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THIS ONE THING I DO.

A

CALL TO CHRISTIAN EARNESTNESS
ADDRESSED TO NEW DISCIPLES.

Mrs. Sarah J. ...

“I count not myself to have apprehended: but THIS ONE THING I DO. * * * I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—PHILIPPIANS iii. 13, 14.

“I tell thee, if thou wilt observe but THIS ONE THING for thy soul, I make no doubt of thy salvation. Shake off thy sloth and put to all thy strength and be a Christian indeed: I know not then what can hinder thy happiness. But * * * * if thou loiter when thou shouldst labor, thou wilt lose the crown.”—SAINT’S REST.

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PREFACE.

THE reader of the following pages will find a slightly varied repetition of familiar and thoroughly discussed truths. Yet the writer believes that, though there is neither novelty in the subject nor obvious peculiarity in the mode of treating it, the little book will not altogether fail to promote inquiry, illustrate truth, and define duty. "Each messenger," says a late eminent divine, "has some peculiarity in his way of influence; and every man who thinks long and deeply upon the plan of grace has certain views which he cherishes with delight and in which he strongly desires that others may participate. Even truths as old as Christianity itself strike him in such a way that he flatters

himself he can bring them home with a kindred freshness to his neighbors and brethren." If, by an individual mode of considering an important question, some degree of clearness and precision has in one case been attained, it seems natural to apply to other minds the same process, and reasonable to expect a similar result. There are many in the Christian community who, owing to youth, to manner of education and conversion, to habits of superficial thought, and, especially, to the undue predominance in the present day of active over contemplative religion, have never comprehended their position nor duly estimated their engagements. When, heretofore, the writer's attention was directed to the import and obligations of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, she became sensible of the insufficiency of general religious reading and reflection, and perceived a probable advantage from arranging for herself, in relation to this subject, some simple form or system of opinion and meditation.

In her search after truth, she found much requisite information and many valuable directions; but the precious ore and shining metal seemed to need the coinage of her own brain and the touchstone of her experience before they could become available to her purpose and sufficient for her wants. She was thus first prompted to write in a private record some portion of what here appears as preparation for the Communion, and afterward found interest in amplifying the subject until it reached a shape in which she hopes it will not be deemed inappropriate to publication nor prove serviceable only to herself.

January, 1860.

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THIS ONE THING I DO.

EARNESTNESS in the pursuit of an object is the surest pledge of its attainment. Involving faith in the value of the thing sought, it gives diligence and perseverance to effort, and often compensates for defect of strength and lack of means. Especially is this true in reference to the religious life. The Christian is to strive for the prize of the high calling which is in Christ Jesus, is to follow after that holiness which is at once the condition and evidence of his acceptance with God. On the character of his first convictions and

purposes his after-course will in a great measure depend, and in proportion to his standard of Christian excellence will be his progress in grace and his advance in the divine life. According to his sense of sinfulness, of gratitude to his Redeemer, of desire to evince by his life the sincerity of his repentance, will, in general, his self-surrender be complete and his holy desires abiding. With low and unworthy aims and views, he can rarely be other than a feeble, wavering Christian, if indeed he be a Christian at all; and, after having faithfully sought the answer to the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" he can scarcely fail to obtain a more perfect acquaintance with self and a clearer insight into the will of God,—to know and do which constitutes the whole of human duty.

It is this sense of the importance of earnest thought and action in the commencement of a religious life which has led us to consider particularly the first duty of a Christian as such,—the act by which he assumes the name and obligations of a follower of Jesus Christ,—and to endeavor, in describing the preparation for partaking of the Lord's Supper and the right use of prayer and the study of the Scriptures, as the main helps to holy living, to trace an outline of what we deem should be a Christian's walk and conversation. With the commemoration of the death of his Saviour, the religious life of the professing Christian begins; and perhaps no portion of his duty has been more ably discussed or more fully enforced. In our Protestant age and country, there is less danger of ignorance or misapprehension

on this point than on almost any other. Still, it may be of use to attempt to elicit from the mass of what has been written, the simplest form of doctrinal truth and the most profitable suggestions for practice. As minds vary, so will religious experience vary; and often that which will be most valuable in one case should in another occupy a less prominent position, and may indeed be altogether unnecessary and irrelevant. But in the ordinance designed to be the bond of union and the pledge of obedience to Christ, there are general considerations adapted to each understanding, and general directions which cannot fail to secure to the sincere inquirer the desired benefit. To such a one, if this little book should meet his eye, we would address the word in season, hoping, in considering this sub-

ject, to propose nothing calculated to perplex and oppress his mind, but to offer to him that only which he can readily embrace, easily recall, and advantageously practise.

Let us first briefly review the history of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

Our Saviour, knowing that the time of his departure was at hand, and that the great sacrifice must soon be accomplished which would at once close his ministry on earth, separate him from his dependent followers, and exalt him to be their advocate and intercessor in heaven, "the same night in which he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup when he had supped, say-

ing, This cup is the new testament in my blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." The apostle adds, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." So far as we can learn from this narration and from the early history of the church, this was regarded as a perfectly simple transaction,—a direction to refer at certain periods to the Saviour of mankind, and to keep ever, through all time, in all subsequent states of the church, "till he come," the recollection of his life and death by means of this visible observance. It was during the commemoration of the Jewish passover that Jesus Christ gave this command to his disciples. To their minds, then directed to the typical deliverance of their nation from bondage and death, and to the

shedding of blood as their salvation and hope, this reference to the predicted sufferings and death of their Master, the true Paschal Lamb, the end of the law, the thing signified in all their ceremonies, must have presented itself with peculiar force.

To the Christian church, since the days of the apostles, the obligation to this commemoration of the Saviour is his command; the virtue of it, that it is an act of love, of faith, of gratitude, of self-consecration to Him who requires these exercises of our minds, and without them will not bestow the blessings of pardon and eternal life. It is also the sign of the Christian church,—that by which it declares its Master to be Christ, its Head, the crucified Redeemer of the world. Christians, therefore, from that period until now, have obeyed

the dying command of their Lord, and from time to time have united in a feast which has thus become the bond of their union and the token of their obedience to Christ. To constitute a fitness for it, there is nothing requisite but faith in him, repentance for sin, and a consequent purpose to lead a holy life. In our day this memorial of the Saviour has been described as a mystery and a sacrifice. But surely in no sense can either of these terms be appropriate, and the use of them confuses and darkens a subject than which none in revealed truth is simpler and more manifest. We believe that much of the hesitation and fear often felt by those who desire to make a public profession of faith in Christ arises from some such false view of this ordinance and from

imperfect examination of its history and import.

