

THE CIRCLE
OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

A HANDBOOK OF FAITH
FRAMED OUT OF
A LAYMAN'S EXPERIENCE

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

THERE are truths of which the common-ness measures the importance. They are such as require continually to be presented afresh to the human mind. To exhibit them in the form in which they gained the assent of one inquirer may not be without benefit to others. And a layman's views may approve themselves as sound to other laymen, in whom similar prepossession may be corrected by similar analogies from common life.

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CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

I.

NATURAL RELIGION.

I HAVE never forgot an occasion in early life, when the subject of religion came somewhat lightly on the carpet, and a young man of the company exclaimed, with an air of satisfaction, "A little natural religion is enough for me!" This young man is the type of a large class, and a class to which many belong who do not so candidly own it. Religion is a thing which most men have the impression they cannot altogether do without, and which many are fain to reduce to the smallest quantity which will serve the purpose. They content themselves with just so much as may maintain in their mind a comfortable impression that they are not absolutely

irreligious, and have as fair a chance as others of being safe and happy in another world. Even where they do not exhibit any affectation of infidelity, and submit to be reckoned amongst Christians, their religion is often such as to reduce Christianity to a negative quantity. Their faith is nearly all comprised in a vague apprehension of a God, to whose judgment they are accountable, but whose mercy is so comprehensive as to take away all cause of alarm, and to save the necessity of any further thought. A little natural religion is enough for them.

But a slight amount of reflection may bring, as it has brought, even such an one to perceive that, if religion have truth in it at all, it is essential to accuracy of thought that the whole truth should be discovered; and that on this, as on other subjects, recourse should be had to all the sources of information. When entering on the study of any human science, we do not shut ourselves up within the bare walls of a closet, and abandon ourselves to the working of our unaided mind: on the contrary, we add to our own researches, or more commonly pave the

way for them, by a reference to the writings of competent authorities. We do not study chemistry or botany on abstract principles, taught by unassisted reason. So to study history, which religion in great part is, would be the essence of absurdity. Considered intellectually, religion ought to be subjected to the same mode of inquiry applied to any other topic. But religion is not merely an intellectual, it is also a practical thing; and defective information may therefore lead, not merely into error, but into danger. Picture an individual, sent on a responsible mission, with full directions put into his hands, but who never opened his letter of instructions, but spent his time in speculating within himself on the probable nature of his task. We should deem such an one little short of mad. Yet the man is chargeable with scarcely less folly, who, sent into the world to perform a part allotted to him by God, occupies his short span with the theories of natural religion, and never opens his Bible.

Revelation is to natural religion what acquired knowledge is to intuitive; and it bears the same character of superior information. All that a

man's own observation, were it as comprehensive as the world itself, could teach him concerning God and God's ways, would have little value as evidence, compared with the direct testimony of God himself. In refusing to listen to that testimony, he wilfully shuts out what is the best and clearest proof, in order to rest on that which is defective and uncertain. He acts as anomalously as a court of justice would do, which should refuse direct evidence of the fact, and pronounce judgment on the ground of theoretical probability. Indeed, he strangely excludes the highest and most credible testimony, in order to listen to weaker evidence of the same class : for the doctrines of natural religion are just God himself, saying obscurely, through the whisperings of the mind which he has formed, what he tells in his Word, in language plain and express.

The truth is, that those amongst us, who conceive themselves disciples of natural religion, have derived their teaching, for the most part, unconsciously from Revelation. In a land like ours, in which the light of revealed truth has long prevailed, the deductions of reason, and the lessons

from Revelation, are to a large extent undistinguishable. The supposed illuminations of reason are often nothing else than glimmering remains of early education, or unconscious participation in the common light from above. Revelation has had on human knowledge the same imperceptible influence which Christianity has had on civilisation ; and the fancied scholars of nature have, without knowing it, been learners in the school of Christ. The combination of reason and Revelation is a divinely appointed union, which man is prohibited to dissolve. It may not be forbidden, as a philosophical speculation, to endeavour to discover how much man may know of God by the mere light of reason, and for this end to abstract the truths of natural religion, as the subject of separate contemplation. But the experiment is not free from risk ; for it tends to present truth in a partial, and therefore an unreal aspect. The exercise is at best a piece of intellectual gymnastics ; it is not practical progress : on the contrary, it tends to obstruct practical progress, by wasting the energies on a speculation inapplicable to the reality of the case. Life is

too short, eternity too near, to make it safe to spend our moments on the theories of natural religion, when the truth which is to save from perdition lies in the volume which we leave unopened at our side.

A bad example has been set in this matter by our writers on Theology and Ethics, even the very best of them. In the works of some, there is no reference whatever to God's Word : and we find presented to us the most varied and contradictory theories as to the standard of morals, whilst the Law of God, which, with all who believe in a God, is the true rule of conduct, is never so much as mentioned. This is as anomalous as if, in a country possessing a written code, a lecturer on municipal law occupied his whole course with the doctrines of natural equity, and never once mentioned the code. With a better class of authors, a common course is to treat the subject in the first instance according to natural reason, and afterwards to show, though sometimes by a scanty supplement, how the doctrines taught agree with those of Revelation. I do not say that incidental advantages are not attached to this mode of pro-

ceeding. There are some minds, which may by this way be brought unresistingly to the truth ; from which they might have been deterred by an earlier exhibition of Scripture authority. But the danger is, that men generally may be carried on a wrong track, and led to rely primarily on reason, with Revelation merely as a confirmation. This is to reverse the right order of things. Revelation is, to all who receive it, the proper basis of belief. Revelation ought, therefore, to be always set forth as the origin and foundation of truth. With the doctrines of Revelation all instruction should commence. Reason may thereafter rightly be appealed to, in order by her teaching to illustrate the doctrines, and confirm the fitness of the adaptations ; to add clearness to the views, and force to the sanctions ; and, by fair and judicious analogy, to supply the intentional blanks, which man has had left to him to fill up.

An *a priori* demonstration of God's existence and attributes is a philosophical impossibility. The attempt was made by one of our ablest philosophers, and proved a failure. He might succeed in establishing the necessary eternity of

a self-existent cause. But eternity of duration may belong to many different forms of being ; and the character of the self-existent is not determined by the fact of self-existence. The great philosopher, when establishing what God really is, was obliged at last to have recourse to his works as proof. He was driven to this by the necessity of the case ; for the attributes and proceedings of any being in the universe, from the lowest up to the highest, are not matter of demonstration, but of evidence. To the works of God, accordingly, those who most advocate the claims of natural religion are in use to have recourse, as the legitimate method of acquiring the knowledge of Deity. But why confine ourselves to the works of God, to the exclusion of his Word, except on a principle unknown to ordinary human dealings, and at variance with practical good sense,—the principle of pronouncing judgment on evidence which is partial and obscure, without regard to that which is direct and conclusive ?

Natural religion is at best truth imperfect. In reality it is something less, for in regard to some

points, and these of the highest importance, it is truth unknown. Considering the limitations under which a finite being necessarily subsists, it is very reasonable to suppose that something should be revealed by God to man, to the knowledge of which man could not of himself attain. And so accordingly it is. The scheme of redemption by the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God is what natural reason could never find out. Other doctrines, such as that of God's existence in Trinity, stand in the same predicament. It is a striking instance of the obliquity of human nature, that the quality of novelty, which in other objects is so attractive, is the very quality which repels from the consideration of topics such as these. If a visitant from another planet alighted on this earth, he would gather around him a host of scientific inquirers, eager to catch from his lips the amplest and minutest details concerning the unknown world. For these same persons to turn away from the contemplation of the wonders of redemption, as told by a message from a distant and loftier sphere, indicates, were it nothing more, a singular want of philosophic

curiosity ; indicates, alas, in beings whose practical interests the revelation so closely touches, a wilful blindness, as culpable as it is fatal.

I assume, in these observations, that the Bible is not disputed to be a genuine communication from God. I have at present no controversy with those who deny its authority, either expressly, or by what, in modern times, is the common form of denial, by simply ignoring its existence. My present argument is not so much with those who discredit the Bible, as with those who neglect to read it. If the authority of the Bible be the subject with any one of serious doubt, I simply ask of such an one to suspend his judgment until he can say that he has studied the whole body of evidence, as well for as against. I willingly leave him to the result. For, whilst nothing is more consistent with fair probability than that God should, in some way or other, communicate with his intelligent creatures, there is felt, by every one who carefully studies the subject, to be overwhelming proof that the Bible is the true record of such communication. Meanwhile, let not those be blamed who receive the Bible, and rest

on its authority, on the simple ground of its general acceptance. They act in this just as they act in common life, and are not chid for acting ; for, in the ordinary case, the works of human authors are not otherwise vouched than by general acceptance ; and no one refrains from perusing any great historian or poet till he first perform the process of collecting evidence of authenticity. The philosopher sits down to read his Plato or his Lucretius, satisfied, on the evidence of general reception, that the work he peruses is the genuine production of the author whose name it bears ; he is not entitled to blame the humble Christian that he does just the same by his Bible.

The possession of a revelation such as ours affords proof of an adaptation to human necessities, at once wise and compassionate. The great bulk of mankind have not capacity, even had they inclination and leisure, for intellectual research. For the most part, they take their information from what they deem trustworthy authority, and in doing so exhibit the practical wisdom suited to their position ; for authority and testimony are providentially appointed means of knowledge, to

those whose situation admits of little self-acquirement. For the greater part of these there would be no religion, were there no Bible. But the benefit is not confined to these. The strongest and loftiest mind feels at times so perplexed amid its own speculations, the height of which only brings it into a cloudier region, that it yearns for some sure testimony from without; happy could it exchange the elevation of unsatisfied intellect for the quietness of humble belief. It attains not to peace till it return to the point from which it started, and rest, with the faith of childhood, in God's testimony concerning himself.

The Bible carries out its adaptation to the common intellectual wants, by being, for the most part, not so much an exposition of abstract doctrines, as a record of facts. With the greater part of men, the enunciation of abstract truths is uninfluential, because unintelligible; with the higher orders of intellect, that very exercise of thought, which the apprehension of such truths requires, is apt to lead into questions which no finite mind can solve. The power of fact is universal. The mind which, from its native weakness, or from the

pressure of sorrow, or from the weariness produced by its own workings, cannot maintain its grasp over a process of reasoning, can lay hold of a fact with a retentiveness which nothing will undo. The Bible beautifully accommodates itself to this peculiarity in the human mind. The Old Testament is, in substance, just the history of God's chosen people ; the prophecies being interwoven with the events as integral parts of the story ; the Psalms being an extant portion of the worship of the actual Temple. The Gospel is a narrative of Christ's life and death ; the remainder of the New Testament an account of the diffusion of the Christian faith ; the Epistles themselves not being formal essays, but the letters written to particular Churches, with special reference to their existing necessities. Thus the Bible presents, to minds of every shade of intelligence, truth in its most tangible form. The experience of almost every Christian supplies an illustration of the influential character of Scripture as an authoritative record of fact. Not a few will unite with me in confessing to the occurrence of seasons (now perhaps long past), in which doubt and uncertainty crept over

the simplest points of belief, with the power of a supernatural darkness. Doctrines appeared so hard to believe, difficulties so inexplicable, contrarieties so irreconcilable, that the mind seemed for the moment to lose all hold of religion, and ready to make shipwreck of faith. One thought sufficed for relief, the thought that the Gospel narrative was so true, that, as surely as I knew that any hero or sage of antiquity existed, so surely did I know that Christ Jesus lived, and taught, and died, and rose from the dead. The living Christ of the New Testament was to me the reality of an historic record, with all his grandeur of purpose, and all his tenderness of heart ; with the exquisite simplicity of his teaching, and the spotless purity of his life ; the agony of his death, and the glory of his resurrection. Unless all history was a fable, and the whole world around me but a dream, the Gospel record was truth, and the Gospel doctrine taught of God. In this I must believe, if I believe in anything at all. With this one thought the mind regained equilibrium. Religion became an object of clear contemplation ; even as if I saw the words, which

may be said to sum it up, written in characters of light: "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The faith, which could not have been sustained by any deduction of reason, rested secure on Revelation; and proof was given, that the foundation afforded by Divine truth is as different from any that can be laid on natural religion, as is the rock, which God has fixed in its place from the beginning of the world, from any artificial prop of the most skilful human science.

II.

SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES.

ONE of the Apostles, in alluding to the writings of another, uses these remarkable words: "In which are some things hard to be understood; which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Throwing out of view, for the present, the abuse said to be made of the obscure passages, we have here express testimony to the fact of obscurities existing in writings which form a large portion of the Gospel record. Let no one say that there are no difficulties in Scripture, when an inspired Apostle speaks thus.

When the subject is carefully pondered, it is perceived that such difficulties are not only naturally to be expected, but belong so essentially to the nature of a revelation from God, as actually to attest its authenticity. The subjects of which

the Bible treats are, many of them, so far removed from the sphere of ordinary experience, as to gather round them the usual obscurity of distance. God, and God's nature, his attributes, and his ways, lie within a region of infinity, to the full scope of which a finite mind cannot stretch its grasp. Even as to the things within our reach, it is the characteristic of knowledge always to run into mystery. Clearness everywhere ceases beyond a certain point. How soon must it be lost, when the mind is called to enter that infinity in which God dwells. It follows from their distinctiveness of being, that some things will always be known to an infinite and omniscient God, which are not apprehended by finite and inferior creatures. No revelation will ever reveal all ; and the knowledge which is imperfect is on that very account obscure. Difficulties so inevitably attend every revelation from above, that, in place of such difficulties forming an objection to its reception, it is more truly said that entire clearness would be ground of suspicion, and absence of difficulty form an impeachment of credibility.

The practical course, which in these circum-

stances should be followed, has been dictated by a successful experience. It is not very different from what might be adopted in ordinary life, with regard to a communication from a friend, the authenticity of which is undoubted, and its general contents clear and kind, but which contains passages of which the full meaning is not at the time apparent; or from that which is every day followed in regard to the works of human authors, of which we know many, possessed of the highest classical value, which are thickly bestrewn with allusions, the exact import of which it is now hopeless to understand. I am not the less to receive, and to use for the intended object, the things plainly revealed, on account of intermingling difficulties. When I meet with a passage, the full import of which I cannot, with all my efforts, perceive, I pass it by for the time, and proceed to what is clear and definite, blessing God there is so much. Perhaps I return to the difficulty, and again attempt to solve it. If again foiled, I renew the same practical course; I turn into the path on which the clear light shines, and leave the obscurity which I cannot penetrate, to

be cleared up by after illumination, or, it may be, to be overcome by the loftier elevation of an immortality in prospect. If, at any time, the perception of difficulties awake a spirit of scepticism, I at once make it matter of conscience to hasten away from the contemplation. I feel that, in this, there is no cowardly shrinking ; it is the practical good sense which preserves the equipoise of the mind, by the exclusion of those intrusive imaginations which, known to be baseless, will yet, if indulged in, shake its firmness and disturb its peace. In the very next sentence to that which creates my difficulty, I find a truth so plain, so elevating, so full of comfort, as fitly to absorb my attention, and awake my praise.

I know how it may be said (for it has been said often, and thought at some time by almost every one) that the obscurity of a human composition ought not to be found in a revelation from God, who could make all things clear if he would. But those who say so do not sufficiently consider the nature of the case, or how nearly what they demand touches an essential impossibility. When God speaks to man, he must

employ man's own language,—none else would be understood ; and so he must of necessity use an inadequate medium of communication. We can only be taught heavenly truths, as the barbarians of another hemisphere are informed of the customs and institutions of civilized life, by images borrowed from our previously formed conceptions ; and the language of accommodation is, in its nature, language of imperfect representation, conveying the truth by approximation merely. This, however, is not all. The obstacle to clearness of communication lies deeper than in the imperfection of the language ; it lies in the different nature of the beings brought into converse. The correspondence of knowledge and feeling, which makes it easy for man to express himself to his fellows, does not exist when God communicates with his creatures. And whilst it may be true, in a general sense, that all things are possible with God, yet there are self-contradictions which are necessary exceptions to the rule ; and it seems to be one of these to suppose that the knowledge of the finite can be made co-extensive with the omniscience of the Infinite. A man may pour his whole heart

into the bosom of his fellow ; but so incommensurable is the human mind with the Divine, that a revelation from God to man, absolutely complete, and clear because of that completeness, is, in any right view, impossible. The true position of the finite towards the Infinite is that of one who is ever receiving fresh accessions of knowledge from the stores of the Omniscient, but to whom there still remains something beyond, undiscovered and uncommunicated, marking the ineffaceable distinction between the creature and the Creator.

