwell in the changeless mind ;
By a childlike love — the love we felt
In the earthly homes, where our parents dwelt.

* * * * *

“ How shall we know them — the infant race ;
How will the mother her loved one trace ?
Not by the glance of his sunny eye,

'Twas but a gleam o'er mortality;
Not by his look when he sank to rest,
A closing flower on her throbbing breast;
But by a feeling like that which burned,
When her heart o'er the guileless stranger yearned;
By a thrill like that which, when first he smiled,
Came o'er her soul, will she know her child."

I have not, in this discourse, expressed any very confident opinions on the questions alluded to; and I think, as I have said, that Paul, himself, decides much less than we have been too generally in the habit of attributing to him. His great point, as I conceive, is to show that scepticism has nothing substantial to present against the Christian doctrine that man will live again, the doctrine of Him who rose, himself, from the dead to help struggling and staggering faith. And he dwells, as he does, upon the analogies of nature that bear upon the subject, not for the purpose of amusing an idle curiosity, but for the purpose of arousing a dormant conscience. "Awake to righteousness," is the burden of the solemn disclosure. Like his Master, he brings life and immortality to light, that men may walk as children of the light and of the day, in sober and serene elevation of spirit, in sure hope, in peaceful faith. Like his Master, he would have man to know that the commandments of God are life everlasting. He admonishes us that it is the fool who says in his heart, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we go hence and are no more; that the wise man will say, Let us cultivate a taste for intellectual, moral, and spiritual pleasures, for those pleasures which he enjoys who makes the senses his

servants, instead of being their slave; for a world is fast approaching in which those pleasures will be the only ones. Let us, he will say, cherish that thirst after righteousness and truth and grace which shall, surely as God liveth, be satisfied as fast as it is renewed, for ever and ever, at the fountains of immortality.

My friends, we may speculate with Paul, but in Jesus must we, (according to Paul himself,) in him, the Master, must we believe, if we would know and possess the life eternal. To the truth as it is in Jesus, does the great Apostle himself bid us go. Whosoever liveth and believeth in me, said Jesus, shall never die. To him that does believe in Jesus, that is, in the spiritual truth, law, and providence which he represents, and which he lived and died to glorify, no other death is more than a transient incident, except the deadness of the mind and heart to the beauty of holiness, the gain of godliness, the preciousness of truth, the majesty of virtue. The waking up and living up of man to these great realities is the true resurrection to life immortal. By such awakening and such life, immortality begins even here. To-day, even now, the Lord, the Saviour, the captain of salvation, speaks to each one of us and says, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. I know that the commandments of the Father are life everlasting and thou shalt know it, when thou knowest me, and through me Him that sent me."

XXIV.

THE BROAD COMMANDMENT.

THIS DO, AND THOU SHALT LIVE. . . . GO, AND DO THOU LIKEWISE. . . .
ONE THING IS NEEDFUL. . . . — Luke x. 25—42.

THE portion of Scripture which has been read to you this morning constitutes the text and presents the theme of my discourse. A long text and a large theme — nevertheless I think you will find that there is sufficient unity — and sufficient definiteness in the drift of the whole to give a practical point, and a not unseasonable turn, to the discussion, even of what contains in itself several subjects and sermons.

David, in the 119th Psalm, speaking of the Law of the Lord, and comparing it with human models and attainments, says, “Thy commandment is exceeding broad.” My object in using the Scripture before us, is to show how emphatically true this is of the commandment of God, the law of life, as set forth in the teachings of Jesus.

There has always been a tendency in the religious world, and it is apt to be particularly strong at times * when any sudden waking up of the public mind to

* This sermon was preached during the “Revival Winter” of 1857–8.

religious matters creates a desire for decisive tests and manifestations of piety,—to really reduce the dimensions and demands of the gospel, while professing to exalt them; to bring the standard down that it may seem near to the eager impulse of the new enthusiasm; to narrow the channel of the Christian life, in order that the zeal of the believer may, thus confined, be urged on in a stronger and swifter current. At such times single phases of truth, of duty, of character are liable to be put forward for the complete and harmonious whole. “Christ is divided.” (to use Paul’s striking expression,) the symmetry of the divine perfectness of truth, beauty, and holiness, as imaged in the man Christ Jesus, is seen at best in a defective and distorted form; and though we hear, on every side, the cry, “lo here is Christ!” and “lo there!” we do not find him, his whole, well-balanced teaching or temper, in all its fair proportions, but only some one or other of his truths or traits, exaggerated at the expense of the rest. The representations put forth, at such times, of the saving truth, the saving work, the sanctifying spirit of the Lord, are too apt to elicit from a thoughtful soul the ejaculation, “O righteous Father, O meek and lowly Son of God and of man, the world hath not known thee!”

It is well, indeed, that occasions should occur which urge upon us the duty of seeing to it that the stream of our religious thought and life does not spread itself out into such a wide and shallow bed, as to waste itself in a speculative or sentimental stagnation,—it is well that we should be admonished

that mere musing, mere drifting along as chance may direct, cannot meet the demands of the Christian law; that we should, in whatever way, be waked up to the necessity of there being some banks, some defining landmarks, to form a channel in which our life of faith, and hope, and charity shall flow on, as a strong, steady and fertilizing river, to the good of man and the glory of God; but, at the same time, there is no inconsistency in our taking care that the channel shall be as broad as the Christian pattern: there is certainly no necessity of our so narrowing the channel, for the sake of increasing the speed of the waters, that the earth-stained and spray-mantled element shall reflect in its bosom no clear and consistent image of the upper world of God's truth and grace.