He who wishes to unite himself to the church of Christ should ask, Do I believe in my Saviour? Does my faith influence not only my intellect but my heart, inclining it to embrace the gospel scheme of redemption and to submit to its terms of pardon? Do I feel true repentance for my sins, not only for single offences which out of the multitude of the past may stand forth pre-eminent, but repentance for "the inward principle of contrariety to the law of God," for the continual proneness to evil, for that other law in my members ever warring against the law of my mind? Do I purpose to lead a holy life, and is it my most earnest desire to do the will of my Maker, to honor his cause and to glorify his name? Who-

ever can before God and his conscience faithfully answer these questions, may come with confidence, though with humility, and receive the emblems of his Saviour's body and blood. Still, it is most needful that sufficient evidence be furnished that this is indeed the state of the heart. Many, it is true, hesitate without cause; but we hold—though in opposition to some writers on this subject—that the communion of the body and blood of Christ, though unquestionably a means of grace, is not solely or primarily such. It marks a position already attained, it states a fact, it supposes the partaker to have already chosen whom he will serve and on what side he will stand. Something of grace and of the work of the Spirit must then be perceptible in the life of him who enrols himself in the Christian ranks.

If he expects to wage a conflict with sin and Satan, he must see to it first that he has his weapons, and that they are tempered for the strife. The assurance of hope, the certainty of being in a state of reconciliation with God and of having become the subject of his grace, are not possessed and enjoyed by every believer; nor is any such confidence, however much it may comfort and elevate, essential to conversion or a necessary condition of acceptance with our Maker. But he who designs to connect himself with the visible church of Christ must have the consciousness of his sinfulness and the desire for holiness so far developed as to have induced, by the influence of the Spirit, some degree of repentance for the one, and of faith in Christ as the means of obtaining the other. These

internal principles cannot exist without their outward expression. They must lead to the state of heart and the mode of life which the Bible describes and enjoins. This conformity to the law of God is not the less real because it may vary from circumstances of education, temperament, position, health, and belief. Neither should its existence be doubted because it is not at all times equally discernible in the life of the penitent who desires yet hesitates to call himself by the name of Christ. His experience so far has been, and, we can tell him, will continue more or less to be one of grievous sins, sad declensions, frequent coldness, and, perhaps, unbelief. But if he can through this darkness see the faintest spark of desire after God and holiness, if he earnestly seeks to be delivered from sin,—not

merely from its consequences, but from sin itself,—if he honors the name and day of God, loves his people, feeds his poor, and frequents his house, then may he take heart and come forward to his Master's table, there to declare his devotion to him and to unite with Christians in celebrating the love which will accomplish their redemption.

By all who recognise the ordinance of the Lord's Supper it is admitted that a special preparation is ordinarily essential to its worthy and profitable reception. The teaching of Scripture is explicit on this point:—"Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith." "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup; for if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged;"—and it is believed that in proportion to the careful-

ness of the preparation is the benefit accruing and the comfort enjoyed. The work of the heart is not, it is true, dependent on set times or serial exercises. It may be, and doubtless often is, as fully accomplished in moments as in hours. Such, however, is not generally the mode of the Spirit's dealing with us; and, free and boundless as is God's mercy, he will still be inquired of in the bestowment of his blessings. His word declares what our experience confirms,—that here, also, we must walk in the appointed way, must ask if we would obtain, seek if we would find, and be willing to give an undivided attention to the consideration of this solemn act of faith and love if we truly desire communion with Christ and fellowship with his disciples. The heart is by nature so sluggish, so averse from holy thoughts

and spiritual exercises, it so shrinks from groping in its own darkness and tracing the windings and doublings of its own deceitfulness, that, unless constrained by repeated efforts, it will relax in vigilance and become satisfied with a formal and imperfect self-examination. It will also in almost every instance be found that, however weak the sense of sin and self-abasement, it will strengthen by meditation, and the breath of prayer will kindle within us what were before the dying embers of faith and love.

Give yourself, then, young or unthinking disciple of Christ, in earnest to this work. Leave not to the latest period that consideration which you dare not altogether neglect, but which is unwelcome and painful to you. Restrain the demands of society, and, as far as possible, of business, upon your

time. Put your mind in a posture of thoughtfulness, of prayer, and of self-examination. If not at other times, at least *now* when you are about to engage in one of the most solemn acts of your spiritual life, give yourself up to direct communion with your God, to remembrance of your Saviour, to supplications to the Holy Spirit for aid in all the parts of your duty, for strength to resist the adversary of your soul, who would tempt you to unbelief, to wandering and lightness of mind, to hardness and indifference of heart.

You have very much to ponder;—the prevailing state of your spiritual concerns,—the particular sins to which peculiar circumstances and temptations have inclined you,—the besetting sins against which is your hardest struggle and which have either been successfully

combated, or, obtaining the mastery, have rendered you feebler than before. You have to ask what is your repentance for thrice-multiplied transgressions against the law and love of God. Is it *repentance*,—a grieving for and a turning from the sin? Is it, with sorrow for the offence, an earnest purpose of a new obedience? Do you view with loathing and self-abhorrence the desperate wickedness of your heart and the evil of your life? Or if, in the providence of God, you have been kept from gross sins, if by natural temperament you are not susceptible of strong emotion, and cannot bring yourself to feel the keen anguish and remorse that the sense of sin occasions to others, still do you entertain a clear conviction of having offended God? Do you consider sin as hateful in itself as well as awful in its

consequences? Do you feel a positive, if not overwhelming regret for your past misdeeds?

What is the character of your *faith* in Christ? Have you accepted him as your Redeemer, and are you continually trusting to him for salvation? Do you view him in his human nature as your friend, your elder Brother, your counsellor, your guide, your comforter? Have you discerned the loveliness of his unequalled character? Have you felt his tenderness? Have the tears he shed over Lazarus seemed again to flow for you *dead* in trespasses and sins? Has that look which fell on Peter seemed at times to rest on you and rebuke you for your faithlessness and indifference? Peter denied his Saviour thrice; but you, who went not up amid the fury and tumult of a mob to the judgment-hall,

you, who have now learned the triumph of his death and the wonder of his resurrection,—how often have *you* denied him? In his divine nature, do you view Jesus Christ as the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, the Creator of worlds, the Judge of men? Is he equally with the Father the object of your praise, and do you exalt him in your heart as one with the Father, God over all, blessed forever?