A prominent cause of the difficulties found in the Bible is the unsystematic character of its teaching. It presents us nowhere with a formal scheme of theology, but communicates the doctrines unfolded by it rather in the way of incidental allusion, or at most of desultory treatise, leaving us to combine these into a system for ourselves, with the liability to error so strongly proved by the variety of systems actually formed. This characteristic of the sacred volume is apt at first sight to appear a defect ; it will be seen, when more closely examined, to afford additional

evidence of Divine authorship. The undoubted fact, that much uncommunicated knowledge will always remain with God, excludes the idea of God giving to man, on any subject, a system which shall be complete ; for every system must be defective to the extent of the information undisclosed. Hence, if the Bible had assumed the form of a systematic treatise on theology, the defect of information, essential to all communications from the Infinite to the finite, would have laid it open to the charge of imperfection ; and the question would have arisen, how that could be the work of a Divine author, which, purporting to be an entire system, exhibited so much wanting. The absence in the Bible of all appearance of system is strikingly illustrative of Divine wisdom, and gives to the volume the impress of a Divine hand. It is characteristic of the mode in which God must instruct man—which is partially. It places man in his true position, as a creature who can only know in part what is fully known to the Creator. It is, besides, admirably consistent with the intended method by which man is to be advanced in knowledge, which is not by expound-

ing arbitrary truth to minds which passively receive it, but rather by affording them materials for working out their own way to increasing illumination. So is progress in knowledge made a never-ending occupation for the immortal soul, giving it to exercise, as it proceeds, the moral virtues of faith, and humility, and hope.

Connected with this topic is an important practical lesson. Seeing that the Bible avoids, of set purpose, teaching systematically, we ought not to affix to its expressions the inflexible signification proper to a system ; but to deal with them as we do with popular language, giving them a meaning more or less different, according to the object of the communication, and context of the passage. Every one knows of how many shades of signification the words employed in ordinary speech are susceptible. Every page of the dictionary bears testimony to the varieties of meaning, sometimes directly opposite to each other, of which the same word is capable. As God then has been pleased to instruct us in popular language, we should interpret the communication according to the rule proper to the case ; not confining the same

word in every passage to exactly the same signification, but fairly gathering its import, as we would do in common speech, from the general scope of the address. If this sort of fair dealing were shown towards the Bible, it would not only remove much apparent difficulty, but also put an end to a great deal of unseemly disputation ; for not a few of our theological differences have arisen from pressing into the service of a system, by rigid and inflexible construction, passages of which the true interpretation possessed a latitude much more comprehensive.

It is another truth, of considerable practical importance, that, on many points alluded to in the Bible, it is intended only to afford us a general idea, and this at times an extremely vague and indistinct one. There are many passages of which, as I believe, it is designed that we should acquire only the general scope, not the full import. We obtain, as it were, a glimpse into an inner sanctuary ; the sight of a shadowy outline, in twilight, or afar off, and nothing more. This is the case more especially as to what may be called the extraneous topics of Scripture ; I mean those which

are not directly concerned with religious doctrine, or moral obligation, but are mere subjects of intellectual inquiry, or objects of legitimate curiosity. With regard to these more particularly, I conceive that Scripture, in many passages, purposely veils the subject, under words intended to convey a shadowy apprehension, but not definite information ; and I doubt not that, in many instances, we act at variance with God's design, when we extort a distinct image out of a literally construed expression. Forgetfulness of this truth has contributed to the scepticism of some philosophers ; but not less to the dogmatism of their opponents : the same error being committed on both sides, of rearing a definite idea on a literal interpretation, and so ascribing statements to the Bible, which the former consider contradicted by the discoveries of science, and the latter insist on believing, in spite of them all. Any opposition between the Bible and science, rightly so called, cannot be real, but only apparent. If there seem a conflict between them incapable of being reconciled, there is, on one or other side, something still to be cleared up. It would be well if, whilst

religious men forbore any obstruction to the prosecution of scientific inquiries to the utmost verge of human powers, men of science, on the other hand, abated somewhat the positiveness of their conclusions. It is no derogation to science to remain for a time uncertain. A period of intellectual suspense is a proper characteristic of a state in which knowledge is progressive.

To a large extent, the object of the Bible is to teach relation rather than essence; in other words, what belongs to practical interests, rather than to speculative inquiry. This is emphatically true with reference to the Supreme Being; for if Scripture be rightly analyzed, it will be found that by far the greater part of our information concerning God is that of relation merely. To express the relations borne by God towards man, terms are necessarily employed, drawn from earthly associations,—maker, benefactor, lawgiver, judge. None other would be intelligible. When we pass from the view of these relations to the contemplation of God as He exists in Himself, we not only transfer our thoughts to a subject in its nature obscure: we do so under the disad-

vantage, if I may so speak, of ideas previously formed on merely human analogies. The result is frequently a confusion of mind which is inextricable. At least we gain extrication only by reverting to the simple ideas of relation, previously familiar, and leaving the higher topics to the obscurity which we cannot pierce. There is, in such a retrogressive process, nothing of which any inquirer needs to be ashamed. It is merely to retreat from a position which the mind is not strong enough to maintain. It is only to return to those simple ideas concerning God, which are primarily intended for human apprehension. Such ideas compose the general information of the race, and are, generally speaking, sufficient for practical guidance: the higher flight is for a stronger intellect, and, for this itself, only according to the measure of its conscious powers.

The Bible has this peculiarity, above most other books, that it was intended for all orders of mind, for the most accomplished, and most untutored, for the philosopher, and for the child. It followed, almost necessarily, that it should contain truths of which some were simpler, some more recondite

than others. Such accordingly is the fact. Whilst enough for salvation lies within a few simple ideas, there are materials for exercise to the loftiest intellect. But this adaptation led inevitably to the occurrence of Scripture difficulties, for some truths would always be beyond some minds. It follows, equally, that the readers of Scripture must exhibit a variety of grades in respect of acquisition from its stores. All will not be equally instructed, where all may be equally Christians. No error can be greater than to fancy it necessary, towards equal height of Christian character, that the different individuals stand on the same level in regard to theological attainment. The error is one to which those are peculiarly exposed, who, themselves educated in a school of systematic theology, and trained to contemplate all Scripture truths as parts of a great scheme of doctrine, are apt to consider an imperfect acquaintance with the system in the light of an essential defect. It is a grave error notwithstanding. Theology is not religion, nor are theological attainments a necessary measure of Christian progress. I believe that there are multitudes of .

genuine Christians, and some of the very highest order, whose intellectual Christianity, if I may so term it, does not rise above the simplest lessons of childhood ; who are wholly unacquainted with theology as a system, have, if any, the most vague ideas on controverted points, and could not so much as apprehend the distinctions of the rival schools ; yet are, all the while, living a life of faith, and prayer, and holiness ; possessed of the spirit of the simple-minded martyr, who, assailed at the stake by the reasonings of subtle disputants, replied, “ I cannot argue for Christ, but I can die for Him.” Yet it is not less the part of those, who by position and training are fitted for the task, to search deeper into the mine ; to grow in the knowledge of Christian doctrine in proportion as they grow in acquaintance with earthly science ; to give to their study of the sacred record the same character of philosophic analysis, by which, in other departments, they investigate, distinguish, classify ; and so to make the progress of Divine truth commensurate with the advance of all human knowledge.

The miracles of Scripture are with many its

greatest difficulty ; with some a difficulty which is insuperable. Yet, whilst no question has been more perplexed by metaphysical subtleties than that of miracles, there is none to which practical good sense affords an easier solution. No one who believes in a God can consistently say that a miracle is impossible ; for the same omnipotence, which established and maintains the general course of nature, can at pleasure suspend it. Indeed, not only is a miracle possible to Divine omnipotence ; it is seen, on a moment's thought, to be an exceedingly probable event, in the course of Divine administration : for nothing can be more probable than a revelation by God of himself, and his purposes, and his will, to his intelligent and responsible creatures ; and such a revelation is itself a miracle. In whatever form it is made, whether by direct oral address, or by inspiration of the men who are the chosen instruments of the communication, revelation implies a miraculous intervention ; and so, if we had no miracle, we could have no revealed truth. But once fix a miracle as possible, and the question, whether a miracle has occurred in any indi-

vidual instance, is simply a question of evidence. It is to be determined, like other questions of evidence, by the amount of proof presented to the mind ; including for consideration, as every such question does, not merely the testimony of the witnesses, but the fair probability of the occurrence ; in other words, the likelihood of the intervention in the particular circumstances, and for the particular purpose. If the miracle is recorded in God's Word, it rests for its truth on the testimony of one who cannot lie ; and must therefore be believed by every one who believes the Bible. For the same reason, it must be believed according as the Bible states it, and not otherwise ; for to do anything else is simply to discredit the Bible in this particular. There can never be any difficulty to a reflective mind in accepting the Bible statement, as to any of the miracles described by it, in the natural sense of the expressions ; for, whatever infringement on the ordinary course of nature is made by the Divine hand, the same hand can in its omnipotence rectify, without any disturbance to the general harmony of the universe. The earth may be

stayed in its orbit, and the sun be seen to stand still ; and, by a single word from the lips of the Supreme, the whole arrangements of the material world be so accommodated to the pause, that the heavenly bodies resume their path, with everything exactly the same as if the pause had never occurred. It may be true of every miracle, that it comprises something which we cannot clearly apprehend. A miracle is in its nature a mystery. But the fact of its being a miracle, in other words, a special intervention of the Supreme Being, out of the usual course of nature, if such be the statement of the Bible, according to its obvious meaning, we must implicitly believe ; otherwise to that extent we simply reject the Bible. To endeavour in such a case to explain away the miracle into an ordinary phenomenon is just, to that extent, to turn God's Word into a lie. It is not only a much easier, it is a much more logical process, to throw aside the Bible altogether.

Nothing can be more at variance with sound reason, than the way in which the Bible has been largely dealt with in our day by some professed

teachers of theology. Admitted, at least not formally denied, to be the Word of God, it has been held so subjected to human criticism, as to be liable to be in part received, and in part rejected, as the judgment of the reader may dictate. The supposed contrariety of some of its statements to the views of natural reason,—the alleged contradiction of others by the discoveries of modern science,—the apparent inconsistencies of its narratives,—the fancied impossibility of its miracles,—these, and other reasons of a like description, have seemed to some to authorize the readers of Scripture to extract, and cast away as excrescences, portions of the sacred volume, larger or smaller, as the mind may be impressed with a sense of inadmissibility. But this is to destroy the whole authority of the volume, and to take from faith all foundation, by the very nature of the process. For the residue of the book is alike assailable ; and that which is left has no more intrinsic weight than that which has been taken away. The Bible thereby loses its essential character of supernal guidance ; for it is now only the echo of human reason, and unauthori-

tative beyond. In place of being that Divine Word, by which the whole moral world is ruled, it is now a different Bible to every different man. It is impossible to maintain God's Word as such, in character, trustworthiness, or authority, unless every part, without exception, is held the subject of Divine inspiration, and every statement, without exception, to be truth. The mode of the inspiration is a topic of perhaps permitted, though always of perilous discussion. It is fairly deducible from the diversity of character and style in the sacred writings, that, in the general case, the Divine procedure was not arbitrary dictation, but the exercise of a guiding influence over minds which were largely left to their own distinctive workings. Hence it is naturally to be expected, that the same doctrine will be set forth with the diversity of exposition proper to different teachers ; and the same fact be narrated with the diversity of circumstantial incidents proper to different narrators. But the very conception of the Bible as "the Word of the Lord which endureth for ever," implies the existence of an overruling and preservative power, protective

against all error, in the most absolute sense. The truth may in some parts be obscurely perceptible; it may intentionally be so dim as only to afford a vague and general conception: in some instances it may be so dark as to leave little else of duty than reverently and patiently to keep it for the time of greater light. The difficulties may, many of them, be such as to maintain the mind in a suspense as to the true mode of their solution, from which it never wholly escapes. There may be a faith which reverently preserves what it cannot fully perceive. But to charge with positive falsehood any one statement of God's Word is not only in itself against reason; it is also nothing short of an insult to the Divine Majesty, from which every right-thinking mind ought to shrink back with horror. Formally to take out of the Bible any one statement as untrue is not merely to disfigure and desecrate the holy fabric; it is also to run the risk of throwing it entirely down into a confused mass of ruins.

Scripture difficulties so far resemble those to be found in human compositions, that they yield

largely to patient painstaking, and the common influence of familiarity. Like all other difficulties whatsoever, they yield to the power of prayer. There cannot be conceived a more likely subject of successful prayer, than the help of God to understand his own message; and communion with the Spirit of God is as converse with a high intellect, stooping to enlighten us. It cannot, indeed, be promised that all difficulty will vanish. We do not climb the earthly heights, on which, though hill rises above hill, yet we know that the loftiest peak will at last be gained: rather we wing a flight towards a higher atmosphere, in which the heaven still appears far above. But take the testimony of experience, that, pursuing the course which is at once that of reason and of faith, holding and practising what is clear and definite, humbly exercising the mind upon the difficulties experienced, and, where they cannot be overcome, patiently keeping them for a time of after illumination, always maintaining prayer for light, yet ready to remain in darkness so long as God willeth, every fresh perusal will be found to clear away an additional portion of the obscu-

rity. Open at this moment any treatise which may be beside you on an unfamiliar science, and see how dark it appears ; little perhaps found in it except the glimmering of a vague conception ; or, it may be, the whole statement incomprehensible as a foreign tongue ; yet you know that to the diligent student this becomes clear as the common light, and familiar as the everyday language. Think (I may say to many, with a sympathetic recollection of my own) of the time, when, entering on the peculiar study which was to fit you for the occupation of life, you first looked into the volume containing the elements of the science, plunging with juvenile carelessness into the very middle of its contents ; and remember how it seemed so hard to be understood, that for the moment you despaired of ever mastering it ; then think how the intricacies of the subject are now so familiar, that you scarcely can comprehend the difficulties they create to others. Why doubt that the same gradual illumination will attend the earnest study of God's Word ? Scarcely any one but possesses what he calls his favourite author ; and what more common remark, than that, every

time the volume is taken up, there is found additional meaning, and new beauties are perceived ? Make the Bible the favourite work ; and be sure the like result will follow. Every time you peruse it, you will discover something unperceived before. Expressions will start into view, like light bursting on a dark place, and illumining all around. Difficulties will imperceptibly fade away, till they are scarcely remembered. Day by day, you will experience more clearness, and certainty, and comfort. So you will be making that progress in Divine knowledge, characteristic of a finite intelligence, rising always higher toward the Infinite. There will remain some of the dimness proper to the morning of being : but yours will be “ the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

III.

THE ATONEMENT.

THERE is a mode of teaching the doctrine of the Atonement, which is by no means uncommon, but is productive of great embarrassment to a reflective mind, at its entrance on religious inquiries. It is that which presents, not merely the Atonement, but all its consequences, in the light of past facts. The Atonement is set forth as such a satisfaction for sin, as by anticipative efficacy to have removed, in every case, the penalties otherwise exigible. Each individual who is addressed is called on to believe as to himself that his sins have been blotted out, and to take the corresponding comfort. Faith in the accomplished fact is alone needed to secure salvation. Now this method of teaching is apt to produce great difficulties in thinking minds. There seems to be somewhat of inconsistency in asking men to achieve, by an act of faith on their part, that

which has been already accomplished for them, without their interposition, centuries ago. How, it is asked, can any act of belief alter the nature of a fact already fixed? How can men be called on to apply a remedy already applied, irrespectively of their will? If the Atonement has already wiped away my sins, the fact must remain such, whether I believe it or not. If it has not done so, I am asked to believe what is not true, on the assurance that by doing so the fiction will be turned into a reality. With difficulties such as these, the inquirer stumbles at the threshold.

Let the mind then try another starting-point, from which the course has been found easy.

It lies in that idea of mediation, which, to human beings, is the simplest and clearest of ideas. The intervention of others on our behalf is one of the necessities of our present state. It is through the interposition of others that a great part of our objects is gained. To conscious guilt, intercession is the most obvious remedy. When was there an offending servant, whose first thought was not to seek forgiveness through the mediation of a favourite child?

But the idea of mediation implies that there is something in the mediator, giving him a title to ask the boon which he seeks. He stands, it may be, in a relation which clothes him with the influence of affection. Or, he has discharged duties towards the person with whom he mediates, with a fidelity entitling him to a return. Or, he trusts to the power of high moral character, and the rights of a well-known benevolence. Nor is it by any means the least admissible, on the contrary, it is at all times a powerful reason for prevailing in the suit, that he who urges it has suffered loss or wrong through the person for whom he intercedes. Who is so successful an advocate for the criminal, as he on whom the crime has drawn down suffering or privation, or death itself in prospect ?