In what way the teachings of Jesus, by their general tenor and tendency, offer to help us seize the advantage of a period of religious stimulation, like that through which we are passing, and at the same time guard ourselves against its power to belittle our conception of the true ideal of manhood and godliness, is happily illustrated for any one who, with his mind and heart open to the fair impression of the whole, will read and ponder, in their connection with each other, the several parts which go to form the scripture selected for our present study.

Those of us who have recently begun to study together the gospel history, — and I take this occasion to remark how proper and goodly a thing it would be, for a whole congregation to resolve itself into a Sunday school or Bible school, — have observed

that the Evangelists do not undertake to give a complete or consecutive biography of Jesus, but only memorabilia, reminiscences, of his deeds and discourses, such as their own recollection, quickened by the Holy Spirit, enabled them, and wisdom from above directed them, to record; and that they arranged these memoirs not always, by any means, in chronological order, but in many cases, (and this applies especially to the writer from whom our text is taken,) grouped together incidents and sayings, simply because, from some resemblance among them, they seemed to belong together or recurred together to the memory. And in some cases, where, perhaps, even what we, in our ignorance, call accident, led to the order in which things follow each other, we find a significance and felicity in the connection, which impresses us with the feeling of a divine wisdom.

And with regard to the Scriptures in general, I think, every reflecting reader will agree with me that there is no one trait which more strongly marks them as a whole, (and, to my mind, this gives what I may call a providential unity to the Bible as a great education book, as well as record of the actual schooling of humanity,) — than the sober tone, the evenly-balanced, well-proportioned manner in which all sides of truth are presented — the even-handed justice which is done to all the various wants and tendencies of our manifold nature. On surveying the whole field at a glance, I am continually more and more impressed with this characteristic of the Bible, and its fitness, by virtue of this, to be the teacher of a world, and an age of the world, in which

soberness is so much needed (I do not mean dulness nor sanctimoniousness, but harmony) in the theories, tempers, lives of men. I speak of that freedom from exaggeration and extravagance in the Bible, that largeness of scope which forbids it to be monopolized by any sect of religion or school of philosophy. Well has it been said that, "the simple and unprejudiced study of the Bible is the death of religious extravagance." And this effect it has, not by making a man indifferent to truth, but by informing his whole nature so equally with the spirit of all the great truths, that his life of thought and zeal and action, shall be a sustained and strong and steady one. And when, in accordance with this, I say, that a sober spirit is just now greatly needed, I do not mean that meagre and bloodless, that sanctimonious and sepulchral thing which so often passes for soberness, and which is simply a vacuity of thought and feeling, but that noble quality which consists in a harmonious combination of gifts and graces, — which aspires, at least, to stand perfect and complete in all the word and will of God.

But this soberness requires something which in our day is not easy — and that is study. It has been said that "we are, beyond any nation that is or ever was on earth, a reading people." I fear, however, that the amount of study done, in proportion to the amount of reading, is alarmingly small. It seems to me particularly needful now, when there is so much stir in the name of religion, so much running to and fro to hear the word of God or of man, so much looking to and fro for signs and won-

ders, that we should labor for a revival of the reading and reflecting spirit. There seems to be a feeling with multitudes, that "faith cometh by *hearing*." If it does, (for I would observe that this assertion is not made by Paul, but only supposed by him to be the objection of a man with whom he is arguing,) if faith does come *by* hearing, it does not come *through* the outer ear. It springs up from within the mind that listens with the ear of thought. Faith comes neither through the ear nor through the eye, neither by hearing nor by reading merely, but by thinking, by studying, by meditation, and that prayer to which meditation impels, and that life to which prayer impels. We need in these days to remember, that the sanctification for which there is just now so much praying and laboring in the community, is to come (according to one of the last words of Jesus) through the *truth*, and we are further admonished that no soul can make the truth its own without an earnest and sober study of it. We need vastly more study, (I do not mean merely solitary, but social study, also,) of the Scriptures, — the records and remembrancers of that truth which is at the bottom of all the great movements that are reforming and redeeming the world, — that study which alone can properly replenish and sustain and guide the zeal that is to carry them on to perfection. We need to study the Book of Books, so that we may read other books, not for the mere purpose of killing time or keeping up with the fashion, but for the noble purpose of accomplishing ourselves in the wisdom that, in the largest sense, makes wise to salvation.

But, breaking off here these general remarks, I ask you now to look with me into that mirror of the law of liberty, which the scripture, that has been read here to-day, holds up, to show us what manner of persons we ought to be; and I beg you to see, within the short compass of these few specifications of incident and character, how many of the common tendencies among men to narrow the spirit of Christianity into one or another form of manifestation are virtually rebuked by the teaching of the Master, and how impossible it is to read his teachings connectedly and thoughtfully, with a view to learning what is the great commandment of the law, without feeling how broad that commandment is, how large is his philosophy of life, how generous, free and flexible his way of salvation.

Thus, is there at this day one, perhaps many a one, who comes in a speculative or sentimental mood, self-complacently, to have the thought of his heart confirmed and the habit of his life countenanced by the highest authority, to extort from the wisdom of Christ an acknowledgment that it is enough for a man to cherish a large and liberal theory of religion, or who, hearing it preached that to love God and man is the sum and substance of Christianity, is ready to exclaim, "That is exactly my sentiment," showing by his life and temper that it is little more than sentiment, — to such a one what a keen reproof does the simplicity of Christ administer, when he says, "*This do* and thou shalt live," — (conscience silently adding, "*say this without* doing it, and thou shalt die, even as when an hungry man

dreameth and behold he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty,") and how he presses the probe home, when he makes it the vital question whether all our orthodoxy or liberalism or sentimentalism can keep us from giving way to the inhumanity that tempts us, in daily life, through the power of a fierce partisanship, a false patriotism, or a cold, worldly, or spiritual pride!