You have also to recall your conduct and examine your feelings toward your fellow-men. If you have enemies, are they such without fault of yours,—or with strenuous efforts on your part to repair whatever injury you have done, to forgive every injury you have suffered, joined to a willingness to return good for the evil received? How

have you performed your duties to your family, your friends, your neighbors, and your country?

If a husband or a wife, how have you acted in this tenderest and closest of human relations? Have you been faithful to your pledges and to vows made before God and recorded in his book? Have you loved and honored, cherished and clung to, the companion of your life? or, at least, have you been kind and tender-hearted, forbearing and forgiving, and has this been not your occasional but your habitual practice? Have you been self-denying and patient, not only in the emergencies, but in the ordinary trials and anxieties, of your condition? You could perhaps have found strength to forgive and meekly endure exaggerated offences and gross wrong. Have you, in like manner, for-

given and endured, not sullenly or sternly, but with gentleness and tenderness, the petulance, suspicion, and distrust which without cause may have wrung your spirit and marred your peace? Especially, have you sought the spiritual advancement and eternal salvation of the partner of your bosom? Have you prayed and striven that you might be joined not only in the flesh but in the love and service of God, that you might be one in Christ, one in hope and aim, and one at last in heaven?

If you are a parent, have you asked for your children what Solomon desired chiefly for himself,—not riches or honors, but the only true wisdom? Have you early and uniformly purposed, with Hannah, that you will lend these children unto the Lord, that “as long as they live they shall be lent unto the

Lord"? Have you ever tried to measure the length and breadth of your duty to them? Pause, now, and look at it for a moment. Your helpless, innocent, unconscious children, who can now look to you alone for temporal and spiritual good, who must lean on you—alas! it may be a broken reed—until their eyes are strong to discern and their feet to tread the right path, whose tempers are to be moulded to gentleness and Christian meekness, whose minds are to be directed to whatsoever things are true and pure and lovely, who are to be led away from contemplating the dross of this world to perceive and value the pure gold which adorns the everlasting temple of God, into whose open, thirsting minds are to be carefully, constantly *instilled*—yea, poured, drop by drop—lessons of that wisdom which

only can secure to them salvation;—oh, who is to be faithful to them in these things! Pray, parent, for them, and pray for yourself, that a God of mercy may not let you lie down on a dying bed conscious that you have utterly come short in all. Ask him to direct you and aid you to keep ever before your mind that these are immortal souls committed to your charge, and that it will perhaps depend on you, in his mysterious dealings, whether they are to dwell forever with the damned, or to rise to light and holiness and bliss.

In your intercourse with the world, is it your endeavor to lead the life and show the spirit of a Christian; and, whatever be your time, influence, talents, and attainments, do you use them for the furtherance of the interests of religion? Is it the office of your tongue

in season to instruct, to warn, to exhort, and to convey to other minds sound opinions, pure sentiments, and the most decided testimony to the truth and power of the religion of the Bible?

Lastly, if you have already become a member of the church of Christ, what has been your position there? Have you added one to its number, but nothing to its strength? Have you been the unfruitful tree which hath cumbered the ground and hindered the growth of other plants in the vineyard of the Lord? Has the light and heat of ordinances been shed on you in vain, and has the breath of prayer in God's house been in vain wafted over your soul and failed to bring forth the fair blossoms of Christian love and hope, the fruits of Christian righteousness and usefulness? Or have you perceived that

the end of your faith is not simply to secure your own salvation, but to glorify God and to honor your Saviour by extending his cause, co-operating in his work, and conforming to his will?

Such is a somewhat extended outline of the duty of self-examination; and it is to be filled up with whatever arises from individual or peculiar obligations, temptations, and capabilities.

Another means of preparation for the Lord's Supper is *meditation* upon his life, sufferings, and death, the wonderful love which induced his sacrifice, and the glory of his reappearing. Indeed, this is the subject which should pre-eminently engage our attention. "Jesus Christ and him crucified" should be at such a time the chief theme of our reflections,—a theme from which not even our unworthiness, repentance, or any

other topic connected with the occasion, should long distract us. We should aim at exercising such faith and trust in him as that, when pressed down by a sense of sin, by doubts of our perseverance, and by despairing views of our weakness and the strength of our spiritual adversary, we may look to the cross, and, there beholding the full atonement for all sin and recalling the precious benefits and pledges afforded us by this perfect satisfaction of our Redeemer, may overcome every doubt and fear, and draw supplies of strength and hope from the contemplation of his boundless love and unfailing mercy. Chiefly, therefore, should you dwell on the great work of Christ and his ability to save. Your soul will thus be filled with awe and tenderness in view of his amazing sufferings, with gratitude and admiration, and with ear-

nest desire to appropriate the blessings of his death. Remembering your past omissions, yea, carefully recalling them and striving for a due sense of shame and sorrow, you will, in view of that perfect purity and that infinite compassion for your infirmities, the more earnestly form purposes of amendment, and this not in your own strength, but fervently supplicating the influence of the Holy Spirit.