When the Christian scheme, therefore, presents to me, in the person of Christ, a mediator between God and man, fitted to maintain a successful intercession, at once by what he is, and by what he did and suffered, I receive an idea of a familiar and intelligible character. I feel myself to be a sinner, in danger of perishing eternally. In myself I have no merit, on which to raise a claim for the

Divine favour. I cannot render to God any service that is perfect, or which does not itself in some point require forbearance and forgiveness. Even after my best resolutions I relapse into transgression, and must resort anew to a throne of grace. In this my state of need, Christ is presented to me by the gospel as a ready mediator, to whom I may at once have recourse. To assure me of the prevalence of his intercession, the gospel sets before me the title of the intercessor to obtain the boon he asks, in his relation to God as his well-beloved Son, his spotless obedience, his sufferings, and his death. What is this but the simplest exhibition of intercession, by one who has complete assurance of succeeding in his suit? What is it but the familiar mediation, on behalf of an offending servant, of an only-begotten son, in whom the father is ever well pleased?

But, in further reading my Bible, I discover that I cannot stop at the general idea of mediation, carried on by an intercessor qualified for the office by high position and exalted virtues. I perceive that the mediation is maintained on a special ground, and involves a particular reason

for prevailing in the prayer. I see it to be clearly revealed, that the sufferings of Christ were not merely, in a general sense, part of his qualifications as mediator ; but were so endured on account of the sins of the world, as to form a substitutionary infliction, and as such to be pleadable in the intercession. It may not, indeed, be said, though some have said it inconsiderately, that Christ endured the very punishment which the individual sinner must otherwise have sustained ; for this is eternal condemnation. But the Scripture clearly reveals to me, that sufferings were borne by the Redeemer, which, peculiar in their nature, not less than in the character of him who bore them, were expressly undergone as a satisfaction to Divine justice, to the end that the intercession might be grounded on the plea that the mediator had suffered in room of the transgressor. These sufferings are presented under the aspect of a sacrifice, with special reference to that conception of the necessity of approaching God with an expiatory offering, which is so deeply implanted in human nature, as to have been found prevalent in almost all nations. Not that the

offering was considered, at least by the more thinking portion of them, as possessing any intrinsic value ; but it indicated an acknowledgment by the offerer that offended law required an open satisfaction, and expressed an humble desire that the Deity who was worshipped would accept, in his clemency, the death of the victim, instead of the death of the transgressor. To the better instructed Jews, sacrifice was at once exhibited and enjoined, as a type of the true expiation which was afterwards to be made. At last, in what the Bible calls, in its expressive language, "the end of the world," that is, at the time for whose arrival the previous course of the world was all a preparation, "Christ appeared to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself." He "died for our sins, according to the scriptures." He "gave himself a ransom for all." He "suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." I perceive the Scripture to set forth the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, with a fulness of expression overflowing all its tenor, and a depth of meaning which pervades the entire volume.

Here also, amidst much that is mysterious, I

perceive much which accords with human experience, or finds matter so analogous as to render it easily intelligible. Vicarious punishment is by no means an unfamiliar conception. Scarcely a child but understands, how his own punishment may be remitted, by a portion of the penal task being borne by his fellow. Nothing more common than for one to bear the burden of another, and so relieve him; and, if that burden be penal, this is in its essence vicarious suffering. Every friend, who discharges from his own substance the legal penalty of another's transgression, may be said in some sense to bear that other's punishment, and to acquit him by so doing. One of the finest tales of antiquity is that in which a friend, being left as an hostage for his friend's return, is about to die in his stead, and is barely saved from doing so. Perhaps a still more touching is that in which a parent inflicts on himself a portion of the severities of his own stern law, that he may save his son from the extremity of the sentence. Nor is that a sound objection, which is often stated against the doctrine of the Atonement, that it involves the anomaly of the innocent being pun-

ished for the guilty ; for, if this objection were well founded, it would exclude all vicarious suffering, however voluntary. It would exclude all that endurance on behalf of others, which is not only so familiar to our experience, but gains, for the most part, the praise of generous self-sacrifice. The spontaneousness of the suffering is in such a case considered to take away from it all character of injustice. Why should it be held otherwise with the interposition of the Son of God, "who loved us, and gave himself for us"?

I find therefore no difficulty in accepting the idea of vicarious suffering on the part of the Mediator. And, pursuing the analogy of ordinary life, I also find it easy to conceive how the sacrifice should be offered once for all, and be operative afterwards in the case of the particular individual, by force of that individual's own application for mercy. I can picture a band of rebels, in arms against their lawful sovereign, and justly amenable to the punishment of death, for whom some one of high station and character, perhaps the son of the king, interposes and mediates. He offers to satisfy the offended majesty of the law by a great personal

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sacrifice. The offer is accepted, and the proclamation of mercy is issued. But it is not a declaration of indiscriminate grace to all, whether penitent or not. It is an offer of pardon to those who come to the foot of the throne, to acknowledge their guilt, and to sue for forgiveness for the mediator's sake. There is nothing in this but a proceeding the most intelligible and reasonable. And so it is with the personal appropriation of the Atonement, which is to many so perplexing a difficulty. It is made by the simple act of the sinner's resort to the throne of grace, to pray for pardon for the sake of the propitiation, and of him who made it. The death on the cross was truly, as the Bible declares it, a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But it was not so, in the sense of the identical punishment proper to the individual transgressor being borne by the Son of God. It was a grand vicarious sacrifice, offered in the sight of God's moral universe, as an act of satisfaction to violated law ; to the intent that every sinner, who might humbly pray for it, might obtain forgiveness for the sake of him who, having died for his sins, "liveth to make intercession for him."

I thus attain to a clear practical view on the subject of the Atonement. I obtain it by the simple expedient of always considering atonement in connexion with mediation, never abstractedly. Christ the Sacrifice is contemplated simultaneously as Christ the Intercessor, who pleads his propitiation on my behalf. I do not thereby displace the doctrine of the Atonement from its rightful position in the gospel scheme : I only combine it with an equally authoritative doctrine, to open thereby a clear way for its practical application. The Atonement is beyond a doubt the fundamental doctrine of the gospel. The death of Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, is the central point of the Christian system. It is the atonement which gives prevalence to the mediation ; and that quality to the mediator, which, above every other, holds the heart, and draws the confidence, and prompts the obedience of the believer. The Cross is the Christian's boast. The Lamb that was slain is the subject of heaven's anthems. But to teach the Atonement as a past fact, complete in all its consequences, throwing out of view the present mediation, by which its benefits are won and

applied, cannot but lead into error. It is, by logical sequence, to set aside the intercession as not required; and to make prayer unnecessary, by leaving nothing for which to pray. To proclaim, on the other hand, the mediation of Christ, without reference to the atonement, on the ground of which the mediation proceeds, and is all-prevailing, would be simply to ignore the grand characteristic of the Christian scheme of salvation.

There is nothing of more importance in practical religion, than to maintain a clear and simple idea of a great truth, like that of the Atonement, for ready mental recourse, amidst distracting difficulties. The doctrine of the Atonement is, like other doctrines of the faith, perhaps more emphatically than others, surrounded by mysteries; escape from which is often not to be gained except by resort to a simple habitual conception. When the mind expatiates on another great truth of Scripture, the proper divinity of the Saviour, and, entering as it were within the veil of the Godhead, endeavours to realize the idea of Deity atoning to Deity, of God interceding with God, it is lost in a labyrinth of perplexity; and can

only regain stability by quitting the subject, as a forbidden mystery of the Divine existence, and reverting to the simple view of the incarnate Son, dying for the sins of the world, and now an ever-living intercessor at the right hand of the throne, pleading his merits and death. Again, the doctrine of the Atonement is often, even in Scripture, set forth in language of a highly figurative character : and the figures at times perplex, more especially when transferred to formal systems of theology, and employed to systematize, not, as in Scripture, to impress. The remedy is found in perceiving that all the figurative expressions, rightly analysed, involve the same simple idea of mediation by a spotless intercessor, who suffered in room of the sinner. This simple conception is the strong tower for the mind, into which it runs and is safe.

The necessity of the Atonement is a mystery, with which the mind very early perplexes itself. Why, it is asked, should God not forgive, without the interposition of suffering on the part of any one ? Perhaps there is no answer, which entirely concludes the question, except that God has so willed, and man should be thankful. At the

same time, there are many considerations which materially aid its solution. To the devout mind, the thought is generally sufficient that, in the plenitude of Divine wisdom and power, nothing is ever done by God except what is necessary ; or, in other words (for so only can we apply the phrase towards God), without which the end in view could not have been rightly accomplished. To one who searches deeper into the subject, arguments of a very reasonable character are supplied by that analogy of the pardoned rebels, which so accurately depicts the position of fallen man towards God. In such a case, equally, the thought which may first occur is that the sovereign would perform a more generous act were he to grant at once a free and unconditional pardon. But a little further consideration impresses the policy of not lightly forgiving rebellion ; on the contrary, of marking the heinousness of the crime by the requirement of a propitiation. As nothing is more true in morals than that a pardon easily won is little esteemed, it is perceived to indicate wisdom so to connect forgiveness with sacrifice and suffering, as to show at once the value of the

boon, and the difficulty of obtaining it. A felt obligation to the deliverer is calculated to form itself a guarantee for the after allegiance. A palpable exhibition of offended justice, requiring infliction before it could be appeased, may be the fittest mode of securing the fidelity of other provinces, still unrevolted. So the proceeding, by which pardon to the rebel was only allowed to be purchased at the cost of endurance to the intercessor, may at last come home to the mind as a fitly devised plan for combining justice with mercy. Applying this analogy, I feel the force of the expression by which Christ is said by his sacrifice to have "magnified the law and made it honourable." I see how, in my salvation, mercy to the sinner is combined with satisfaction for the sin : and God is "just yet justifying." My mind receives a satisfying belief in the necessity of the atonement : not as though pronouncing dogmatically on what God can or cannot do, but inferring from the fact of their employment the exclusive fitness of the means employed, and fortifying the conclusion by considerations which approve themselves to sound reason. But, if difficulties still

arise, and the subject anew pass into the shade of that mystery by which our view of the Divine dealings is so often darkened, I close all controversy by discharging from my thoughts the question. The reasons of God's procedure are eminently amongst the Divine secrets : and it is always the least admissible ground for refusing credence to a fact fully revealed, that all the objects of the arrangement are not perceptible. I dismiss the mystery, to repose in the fact ; blessing God for its gracious adaptation to my felt spiritual necessities.

The prevalent source of difficulty on the subject of the Atonement is the practice, in considering the doctrine, of unduly intermingling the Divine and the human contemplations. To the eye of God, which sees the end from the beginning, the ultimate destiny of every one has all the certainty of an accomplished fact ; and not only the Atonement, but its consequences, may be viewed as past and complete. To the foresight of God, every one who is ultimately saved is seen now to be safe. But this is a point of view to which man cannot be transferred. To proclaim

to any individual, that, by force of the Atonement, he is now and henceforward absolutely safe for eternity, is to pronounce what God only can pronounce, and to assume as within human apprehension what can only be known to Divine intelligence. There is risk of an alternative result ; either that there is produced a false and presumptuous confidence, or else that the individual falls into dejection, it may be sinks into despair, through the felt impossibility of so clearing his condition. The doctrine is, like all others which are intended for practical guidance, to be presented to man at man's point of view. It is then a proclamation, to all indiscriminately, not that all indiscriminately are safe for eternity, but that to all is open the way to pardon and acceptance, through application at the throne of grace for the sake of the crucified Redeemer. To God, and to him alone, is known who of the number shall, through acceptance of the offered grace, and steadfast continuance to the end, attain unto life. To man nothing is known, save that God waits to be gracious ; and that whoso goeth unto him shall in nowise be cast out. And this is

enough. The doctrine is thus removed from the sphere of perplexing mysteries, and placed amongst the plain and efficient principles of human conduct.

It is from not maintaining the distinction between Divine and human contemplations, that arises any disturbance to the mind from the mode of setting forth the Atonement, in which Christ is represented as dying for the elect only. This is rightly said in reference to the view of the Divine mind ; for it then expresses the undoubted truth that, in the foreknowledge of the Supreme, the Atonement is so seen in connexion with the precise number of individuals by whom its benefits will be accepted and appropriated, as to make it in the Divine regard a propitiation exclusively for these. It is as if, in the case of the rebels, a prophetic foreknowledge was possessed of the precise individuals by whom advantage would be taken of the proclaimed pardon ; when it fitly might be said that the satisfaction was offered on behalf of these only. When Christ is said to have died for the elect and none else, there is expressed not a truth merely, but a

truism. It is to say that the elect are the saved, and the saved are the elect. It is simply an expression of identity ; such as many, if not most, metaphysical propositions turn out, on dissection, to be. The doctrine cannot, except by way of caricature, be presented so as to exhibit the Divine Being, as making a purely arbitrary selection ; like a blind man laying his hand at random on the heads of a surrounding throng. God's ordination unto life is made on God's foresight of the acceptance of the life offered ; not indeed by way of transaction, presenting any motive or condition to the Divine mind, but through God's gracious sovereignty, decreeing the acceptance of His mercy to be followed by its full enjoyment. And so the doctrine of election, whilst undoubtedly true as a point of dogmatic theology, presents, when rightly considered, no obstruction to the freest application of those texts which declare Christ to have so died for the whole world, that every one, without exception, who goes to God through him, shall be accepted and saved. He who, believing the message, accepts and acts on the offer which it brings, and wins from divine

grace, sought by prayer, the redemption which he seeks, will know himself, in the revelations of eternity, to have been, on that very account, chosen unto life before the foundation of the world.

The great evil, which attends the exhibition of the Atonement from the Divine and not the human point of view, is the risk of setting aside, or disparaging, the instrumentality of prayer in the matter of individual salvation. When the whole consequences of the Atonement are set forth as realized and completed, the inference left on the mind is that nothing requires to be sought, because all has been already done. Hence it not seldom happens, that the individuals addressed with the gospel message are earnestly urged to accept, to take, to rejoice, without all the while being ever once told to pray. The Atonement is frequently expounded, without prayer being mentioned, from beginning to end of the exposition. This can scarcely be other than a defect. The forgiveness of sins is to be sought, like any other of God's gifts, and not the least so, if best of all, by supplication presented through the Mediator.

The Bible commands us to pray, for the pardon at once of our own sins, and of those of others. "Forgive us our trespasses," is one of the petitions in the prayer taught by Christ. "Father, forgive them," was His own prayer on the Cross. "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities," is the Psalmist's supplication. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed," is the apostle's injunction. To close with Christ--to accept Christ--to put on Christ, are sound scriptural expressions, when used with the intent and effect of sending the sinner to his knees. But, if employed to warrant to him the possession of a completed salvation without the intervention of a prayer, they are calculated to produce very serious practical mistakes. To exhibit salvation as won without a prayer for pardon, is to alter the process by which man attains to grace, in the point the most essential of all. It is to confer deliverance from punishment, without either penitence or confession. It is to do away, at once with sorrow for sin, and supplication for mercy ; and to substitute with all an indiscriminate feel-

ing of triumph, for something already achieved for them, without their having even to ask for it. The proceeding may be successful in affording peace; indeed, its origin lies in an anxiety to confer peace, which forgets all other considerations. But peace is premature and unstable, unless won after the gospel method. The way of prayer is the only Bible way of a sinner's return to God. Any scheme of salvation, which holds the redemption of the individual to have been already so accomplished by the Atonement as to dispense with the necessity of prayer, is a device of human science, entangled amidst the Divine counsels, and not the simple teaching of God's Word. The error is corrected, by simply recurring to the view of the Atonement as it appears from man's own position; when it becomes the groundwork of a penitent prayer for God's forgiveness and grace, sure of a favourable answer, because presented by the Divine Mediator with the incense of his own perfect sacrifice.