Or, again, is there one, who, catching only the words, "*This do and thou shalt live,*" thinks he is echoing the sentiment when he says, "Yes, that is exactly it; true religion does not consist in dreaming fine theories and sentiments, but in doing what God has given a man to do from day to day; that is just my creed, that every man should mind his own business, and whatsoever his hand findeth to do, do it with his might,"—is there one who thus justifies himself for being so immersed in earthly cares that he has no time nor thought for higher things, pleading that Divine Providence has placed him where he is, and that he is attending to the great work of life and the business of the Father in following his earthly calling, and treating every thought of holiness and heaven that would steal into the midst of it, as an impertinent intruder,—to him again the faithful Friend and Master comes and says, "Thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful,"—he does not say (as it has been sometimes interpreted) that there is *but* one thing needful, for daily bread is needful, else he would not himself have taught us to pray for it,—but he simply says that *one thing is*

preëminently, absolutely, and eternally needful, to which all others must be secondary and subservient. He does not blame Martha—he does not blame any man or woman at this day for attending to household or business duties, but only for being anxious and worried about them, as if they were not a worthy human interest,—he does not bid Martha leave her house-work; he simply forbids her to take Mary away from the work *she* was doing at the time in another sphere, declaring that she has chosen that good part of the great work of humanity which must not be taken away from *her*:—at the same time he does unmistakably intimate that the higher world should be heard, in the very midst of life's cares and joys, to hallow and to chasten them, and that its messenger should abide with us, not, indeed, as a strange and spectral apparition coming to torment our life, but, on the contrary, as a calm friend and monitor, who would prevent us from being strangers and spectres to ourselves, from tormenting ourselves with earthly apprehensions that cast their long shadows into the unseen future, and would anchor our souls in peace to that which is within the veil.

But now, once more, is there any one, (as there doubtless are many,) who, taking only those words by themselves, “One thing is needful,” and associating them only with that pensive and receptive sister, sitting at the great Teacher's feet, concludes that *that* is the *only* good part of what is done among men, *that* is *the* one thing needful, to wait and watch for a work to be wrought mysteriously

in the soul, to attend upon the direct exercises of religion, to hear the word, to be looking and listening for a sensible influence to come and convert the heart ; and is there, perhaps, one (as it is to be feared there are also many) who carries this, or is carried by it, to such an extreme, as to be really getting farther away from the characteristic element of the Gospel, namely, its practical and philanthropic essence, while under the delusive dream of growing in grace ; is there any one who thus resolves salvation into a sanctification of selfishness, instead of a quickening of generosity, — to such a one the spirit of Christ, speaking out of the Gospel and out of the conscience, pointing back to the good Samaritan, says, “ Awake from thy dream of indolent self-indulgence and self-complacency ; go and do thou like him ; live not for thyself, but for thy brethren, and then thou livest indeed, and livest eternally, because the spirit of the Father and of the Saviour liveth in thee ; thou hast denied thy very self, thou hast emptied thyself of self, and the Lord has filled thee, and there is that built up in thee which death cannot dissolve.”

If we would read to our present and practical profit the short but most suggestive narration which Luke so felicitously (as has been said) places directly after the parable of the good Samaritan, we must consider that, inasmuch as the illustrious and holy guest, whose presence caused such a sensation in that home at Bethany, ceased long ago to be a personal partaker of human hospitality, a personal object of earthly homage, of course the “ much serv-

ing" undertaken in his honor, which the spirit of Christ deprecates, now takes other forms. The carefulness and cumbersomeness of creed-worship and ceremonial observance too often makes man forget practically what it all professes to remind him of, the one thing which is really needful, the devotion of his own mind, heart, and life to the glorification of the God who made him, and sent him into this world to serve and to save it, and so to glorify the Father by doing his will. And hence one might say that in these days, in the house of the Lord, Mary may sometimes be found cherishing, with her homage of the Saviour, a superstitious anxiety about appearing well in his presence, which is hardly more worthy of a spiritual faith in the simple and practical Gospel than was the secular anxiety of Martha herself. How true it is, as Paul said, that when the soul shall once turn to the Lord, who is a spirit, the veil (and so these veils, whether of self-love or of servility) shall be taken away, or rather shall melt away; as the mists melt before the sun, so shall these heavy mists of fear and formalism be swallowed up in the light and love of Him whose law is a law of liberty, whose countenance is a sun of righteousness. Then, instead of cumbering themselves, instead of worrying themselves and one another, with a thousand minutiae of dogma and discipline, men shall all listen to the common Master, and hear him say, that the one thing needful is not merely to do this or that act, to observe this or that rite, to believe this or that opinion, but to have the whole heart and life filled with that faith in God which must needs

be always manifesting itself in the works of God,—that love of God which will shine out steadily in the love of man, as God's child, not of man in the abstract, but of men in detail,—a charity that shall not exhaust itself in almsgiving any more than evaporate in sentimental sighs or sectarian tolerance, and that shall remember the wounds of the spirit, and seek to heal and not aggravate them, as well as the wounds of the flesh.

Behold, my friends, something, however imperfectly and feebly I have presented it, of the large idea of the life communicated by Christ Jesus! Once in his spirit, we look upward without spiritual pride, inward without morbid anxiety, outward without distraction. Between these three worlds,—the upper world of truth, the inner world of conscience, and the outer world of action,—we keep a calm position, hold on a calm course, finding all their otherwise conflicting and distracting demands to harmonize in the simplicity of a Christian faith in the Divine Omnipresence, and in the identity of all goodness.