But self-examination and meditation on the character and work of Christ will be insufficient to your preparation for the solemn ordinance which you design to observe, if you add not to them humble, fervent, believing *prayer*. At no time, perhaps, can you offer your supplications at the throne of grace with greater hope of their being heard and answered. If you have faithfully pur-

sued the course that has been indicated, you have, as a natural result, obtained clearer views of your lost condition, of your inability to regain the forfeited favor of your God, and an almost despairing sense of your proneness to evil and of your feebleness to oppose the attacks of the great enemy of your soul. If your meditations have been blessed by the influence of the Holy Spirit which you have invoked, you have a more perfect apprehension of the worth and mercy of the sacrifice which the Son of God has made for you, of the spotless purity of his human and of the glorious majesty of his divine nature. He has appeared infinitely precious to your soul, so that you could cling to him as your Master and Lord, and desire no other attainment than to be "like him," no other portion than to be

“forever with the Lord,”—a partaker alike of his nature and his glory. You have for once felt some longing to be done with the sin as well as the misery of your state,—to bid adieu to every doubt, regret, and fear,—to serve without imperfection or distraction that Saviour whose claim to your gratitude and love is lasting as eternity,—to bask in the light of that uncreated sun whose far-reaching beams reveal in the fair works of the heavenly world no stain or deformity, but only truth, order, and beauty to your bewildered intellect, and purity and peace to your longing and wearied heart. You have in these contemplations so refreshed and strengthened your soul that it has ranged with ever-new delight from each manifestation of the Saviour’s perfection to his promises of pardon, from the holiness

of the law to the satisfaction of the atonement; and to you have perhaps been granted those "permitted moments of exultation through faith when we cease to feel our own emptiness save as a capacity for our Redeemer's fulness." What more fitting, then, than that at such a time you should seek direct and personal communion with Him who has been the glorious and inexhaustible theme of your meditation, and that, when you have reason to think he has graciously visited your soul and afforded it some clearer view of his perfection, you should, with increased humility, faith, fervor, and hope, bring unto him the offering of your praise and plead for forgiveness and eternal life? Sensible how feeble are even the strongest motions of your soul toward him, how dim your brightest views, and how imperfect

your best apprehensions of his presence and character, you will pour out your heart in supplications for the especial aid of the Holy Spirit to enable you to obtain a more full conception of the great scheme of redemption, of its sublime commencement, its wonderful prosecution, and its stupendous accomplishment. You will ask the same gracious influence, that your heart may be deeply affected by the remembrance of the sorrowful life and agonizing death of Him who showed such love to your soul that he left the glory and bliss of heaven that he might provide the means for its salvation, and, *if possible*, induce you to adopt them.

From supplications like these you will rise prepared to go, not with doubting and trembling, but with confidence, yea, joy, to that feast spread out for

you, and you will experience what we believe is not merely the desirable, but the only suitable state of feeling when partaking of the memorials of our Saviour's death. Humble you will feel yourself to be, deeply self-abased, even as after the commission of some heinous sin; but, unlike that humility, your present prostration of spirit will be unaccompanied by bitterness and degradation. Self and sin will almost be lost sight of in the contemplation of an infinitely lovely Saviour, in transporting views of the freeness and sufficiency of the salvation he has worked out for you, in exulting anticipation of his second coming, when you shall taste with him that "new wine,"—the blessings of redemption,—and, freed forever from sin and sorrow, shall have perfect and eternal scope for the highest exer-

cise of your gratitude and love to this blessed Lord and Master. *Self* and *sin!*—what have you now in these favored moments to do with them? Has not the one been devoted to your Redeemer, consecrated to him for time and for eternity, and will he refuse the offering he died to secure? “Will he lead thee to death who died to save thee from it?” *Sin!*—has it not been abhorred, repented of, renounced? Has not He who is faithful pronounced that it shall not have lasting dominion over you? What more can you ask? No: your communion is *now* to be with your Redeemer, and his matchless condescension the theme of your reflections. You are to catch some rays from the glory of his countenance, to rejoice for a season in his smile, and to hear the gracious tones of his voice speaking

peace to your soul with the precious and eternal words, "I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also. I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

But, like Moses, we must leave our mount of vision and blest meditation and return to the cares and duties which too often hide heaven from our eyes and attract so long our gaze that it cannot return to the prospect that had cheered and strengthened us. Here indeed is the problem of Christian life; here the rock on which so many split; here the darkness through which so many grope, and, alas! never learn to direct their eyes to the light. How can

we reconcile the earthly walk to the heavenly mind? How are we, being of the earth, earthy, to fulfil the lawful requirements of this our nature,—to eat and drink, to love and rejoice, to labor and repose,—and yet live in heart and mind in that heaven whither we would go, and habitually value the objects of faith and hope far beyond those of sense and sight? This is the lifelong perplexity of almost every Christian. Even though theoretically he may have removed the difficulty, practically it is ever renewed till death translates him to a state where his nature is no more subjected to adverse and debasing influences. And yet, on right views of this subject, on persevering efforts and constant direction of the mind to the truth, depends most of Christian attainment and perhaps all of Christian com-

fort. We complain of drawbacks, of want of peace, of broken resolutions, of misspent time and misused influence, of inability to make any advance in the divine life, of coldness in prayer and ever-wandering thoughts in the house of God; and, if a careful review be made, it will be found that our sinfulness and misery have formed the chief subjects of our religious meditations. Needful as are an acquaintance with self and an abiding sense of infirmity to occasion humility, watchfulness, and dependence on God, still we shall never walk in the light nor enjoy the liberty of the gospel, if from the stepping-stone of self and earthly circumstance we ascend not into that higher region where we may ever behold the perfections of God, obtain glimpses of the paradise above, and discern more clearly

the wonders of creation and providence. If we admit that conduct is the result or development of mental operations, we must perceive the value, nay, the indispensable necessity, of such views of our relations to God, of the uses and duties of the present life and the character of the future, as are adapted to dismiss perplexity,—so often ending in doubt and disbelief,—to elevate and enlighten the intellect, and to diffuse peace through the heart. But for the benefit and enjoyment of such meditations there is a training necessary,—a training which no Christian parent or teacher can give, and which is the result of a deep conviction of the paramount importance of heavenly things and of faithful, persevering prayer.

Bishop Wilson said, He who has learned to pray has learned the secret

of a holy life. Here, then, we offer you the solution of the problem we have spoken of,—answer now the question which to philosophy, to a formal religion, to your own understanding, you have so often and so vainly proposed,—furnish you with the only means by which, in the necessities and enjoyments, the temptations and trials of your condition, you may ever walk with God,—and point out to you the bridge which, unseen by so many mortal eyes, connects earth and heaven, and passing over which you may discover the richest treasures and return laden with the most precious gifts. How can it be otherwise, when it is *prayer* which opens to us the holy of holies of our faith, which affords us the nearest view of the heavenly glory, the clearest manifestation of the will and, perchance, of

the favor of our God, and, clearing the film from our eyes, enables us to behold in vision our destiny and freedom, our true life and completed happiness?