The doctrine of the Atonement is often treated as if its practical application touched only a single point in the spiritual history, that of con-

version. This is again a consequence of regarding atonement abstractedly from mediation : and dealing with its results as all accomplished, and requiring nothing but a simple apprehension of the fact. Rightly held, the doctrine diffuses its practical application over the whole of life. In whatever aspect the future of the believer is seen in the Divine contemplations, it is to himself, and in his own view, a path of uncertainty ; or, if certain of anything, only of this, that renewed snares await him, and fresh sins will be committed. Life is to him an abiding scene of temptation ; a continuing conflict with indwelling corruption ; a course of moral progress, marked, as with human beings such a course must ever be, by frequent shortcoming and failure. In this his conscious state, the doctrine of the Atonement is not merely the groundwork of one isolated transaction in his history ; it is the basis of a recurrence to the throne of grace, frequent as is his need. The thought of the Atonement brings with it, in a connexion which is inseparable, the thought of a ceaseless mediation, and of an ever-during mediator. Day by day, the Christian

must go to God, with a true, not an ostensible, prayer for renewed pardon. In his ever-recurring necessity, the Atonement is not set before him as a remedy to be applied only once ; nor is he left to the misery of supposing that, having once applied it, and found it to fail, he is now given over to reprobation. The object displayed to him is the Lamb in the midst of the throne ; the High Priest abiding continually ; the ever ready intercessor, who, pleading his own merits and sufferings, is sure of obtaining for him renewed forgiveness and grace. This, beyond a doubt, is the truth of Scripture. When the beloved disciple, who was taught on the bosom of the Saviour, proclaims the grand vicarious sacrifice by saying, " He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world," he gives to the doctrine its proper adaptation to the course of everyday life, by saying simultaneously, " My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

The doctrine of the Atonement is not effectually

taught, unless the teaching of it lead to a clear and actuating sense of the subsisting personality of the Saviour. Christ, in his personality, is at times not sufficiently presented. His great work is magnified, at the cost of throwing out of view the Divine agent who wrought it. Yet the grand aim of the gospel is to enforce communion with a personal Saviour, ever at hand to hear and to help. Christ is not presented to us in the light merely of an historical personage : of one who, in past ages, accomplished a mighty achievement, the benefits of which may still be obscurely traced, though the great agent is no longer in the midst of us. He is exhibited as an existing friend, unceasingly at our side, with whom converse may be maintained, as with one who talks with us by the way, and to whom we may at once have recourse, for counsel in difficulty, for comfort in sorrow, for guidance in life, for support in the hour of death. We are called to a communion with Christ, intertwined with all the incidents of our daily life ; and the commonest bounties of Providence are set before us as procured by the intervention of the Saviour, and as

part of that grace towards a sinful world purchased by the blood of the cross. Christ is given to us as the object, not of memory merely, but of present love ; as one of whom we say, with a conscious gush of affection towards an existing object, " We love him, because he first loved us." Let no one accuse of fanaticism the faith which would expend on a personal Saviour the love and reliance of a strong personal attachment. The doctrine may indeed be practised fanatically ; so may every doctrine of the Bible. The great Son of God is not to be addressed in the accents of vulgar familiarity, or of girlish fondness. But he is not the less to be the object of devout intercourse, as real as his personal existence, and unceasing presence. The gospel, in presenting Christ to us, satisfies one of the strongest yearnings of the heart ; the yearning after a human friend, with superhuman power. Our desire is for the sympathy of humanity, combined with the helpfulness of Deity. It is this desire, which led the heathen to invent gods of kindred infirmities with their own : until that diversity of deities, necessary for adaptation to the variety of

human character, issued in a rank polytheism. It is the same desire which, in a corrupt system of Christianity, clings to the conception of human mediators in glorified saints. The gospel displays a beautiful accommodation to the natural instinct, by exhibiting to us the Man of Sorrows, clothed with the omnipresence, and alike with the omnipotence of the Godhead. By means of that union of the Divine and human natures, which reconciles earthly impossibilities, we have bestowed on us a friend who died for us, and who still lives for us as well. The atonement made on the cross is our assurance of a love stronger than death; the pledge to us of fidelity to the end. To the well-taught Christian, the Saviour is the friend "closer than a brother," to whom to turn in the pettiest perplexity, and carry the commonest care; on whom to lay the burden of every grief; in whose footsteps to tread; and in converse with whom to maintain the whole journey of life. Thus is the Christian, in the highest sense, and for the best practical purpose, "always bearing about the dying of the Lord Jesus."

IV.

FAITH.

NOTHING is more difficult to obtain, than a satisfactory definition of faith, in the gospel sense. To describe gospel faith as the mere assent of the mind has, to most expositors of theology, appeared inadequate to account for its effects, and likely to give a handle to the objection against salvation being supposed procurable by a mere intellectual act. The difficulty is sought to be avoided by giving to the word so many different significations, as almost to lead to the inference that it has no fixed meaning at all. In order, as is supposed, to give the term more precise adaptation, it is a common course to divide faith into several different kinds, as historical faith, saving faith, the faith of miracles, and the like. This is very perplexing to a philosophic mind, to which accuracy of terms is essential towards clearness of apprehension.

The difficulty has been found to work itself clear, through a process of reasoning, which seems to combine simplicity of definition with soundness of practical deduction.

Faith, in the proper sense, is simply belief. It is the mental act of crediting a statement as true. The act of belief is always one and the same. The difference, speaking philosophically, does not lie in the kinds of faith, but in the objects of faith, that is, in the things believed, which are as numerous and various as are the subjects of human knowledge. And according to the different nature of the things believed, the effects of faith will vary. When the object of faith is an abstract truth, the mind will not proceed beyond a mere intellectual act. When it is something which affects the wellbeing, the belief will act directly on the feelings and conduct. I cannot believe that a particular acquisition will give me pleasure, without desiring the acquisition ; or that a particular course will lead to my advantage, without, generally speaking, adopting it, if in my power. I cannot believe a friend to be faithful without a feeling of trust being awakened ; or

danger to be imminent, without anxiety for deliverance ; or one way only to be open for escape from death, without at once pursuing it. Hence faith, or belief, though in the strictest sense an act of the intellect, becomes, by the constitution of our nature, a practical principle, wherever the thing believed is not a mere abstract truth, but something which bears on our position and circumstances in life. The mental act of belief is the first step in the process ; but according as the subject of belief is something which touches the sensibilities, or affects the interests, belief is attended by feeling, or issues in action. It is, of course, assumed in this, that belief has true possession of the mind. If it be a pretence, not a reality, no result will follow ; for, in order to a true effect, a true cause must precede. Or, it may happen, that the individual contrives to dismiss the subject from his thoughts, as men drown by dissipation the recollection of their cares, or put away serious reflection by the distraction of trifles. There will in that case be no faith, because there is no mental exercise, just as there is no vision when we shut our eyes, or turn them away. The effects

of faith will not exist, where faith itself does not. But wherever belief takes true hold of the mind, it will produce its natural fruit ; and this is practical conduct, where the matter is of practical concern.

Faith in the gospel is belief in the statements of the gospel on the subject of man's salvation, including, as the belief must do to be complete, their personal application to him who reads them. Now these are not statements of abstract doctrines merely, but of practical truths, directly bearing on the circumstances and welfare of the individual addressed. He is told that he is a sinner, in danger of eternal death ; that God is willing, for Christ's sake, to forgive his sins, and to aid him by His Spirit to maintain a life of holiness ; that his only hope of safety lies in an application to the throne of grace, through the one Mediator between God and man. He, by whom all this is truly, and in his heart, believed, will, generally speaking, go to God by prayer, in the way of God's appointment. He will do so as certainly, as he who truly believes himself in danger of his life, and that he only possesses one mode of escape, will, without delay, adopt that method of deliver-

ance. If he does not do so, the reason is, generally speaking, that the message is not received in its entirety, but is disbelieved in one or other part of it; either, for instance, that he does not believe himself the sinner described, but thinks that on the whole his merits overbalance his faults; or does not believe the danger so imminent as to require an immediate refuge; or does not believe that salvation can be obtained in no other way, but thinks he may commit himself to the general mercy of God, without farther ado. The obstruction to the reception of Divine truth, created by sinful passions, usually operates by preventing belief on one or other of such essential points. A true faith in the entirety of the message, considered both in itself and in its personal application, will, with men ordinarily constituted, impel to the appropriate course, with all the certainty of a general law.

Hence it is made apparent, how unfounded is the objection against the gospel scheme, that it makes salvation the result of an intellectual act merely. Such an act is undoubtedly the first step in the process; for the message must be credited

as true, or else will not be received ; but the process does not stop here, nor is the end attained by a simple intellectual perception. The belief entertained, being a belief in the necessity of something done by the individual, the necessity, namely, of his applying by prayer for pardon, for the sake of Christ, leads to that something being done accordingly ; and it is not through the mere belief, but through the consequent act, that the end in view is accomplished. Nor let it be supposed, that it is aught slight or trivial that is required, or that the phrase, "something done by the individual," is only made applicable by an overstrained use of language. The act of applying to God for pardon, for the Redeemer's sake, is, with many, a most difficult act, far more difficult than countless others which may be fancied. So much there is of pride in the human heart, so much of reluctance to confess sinfulness, and abandon all pretence of merit, so much of proneness, under transgression, to assume an attitude of haughty recklessness rather than of humble penitence, that, with the vast majority of the race, few things would not be done more readily than to

stoop to the position of a sinner, destitute of all excuse, and to be pardoned for nothing in himself, but through free grace, extended for the sake of another. It would be, with many, easier to travel thousands of miles, than simply to go to God's throne, though requiring nothing more than the direction of the mind towards it; easier to take on them years of laborious drudgery, than simply to bend the knee in the attitude of supplication. The application to God for pardon through the Redeemer is as much a piece of practical conduct, as is the journey of the rebel from a distant province to the seat of proclaimed mercy. He, who is saved by such an application, is not saved by an intellectual act of belief, but, in a strictly proper sense, by belief leading to action.

The mistakes committed on this subject have to some extent arisen from a misapprehension of the phrase, "Justification by Faith." The phrase, at first sight, not unnaturally suggests the idea of a mere act of intellect being the procuring cause of salvation. But the true explanation of its use is, not that it contains within its limited words a full explanation of the gospel plan, but merely

that it is employed by way of general epithet, marking out the scheme by reference to the prominent feature in which the true doctrine differs from the false. The plan of salvation, to which the gospel, in its whole tenor, stands opposed, is that which represents eternal happiness as the reward of merit or good works ; and in contrast to this is inculcated the true scheme of the Bible, which teaches that salvation is procured, not through a man's own works, but through faith in the efficacy of what has been done for him by the Saviour. Works in the one case occupy the foreground of the scheme : faith in God's mercy is the prominent feature of the other ; and the faith is, in the language of the Bible, " faith without works ;" or, in other words, the faith, which brings to the mercy-seat, brings without a plea of good works,—without, it may be said, even a thought of them,—on the part of the suppliant. According to a very common proceeding, the former scheme is termed, descriptively, " Justification by Works ;" the other, " Justification by Faith." It is not thereby intimated that nothing is to be done under the one scheme, or that nothing is believed

under the other ; but the two schemes are distinguished by appellations taken, in each, from its most perceptible element. The phrase is not a logical definition, but a characteristic epithet. It is the brief title to the ample volume. Rightly to apprehend the gospel scheme of salvation, the inquirer must read the volume itself, not content himself with arbitrary deductions from the title-page. In the true construction of Scripture, faith does not, more than works, possess any meritorious efficacy. "By grace are ye saved," is the Scripture doctrine, referring all to the free mercy of God, flowing through the channel of the Mediator. But faith in the revealed grace is so needful towards seeking and obtaining it, as to form the prominent counterpart on the side of man. "By grace are ye saved, through faith," is the full measure of Scripture expression. To be saved through faith is an abbreviated colloquialism. No sound inquirer will be misled by the colloquialism into conceiving that the faith which saves is a mere intellectual act, or other than an active principle ; a faith which leads to prayer, and through prayer procures deliverance.

It appears to many excellent persons, that to represent anything as done on the part of the sinner towards procuring salvation is at variance with the freeness of the gospel scheme. But, in so thinking, they forget the undoubted truth, that a thing may be done, and yet there may be no merit in doing it. We cannot move our limbs for the purpose of walking towards a given point, or raise our hand for the purpose of taking what is offered us, without something being done by us, in the proper sense of the word; yet to speak of such acts as implying merit would be mere absurdity. When the gospel enjoins the sinner, in order to his obtaining forgiveness, to go to God by prayer through the one only Mediator, there is no more of merit implied in his doing what is required, than there is when he uses his limbs to walk from a place of danger to a place of safety, or stretches out his hand to take what is presented to him as a free gift. It is a similar objection, which is urged against speaking of conditions in connexion with the plan of redemption. Here again it is forgotten that condition, in a philosophical sense, merely imports the necessary pre-

cedent to a result, not a precedent holding in every case the relation of merit to reward. In the true sense of the word, everything which must be done, before something else will happen, is the condition of that other coming into existence. And so our removal from the place of danger to the place of safety is rightly said to be conditional on our making the necessary exertion, or our acquisition of a gift to be conditional on our stretching out the hand to receive it, without, in either case, the least implication of desert. When the rebel is called on to journey from his distant province to the foot of an earthly throne, to seek and to obtain pardon, his deliverance is strictly conditional on his doing what is prescribed; yet no act of merit is then performed by him, and he owes his safety to the free grace of his sovereign, and to nothing else. To represent the salvation of the soul as conditional on going to God's throne, in the way of his own appointment, detracts as little from the freeness of the pardon.

Objections such as these originate in a feeling entitled to respect, yet sometimes carried to an injurious excess—I mean a feeling of fear lest the

gospel scheme should be stated in such a way as to derogate from the sovereignty of Divine grace. Hence there is a shrinking aversion from the use of any language which seems to ascribe to man a share in the work of salvation ; and such words only are employed, as intimate the scheme to be one in which God does everything, and man does nothing. But, in seeking to avoid one error, such persons run into the exactly opposite, and appear, by the phraseology used by them, to represent man as a mere passive machine, acted on mechanically by Divine grace, without power of resistance, or liberty of choice. The mistake arises from an over-sensitiveness about the use of ordinary language on religious subjects, even when such language is liable to no misapprehension ; for who doubts the freeness of the pardon given to the rebel, or attributes any merit to the journey taken to procure it ? A scrupulosity such as this, though springing from amiable motives, is unwarranted and injurious, and is directly rebuked by the free and unrestrained use of the common forms of expression exhibited in the Bible. The fittest language to be employed on religious sub-

jects, as on all others, is the daily language of practical good sense, with which, as those who use it may be assured, the expositions of sound philosophy will never be found to conflict.

The controversy concerning faith and good works,—in other words, the question whether the doctrine of justification by faith be, or be not, injurious to morality,—is as old as Christianity itself. It will aid in the solution of this question to remember the simple principle that, just as faith is belief, so the effects of faith are determined by the nature of the things believed. If the doctrine given to be believed was that which has at times been alleged, that, by a single act of the mind, the Christian passed into a condition of safety, which no after occurrence could endanger, it might be rightly said that the doctrine was perilous to morality; for it would reasonably be maintained, that a sense of security would weaken the impulse to duty, and that he, who knew himself to be in no danger from transgression, would easily be tempted to transgress. But the gospel inculcates no such lesson. It places the penitent sinner where the penitent trans-

gressor in ordinary life is placed. It assures him from Divine grace, sought by prayer, of what the Bible itself calls "the remission of sins that are past." But, with reference to his future course, it leaves him the same moral agent as before, alike bound in duty to God, alike liable to come short in that duty; exposed to renewed danger by renewed transgression; but with the same refuge in Divine mercy, and additional motives to obedience, arising out of a personal experience of the Redeemer's love. The Bible, indeed, tells the believer that he is "not under the law, but under grace;" and the language has at times been interpreted, as if it signified that the moral law no longer applied to him, either in its obligations or its penalties. But this is another misconstruction of an abbreviated truth. The Bible does not thereby proclaim to the believer an exemption from moral obligation, but simply reminds him, by an emphatic form of expression, that he is now about to act under a different dispensation; not of law merely, as at first, but of grace to an offender against law, such as lays on the moral agent an additional restraint of the strongest possible

kind. It speaks, at the same time, in language plain and unambiguous, of a "fall from grace;" and tells not only of a possible declension, but of a declension of which the consequences may not be easily retrieved. "It is impossible," says the Bible, using, as in common speech, the language by which a case of extreme difficulty is indicated, "it is impossible for those, who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." Now he, who believes all this, must needs be impelled to good works, by the natural effect on the mind of the things believed by him. Feeling himself as much as ever under the law of moral obligation, he is as much as ever influenced by its power. He has an added impulse to duty, in those sentiments of gratitude for what redeeming love has done for him, which, with all but the basest of their kind, are the strongest incitements to virtue.

Love towards Him who died for him, is that motive to compliance with his will, and imitation of his example, which, in every rightly constituted mind, love is always found to be. "The love of Christ constraineth him." "He is not his own; he is bought with a price."