Let our great solicitude be, in these days of eager chase and anxious inquiry in the things of religion, to get a broad and deep foundation laid within us that shall sustain a strong and steadfast character. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ; but we must remember that no man can lay this for another; each must lay it for himself, after the pattern laid down in the gospel itself. Men will be ready enough to show us how we are to lay our foundation with the single

stone of some dogma or observance; but we must come to the gospel, and humbly but honestly build for ourselves on a foundation no less broad than the truth as it is in Jesus.

The scripture which we have been studying shows forth, in the light in which we have surveyed it, a fact worthy of more attention than has hitherto been given to it,—how comprehensive and particular a thing, at once, the religion of Jesus is. How few, perhaps, of those who repeat the familiar saying, that *one thing* is needful, take so general and generous a view of the truth as it is in Jesus, as to understand and feel that that one thing is no single, specific, mysterious, passive experience of faith or feeling, but a life of love to God, manifested in the active service of truth, and goodness, and charity. The tide of true Christian zeal, then, needs not be shallow in order to be clear, nor narrow in order to be strong. If it flows from the fountain of communion with Christ himself, as presented in the gospel, it is a calm, broad, beneficent river of water of life.

There are a few conclusions and cautions which I would now, in leaving the subject with you, commend to your attention.

In the first place, let no one say that the doctrine which has now been preached is a hard doctrine; and in the second place let no one say that it is an easy one. Whoever should say either of these things, in his heart, would greatly misconceive the truth, as I have intended to represent it.

Say not in your hearts, as men did of old, “This

is a hard saying; who can hear it? This is a high achievement; who is sufficient for it?" What is it, I demand for the Gospel? Simply that it should be studied, received, and lived soberly, in the spirit of that Master who said, "This ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." I do not demand the possession of any great philosophical powers, or the putting forth of any great intellectual effort, but simply soberness of mind, steadiness of view, and justness of discernment. My doctrine does not presuppose any mighty comprehensiveness of theoretical faculty. It simply calls you to notice that the same law in nature which enspheres a universe, gives a globe-form to the drop of dew; and to reflect that this is an emblem of the truth, that the religious principle which forms the unity of Heaven, which binds all intelligent creatures to God and to each other, may be manifested, and should be manifested entire in each smallest act of our life.

On the other hand, let it not be imagined that our doctrine is too easy, as if it recommended what may be called a mere chameleon-Christianity,

"All things by turns and nothing long;"

or a mere eclectic religion, which goes about picking out what is good or agreeable in this, that, and the other human system, and so making up a patchwork-creed and method. The method I contend for is just the opposite of this. It may, indeed, be *suggested* to a thoughtful mind and sympathizing spirit, by mingling with all souls and sects and systems,

and lamenting the distractedness of the religious world ; but its remedy is no outside measure ; it does not run round on the circumference of the world of forms and opinions ; it goes right inward to find the central principle of the religion of Christ, — that principle which, once settled in the soul's faith and love, will radiate divine life outward in every direction toward the circumference of being and all the forms of existence. This central principle can be found only by entering, through meditation, study of Scripture, prayer to God, and labor for man, into the innermost mind of the Lord.

May the broad and deep faith which I have thus imperfectly delineated be ours, my friends, so that we shall not, like so many unhappy slaves of a half superstitious, half sensuous system of religion, steal through the midst of life's cares and joys as if truants from God ; that, on the contrary, we may feel ourselves to be always *in the school* of the Spirit, faithful and growing pupils of the Divine grace ; glorifying the Father in all our works and ways, by the honesty and humility of our purpose ; adorning the broad commandment, the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, by a true filial gratitude, and reverence, and charity ; and having, not merely a hope to live, still less a mere name to live, but something, and continually more, of that real and eternal life which is in the Father and in the Son.

XXV.

THE PRESENT CRISIS OF FAITH.

BY FAITH, ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED; AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT. — Heb. xi. 8.

THIS historical picture of the Father of the Faithful going forth, in obedience to the call of God, into an untried and unknown wilderness, is also an emblematic and prophetic picture of that noble army of exiles and pioneers in the world of thought, who, in every age, whether called or not to sunder the external ties of home and country, have bravely and cheerfully left the comfortable home of conformity and community in creed and worship, to follow Christ and conscience and conviction. They, too, went out, *not knowing whither they went*, into the field of inquiry; not knowing whither the Spirit of Truth would lead them; knowing *this* only,—which was enough for them to know,—that, if, with Truth, safety was not to be found, there was no safety for them; that, without faith in the Truth, the ground was hollow under their feet, but, with Truth in the inward parts, they stood on the rock of ages. The father of the Hebrew race is, in this respect, a type of our Pil-

grim Fathers, — the fathers of our political independence, — the fathers of our spiritual liberty, — and of all the pilgrims and protestants and martyrs of faith and freedom in all time. All of them have been sustained and cheered by the memory of his example, and by their faith in the promises and providence of the God of Abraham.

Nor has the day yet arrived when the remembrance of such examples is no longer needed, when the call ceases to come to us to cherish the spirit which animated these old independents, and to follow their faith. To judge by what we hear from time to time, one would think that the battle for free thought and free faith was ended; that the trumpet might be hung up in the hall, the sword restored to its scabbard, and the pilgrim soldier sing the song of peaceful commemoration. But this would be a serious mistake. It is not yet too late for us to be reminded that, to be in a minority, and a small minority, is not a symptom of our being in the wrong; it is still seasonable to remember that the kingdom of God cometh not with observation; the occasions have not all gone by, which make it wholesome to caution those who profess faith in Christ against despising the day of small things; and against the danger that ambition, to make a fair show in the flesh, will outrun anxiety to have our life hid with Christ in God. It is not superfluous nor ill-timed, at this day, to exhort one another not to be ashamed, and not to be weary of well-doing, and of hard endurance, in the precious cause of building ourselves up on a faith that shall not need the support

of imposing statistics, the sympathy of a complacent crowd; that can live upon a meat which the world knoweth not of.