In entering upon this duty, which so remarkably connects the reward with the performance, we should endeavor to view ourselves as in the presence of the Godhead, to exclude as far as needful earthly objects, and to feel our own insignificance and the greatness of the triune Being whom we address. In the effort to do this, we must bear in mind God's revealed character, the heaven—whether place or state it matters not—into which he invites us to enter, the promises of pardon to repenting sinners, and of salvation through the atonement of Jesus Christ. We should avoid straining after conceptions which, as we find them in recorded prayers of many

holy men, seem generally the product of a morbid, over-stimulated fancy, which are scarcely sanctioned by the Bible, and which, even if natural and legitimate to some minds, are neither possible nor profitable to others. There are those who feel ever the glowing fervor and mounting enthusiasm, who decorate their daily life, and even the hour of death, with the golden coloring of that faculty which, in its renewed state, is effulgent with the glory of heaven, and, seeking ever there its loved forms of perfection, returns to the dark and defiled objects of earth only to reflect on them its own brightness and to transform them into its own purity and beauty.

Other minds, again, know nothing of this affluence of thought. To their less susceptible intelligence, Imagination

neither makes near and visible the unseen, nor, acting in her most valuable capacity,* does she aid them to appre-

* This mode of operation of the imagination—not stated, so far as we have seen, in any treatise on mental science—is occasionally elsewhere adverted to. Bishop Butler's rare discrimination and candor could not but perceive and admit that the "vain, delusive faculty" was of "assistance to apprehension." Coleridge wrote that "if imagination is sometimes an *ignis fatuus* to lead us astray, it is more often a torch of light to guide us in our way." Shelley, in his "Defence of Poetry," says that "poetry"—which may here, as its result or expression, be considered synonymous with imagination—"is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge;" and a living writer has the same thought when, describing this power, he says, "Penetrating always to the innermost nature of every thing it grasps, piercing the very heart of things, poising itself at the positive centre. &c., imagination is in man the brightest intellectual reflection of the Godhead." And again, the same writer says, in another article, "Imagination discovers, by modes peculiar to itself, truths which no other mental power does or can discover. * * * The peculiar force of imagination is connected with such intuitive perceptions of otherwise unnoted truth as justify the thought that it is the chief of intellectual powers, the very vivifying soul of reason." See articles on Coleridge and Tennyson

hend truth, to collect materials for the operations of reason, and, indirectly, thus to lay a broader foundation for their religious faith. But even to them the history and facts of revelation are a lamp in darkness, and, with less of exulting joy, they may still offer their praise, make known their requests to God, and wait in confidence and peace for the unsealing of the mystery.

To a third class of Christians, whose type may have been Thomas, the flights of a sanctified fancy, even if possible, seem forbidden. They feel oppressively the wonder, the solemnity of existence, and, in viewing the awful uncertainty of the future, the heights and depths of God's nature and government, their flesh seems to tremble and their heart to fail.

in "Presbyterian Quarterly Review" of June, 1855, and March, 1858.

They ask for facts, for simplest truths. They will not rest content with the testimony of even a Mary or a John; but, with every sense strained as for the life and death of their souls, must look at, must handle the evidence of their hope. Such find it often fearful to pray. They come more humbly than boldly to the throne of grace, and think of heaven with yearning desire, it may be, but with modified expectation. They might adopt the language of one who had, more than most men, and unrestricted to poetic perception, a "vision and faculty divine," and whose diligent study and careful pondering of revealed truth made him pause and reverently tread where the thoughtless rush in unawed and confident. "To pray," says Coleridge,—“to pray as God would have us,—this is what at times makes me turn

cold to my soul. Believe me, to pray with all your heart and strength, with the reason and the will, to believe vividly that God will listen to your voice through Christ, and surely do the thing he pleaseth thereupon,—this is the last, the greatest achievement of the Christian's warfare on earth. Teach us to pray, O Lord!" The typical language which pictures the scenes and employments of heaven or describes the horrors of hell,—the green fields and still waters, the harp and the crown, the white robes and seraph wings, the unquenchable fire and the worm that dieth not,—though David and Isaiah, Wesley and Cowper, have hallowed it to our thoughts and almost made it a part of our belief,—is all unwelcome to that earnest mind which wants proof

alone, and turns impatient from only illustrative imagery.

It matters little, then, what our conceptions are, if we can receive with faith the declarations of the Bible and make our approach to a holy God as reverent and penitent children. He requires of us not so much the exercises of the intellect as the tribute of the heart. Just sentiments in well-selected words may be indeed a tongue to the dumb and a help to the inexperienced believer whose sense of his want has as yet not prompted the expression of it; but, unless the words we use, whether our own or another's, are the soul's pleadings with God, they are in vain addressed to him. We must—to use the Scripture paradox—strive to see Him who is invisible, and speak as if we were well persuaded of what we profess to believe and

do constantly acknowledge,—that “he heareth us.”

The subjects of prayer have been arranged under the heads of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Petition, and Intercession. These divisions embrace all direct intercourse with our Maker, and a reference to them will be a guide to our thoughts and enable us to order well our words. But a close and uniform adherence to the order of address or the form of expression will be found a hindrance rather than a help, will make a burden and labor of prayer, and cramp the free movement of the soul toward God. One of the best prayers ever made—for it was recorded with commendation and rewarded with immediate blessing—was a single petition and single confession:—“God be merci-

ful to me, a sinner!" The character of prayer, though it should not solely depend on our frames and feelings, must in a measure be modified by them; and our spiritual perceptions and requirements vary like our physical needs. There are occasions when views of our unworthiness and doubts of our acceptance may forbid any utterance but that of *confession*; when dread of an impending calamity or threatening of spiritual enemies will resolve all our thoughts into the language of *petition*; when anxiety for the salvation of beloved friends will cause us to pour out our heart, our self, in agony of *intercession* for them. But in the ordinary performance of the duty of prayer, our personal condition and relative claims should find their appropriate expression. It is possible to dwell too long upon a sin or a

want, to be one-sided in prayer as in opinion, to look so long at self as to impair our perception of God and contract our sympathy with man.