The expression "good works" has commonly had a meaning attached to it, different from what truly belongs to it, in reference to the Christian scheme. In the minds of many, if not of most, the phrase invariably raises the combined idea of work and reward; the conception of virtue, claiming recompense as its right. Such is not the gospel sense of the expression: nor can ever be its meaning, in any system of belief which contains a right estimate of the relation in which man stands to God. For, however his virtue may be deservedly applauded by his fellow-men, it can never be presented to God as otherwise than imperfect and tainted; nor can ever the Divine favour be expected otherwise than of grace. In its gospel sense, the expression intimates the course of him who, humbly believing that for Christ's sake he has been pardoned his past sins, has

entered on a new career, and aims at universal conformity with the Divine law ; not as hoping to attain to an obedience which will be perfect, and entitle him to reward, but as performing the true part of a creature towards its Creator, with the certainty of failure and shortcoming in all that he does, yet the assurance of advancing, through Divine grace, to an always increasing measure of moral excellence. The works of the Christian are denominated good, because done from a right motive, regard to the Divine will ; and done towards a right end, fulfilment of the Divine purposes : and so having the essence of virtue, though not of virtue complete. They are marked by many imperfections. They are broken in upon by many infirmities. Their attempted performance results in still recurring disappointment. The consciousness of this keeps the Christian humble : at the same time it impels him to renewed efforts after holiness, and renewed earnestness of prayer for the aid of Divine grace. His language, from the beginning to the end, is what the chiefest of the Apostles is found using ; “ I count not myself to have apprehended : but

this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The course of the Christian is, from the first, a course of good works, in the only sense in which the services of man towards God can be rightly so described; and the phrase is an expansive term, embracing the weak beginnings of the believer, not less than his highest attainments.

The peculiarity of the Gospel is not that it relieves from moral obligation, but that it denies to man's righteousness all title to reward at God's hand; depicts it as ever marked by incompleteness, and intermixed with sin; and presents salvation in the aspect, exclusively, of a free gift of Divine grace. Nothing can be more absolute than the exclusion, under the Gospel scheme, of all plea of merit before God. Man is, from first to last, placed in the position of one who requires forgiveness for something in his holiest deeds. Heaven is bestowed on him, in a sense the most absolute, for the sake of Christ only. But, so

far is this scheme of salvation from injuring the interests of morality, that, in reality, it is of all others best calculated to secure, in the moral agent, the continual advance in holiness which is the grand object of the Divine plans. In place of its impairing moral obligation, it only makes duty more exacting, by heightening its standard ; whilst it adds to the inducement to pursue it, by awarding the prize to diligent striving, not confining it to successful achievement. Where man expects to be saved by his own good deeds, the result is a tendency to reduce the requirement to the level of his attainment ; and, having reached the mark placed by himself, he rests content. Or another alternative may occur, that, feeling the aim presented to him to be beyond the reach of his powers, he abandons further effort, and either remains in desponding inactivity, or gives himself up, as in shipwreck, to the reckless jollity of despair. The Gospel, in showing to man the way to pardon and to purity, through the grace of God, dispensed for the sake of the Redeemer, delivers him at once from fear, and from the inactivity of fear. It inspires him with the con-

fidence necessary for the effective exercise of his powers, by showing him the foundation of his safety laid securely on another's merits, not his own; whilst the very thought of his being so saved maintains the humility indispensable towards further progress. It turns him into the path of duty, with the highest requirements laid on him; and yet, by refusing to stamp any act of his as worthy of recompense from God, it prevents him from at any time reposing in a fancied state of perfection. Day by day, the Christian strives after duty with more of vigour, and finds the strength of duty to grow with its exercise; yet, day by day, he goes to God for pardon on account of felt deficiencies; and, in the act of doing so, perceives a flaw to mend, an error to avoid, an aim beyond, towards which to start afresh on the morrow. Thus there is secured an unceasing progress upwards; and so the Gospel solves the grand problem, how man may attain to an heavenly inheritance, without his own works having any share in the acquisition; and yet there be thereby not prevented, but promoted, a course of moral improvement, rising always

higher and higher towards the loftiest eminence of virtue.

There is a topic, comprised in that of faith, of not unfrequent discussion, and of still more frequent dogmatism—I allude to the connexion of faith with responsibility. It is stated by some, as a truth too clear for argument, that no one is responsible for his belief; for belief (they say) cannot be ruled by volition, but must necessarily be determined by the amount of evidence presented to the mind. There is here, to some extent, involved the same error of considering faith, in the religious sense, as a mere intellectual act, and not a practical principle. Not that there exists any absolute exclusion of responsibility, even from the performance of a simple intellectual act; for although, in one sense, it may be true, that belief is independent of volition, and must be ruled by the amount of evidence before the mind, yet he who, from indolence, or other engrossments, or a desire to remain unconvinced, refuses to collect and consider the evidence which would convince him, is justly deemed criminal on account of his unbelief. Take, for instance,

those truths of physical science, on which such a flood of light has been thrown in modern times. Surely, if an individual were in circumstances enabling him to obtain the illumination of recent discovery, and yet obstinately refused the information, and blindly adhered to the dogmas of an antiquated theory, he would be justly censurable for his scientific scepticism. Or, take the case of a simple historical fact, resting on evidence held sufficient by mankind generally for its establishment. He who, in a perverse or trifling turn of mind, declares his disbelief of the fact, without any inquiry into the evidence, will rightly have his dissent from the common faith made the subject of moral blame. It may be that, in strict philosophy, the culpability does not lie in the want of faith, but in the want of faith's precedents, the want of candour, of humility, of serious reflection, of diligent inquiry. There may be ground, in accurate metaphysics, to remove the responsibility from belief itself, and to place it in those acts or omissions which form the preventives to belief. But practically the result is the same. At whatever point of the mental process a precise analysis

may attach the blame, what the common judgment of mankind substantially does is to condemn the individual for his unbelief. But responsibility is held, in common life, still more clearly to attach, when that which is in question is the adoption or rejection of a practical course, proposed on the authority of intervening friendship, for the attainment of an important end. Here, again, a philosophical analysis may place the culpability, not in the absence of belief, but in the absence of the preparatives towards believing ; but, in practical result, the rejection of the proposal will meet with merited condemnation, if in itself it be one, of which a little reflection would show the soundness and efficacy ; and the alleged unconquerable scepticism will be viewed as a legitimate subject of moral censure. If a man be told by a friend, of whose wisdom and kindly feeling he has every reason to be assured, how to escape from surrounding perils, and refuses to listen to the advice, the common sense of mankind holds him responsible for his ruin ; and to plead in excuse a want of faith beyond his power to avoid, would be only con-

sidered evidence of a diseased intellect, or irclaimably careless heart. In the practical matter of salvation, men are dealt with by the Gospel on exactly the same footing. The Gospel is a message from a friend who cannot lie, and whose power can fully execute his wisdom, pointing out to sinners, in danger of perishing, the simple practical course by which they may attain salvation. He, who refuses to follow the course prescribed, fitly has his ruin laid on his own head ; and, if claiming exemption from responsibility on the ground of inability to believe, advances a plea which he would not dare to present in the affairs of ordinary life, because all around would at once reject it with derision. And the Bible only repeats the common language of mankind, when it declares that the rejection of the Gospel is an aggravation of the guilt incurred by the transgression of the law ; just as, by common consent, he who transgresses command is deemed to add to his culpability, when he also sins against the love which would forgive and reclaim. “ He, that despised Moses’ law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much

sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God ; and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing ; and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace ? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me ; I will recompense, saith the Lord.”

V.

ORIGINAL SIN.

HEREDITARY succession is commonly viewed as an institution of human policy. In an enlarged sense, it is seen, on reflection, to form a principle of Divine administration. By a law universal as our nature, those, who have neither houses nor lands to confer on their children, transmit to them their features and dispositions, and give them to inherit their peculiarities of body or mind, though often by an unequal distribution. A physical peculiarity will so pass from father to son, as to form the badge of a whole race ; perhaps, in the course of ages, to expand into a national characteristic. There are particular dispositions which, even in common conversation, are spoken of as belonging to particular families. And it is very noticeable, that the derivative qualities, which are most prominent, are those

which have in them the character of imperfection or fault. The law is so general in its operation, that probably there is no one, who has not derived from his parents some inheritance of this sort, some peculiarity of intellect, or habit, or temper, sometimes of mere manner and gesture. Any seeming exceptions to the rule will be found, in most instances, to be apparent only ; and the reality of the case to have been unperceived, either from want of sufficient observation, or from that familiarity, through which characteristic dispositions so soon pass out of sight.

If, therefore, a free agent fall into a depravation of moral character, it is consistent with human experience that a similar tendency to evil should appear in his offspring, in the form of an original taint. This is nothing else than that hereditary succession, in temper and disposition, the evidences of which are scattered thickly around. Hence the doctrine of Original Sin, or, in other words, the belief that an original bias towards evil is inherited by all mankind from their first parents, is sufficiently intelligible, and ought to be considered very reasonable. If our first parents

contracted through sin a depravation of moral character, it is not only not wonderful that this should pass to their posterity, but anything else would have been at variance with the fixed rule of derivative life, in the whole surrounding humanity.

It may not at first sight be clear, how such depravation of moral character could result from a single transgression, however aggravated. But a little consideration will show, how even a single sin may change the whole moral constitution of a being previously pure. The knowledge of sin is itself a taint, and not unlikely to become a temptation. The consciousness of moral degradation introduces fretfulness and despondency into the heart,—qualities importing a lowering of moral tone, and inconsistent with that happy confidence of right, from which the vigour of duty arises. Love is, as a motive, exchanged for fear, thereby substituting a new and less elevated source of action, and diffusing through the moral frame an element of vitality proper to a being of a lower order. Hence it may be seen, how even the single sin of our first parents imparted to their moral

character an essential deterioration, passing to all their descendants, by the grand rule of hereditary derivation.

Original sin is not a dogma, but a fact. The Bible deals with the Fall as a matter of simple narrative, and declares the resulting consequence to the race at large, in the language which announces an event. The account of the Fall is very plain and explicit, though expressed in terms suggestive of something beneath the surface, not fully revealed. When I read of a garden in which God is described as walking, and of a tree of which to eat made "to know good and evil," and of another tree, concerning which the Supreme Being is apprehensive lest man "put forth his hand, and take of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever," I cannot help seeing indications of objects and their qualities, different from what fall within our present experience, and marking a mysterious peculiarity of condition and circumstance. I cannot regard the statements as purely figurative, except on a principle of construction destructive of all simple faith in the Divine Word. I cannot, at the same time, venture to interpret

them according to a rigid literality. I maintain a mental suspense, exclusive of all dogmatic assumption of complete knowledge, and expectant of some after revelation, which will show that, when man lost his primal Paradise, he lost more than the earth, as now constituted, could afford. I see clearly, that the object of the revelation is not to give precise information as to the external circumstances in which man was placed, but to convey a distinct impression of the moral character of his fall. As to this, it is distinct and unambiguous. The substance of what it tells is, that man committed an act of direct disobedience against God's command, when the precept was so plain that he could not misapprehend it, and the circumstances were such, that the sin combined ingratitude for manifold bounties with discontent under a single privation. There was transgression of God's law, express in its injunction, and reasonable in its limited requirement. There was offence against God's love, which gave so many enjoyments, under a condition easy to be fulfilled. There was restless and unthankful disregard of the blessings bestowed, accompanied, as it usually

is, by a rebellious aim at a gratification for the time forbidden. And the guilt was aggravated, not palliated, by listening to a temptation, which, standing, as it did, in direct opposition to the unequivocal expression of God's will, could be nothing else than an incitement to evil, the suggestion of a wicked creature, in a state of revolt against the Creator.

That this transgression of our first parents produced a deterioration of moral character, passing by inheritance to their posterity, is declared with equal explicitness. And the testimony of Scripture is fully confirmed by experience. The fact of an original taint, universal as the race, is singularly attested by proofs presented to everyday observation. It is made manifest in that early period of life, when nearness to the source may best determine the quality of the fountain. The children of every family exhibit, intermingled with the many charms of infancy, a perverseness and capriciousness of temper, indicative of a moral malformation, therein displaying the child as the miniature of the man, with the streak of the primary corruption running across a multi-

tude of noble qualities, and attractive graces. The savage of the woods discloses the state of human nature ere it has received an artificial covering, and shows that it never exists without a deep blemish, breaking forth, in some particular point, into distinctive vice. But it needs not that we go so far. There is testimony to the fact in every bosom, if men were but faithful to look for it. Scarcely any one but must be sensible of one point of his character, in which there lies a peculiarity of temper, a besetting infirmity, fairly traceable to original obliquity. Actions are frequently performed, so much at variance with the general principles and habits, as to indicate "a law in the members, warring against the law of the mind." The continual indulgence of inclination, in opposition to the most urgent dictates, not only of reason, but self-interest, is strong evidence of a native bent towards evil. The incessant relapse into the prevailing sin, notwithstanding the strongest resolutions to the contrary, manifests at once the existence, and the strength, of the bias. In the daily history of common life, there are instances of conduct so irregular, so un-

reasonable, so wayward, as to present a standing testimony to the Fall. I think I see traces of it even in ordinary human language, with its grammatical corruptions and caprices, its countless deflections from rule, its so frequent perversion, in practical use, into something the very opposite of what is right. For language is but the index of thought; and these irregular movements, on the surface of the dial, prove the derangement of the machinery within.

When the Bible says, "By one man sin entered into the world," it immediately adds, "and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Here it intimates that the punishment, as well as stain, of the sin passed upon Adam's posterity; and to some this is a hard saying. It seems as if the transmission of the penalty was still more difficult to be understood than the transmission of the taint. In reality it is easier, so far at least as the penalty consisted of such a disorganization of the physical frame, as at last resulted in dissolution; for nothing is more accordant with experience than the transmission, from father to son, of disease, and

death as its consequence. If the doom of Adam was death, as the result of physical deterioration, the doom was one which, according to the existing course of nature, must needs be shared in by his descendants, simply as inheritors of the parental frame. There may be mystery in the enforced inheritance ; but the fact is before every eye.

The grand question which is always asked is, Why should all this have occurred, seeing that God, by his omnipotence, might have confined both the taint and the doom of the sin to Adam himself ; some will add, not unfairly, might have prevented, in the case of Adam himself, the existence of either ? When this question is put, it is sometimes forgotten that it has a wider scope than the matter immediately in hand. It touches on the general topic of the origin of evil ; as to all of which, moral or physical, it is equally open to inquire, why it should have occurred under the government of Omnipotent goodness. The question is one of natural theology, rather than of Christian doctrine.

The wisest of our race have found the subject

of the origin of evil to be surrounded with difficulties, incapable of entire solution. And yet there are considerations lying on its surface, which, if they do not remove the difficulties, at least greatly relieve them. I see clearly, that the creation of finite beings, who are at the same time free agents, will, by natural consequence, bring with it the entrance into the world of moral evil. For, in its very conception, free-agency supposes a possible declension. And we cannot conceive that such declension should never take place, without imagining an inevitable propension to what is right, such as seems, in finite creatures, contradictory of the notion of free-agency. The nature of such creatures implies the possession of intelligence and information short of perfect; and this very imperfection of knowledge will produce a deviation from duty, where intentional disobedience may not exist. Hence I attain to the perception that moral evil, to a greater or less extent, followed inevitably the creation of free moral agents; and that this result could have only been avoided, by God abstaining from such creation altogether, and dwelling in the solitude of his own perfect

being, in a world unpeopled by intelligences finite and subordinate.

But I also see that, wherever moral evil or sin occurs to any extent, physical evil or suffering is its natural concomitant. If the free moral agents have God's works at all within their power, a part of their sin will not improbably consist in an abuse or dilapidation of these ; thereby introducing disorder into creation, and pain into the sentient parts of it. But suffering is, moreover, in any view we can take of the natural fitness of things, the proper atmosphere of sin. That transgressors should be placed in a condition where no evil exists, and all is unmingled happiness, is a thing so abhorrent to reason, as to make its occurrence inconceivable, under any right moral system. Suffering is not only the natural product of sin, but also its necessary corrective. Hence I am led to the conclusion, that the existence of finite beings, who are also free agents, as it implies the entrance of moral evil, equally implies the accompaniment of physical ; and that, just as free-agency admits of sin, right moral government imperatively requires suffering as its consequence.