It must be said, that this age is not specially a spiritual one. It is not specially an age of clear, consistent, understanding faith. A great deal is said and done, printed and preached, about this faith and that faith; there is no little stir in regard to creeds and forms; but of faith, that understands itself,—faith, as a profound, generous, independent principle, independent of all else, because dependent upon God,—of this, a thoughtful spirit finds too little in this busy, bustling age.

Faith is an inexhaustible, because an infinite theme. But in these last few weeks attention has, in a special manner, been drawn to the subject. That old word has come up again in a fresh aspect; and it may, therefore, be seasonable for us to do, what is always serviceable, namely, to reconsider what it means; to revive our convictions of what is to be received as true, and what is to be unlearned as false, and rejected as useless, burdensome, or injurious, in relation to the subject it suggests.

Hardly any who hear me can be unaware of what, since the foreign war ceased, has become to such a degree the staple, not only of religious but of secular newspapers of the day, namely, the position of what is sometimes called the Liberal, and sometimes the Unitarian denomination, in regard to religious faith in general, and Christian faith in particular. It has been asserted with great confidence, argued with great ability, and illustrated with great

felicity, that the age we live in is characterized, religiously, by a "suspense of faith." The idea has been eloquently and energetically impressed upon the popular mind, that Protestantism, particularly in the rational form held by ourselves, (who have been called "Protestants of the Protestants,") having gone over so far in the direction of individuality, independence, and informality, as to shudder at its own hardihood and at the wilderness before it, is beginning to pause, and consider whether it is not time to turn back and seek again the central ground, the safe ground, the solid ground of fixed forms and formulas.

Here are two questions : first, as to the nature of the disease, and then, as to the best mode of curing it. Perhaps, as has been said, it is easier to detect and describe the disorder, in this great religious matter, than to prescribe, clearly and wisely, a remedy for it. It seems to me, however, that in these spiritual concerns, really and rightly to conceive of the difficulty, where it lies and what it means, is one important step towards, at least, a practical, even if not yet a theoretical solution of it. There is often too great an impatience amongst us to frame theoretical solutions of problems in the life of the church, instead of awaiting, and helping work out the practical one, which we are invited to believe that a good Providence is, however slowly, as we may think, yet surely, bringing about.

This discourse will, therefore, treat chiefly of the question, what the trouble really is ; intimating, perhaps, occasionally, a negative suggestion, — how it

is *not* to be relieved, — that anxiety and effort may not be frittered away in unprofitable directions.

And if I dwell somewhat on the meaning of terms, it is because I feel that a great deal of the disagreement among us, in regard to the real trouble to be cured, grows out of loose ideas as to what we mean by certain consecrated words; and that often, when we think the only question is one of fact, there is a previous question, that scarcely gets a hearing, as to the use of language. Now, the phrase “suspense of faith” may be admitted to express, fitly enough, what is, to a great extent, the spiritual condition of the general mind at this day, not merely outside of the nominal church, but in some parts of the church, or congregation of nominal Christians itself. Only the phrase is capable of several different meanings, and, I suppose, does awaken different ideas in different minds. To one, the “suspense of faith” may mean that faith is in a state of *suspended animation*. It may suggest the image of a faith which, exhausted in the struggle with surrounding infidelity, iniquity, and indifference, gasps in the heavy atmosphere, painfully holding its breath, and panting for some inspiration from above, or some power to bear it aloft into the clear upper air. To another, the phrase may tell of a faith which, having outgrown old forms, is in a state of suspense until it can find or frame new ones, — a new dress and body for the disembodied spirit of truth and piety. To another, — looking from another point of view, or with other eyes, — “the suspense of faith” may call up the picture of a spirit only bal-

ancing itself on level wing in the sky of faith and freedom, which the vast, infinite kingdom of truth opens, and in which it only seems to be for the moment idle, when it is really bearing itself up by an almost unconscious effort, and preparing for further and higher sweeps through that element,

" Where nothing earthly bounds her flight,
Nor shadow dims her way."

In either of these, and in still other senses, according to our idea of what *faith* signifies, we might, one and another of us, readily grant that our age is marked by a *suspense* of faith. To say, that such is its *reigning characteristic*, at this or at any moment, provokes, I think, at least a suspense of judgment in a thoughtful mind; because it is not easy, and grows more and more difficult, in proportion as education makes people think, and thought makes them independent, to say what *is* the one great and common trait of that agglomeration or average of individual souls which we call an age. It is very easy to deceive ourselves, by generalizing too rapidly in the direction in which some strong feeling or vivid experience of our own may lead us, and letting the mood of our spirits color the whole field of our vision. Men, proverbially, often reason from their feelings. The wish is father to the thought, or sometimes the *fear* is. So, too, the rhetoric is often father to the logic, and a felicitous figure stands for a final argument.