We fail greatly more than anywhere else in prayer in the duty of Adoration. If it is to be a prominent employment in heaven, why should we not more frequently engage in it on earth? Why delay to enjoy blessings which are offered now? Why reject the privileges of a sonship which is already ours? Why withdraw ourselves like Adam, when, like Enoch, we might walk with God? Mary sat at the feet of her Saviour. John—perhaps from accident of Oriental attitude, but, we love to think, from the promptings of affection—leaned on the bosom of his Lord. Thus, Adoration places the soul in a position before its Maker which it ought

more often to assume. Looking on Him who has revealed himself, even though it be as through a glass, darkly, we become more familiar with his attributes, more sensible of his presence. Our fear purifies our love, and then—blessed be God!—perfected love forever “casteth out fear.” There is a poverty in the Christian meditation so long as it stops with self. To look only at ourselves will not help us in the onward course. We shall—to apply otherwise the language of Baxter—only turn over bones and read our lesson in the dust. Are the glories of the Godhead, the wonders of creation, and the hopes of redemption, to be set aside by our own comparatively pitiful wants and offences? Why can we not look above these? Why return ever to our wallowing in the mire? If we have repented of sin and accepted

Christ as our Saviour, why not receive instruction and comfort from the assurances of Scripture? “Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” “We have received the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” “Now being made free from sin and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” “We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

We practise most imperfectly, also, the duty of Intercession. Every one who prays at all, prays for some parent, brother, child, or friend. Many, doubtless, pray, with desires as vague as the petition is general, “for all classes and

conditions of men ;” but such is not the pleading for others which the law of love requires. Our daily intercourse with the world brings us into contact with many who need our prayers if we cannot always address to them our warnings. The beggar who receives your alms scarce knows there is a God. The philosopher whom you honor and admire may only have that wisdom which is “foolishness in the sight of God.” The laborer, mechanic, or artist who cultivates your land, erects or adorns your mansions, year after year receives your directions and your money ; yet you remember him no more when he has fulfilled your need, and never ask God to save his immortal soul. He who ministers to you in holy things may point the way, yet not walk in it ; and even if he is earnest and faithful,

he is human, and needs fellow-helpers in uplifting his arms to God. Still further;—along your crowded streets you hear the language of passion and profanity: you see not perhaps him who utters it, but pause a while, and, however engaged, lift for a moment your heart to God and ask for pardon and redeeming grace for that poor outcast. Do not despair of being heard. Whether heard or not, if you love your brother man, you cannot but pray for him. Plant your seed: in due time it may come forth. Pray! labor! that you may save one soul, or at least help it on to happiness and heaven.

We may not omit here what might seem an almost needless remark,—that prayer is not confined to the reverential posture and to the appointed hour of devotion. Valuable and necessary as

these are, they are adjuncts only, not prayer itself,—the stays and props of our feeble spirituality, the hedges and fences to our wandering attention and affections, but not to be mistaken for the soul's communion with its Maker. The man who has the spirit of prayer may on the battle-field, on the ocean, on a sick-bed, have small opportunity for the regular devotion of ordinary life; but the presence of his God is with him to afford him spiritual strength, and in each varied scene, in the enticements of pleasure, the hurry of business, or bearing the burden of sorrow, he seeks continually divine help,—like the child who neither in the flowery pathway nor the rugged road ever wanders far from his parent, but turns still to catch the glance of sympathy or grasp the extended hand.

In conclusion, we shall best learn the spirit of prayer and its appropriate expression by making the word of God our guide. Those who daily transfer the subjects of their Scripture-reading into their addresses to God, and adopt its sentiments and language, will find an enlargement and encouragement in this exercise which no other human means—if indeed it can be called such—will so fully afford. The Christianity which is daily baptized at the ever-springing fountain of Scripture will continue to wear the freshness and purity of its youth, and to display the vigor and devotedness of new consecration. He who—to change the figure—daily dons that divine panoply will go forth well defended against the attacks of Satan and the world, and with ample compensation for his own feebleness.

We fall so often in the combat because we forget or lay down part of our armor, have let fall our shield of faith, or, while we wield the sword of the Spirit, are unshod by the temper and principles of gospel peace.

We need a power beyond our own to enable us to distinguish and resist not only ordinary temptations, but such as are peculiar to our favored times. If in heathen lands men grope in the darkness of ignorance and vice, we seem to see them in Christian lands blinded also and stumbling by reason of the light which now in its noonday blaze is diffused over the doctrines of theology and the rules of practice. Routine and formality on the one hand, and a spurious enthusiasm, a perverted activity, on the other, lower the standard of Bible Christianity, impair its influence, and en-

danger its life. In no way can we avoid these evils but by faithful study and constant, prayerful application of the teachings of Scripture. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." "To the law and to the testimony" the prophet directed his people; and so, in our day, to no other source of wisdom and peace can we point you than to a law so perfect, so searching, that it discerneth the thoughts and intents of the heart, and casteth down every imagination even that unduly exalteth itself; to a testimony so full, so impartial, of the character, sins, and sufferings of God's people, so abundant, and convincing, of his long-suffering and love, of his willingness to receive and pardon, of his grace conferred through life, and his support promised and bestowed in death, that it reaches

every conceivable case of guilt and affliction, and reveals the only method of recovery and release. Well might the sacred writer exclaim, with seemingly irrepressible emotion, and with forcible and welcome repetition throughout the Psalm, "Oh, how I love thy law! How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage forever: they are the rejoicing of my heart! Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it! I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord, and thy law is my delight! The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding and I shall live."

We have finished what we proposed to do. We have endeavored to urge upon those commencing a Christian life

the necessity of an earnest and careful consideration of the duties of the service they have chosen; to point out the importance to their subsequent course of a high standard of excellence and of right views of the ordinance which signifies their union to Christ; and we have concluded this portion of our discussion by a warning that the strongest convictions and the warmest emotions will become faint and cold, and the heart relapse into worldliness, unless the Christian abide in the spirit and practice of prayer. As bearing directly upon the argument, we have added some general and desultory, but, we believe, important observations on the mode of conducting this our intercourse with God.

From what has been said, it is plain that our aim is to set before the mind

of the reader that the love and service of God are to be considered “the grand affair of life;” and that the resolve to embrace the doctrines and conform to the requirements of the Christian religion is to be—as has been admirably stated in a kindred connection—“the result of foresight and deliberate purpose, not a matter of indolent acquiescence or passive resignation, but what we arrive at by bent of soul, plenary choice, and a decision which disregards all risks.” Other objects, not opposed to the spirit of Christianity, but very distinct in character and sphere, will demand and were designed to receive a large portion of your interest and attention; but, more than all else, value the favor of God, and chiefly endeavor to obtain the holiness and happiness of heaven.