But so soon as I reach the conviction that, in a creation peopled by free agents, some evil, more or less, must exist, I find myself in substance relieved from all the difficulties of the subject. It is true, that a general belief in the necessity of some evil existing affords no satisfaction as to the reasons of particular ills. But it tends to produce in the mind a feeling of acquiescence in their occurrence ; and thereby to place it in that frame, in which it willingly turns to the perception of their uses and alleviations. The great difficulty is to understand why evil should have existed at all. When that difficulty is overcome, and evil in some shape is perceived to have been inevitable, the mind is open to those compensating considerations, which it now perceives are all of which the subject admits. It observes, with thankfulness, the much of good which is mingled with the ill. It traces, with satisfaction, the moral benefits of physical suffering. It not merely comprehends, but appreciates, the wise and holy purposes of the dispensation. If, in any particular case, it has evidence of a remedy within reach, by application of which the evil may be removed, it

loses, as to that case, any feeling of uneasiness ; for, even though it should remain a mystery why the co-existence of evil and remedy should have been ordained, in place of the evil being altogether prevented, yet, in practical result, deliverance from the evil, placed within the reach of the individual, puts, or may at his own good will put him, in the same position as if the evil had no existence.

The consideration last mentioned is peculiarly applicable towards removing the difficulties connected with the subject of Original Sin. There is here an evil, and an evil of which the magnitude can scarcely be exaggerated ; but God has provided a remedy, by the application of which the evil and its consequences are all taken away. In this, even more clearly than in other instances, man has never been left to the contemplation of unavoidable, and at the same time irremovable ill. The co-existence of evil and remedy has been from the first proclaimed. It was announced, if I may so speak, with such benevolent haste, that the voice, which declared the consequences of the Fall, intimated in the same breath, although with

the obscurity proper to the Divine plan, the Atonement by which these consequences were to be retrieved. In one particular, the parallelism of the evil and remedy is manifest to all ; because, in so far as the penalty of Adam's sin consisted of the dissolution of the body, or what, for distinction, has been called natural death, we know that the doom has been reversed, by the resurrection in store for all. We believe, at least I know not how any can refuse to do so, without denying their natural meaning to the words of Christ, that those many members of the human family, who die in infancy, have their safety for eternity secured by application of "the blood of sprinkling," to remove the only taint which could attach to them. We may not unreasonably suppose that the benefit of the atonement may, in like manner, be extended to others, whose circumstances preclude them, as much as infants, from the knowledge and acceptance of the Gospel message. Even as, in common life, there are mediators, who procure pardon for those who are ignorant of the intercession, so, in the Divine plans, it may be, with "the one Mediator between God and men."

Here, indeed, our information is so incomplete, that we may not venture, dogmatically, to apply the inference to specific cases ; nor, perhaps, can we safely proceed beyond a general impression of the likelihood of such an intervention. But, very plainly, in the only case with which you, my reader, and I are practically concerned—the case of those, who enjoy a clear revelation, and are responsible for their use of it—there are the sure means afforded of removing all the consequences of the Fall, by application at God's throne for the grace purchased by the Redeemer ; and those who do not use a remedy, so simple and accessible, have themselves only to blame for the continuance of the calamity. The hearers of the gospel are neither doomed, nor permitted, to regard the misfortune abstractedly from its relief. It is, to each of them, at once his privilege and duty to view the evil of the Fall in connexion with the remedy of the Atonement. Simply to do so takes away, in his particular case, all pretext of suffering injustice ; for no one can complain of a calamity, from which he has afforded the sure means of escape. It may remain, metaphysically, a difficulty, why

the evil should have been permitted, so as to make the remedy necessary; but the co-existence of evil and remedy practically annihilates the evil.

It is of some consequence to clear the subject of Original Sin, because the doctrine is an essential part of Christian faith, and as such is to be fully believed, and firmly held. The belief of it is of no small efficacy in cherishing the humility of spirit, so needful in the Christian; indeed so indispensable for producing the state of mind suited to the reception of Divine grace. But if, in the case of any one, difficulties should still remain, let me add for such an one the consideration, that these difficulties are not such as should affect, in the slightest degree, the practical course of an inquirer after salvation. He must pursue the same way to deliverance, whether his need of it be created by original, or by actual sin. His difficulties are, at the utmost, speculations as to the origin of the transgressions; whilst, for all practical purposes, it is enough to be convinced of their existence. For the determination of such an one's conduct, it is sufficient to know the fact of his sinfulness, however arising; and

nothing could be more contrary to reason, than to delay his resort to God's throne, by entering on the inquiry how much of the sin, of which he is conscious, is traceable to original taint, how much to the exercise of free-agency. The question is one, which probably never could be solved ; and certainly the solution of it was never intended as a step in the process by which man attains to grace. None possessed of true self-knowledge can doubt, that, to whatever stain he may have inherited from his first parents, he has added an amount of actual transgression, sufficient by itself to expose him to God's righteous judgment, and to make salvation by grace his only refuge from perdition. How much, precisely, of each enters into the aggregate of guilt, it is unnecessary for him to know. Enough, for the great practical end, the truth that he is a sinner, combined with that other truth, that " the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin."

VI.

CONVERSION.

A PASSAGE like the following may strike my readers as something familiar : “ From that moment the whole current of his thoughts and feelings was changed. A new light had flashed upon his mind ; a new impulse had taken possession of his heart, and bore him onward, with a power which all other motives seemed, by intermingling, to augment. Life for him appeared thenceforward to have but one object ; and though his aim was distant, and the journey at times almost hopeless, he still pursued his course, with the vigour of concentrated energy. He saw the bright point still beyond him ; but strove towards it, with undiminished resolution, and undeviating constancy.”

There is no particular volume, from which I have taken this passage ; but something of the

kind I have often seen, either in books descriptive of real life, or in those works of fiction, whose merit is supposed to lie in the skill with which the features of real life are painted. The description is quite a natural one; indeed, the frequency of its occurrence, in works which must win their way by appealing to the feelings of the mass, shows how accordant it is with the realities, or at least with the possibilities, of ordinary experience.

Yet it is no stronger description than this, which is often objected to, when used to depict the process of conversion, in the religious sense of the term. This is scarcely reasonable, and not very consistent. It is strange, that such language should be viewed as rightly portraying the condition of him, whose faculties are absorbed in the prosecution of one grand object of earthly desire, and even to throw around him the dignity and interest of a hero; and yet should be deemed inadmissible, when describing one, who has taken for his great aim in life the object of all the most important—the eternal wellbeing of the soul.

Conversion appears to some either hypocrisy or

fanaticism ; to others, less uncharitable, it is a mystery which it is well to let alone. Rightly viewed, it is a very practical thing, and a very intelligible occurrence. Conversion is, in the spiritual concerns, simply that entire change of course, which is so common in other matters, in ordinary life. The analogy is warranted by that matchless parable of the Saviour, which depicts the restoration of the sinner as the return of the prodigal to the charities and duties of a father's house. The individual has the thought brought home to him, that hitherto he has been in fatal error ; that he has been pursuing sinful indulgences, or following selfish inclinations, to the detriment of his moral constitution, and danger of his immortal soul. He sees that he has been wanting in duty to the Heavenly Master, to love and to serve whom he was bound by the strongest ties ; that he has been guilty of the basest ingratitude to that Divine Friend, who went to the death for his sake. He perceives that he has been neglecting the great end of his being ; that he has wasted his time in trifles, and worse than trifles, till, perhaps, there remains little for action.

The prospect of a coming eternity fills him with alarm. He is convinced there is no safety for him, but in changing his whole plan of life. He must gain God's forgiveness for the sins that are past, and devote himself for the future to the service which God expects from him, and the work which God has given him to do. He is thenceforward an altered man. Having sought, through the appointed mediator, the pardon of his past transgressions, and humbly trusting on the testimony of God's Word, to have obtained it, he enters on a course of sedulous obedience to the Divine will. He withdraws himself from the pleasures of the world, that he may give himself to the work appointed him of God. He openly devotes himself to the service of him who died for him. Preparation for eternity is the great object, which he now maintains steadily in view, amidst all the occupations, and lawful enjoyments, of earth. Advancement in the Divine life is the ambition which swallows up every other. His grand aim in existence is to lay up for himself treasures in heaven. There is nothing in all this, but what finds its illustrative parallel, in

that entire change of sentiment and conduct which is so often exhibited in common life. The change is undoubtedly a great one—greater, it may be, than occurs in any analogous instance. Hence the strong language in which Scripture frequently denotes it; calling it a new heart, a new birth, a new creation. But it bears, in its generic character, so much resemblance to the alteration of course frequently experienced in ordinary life, as to make it, however difficult to achieve, at all events easy to apprehend.

The parallel is maintained, between that Divine intervention by which the work of conversion is originated and assisted, and the interposition, friendly and powerful, which is often found, in ordinary life, to suggest and aid the process of reformation. It is strange that any difficulty should arise in regard to the operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion, when it is considered to how large an extent the Divine agency intervenes in the commonest affairs of life, and with what reason it may be supposed peculiarly operative in the matter of moral regeneration. When pursuing our lawful schemes of worldly advancement, we

rightly desire the Divine countenance and aid; and are considered reasonably to admit that without these we cannot succeed. It would be singular if, in that matter of moral improvement in which God may be supposed to take peculiar interest, and in regard to which his aid would seem the most appropriate, God should interpose the least. If, in regard to worldly wellbeing, we reasonably solicit God to direct us aright, to assist our weakness, to prosper our efforts, we should surely as fitly do so in regard to the eternal welfare of the soul. Considering the relation in which God stands to us as a most kind and bountiful friend, it is natural to expect from him the same description of intervention often experienced from a friend on earth; that he should present to us the warnings and incitements, which will draw us from evil towards good; that he should help our weak endeavours in the way of right; that he should be ready with his counsel in the time of our infirmity; and, from beginning to end of our career, be our never-failing refuge and resource. Nor is the language, in which the Christian ascribes to God exclusively the praise of his re-

storation, much, if at all, more glowing, than that in which gratitude has often dictated on earth the acknowledgment due to the friend who has reclaimed the erring, or redeemed the ruined. It is a familiar expression, that an entire revolution of character has been produced by the influence on the individual of a stronger mind than his own. Why should the language be thought strange, when describing the moral change produced by the influence of that mind by which the universe is ruled ?

The analogy of common life is entirely forgotten, when a stumbling-block is found in the suddenness with which conversion is recorded as often taking place. Nothing is more striking in human affairs, than the magnitude of those revolutions which an instant suffices to produce. The flash of a single thought, the utterance of a single word, the revealment of a single look, are often enough to alter the whole human destiny. The grandest discoveries of science are the fruits of a sudden suggestion, startling the mind into a perception wide as the world itself. The most magnificent productions of genius have their origin in an idea

which all at once met the mind, at a turn on the common path. The highest attainments and acquisitions are capable of being traced to the strong resolution, or fervent vow, of a moment. None but knows how often, with the reckless profligate, the starting-point of a better career has been a sudden fit of remorse, harrowing the soul with the conviction of impending ruin, or the melting penitence, into which a powerful appeal of affection has caused the heart to gush. It may well then happen that conversion, in the spiritual sense, is sometimes equally instantaneous, through the force of a striking thought, or an arousing word; through a flashing conviction of the guilt and hazard of sin, or the influence of the love of Christ, melting the heart into contrition, in the moment of its clear revelation. Nor is the suddenness of conversion confined to the individual. The electrical passage of feeling through a crowd of human beings, particularly when produced by powerful oratory, is an often remarked phenomenon. What is called a season of revival is a natural incident of religious history. There may still ensue, on the preaching of the gospel the result attending the

first sermon which emanated from the company of the apostles—"The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

It is not the less true that here, as in all cases of moral reformation, most of confidence is to be placed in the change which bears on it the character of calm conviction, and progressive improvement. In the ordinary affairs of life, we accord a very different trust to him who has only turned from the path of error, and to him who has long steadily prosecuted the way of right; and so it is reasonable we should do in the matter of religion. The conversion, which proceeds from a deliberate consideration of the spiritual condition and prospects, and which shows itself in a growing vigour of conflict with the besetting sins, and an always augmenting holiness, has, judging from those analogies which God has given for our guidance, a greater prospect of stability, than the rapid transition which, for aught positively known to us, may have had its origin in morbid sensibility, and evanescent feeling. The experience of hasty conversion is too often followed by that of speedy declension; though there never, I believe, is a

wide-spread movement of revival, without some abiding fruit ; without, at least, some "gleaning-grapes" in the topmost boughs. We may not, without strong grounds, take on us to deny, in either case, that the work is of God ; but the judgment which is rested on the steadier exhibition, and more protracted experience, necessarily carries with it the stronger assurance ; is less exposed to the shade of suspicion, and has less attached to it the duty of suspense.

The elements of conversion are generically the same in all : but in specific character they present as great a variety, as exists in the temper and disposition of those who are its subjects. Conversion is so expansive, as to give to its components the varied guise of individual peculiarity. Repentance will be with some a wild and impassioned feeling ; whilst with others it will assume the character of a deliberate and gradual conviction. The prayer for pardon will be with some a cry of anguish : with others the scarcely uttered petition of a quiet sorrow : with some, perhaps, little more at first than an act of prescribed duty, performed coldly and imperfectly, but growing

betimes into the full measure of fervent supplication. The faith of some will be grounded on a clear and satisfying view of the scheme of redemption ; whilst others may be able to do little more than cry out with him in the gospel, " Lord I believe ; help thou mine unbelief." In some the work of sanctification will be exhibited in the steady discharge of limited duties, with advance, perhaps, little marked, save by the conscious growth of a purer spirit ; whilst with others, living in a wider sphere, and amidst more abounding temptations, the progress will be flickering and interrupted ; the sunbeam often darkened by a cloud ; perhaps the calm beauty of the spiritual life never won, till just before the shades of night are about to drop on the scene.

With a diversity so natural and obvious, it is yet a prevalent error, from which the best are not free, to expect an identity in the process, as a test of the reality, of conversion. The rise and progress of the Divine life have been sought to be traced in such a way as to afford unambiguous marks of every stage of advancement. The work has been by no means without its use ; but the

evil has always attended it, that it conveys the impression of one fixed and unvarying course being essential to conversion. It follows that mistakes are often made, either through a too rigid application of the supposed standard, and in consequence a fancied shortcoming from its requirements ; or through a false belief of conformity, where the agreement is little else than formal. Some make convulsive efforts to follow the prescribed course, and, by dint of mere nervous excitement, come to think themselves under a Divine influence, whilst the heart is but little changed. Others, conscious of not possessing the warmth and impetuosity of feeling depicted as characteristic of the transition, sink into needless dejection ; are perhaps deterred from further efforts, and fail to acquire what might have been distinctive lineaments of Christian character, in the hopelessness of resembling the one unvarying portrait presented to their view.

It is simply an extension of the same error to expect an identity in Christian character, after conversion has taken place. It has happened with Christians, even of high attainments, that

they considered the only true exhibition of the Divine life to be that which was made by themselves, or in their own peculiar circle, so that, when religion showed itself in others under a different aspect, the Christianity of these was either doubted of, or considered to be of a low and imperfect type. The idea is directly opposed to what is fairly presumable as to the Divine purpose; which is not to destroy individuality in making men Christians, but rather to give a Christian impress to all diversities of character. The effect of conversion is not to eradicate distinctive peculiarities, nor at once, or by a summary process, to remove even those defects, into which it is an attribute of all human excellencies to run. The man, who is naturally of a lively and cheerful temper, will not in the general case, perhaps ought not in any case, to lose this characteristic; and the Christianity of such an one will be cheerful and happy, thereby giving to religion an attractive grace; though it may be, that the individual falls occasionally into sallies of thoughtlessness, such as form the prevalent infirmity of his peculiar turn of mind. He, to whom the

natural dress of the mind is of a cast more serious and sedate, will display a Christianity of a more sombre tint, perhaps even awaken aversion in some by the sight. A proneness towards the bustle and excitement of active business will cause the new-born sentiment to show itself in the forward prosecution of schemes of public usefulness, and not unlikely bring on the convert the collisions incident to a crowd. A naturally retiring spirit will shrink into the solitude of prayer and meditation. Original warmth of temper will break forth into zeal, sometimes going beyond the limits of sound discretion. The amiability, which was beloved by all, will continue to avoid giving offence, though in doing so it may sometimes have to blame itself for a more than warrantable complaisance. In all these cases, the Christianity may be equally genuine ; yet there may remain, to the day of death, the distinguishing mark of individual character. It seems to be part of the Divine plan to avoid a monotonous sameness, as well in the moral, as in the physical creation ; and to give to the spiritual, as well as to the natural life, the charm of

a wide-spread variety. By dint of those diversities which Christians display, God is served in various ways; and the power of His grace is proved by its touching all natural differences, equally, with a divine hue. We cannot but believe, that the higher intelligencies which people Heaven show the all-pervading holiness imprinted on moral features of great variety of aspect : how then should not Christians differ here in their Christianity, who unhappily to variety of excellence add diversity of defect ?