It is a tempting illustration to speak of faith as having gone, in the swing of free thought, to the *apogee* of its orbit, and to say that it is about time

for it to swing back to its *perigee*, to the neighborhood of the great source of life and object of worship. But, after all, the figure is defective and deceptive, because the alternation of perigee and apogee is a constant law of the earth's movement; and so what it would really seem to teach is, that faith should be free to pass back and forth from the centre to the circumference; or, rather, that its centre, God, is everywhere; its circumference, the limit of thought, nowhere. But why not just as well, if not better, regard this apparent recession of faith as only the momentary recoil of the wave of thought and feeling, that it may gain a new impetus for moving forward, and say that the tide of truth also gains on the shore of scepticism, under the ruling power of God, by a succession of retreats and advances? Or, yet again, why might not one say that the changes of form and opinion in religion may be, after all, only the swaying of the branches of the tree of spiritual life, whereby the root of faith is but fastened the more deeply in the earth?

For myself, without professing to speak for the whole spiritual family, without denying that the same words hold true in other senses, I do, indeed, feel, and think I see, that there is a wide-spread "suspense of faith," in *this* sense, and of this kind, in Christendom around us: namely, a dissatisfaction with the forms of creed and worship in which the religion of the existing sects expresses itself; a feeling of something so inadequate, if not unjust, to the instincts of a humble, honest, humane heart, in the doctrines which undertake to describe religion,

and in the established methods of administering it, that faith is repelled and constrained to fall back upon itself, to remain self-secluded and silent, (the soul thus misinterpreting the Apostolic injunction, "Hast thou faith, *have it to thyself* before God,") till, at last it sinks into a sort of quietism and apathy, lying for the time dead or dormant, — unless (which, indeed, happily, is often the case) the native piety of the heart, unable to confine itself within the narrow conduits or cisterns which a church of tradition offers it, pours the warm tide of its energy into the broad channel of humanity, finds in the world its church, resolves divine service into daily cheerfulness and charity, feeling itself to be sustained therein by the words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

The present suspense of faith, then, so far as it may be called so, seems to me owing, in no small degree, to the fact that the Providential cultivation and civilization of the heart of man in the school of life has brought it to a point which the Christianity of the creed and the church has for the most part failed to reach, and hence a chasm in the inner life, at which the spirit of the age stops, in a state which may be called, indeed, in some sense, a suspense of faith, though, I think, a more fitting description of the crisis would be, to call it a *transitional struggle* of faith, of a faith which has outgrown the walls of old dogmatism and the ways of old discipline, and yearns to build itself a new home on the rock of ages, with its roof the free

heaven, and its ministers the thoughts and aspirations of believing, loving hearts.

I know there are those who make the names of liberty and charity a cloak for mental indolence, moral indifference, and self-indulgence; but, making all due allowance for such cases, I still hold that there is a great deal, far more than the nominal church recognizes, not only of the capacity, but of the disposition to believe and be religious, which does itself violence, or disguises itself in forms not reckoned specifically religious; and that thus, for the simple reason that neither we who judge the age, nor the age we judge, rightly estimate the essence and end of faith, men often pronounce faith to be asleep precisely when and where, perhaps, the real spirit of faith is in active conflict. I believe that, when we once have fixed within us a clear and consistent idea what faith is, we shall cherish more cheerful and charitable views of the condition and prospects of the age in the matter of faith and true religion, as an inward work of the spirit and a general effort of the principle out of which grows the higher life of man.

What is faith? What is the meaning of this much used and much abused word? It is used in three senses, only one of which goes to the heart of the truth.

In the first place, faith is familiarly spoken of as an opinion or a doctrine. In this sense we talk of the Christian faith and the Jewish faith, — the Trinitarian faith and the Unitarian faith, — commonly confounding, when we do so, the internal principle

with the external system. For we do not mean, in such cases, the believing spirit in the Christian or the Jew, or the Trinitarian or the Unitarian, but the things which they severally believe. This is the sense in which faith is generally made the subject of discussion in the world. This is the sense in which we talk of "*our* faith." This is the sense in which, for the most part, men try to convert each other to their respective faiths, and in which they are said to go over from one faith to another. Faith, thus thought of, or talked of, is merely a *thing*, often ; and a dead thing, too.

There is a second use of the word, in which, indeed, the mind passes inward, conceiving of faith as a spiritual thing, but still as something suddenly and mysteriously introduced into the soul from a foreign source. This is the sense in which theologians talk of faith as something at war with reason ; in which we are told that we shall receive self-contradictory doctrines, when we have faith given to us by the mysterious agency of the Lord.

The third and true sense of the word is that which reason and revelation conspire to inculcate, according to which faith is simply the state of a soul recognizing, revering, relying on the great unseen reality which lies at the foundation of all being, the all-pervading, all-sustaining God. We must not hastily infer that faith is wanting, or wavering, from the fact that we find it so hard to get people to agree in expressing truth by the same form of words, or in expressing piety by the same form of worship. The fact that men are dissatisfied with any prev-

alent or proposed method of stating or showing religion by creed or ceremony, may, after all, prove that they have more faith rather than less, when you once come to the recognition of the truth that faith is that in a man which yearns after what is infinite, what no form or formula can express.

Faith is a quality to be educated, — to be *educated* from the soul itself. Why is it that the Scriptures, when they speak of faith, in so large a proportion of cases say, simply, *faith*, without specifying any particular being, or object, or truth, wherein that faith is to be placed, — just as they also do when they speak of hope and love? Several reasons might be given, but *this* is the one which most impresses my own mind, that the Spirit of Truth would thereby lead us to reflect that what we need first and chiefly, what must lie at the very foundation of religion, is the great principle, or sentiment of faith itself. Before we can have a vital and effectual faith in any truth out of ourselves, we must have faith in *ourselves* as actually needing and as capable of knowing the truth. We must believe that which is written, and believe it as applying to our own selves, that man shall not live by bread only, but by the word that cometh from the mouth of God shall man truly and eternally live. Before we can have a living and working faith in any doctrine of God, or Christ as the messenger of God, or Heaven as the kingdom of God and the seat of his laws and the source of his retributions, we must have faith in our own reason and conscience, and in all those holy sentiments which are the presence and power and purity

of God stirring within us. In a word we must have the believing spirit, — that is, the religious spirit, — alive and awake within us. How much has *that* form of faith been wanting, both in the scorers of reason and in the abusers of it, which consists in recognizing reason in man as a religious faculty and responsibility !