We would carefully avoid misleading you in a most momentous matter. The practice of self-denial has in men of widely-differing religious creeds run into asceticism and self-righteousness. The teaching of enlightened and otherwise moderate men has, in this regard, often been characterized by exaggerated statements and misjudged emphasis. Many inquirers, we well know, stand perplexed between the apparent design of God in creation and providence, and his revealed will as humanly expounded or inferred from disconnected passages of Scripture. Everywhere in Holy Writ we are warned to love not the world nor the things of the world, to mortify the affections, to cast aside every weight, and not to entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life.

In urging you to receive these direc-

tions with the proper rules of interpretation, and to look at them in the light which the rest of Scripture and the plans of Providence throw around them, we think we neither intermeddle rashly nor abate a jot or tittle of the law. Why should we be wise beyond what is written? Think you that He who formed the eye to behold each minute glory of a world robed in beauty as in a garment, who attuned the ear to catch the many-toned melodies which from wind and ocean, from insect and bird, swell into so marvellous a harmony;—think you that He who magnificently adorned the spirit as well as the abode of man, who filled the soul with wonders of perceptive and creative power, with desires, hopes, affections more varied and beautiful than philosopher can analyze or poet describe,—

think you that He bestowed on you these capabilities for the instruction and enjoyment which with such lavish bounty he has provided, and then bade you stand aloof, close your eyes, harden your heart, and become a mysterious exception to the reciprocal action and well-fitted relations of his universe? No: let us magnify our God! Not thus do we read his will. In accordance with that will we believe that science, which is the knowledge of creation, the description, including their arrangement and classification, of all observed appearances in the worlds of matter and of mind;—that art, which is combination and representation of materials already furnished,—that the higher forms of intercourse of mind with mind and heart with heart,—may remain to us sources of ever-new in-

terest and occupation. The danger attending our enjoyment of them is that we become unmindful of the end for which it was bestowed; that we forget, in the temporary refreshment and strengthening, the appointed progress and toil, the inevitable burden of life; and that we continually essay to slake in these wayside wells a thirst which only "the fountain of living waters" can quench. But, in the design of God, every blessing has its corresponding temptation, and the very evil, which is thus always with the good offered to our choice, is, strangely, a more abounding mercy and a fuller proof of wisdom and love. If the arrangements of providence seem framed to afford us this discipline of trial, the Scripture word of warning and consolation was surely given to sustain and encourage us in

the process. We stand on the brink of many a moral precipice, and have need to pray, "Order my steps in thy word." "Hold up my goings, that my footsteps slip not." The lesson is repeatedly taught us to "use without abusing," and to let our "moderation be known unto all men."

And what is the great end of this care and watchfulness, this self-mastery, this training of an infant and imperfect mind, this diligent inquiry into the will of God, this obedience to the precepts and imitation of the example of Christ? Let the word of inspiration itself declare it:—"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." Observe the

“new” and final adaptation. The material creation was “very good,” but perishable and finite. In the soul of man is a strange commingling of conflicting principles and dissimilar qualities. Godlike we may call it, for “God created man in his own image;” but, alas! hatred and variance, wrath and malice, murders and drunkenness, are “the manifest works of the flesh,” of that nature whose glory has become its shame. Why it was thus constituted is an unexplained mystery of his will. We confess that the questions of the origin of evil and the decrees of God are none the clearer to us for all the attempts that have been made to elucidate them. But it matters little “*how* these things can be.” It is enough to know that God in his own time will justify his ways to man; that the glory

of the terrestrial is one,—an imperfect, fading glory,—but the glory of the celestial is another and a brighter; that incorruption must spring from corruption; that the raised and beautified body shall be the meet companion of the redeemed and purified soul. In the heaven revealed to the Christian there can be no sin, for nothing that defileth will find entrance; no sorrow, for God himself shall wipe away all tears; no separation, for the “sons and daughters”—the redeemed of all ages—shall be gathered from the ends of the earth; no death, for “they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world” cannot “die any more;” no end to all this blessedness, for “this God is our God for ever and ever:”—“his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and

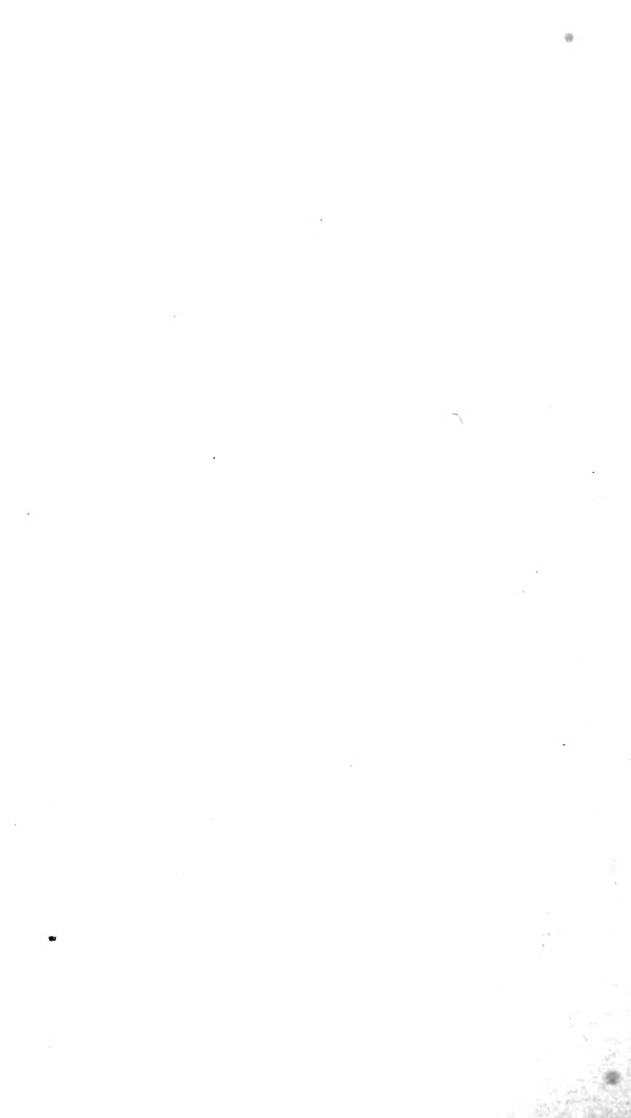
his dominion endureth throughout all generations.