The reality of conversion is a matter of fact, to be determined on evidence; and, as with other facts appropriate to human cognizance, it is the preponderance of evidence which must rule the judgment. There is, perhaps, no lesson more necessary to be learned by Christians, than that which teaches them to avoid pronouncing against the Christianity of any one, merely because they see some one prominent blemish mixed with a religious profession. Of course I speak not of any gross or palpable sin, wholly incompatible with genuine conversion; I allude to those infirmities of temper, and defects from the full

measure of virtue, which are sometimes made the groundwork of a hasty denial of the Christian name. In the best and holiest, there will be found to the last a remnant of sin ; and, in each particular individual, his own besetting infirmity will form his characteristic defect. An accurate self-knowledge would teach every man that this is the case with himself ; and prompt him to extend to others the same charitable construction which he himself would ask. The reason why one Christian would exclude another from the pale will be found, on scrutiny, to be often little else than that the sin of that other is a different sin from his own, and therefore does not obtain a sympathetic forbearance. If the choice is openly made to rank amongst the people of God, and the general tenor of the life be accordant with the religious profession, there is reasonable evidence of conversion ; which ought not to be considered negatived by the exhibition of a prominent fault ; which, for anything we know, has been, day by day, striven and prayed against, and only breaks out through the strength, even in the best, of remaining corruption. The defects are

all the while not to be overlooked, or considered other than blemishes. They may sometimes be so great, as reasonably to make the judgment one of suspense, even though not of condemnation. Observable in the best, they should prevent that idolatry, too often paid to men of high religious name. On the other hand, they should never be taken as the groundwork of a rash decision on the sincerity of an humbler Christianity.

The like fairness of judgment is, with those limitations which the difference of the case imposes, allowable to the individual concerning himself. It is true that, as he knows his own sinfulness more certainly than he can that of others, he is called on to pronounce on himself a severer and less tolerant sentence. But the rule still applies, that if, in his heart, there be a conscious love of his Saviour, and a conscious hatred of sin, and if his ordinary walk and conversation be such as become the gospel of Christ, he is not to fall into despondency on the subject of his spiritual state, on account of the recurrence of a prevalent infirmity. He is to strive, and to pray daily, against his besetting sin; but his very

sorrow on account of it, still more his resistance to its influence, should convince him that he is on God's side, and assure him of ultimate victory. Let him not, however, attempt to overcome his doubts by any but those practical references which, in ordinary life, afford the true evidence of a change of course. He will commit a fatal error if, in place of surveying his general sentiments and conduct, he set himself to look for some particular moment in his history, at which he can say that he passed from a state of condemnation to assured safety for eternity. To the Divine omniscience, the precise point of transition is, doubtless, clearly marked ; but, with Christians generally, it can only be surmised to have been passed, from the conscious progress that has been made. It is a mistake too common amongst believers to view conversion as a change of condition, rather than as a change of character ; and, by passing a judgment on their state of safety, to anticipate the judgment of the Great Day. They desert in this their proper field of practical inquiry, for a search after something known at present with certainty to the Divine Being alone.

Escape from condemnation is an essential part of salvation ; but so, equally, is deliverance from the power of sin ; and, in the general case, the proof of safety lies in the testimony of conduct. I say not that, in the variety of the Divine dispensations, it may not be permitted to some to trace satisfactorily the point at which they crossed the boundary between life and death ; but, with most, the conviction of being in the friendly country grows by degrees on the mind, from the new aspect which the things around are putting on. Christ is not present, as of old, to open the eyes on a visible Redeemer. The work of his Spirit is in " the hidden man of the heart." The cure comes on imperceptibly, as the Christian proceeds on the path on which Christ has sent him. " He went his way, and washed, and came seeing," sums up the narrative of the transaction. Often, when urged, like him of yore, to describe in detail the process by which he passed from darkness to light, he can return the same answer, and no other ; " One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

VII.

PREDESTINATION.

SUPPOSE that I met an individual engaged in prosecuting some allowable object of ordinary life, and thus accosted him :—" You know that God rules over all, and that all things fall out as He has appointed. Whether you shall succeed or not in your present purpose, depends entirely on God's will ; and God has already predestined the issue of your exertions. It is idle to proceed on your course, till first you have discovered whether you are foreordained to success. If such be your destiny, nothing can frustrate its accomplishment. If this be not your allotted position, all efforts will be vain to reach it. Abandon, then, all further activity, as wholly unavailing to alter the current of events ; or at least intermit your endeavours, until you have found out, with certainty, what is their predestined end."

I need scarcely say that such an address would, in the general case, be ineffectual to produce any change in the conduct of the person addressed---perhaps only effectual to raise a doubt as to the sanity of the speaker. Certainly, he would be thought guilty of no ordinary folly who, on such considerations, would exchange the vigour of exertion for the vexing inquiries of an interminable speculation.

Yet the conduct of those is not substantially different, who, in the matter of salvation, interrupt the employment of the gospel means of grace by an inquiry touching predestination. There is not more of predestination in regard to a man's eternal state, than in regard to his condition in the present world. The one is, as much as the other, fixed beforehand in the Divine mind. If, therefore, in the ordinary affairs of life, it would be folly to make inquiries into predestination a reason for intermitting the practical means of success, it is just as contrary to good sense, in the matter of religion, to deviate into such an inquiry, from the plain practical course prescribed for the attainment of Heaven.

Not improbably, the individual whom I have supposed myself addressing would reply to me thus :—"I know that all things fall out according to God's appointment, and that the end of my course has been already determined in the Divine purpose. And it does certainly appear to be difficult to reconcile this fact with the exercise of free-agency on my own part. But the voice of the same Great Being calls me to diligence and fidelity in my lawful vocation ; and I am assured that these will, in the ordinary case, command success, not merely from the testimony of God's Word, but from God speaking in daily events. I have at once a command laid on me, and a promise given me, in terms that are plain and unambiguous. This is the practical matter, with which I am immediately concerned. All besides is a mystery, which I cannot solve. When I attempt to do so, I wholly fail of success. What I do, therefore, is to follow the clear rule of practical conduct, and to throw aside the merely speculative considerations, as at present beyond my depth. When difficulties in regard to predestination obstruct my practical course, my resource

is to discharge the subject from my mind, and to resolve and act, as if there was no such thing as predestination."

This will, by most men, be thought a not unreasonable proceeding, and very much the course which practical wisdom would dictate. But if it be so, there is no sound reason why, in the practical part of religion (I speak not at present of the speculative creed), the same course should not be followed. There is as much assurance of success to the use of the prescribed means of attaining salvation, as there is to the employment of the usual endeavours after any right earthly aim : indeed, a vast deal more of certainty, because the promise of success in spiritual matters is a great deal more absolute and unqualified than any that is given in merely temporal. In the one case, as in the other, he, who finds difficulties about predestination an obstacle to his use of appointed means, will act a wise and rational part in discharging the subject from his thoughts, and pursuing the very course he would follow, were the idea of predestination never once present to his mind.

The course, which is thus dictated by practical good sense, is not less defensible on the strictest principles of philosophy. The question of predestination is an inquiry, neither more or less, into the condition of the Divine mind, anterior to the creation of the world. In what precise aspect (so runs the question) did future events appear to the Divine view? Were they before it in the form of absolute decree, or conditional purpose? Did they rest in the Divine thought as the product of mere volition, or the result of contemplated contingency? Was there nothing but pure resolve, or resolve mingled with inquiry? Was it irrespective ordination, or prospective award? The questions may be legitimate in themselves: they may fitly be the subjects of careful investigation, or authoritative teaching; but they belong to speculative theology, not to practical religion—two widely different things. Theology, as a science, contains many points of discussion, with which practical religion has no necessary concern; as philosophy, natural or moral, comprehends many topics, the discussion of which is unnecessary towards the conduct of

active life. I can conceive an individual reaching the very highest Christian attainments, and carried by death from the world in the full assurance of a glorious immortality, without the subject of predestination having ever crossed his thoughts, during a lifetime of prayer and piety.

I know, at the same time, that, with some minds, there is no duty of more difficult performance, than that of dismissing from the thoughts a perplexing subject of intellectual inquiry. The difficulty is not lessened but aggravated, when the subject is found to occupy so prominent a place in our systems of theology, and articles of faith ; and the mind cannot but feel unsatisfied, if full acquiescence do not accompany implied assent. For such a case it is proper to make provision, so far as practicable. Perhaps no better can be made, than to indicate the mode of viewing the subject, by which, in actual experience, its difficulties have, if not entirely solved, been at least so far unravelled, as to secure mental repose.

I believe that it may be laid down, as a rule of universal application, that the great secret, in every such inquiry, is to discover in what precise

point lies the difficulty which is insuperable, and to bring the mind to see, contentedly, what it cannot explain, in the light of undoubted fact. We are surrounded by facts, which we cannot do otherwise than believe, though each of them involving a mystery into which we cannot penetrate. Generally speaking, there is, in every subject of inquiry, a point having this character ; a position which, though difficult of explanation, is easy of admission, or incapable of denial. With this position of unquestionable, though perhaps inexplicable fact, from which to start as a postulate, the subject will, in general, be found to evolve itself, with the clearness of a mathematical demonstration.

In dealing with the subject of predestination, I find the difficulty to lie at a point, which has not always been sufficiently prominent, in the conduct of the controversy. The difficulty, in a proper sense, is not in reconciling God's sovereignty with man's free agency ; its place is higher up ; it lies in conceiving how God could create free agents. To a reflective mind, there are few things more mysterious, than how God could

originate beings, not having the common attribute of creation, which is the derivation of every circumstance of existence from an impulse of the Creator's will, but possessed of independent volition, and power of choice, as if they were not creatures at all. I can scarcely, to my own apprehension, explain the creation of self-determining intelligences, except by a shadowy conception of the communication to such intelligences of a part of the Divine nature, a thought involving considerations of very deep and solemn import. Yet the fact is undoubted, that man is created a free agent, in the sense in which I use the expression ; that is, an agent having the power of choice between one course and another, so as to make the act of choice his own voluntary act, for which he is responsible, not the effect of an irresistible impulse from without. Amidst all the metaphysical contentions that have arisen as to the liberty of the will, none has disputed, at least none has directly and in so many words disputed, that, wherever the moral agent is responsible for his choice, the power of choice must belong to him. The great controversy concerning Liberty

and Necessity, does not, in reality, touch this practical principle. It is a subtle, and not very profitable disputation, as to the precise relation which motive bears to volition; whether, when the will yields to the strongest motive, it must be held to do so by force of irresistible necessity, as contended on the one side, or, as maintained on the other, by force of a self-determining power, which makes the motive the strongest, simply because the agent so regards it. The disputation is mainly of words, and resolves itself, on both sides, into verbal truisms; for, on the one hand, the strongest motive necessarily rules the mind, simply because it is the strongest; and, on the other hand, freedom of choice is freedom between contending motives, by the very force of the term. The disputants, whilst at variance as to the proper nature of motive, philosophically considered (or, to speak more correctly, as to the philosophical nomenclature properly applicable to the subject), are practically at one as to human responsibility. It is admitted by the Necessitarian, as much as by his antagonist, that reward or punishment cannot follow on choice, unless the choice be in

the agent's power. Denying the freedom of the will, the Necessitarian concedes, practically, the freedom of the agent. The great champion of Necessity justifies the doctrine from supposed opposition to that of human responsibility, by expressly saying, "that, notwithstanding this doctrine, man is entirely, perfectly, and unspeakably different from a mere machine, in that he has reason and understanding, and has a faculty of will, and is so capable of volition and choice; and in that his will is guided by the dictates or views of his understanding; and in that his external actions and behaviour, and in many respects also his thoughts and the exercises of his mind, are subject to his will; so that he has liberty to act according to his choice, and do what he pleases, and, by means of these things, is capable of moral habits, and moral acts—such inclinations and actions as, according to the common sense of mankind, are worthy of praise, esteem, love, and reward, or, on the contrary, of disesteem, detestation, indignation, and punishment."¹

Once, however, clearly fix that men are free

¹ Edwards on the *Freedom of the Will*, part 4, sect. 5.

agents, to the same extent to which they are responsible agents, and discharge from the mind all difficulties as to the creation of agents possessing such freedom, and there follow what seem obvious inferences on the subject of predestination. The choice of the free agent cannot have been predestined, in any proper sense of the word ; that is, cannot have been fixed beforehand, so as by necessity to fall out in one way and no other, irrespectively of his own will. To say that it has been so, involves a contradiction in terms ; for it is to say that a man chooses, and does not choose, at one and the same moment. The choice may be foreseen—must, indeed, in every case, be foreseen by God, otherwise the government of the universe could not be conducted. But to foresee, and to fore-ordain, are essentially different things. I am aware of the metaphysical difficulty, as to foreseeing certainly what is to happen contingently. This is, in another form, just the one grand difficulty in the case—the difficulty as to the creation of free agents—for any foresight of the resolutions of such agents must always be in this predicament. The difficulty is involved in the

very existence of free agents, and does not go beyond. But although metaphysically a difficulty, practically it is no difficulty at all; for, considering with what confidence one human being can often predict the course of another, and the infinite superiority of the Divine mind to every other (to say nothing of any mysterious communication between the Divine mind and all others), there are few convictions, which more readily or naturally reach the understanding, than that all the future course of his creatures must be within the foresight of the Creator. The choice of the agent must needs be foreseen of God; it cannot, in any proper sense, be predestined. To make choice predestined is to make it no longer choice.

It is not to be inferred, that the freedom of the choice precludes the operation of a Divine influence to guide and to control it. Such an influence, won, as it may always be, by prayer to God to bestow it, is essential to the choice being right, and the grand cause of its being so. "It is God," saith the Bible, "which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." There is no

truth to be more firmly held, than that man of himself will never choose what is right ; and that only a Divine instrumentality will bring him to do so. So largely operative is the Divine agency in renewing the will of fallen humanity, that, in a practical sense, God is fitly said to do all, and the right choice exclusively ascribed to his grace, and made to redound to his glory. So it will practically be held, in the consciousness and gratitude of every real Christian. It is not the less true philosophically, that, at the turning-point of the mental process, a free choice must have existed, otherwise there could be no responsibility. Give to the act of choice however minute a space, its existence as a free act is indispensable to human accountability. It follows, alike inevitably, that a free choice cannot have been fixed beforehand by an irresistible force from without : to say it has been is a self-contradiction. The choice which fixes responsibility, however much it may be foreseen, is not, and cannot be predestined, from the very nature of the case.

But whilst this is so with the choice itself, the results of the choice must just as necessarily

be predestined, and on the simple ground that these are all fixed by the sovereign will of God, and not otherwise. There is no reason why one consequence, rather than another, should follow the act of choice, except that God has so appointed it. Even so trivial a result, as that a limb moves in obedience to a volition, arises from God's ordaining that the act of will should be followed by this consequence. What are called natural consequences are only so in respect of God's ordination. The laws of nature, commonly so termed, are nothing but the uniform course of action, which God is pleased to follow in the material world. General laws are God's will, producing, for wise purposes, the same event in the same circumstances. Particular occurrences are the same will, in isolated exhibition. In strict philosophy, the distinction, urged in the schools, between a general and a particular providence, is a distinction without a difference. To the present argument, however, it is immaterial whether, in the production of events, the Divine will operates by a succession of direct acts, or by one grand prospective origination. I cannot, indeed,

view the representaion, so common in modern theories, of God launching into space the world which he had created, leaving it, without further intervention, to be governed by so-called law, without considering the idea as substantially implying God's absence from some part of his creation, and placing him in the position of a human workman, who leaves his mechanism to itself, that he may go and play ; throwing all the while out of sight, that the workman's absence only takes place in reliance on the continuing operation of God's general law. God, everywhere present, is God everywhere acting : and the impress of his will must, from the very nature of his being, be always by immediate contact. But it matters not to my present purpose, whether the Divine will act mediately, or directly. It is enough, if it be admitted generally (and none, I believe, will deny it) that, abstractedly from the choice of the moral agent, events, even the most trivial, and so all the results of the choice, are, in one way or another, consequences of Divine appointment. But, just because they are so, all such results must necessarily be subjects of pre-

destination. What God appoints, he, to whose mind the whole of futurity lies open at a glance, necessarily appoints beforehand. Hence arises the axiomatic distinction, which I find the key to the subject. All that God is himself to do, he not merely foresees, but foreordains. All that he does not do himself, but leaves to man to do, by the very act of creating him a free agent, the choice, namely, between one course and another, is foreseen, but not predestined.