If we have faith in God, we shall show it by faith in the faculties he has intrusted to us, in the high and holy instincts which are his inspiration, and whose clear, majestic voices are the voice of God. We shall have faith in the value of truth, the safety of right, the power of love. We shall have faith that what ought to be can be and will be ; faith that (as has been nobly said) the heavens *will not* fall, if justice is done ; that, on the contrary, they will (or would, if it were possible,) stand stronger. And we are without faith, we are infidels and atheists, when we treat moral and religious truth as a shining abstraction or a sounding generality ; — yea, we have denied the faith and are worse than infidels, whatever be our professed or fancied creed, when we thus do despite to the Holy Spirit.

Faith, while, from one point of view, we may regard it as simply the beginning and root of religion, in another aspect, presents itself as the whole of religion, of spirituality, of piety, of right character. In a word, faith, according to the favorite view of the sacred writers, means as much as faithfulness. So that, although the authors of our common version have, strictly speaking, translated incorrectly by the phrase “ faithful Abraham,” what means literally

“believing Abraham,” yet it is one of those mistakes which direct us to a valuable truth. It reminds us that whoever is full of faith is and will be a *faithful* man; that belief is the evidence and the essence of obedience. Faith is sometimes, indeed, treated, in Scripture, as simply an intellectual act or experience, but in the vast majority of cases, as a matter of affection and will. Hence it is that men are so often *exhorted* and *commanded* to have faith.

The reason why, in our popular speech, and that greatly through the influence of scripture usage, this word faith has come to be used in such a variety of applications, is, that faith is really equivalent to religion, which means the allegiance of the soul to God, who, not in one form of manifestation only, but in the manifold appeals of truth, and beauty, and goodness, and good, seeks to draw his children to the contemplation and communion of his infinite perfections.

Faith begins, indeed, with a simple conviction of the mind. In order to have faith in God, we must first believe in his existence. “He that cometh to God, must believe that He is.” But faith is not complete, till it not only believes that there is a God, but *believes God*, and believes in Him. Faith in Him means reliance on his word, confidence in his wisdom and goodness, trust in his providence, joy in the light of his love, constant, cheerful, and implicit obedience to his commandment. Here is a glimpse of the great Tree of Faith, the Tree of Life, which springs from the seed of thought, and whose shade is for the refreshment, its fruit for the nourishment, and its leaves for the healing of the nations.

With this view of faith, instead of asking whether or not there is a *suspense* of it, would it not be more pertinent to consider whether it has *begun* to live and move and have its being within us, — whether the spirit of that Master who, when his disciples besought him to *increase* their faith, virtually replied that if they *had* any faith to increase, even as a grain of mustard seed, it would increase itself, — is not now going up and down anxiously to find faith on the earth? May it not, after all, well be, that to talk only of a *suspense* of faith, and that only in one branch of the church, is really, when you take into view the grand ideal of faith, but a feeble statement of the actual case?

And now, lest it should be felt by any that this great subject has been treated too exclusively in the way of argument or criticism, let us dwell, a few moments, on the positive, evangelical doctrine of faith, as it appeals to the whole man, from the pen of Paul. Nor will such a presentment be a digression here, even from the somewhat special turn the general subject has taken; for I can hardly suppose there is one of us, who can, even at this late day, return to the study of the subject without a new feeling of gratitude and of responsibility, in view of the great truth that the law of faith, as declared by the spirit of Christ, is a law of freedom.

Behold, then, the method of the great deliverance offered in the Gospel of Christ. Distinguishing itself in this by a broad contrast from the various ideas of religion which set before a man the dreary prospect of having to buy the favor of Heaven by a certain (or rather an uncertain) amount of works,

penances, and sacrifices, the religion of the Gospel, by simply announcing to man that all he has to do is to believe in God, and let God work in him and for him, — that when he once has this spirit, this faith, all his doings, all his life, outer and inner, becomes an acceptable divine service and a process of salvation, — by this simple, comprehensive, and beautiful assurance, Christianity delivers man, who would otherwise be all his lifetime subject unto bondage, from the dismal drudgery of the law of works which is a law of death, redeems him into the glorious liberty of the law of the Spirit, which is a law of life, transforms religion from being a mere restraint into a beckoning and quickening presence, and makes man, the conscious child of God, to be no longer a slave, but a son. Until the sunlight of the true religion shines, while he remains in the darkness or in the twilight of superstition, with a belief half sensual and only half spiritual, a man asks not so much *What* shall I do? but rather, *How much* must I do? Not merely the nature, but more especially the *number* of services and sacrifices required of him as an advance payment for salvation, exercises and torments his mind, and divides the wholeness of his life and joy. His dim and doubting eyes behold that vague object, called salvation, that something of which he so strongly feels the want, yet so feebly discerns the outlines, only at the end of an indefinite succession of dead works. Life becomes a sandy desert, and the cry of the soul is,

“ Here, forlorn and lost, I tread,
With fainting steps and slow,

Where wilds, immeasurably spread,
Seem lengthening as I go."