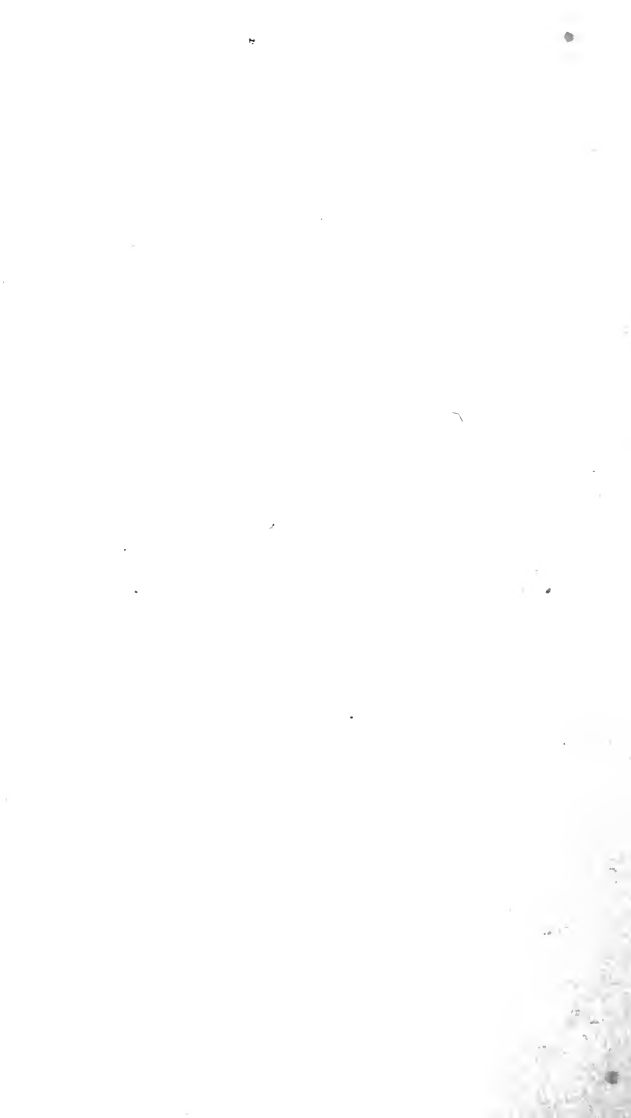
We leave the subject to the mind and conscience of whosoever will follow us to the end. O friend, though we meet not eye to eye, the heart of the writer yearns over you, longs intensely that these words may not have been written for you in vain, that you may know the new birth, or, if you have known it, that you may grow to the stature of a man in Christ Jesus. Oh, be persuaded, if not by this reasoning,—and we believe we have spoken unto you gospel truth,—by any thing more powerful to move you,—by the pleadings of the preacher, by the pious example of some beloved, perhaps departed Christian friend, by the sorrows of life and the coming solemnities of

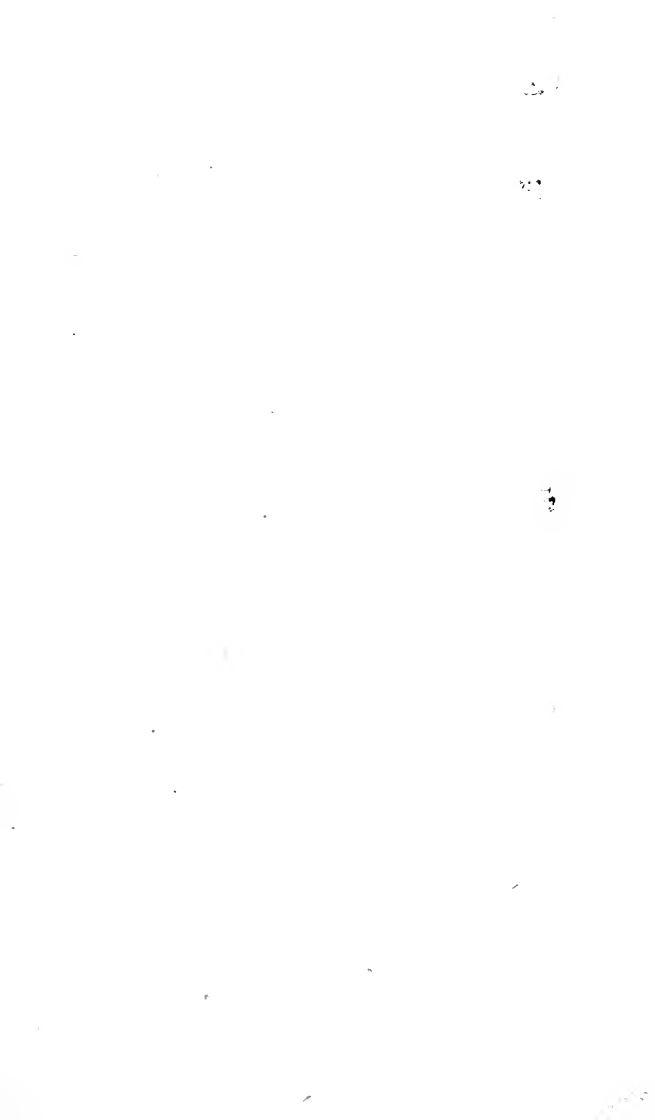
death, to *do this one thing* which is the burden of our message to you. "So run, not as uncertainly;" press toward the mark, for it is certain that you will reach it and receive the prize if you falter not in your course. Enter ye in at the strait gate. Many seek—indolently, carelessly seek—to enter in, "and shall not be able." But as for *you*, agonize, wrestle with God in prayer, lest you be suddenly and forever shut out. Go to your Saviour; listen as he asks, "Lovest thou me?" and if you can utter, even feebly, the response of Peter,—once wavering and unfaithful Peter,—in any calling or place feed the sheep and lambs of that Saviour's flock; like him, having obtained mercy, be steadfast unto death, and He who prayed not for Peter only, but for them also who should in future time be peni-

tent and believing, will show you the path of life and will finally bring you into that Presence where are "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore."

THE END.







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