Religion, with such an idea, becomes not only an endless, but a hopeless task, like an attempt to bail dry the ocean, or to reckon eternity. But the moment the sun of Christian righteousness, of God's gracious way, shines upon the earthly pilgrim's heart, and reveals to him that, not the external which can be measured, but the internal which is infinite, not the outer work, but the inner spirit, not human merit, but divine mercy, is the source and ground of salvation, — from that moment he finds the peace of mind, the rest of faith, in which alone the work of religion, being the work of life, and expressing the whole heart, carries with it an earnest of success and of heaven. He is lifted to a central mount of vision, from which he sees, in the light of the gospel, that salvation, the deliverance which the gospel came to reveal and bring about, is not merely the end, but the beginning, as well, of a life of religious effort; not the future reward, merely, but the present and perpetual inspiration of the laboring soul. Instead of being the oppressive obligation of giving something to God or doing something for Him, religion is discovered to be simply the willingness to receive God himself into the soul, and let Him do and be all.

Do we not need this religion, this blessed indwelling of the Law of Faith in our hearts, in this anxious and ambitious age of ours? Instead of being over-careful to strengthen our battlements and draw our lines of circumvallation, instead of looking

so much at the outworks, and numbering our forces, (as David was provoked into numbering Israel,) to see what kind of a show we can make in the flesh, were it not better to be looking to our foundations, knowing what manner of spirit we are of, and proving our faith, whether it has the breadth and depth of the requirements of the spirit of Christ? Instead of worrying ourselves to know who does and who does not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, in a sense and shape that may be called orthodox, were it not better to consider whether we truly believe *in* Jesus; whether (which is the most searching form of the question) we believe *him*, what he teaches about our life, our relations to God our Father, and to our brother man?

Let us not be as those who doubt that an Almighty and All-wise Providence is at the helm. Let us not sleep, indeed, but neither let us feel as if the Lord were sleeping, and knew not when it was time to awake. The work we have to do is too great to be discomposed by such fitful apprehensions as we are too apt to let interfere with the simplicity of a Christian faith and walk. Let us labor to have faith, and let us seek faith that our work may be a joy, and not a distraction and a burden.

I know it will be said (this, indeed, is the meaning of the existing agitation on the subject) that the very question is, how *are* we to get this faith, which all must feel is so important to their real peace. But does not the very form the question takes, how *are we* to be set right, how is faith to be revived *amongst* us, in the community, in the churches, —

tend to lead us off from the true track? Do we feel that the appeal of the Spirit is to individual souls? Do we not indulge the daydream, that there may be a social waking, independent of individual self-consideration? There is much talk about forms. But, after all, it is for faith to create or reanimate forms; not the reverse. Every one must begin with himself; and if he does so thoughtfully, it is impossible that he should end there. I believe, what would do more than anything else to attract new interest to the few social services of our religion, is a turning of individual minds to the simplicity of an independent faith. Each must do his own part, without waiting for all to begin at once. It is a great mistake, and yet I fear a common one, on the part of those who count the preaching of independence a "sad cure" for the age, to imagine that, because we say a man must live *from* himself, we imply that he must live *for* himself. We simply say, every one must begin with what faith he has,—for every one believes in something. Let every one be true to himself. Let every one understand himself, and seek to know "the mind of the Spirit" that, in his better moments, in the intervals of calm thought, stirs within him. I believe, whoever shall do this will find a conviction spring up, that God is truth and loves truth; I believe he will then be ready to hear the voice of Christ, and follow the Good Shepherd.

The last thing this age has to fear is too much of individual and independent thought. If we have not so earnest and effective a church union, not so much Christian coöperation as we need,

it is because, as individuals, we have waited for a general life to spring up, or come down out of heaven, and make us partakers of itself, instead of recognizing that a true Christian bond is woven of the strands of individual faith and faithfulness, the faith growing out of earnest thought, and the fervor growing out of earnest faith. The melting of many souls in the glow of a common faith and charity is to be effected, not by fires kindled on the outside, still less by painted fires, but by the heat communicated from each individual soul out of its communion with God. When each is in Him, who dwells in all, then, and only then, is there a true, spiritual, living church unity.

Have we to *wait* for the Broad Church? It is already at hand, waiting for us, — a church as broad as humanity, with a service as large and as long as life. We can best aid the cause of faith, not by swelling the cry for new forms, or new stress on old ones, — the great trouble has been, in past times, that faith has had to feed too much on the mere husks of formalism and formulism, and too little on the juices of natural sentiment and vital action; — no; it is not in any such set and methodical manner, through the adoption of artificial and arbitrary symbols of a ritual religion, that we can render the most efficient service to the wavering and struggling faith of the age; but by steadily carrying real religion, the religiousness of a truthful simplicity, into all the common intercourse of life; living out the conviction that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin;” preaching, by the practical eloquence of example, that sincerity is

salvation; recommending, in that persuasive way, the devout reverence our own walk and spirit shall show, for that wholeness of life by which the indwelling of a real religious faith is most clearly evinced.

Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, tells them that the saving grace of God in the Gospel is "from faith to faith." And does not this striking expression happily describe the providential progress of humanity, not only in the mass, but very extensively in the individual,—a progress from faith, through doubt and discontent, to faith again, higher and purer, and more enduring? Let us hope that our present "suspense of faith" is a progress of this kind; that we are passing from the faith of childhood to that of manhood; from the faith of fear to the faith which worketh by love; from the faith of superstition to the faith of reason; from the faith which finds God only in the strange and exceptional, to that which finds him, or rather has him, in what is familiar and universal.

THE END.



437 B