I apply the consideration, in the first instance, to the topic which is usually most prominent, in connexion with the present subject ; I mean the doom of man in a future state. I cannot doubt that this is the subject of divine predestination ; it necessarily is so, just because it is entirely the result of Divine appointment. There is nothing in the conduct of the moral agent to fix his outward lot, by a self-determining process, or otherwise than through the will of God, attaching a particular destiny to a particular course. The locality in which, after death, the moral agent is placed, the circumstances attending his position, the joy or woe which gives its character to his

state, are of one description or another, only in consequence of God's determination ; pronounced, we must believe, in strict conformity with justice, but still dictated by his own sovereign good pleasure. But what thus flows exclusively from the appointment of the Divine will, is necessarily pre-appointed in the Divine purposes. I cannot perceive any substantial difference in this respect between the future world and the present. Just as, in the world that now is, the future destiny of every man is fixed beforehand of God, so his fate in another world must fall out according to God's pre-appointment. And this is just predestination.

But, pursuing the same principle, I see clearly, that it were by far too narrow a view to confine the Divine predestination to the ultimate destiny alone. Whatever God himself does, in reference to the course of the moral agent, is equally predestined, because equally the work of God's hand. In this will be comprehended the external circumstances in which the individual is placed ; his position of advantage or disadvantage for hearing the gospel call ; the whole outward agency, and surrounding influence, to which he is exposed.

There will be further comprehended all that belongs to the more immediate operation on the soul of the Divine mind ; all the working of God's Spirit, awakening thoughts, arousing feelings, presenting views of sin, and judgment, and a Saviour. All this must be predestined in the case of each believer, because it all belongs to what God himself does in the work of salvation. But equally, and for the same reason, will be comprehended all that God does for carrying on the work once begun : all the agency of his Spirit in purifying, controlling, checking, encouraging, comforting. All the good deeds of the believer, following on his choice between right and wrong, come into existence through a Divine instrumentality, giving an outward result to the external volition, which would otherwise perish in the mind without any external consequence : and therefore come into existence through Divine predestination, carrying by previous decree the right choice into effect. Thus predestination pervades the believer's course. The call at first given to him to repent and be saved ; the influence from above, without which he could do nothing ; the

outward result of holy actions, into which he is enabled to carry his holy purposes ; the inheritance of bliss which awaits him ; are all the product of Divine interposition, and therefore all were the subject of Divine predestination.

The result, it will be manifest, is to give to the doctrine of predestination a very extensive range. I cannot, in truth, see how Divine predestination can be otherwise than co-extensive with Divine agency ; for all that God does, God must fore-ordain. In a strictly philosophical sense, nothing is exempt from predestination, but the mere act of choice on the part of the moral agent, which is the necessary exception created by the nature of free-agency. All things whatever are of God, and, therefore, all are the subject of Divine predestination, except the single mental act, which, infinitesimal as it may be, amid the greatness and multiplicity of God's workings, the nature of man, as a responsible agent, excludes from the operation of the general law. In this exception, holding, it may be, amongst the circumstances of the Universe, the place of an imperceptible, or scarcely perceptible unit, lies the secret of the recon-

cilement between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

The reservation may appear, at first sight, not only to be a slight one, but, whilst retaining with man responsibility for choice, to remove from him responsibility for its results. But a little reflection shows that, under the Divine arrangements, responsibility for choice is responsibility for its results also, in the great majority of cases. For God in his sovereignty has been pleased, to a large extent, to proceed by general laws, and so to connect will with act, that the result follows on volition by inevitable sequence. The arm rises in obedience to the will, by a general law, wide as the human race. It may be raised in one case to save life, in another to destroy it; the result in both is the product of the same general law, operating alike in the case of the benefactor and the murderer. In the sequence of act to will, God has established and made known an uniform course of operation, in the case of all men equally; and, by force of this general law, choice is followed by consequence, in the case, equally, of both righteous and wicked. This, in a practical view,

is to place the consequences of the choice within the control of the moral agent, as much as the choice itself; for the result which is known inevitably to follow on volition is, properly speaking, as much his own act as the volition. Hence, whilst it is true, philosophically, that the results of choice are of God's appointment, and therefore all the subject of predestination, it is practically true alike, that man is responsible for the results of his choice; and this just because of the pre-appointed connexion between choice and consequence, which his freedom of will left it in his power either to incur or avoid. Hence, in particular, arises the grand truth, that God is not the author of sin, either in its existence in the heart, or its outward results in the life. The sin lies in the choice which the sinner makes, and makes in the knowledge that by force of a general law, such a result will follow such a volition. Of God nothing can be said, save that, in the case of that individual, he has not interfered to suspend those general laws, the maintenance of which is essential to the government of the universe. In the strictest sense of reason, as well as of justice, man

is himself responsible, at once for his sin and its consequences.

But whilst fully preserving man's responsibility, the doctrine, as I have stated it, equally maintains God's sovereignty. Indeed, the grand objection against the doctrine of predestination has always been, that it so exaggerated God's sovereignty, as to give it the aspect of mere absolute will, if not of arbitrary caprice. It is urged against the doctrine that, as usually taught, it not merely implies an election, from all eternity, of certain individuals, to whom, in the view of a right choice on their part, a condition of bliss is allotted, but an arbitrary pre-appointment of a certain definite number, to whom exclusively the call is confined, the rest being passed by, without the power of choice being afforded. But, though sometimes stated in terms which run into an offensive extreme, the doctrine, in any right exposition of it, expresses nothing in this respect but the undoubted fact, that, in spiritual as well as temporal matters, God has, in his sovereignty, appointed some to a position of advantage denied to others. The objection, rightly analysed, is not

against a doctrine but a fact. The fact is before all eyes, and indisputable. A large proportion of the human race are born and die in an heathenism which the light of Divine truth never penetrates. Even in countries professedly Christian, there are multitudes whose circumstances preclude them from spiritual illumination, almost as much as the heathen, and appear to put them on a footing little different. In the classes more fortunately situated, there are differences in respect of talent and training, opportunity and exposure, which may be viewed as constituting an appointed diversity of gifts. It is only an analogous exercise of Divine sovereignty, which varies the influences from above, just as it varies the influences from without; and bestows upon one man the call, or the light, or the help, denied to another, or less abundantly afforded. These are mysteries of Divine Providence, the difficulties of which are perhaps only to be set at rest by a devout suspense of judgment as to the issue, coupled with an implicit assurance that the Judge of the whole earth will do right, and that every one shall be dealt with according to that which he had, not

according to that which he had not. But the mystery is one of Providence, not of predestination. The mystery lies in the fact, not in the pre-appointment of the fact, which is as necessary as the fact itself. The existence of the fact necessarily implies its predestination.

The doctrine of predestination, thus explained, is the furthest in the world from producing those effects on the mind, which are sometimes charged on belief in predestination. It cannot be made subservient to spiritual pride ; for it so resolves the efficient causes of salvation into a Divine instrumentality, with the part of man confined to a simple act of choice, as thoroughly to exclude all boasting, and to leave nothing to man, but what is common to him with the beggar who takes an alms, or the criminal justly condemned, who leaves his dungeon by the door which free mercy throws open. All else is of God ; and to God alone is the praise. To have been "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world," was a thought which of old brought to the Apostle no cause of vain-glory ; on the contrary cherished in his heart—and was presented to his fellow-

believers, that in them it might equally cherish—the deepest self-abasement, and magnify alone the grace of God. The doctrine, on the other hand, viewed in its full exposition, is such as to afford no countenance to spiritual depression, or ever to be rightly pleaded as justifying despair of salvation. For it presents the freedom of man's choice, as in full harmony with the Divine predestination. It declares salvation to be within the free choice of every one ; and God's predestination, to bliss or misery, to be made on God's foresight of acceptance or rejection of his grace. The same Bible, which teaches so clearly the doctrine of predestination, contains the promise indiscriminately to all, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." The affirmation is alike universal, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." No other than the most literal interpretation, and meaning the most thoroughly comprehensive, is to be put on this grand proclamation.

The key to the differences amongst divines on

the subject of predestination lies mainly in this, that here, as elsewhere, they have not sufficiently discriminated between the two points of view from which the course of the moral agent may be contemplated—the point of view from which God regards it, and the point of view from which it is beheld by man. In some Confessions of Faith, the framers have proceeded on the plan of tracing the scheme of grace, as contemplated in the Divine purposes. In the prosecution of this plan, they represent the Divine Being, with the whole of futurity in His view, fore-ordaining his responsible creatures to their appointed places respectively, of eternal happiness or woe. Considering the Divine purpose as embracing simultaneously all future events, they depict God as pre-arranging, at the same moment, the whole of his own intervention in the work of salvation, from the first call to repentance, to the ultimate transference to heaven. Gathering the whole pre-ordinations into one simultaneous act of the Divine mind, they say—“As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained

all the means thereunto ; wherefore they who are elected, having fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season ; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation." But, in all this, they have no intention of portraying man as a mere machine, driven to a particular point by an irresistible influence from without ; on the contrary, they admit a choice by man, in the proper exercise of volition, in harmony with which the Divine pre-arrangements are made ; and God's predestination is expressly declared to be such, " as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." Believing the Divine Sovereignty to be maintained in full accordance with man's responsibility by these Confessions, when all the different parts of them are taken into view, I hold them to express the very truth of God ; although I may see that, being framed to counteract a particular heresy, they have assumed a form in which the opposite truth

has a more than usual, or, in ordinary circumstances, desirable prominence ; that they share in the imperfection of all human systems, and, in attempting to exhibit a complete theory, in a series of abstract propositions, contain statements which are inadmissible without the correction of antagonist passages ; and that, whilst valuable as the armour in which a great battle of the faith was fought, and as such to be preserved and revered, they are, for ordinary purposes of instruction, to be wholly subordinated to God's Word, which possesses, in its practical simplicity, and unsystematic character, an adaptation to the general mind, never attained by any formal creed of man's composing.

The systems, which are usually considered as opposed to the Confessions now mentioned, regard the scheme at the point of view at which man himself stands. Speaking from their own consciousness, their authors exhibit man as a free and responsible agent, placed under the Divine law, commanded to choose the good, and reject the evil. They view him as, in the exercise of this liberty, sinning against God, and thereby

made amenable to a righteous condemnation. They consider him as then addressed with an offer of salvation on prescribed conditions, compliance with which he may give or refuse, as his free-will dictates. They represent him, if complying with these conditions, as thereby securing heaven ; if refusing compliance, as deservedly incurring perdition. In so stating the scheme, there is a risk of giving to the proceeding a too exclusive aspect of contingency ; as if, with God, as well as man, everything hung in suspense down to the moment of the agent's choice, and everything was then determined by the agent's own act ; and the framers of the scheme have thus exposed themselves to the charge of throwing out of view the Divine prescience, and limiting the Divine sovereignty. Yet undoubtedly they had no such intention. They admit, as fully as their opponents, that events are regulated by Divine appointment ; nor dispute, generally speaking, that this appointment is a pre-appointment, made in the foresight of a particular course in the moral agent, and so as to accommodate itself to that course. Were they brought to an express interrogation, they

would all, I believe, subscribe to the truth that, whatever God does, he must be held also to fore-ordain ; and that, so far as events are the acts of God, he has from all eternity decreed whatsoever comes to pass. If required to follow out the discrimination between what God himself does, and what he has left to man to do, I think they would reach the conclusion which, as accurate reasoners, I conceive they could not avoid, that all besides the act of choice by the moral agent is traceable to the Divine will ; and that, abstracting this act of choice, all events whatever are the subject of predestination. At least, if this conclusion was not expressly adopted, they would probably go so far towards it as to see that, amidst much verbal disputation, there was scarcely any difference, certainly much less than had been supposed, between themselves and their antagonists.

The difference would vanish into nothing, were a view to be taken which, though not easily apprehended by a finite mind, is strongly founded in reason ; the view, namely, that no distinction between past and future exists in the Divine contemplation, but that to God all things are com-

prised in one eternal present. If this be a correct view of the Divine condition of existence, the whole controversy about predestination falls at once to the ground. It is at best a mere controversy as to the order of thoughts in the Divine mind ; but, according to this suggestion, there is to that mind no distinction between before and after. God does not first ordain, and then carry the ordination into effect, by a subsequent and separate act. He works his will, throughout all time, by what to him is a simultaneous accomplishment. He stands towards every individual, as if eternity had no other than the present moment for both. There is, in this view, no room for perplexing the question of salvation, by any inquiry into God's purposes ; for purpose has no priority to act in the will of the Eternal. The only question is, what God now wills and does towards man, and what he now leaves to man, or requires man to do. The answer is written on every page of the Bible. To every one without exception, who, casting away all reliance on his own merits, and trusting alone to the efficacy of the Mediator, stretches his hand towards God,

there is responsively stretched out the hand of God, with pardon, and holiness, and eternal bliss, all contained in it. The grand now, in which the Eternal dwells, is proclaimed to man in these words of grace: "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."

It is difficult, however, perhaps impossible, for the mind which only knows time in its ordinary sequence, to realize this conception. In its very attempt to do so, the succession of the moments, which pass in the contemplation, effectually destroys the idea. We form our conceptions of God in relation to the world he has created; and we therefore cannot help attributing to his existence the same sequence of events which to us characterizes his universe. It is proper to deal with predestination in accordance with our ordinary mode of contemplating the Divine Being; and so I have endeavoured to deal with it. But every view leads to the same practical result—to wit, that there is nothing in the subject of predestination, which ought to prove to any one the slightest obstacle in the way of receiving and applying the appointed means of grace. The phi-

losopher, by whom the question is aright considered, reaches the same practical conclusion with him who, finding its difficulties inextricable, throws it for the time out of sight. Sound philosophy, true religion, and practical good sense, are here, as always, identical.

VIII.

PRAYER.

PREDESTINATION has often been made an objection to prayer, and, strangely enough, by those most of all who least believe in predestination. Perhaps they justify the proceeding, on the ground of one point of an adversary's argument being legitimately used for the destruction of another. However this may be, the metaphysical argument against prayer is by no means to be treated lightly. It is one which has, at first sight, an aspect of great plausibility. If, it is said, all events are fixed beforehand by divine decree, prayer is necessarily ineffectual, and to pray is idle and absurd. To suppose anything else involves the self-contradiction of assuming events to be at the same time fixed and variable. What is predestined is, by the force of the term, unalterable ;

and, therefore, in the very measure in which predestination is believed, prayer is excluded.

If I wished to bring an individual, whom I found under the influence of this difficulty, to the practical exercise of devotion, the course which I would probably follow would be that of declining for the time to answer the metaphysical objection, and of attempting to show that, even were the objection insuperable, a regular approach to the Divine Being, with the language of direct address, would remain, nevertheless, a duty. The argument I would employ would somewhat resemble the following. Assuming an objection to exist, which excludes all petitioning as useless, yet petition does not form the whole of what is addressed to God. Adoration and thanksgiving compose a tribute, fitly due from the creature to the Creator. The great Sovereign of the universe is entitled to a solemn acknowledgment of subjection and dependence. The gracious Benefactor justly claims an expression of gratitude, continual as his bounty. It may also be not unfitting that one, who cannot but be conscious of much violation of duty, should make to the Divine Lawgiver

a manly confession of error. Supposing, then, that petitioning were wholly to be omitted, there is still a duty, of worship and of praise, if not of confession also, proper to be performed. And the duty must be performed regularly, not merely because the call to it constantly recurs, but also because this is the only effectual security against its being neglected. If, by such considerations as these, the reasonableness of which could not well be doubted, I prevailed on the individual to engage daily in the exercise of devotion, even though a devotion from which petitioning was purposely excluded, I would entertain a strong assurance that, ere long, petition would be intermingled. In spite of all the reasonings of philosophy, a sense of want, or of wretchedness, would extort from nature a cry for relief. It would not be possible to be consciously in the presence of a Being of infinite power and goodness, and not appeal to that goodness to pity, and to that power to save. Not improbably, a more than usually bitter sorrow, or a keener remorse, would turn the whole course of devotion into the channel of agonised supplication. The man would come to

pray, in the strictest sense of the word, by the power of a natural impulse, too strong for him to resist. Thus, in regard to this, as to many other points of duty, I think that an individual might be brought to what is right in practice, with all his metaphysical difficulties remaining unsolved.

The difficulty, after all, is apparent, not real, and yields to a little reflection. God, it is true, predestines all events. But he is pleased to fore-ordain these, to a large extent, in connexion with prescribed conduct on the part of the moral agent, to which he gives, in his sovereignty, the relation of cause to consequence, of means to end. The result is in every case predestined by God ; but is so predestined, that he makes it to follow on a particular course, to which, as foreseen by him, he attaches a particular issue. That such a result follows on such an act, arises exclusively from God's appointment. Instrumental means, of whatever kind, have no efficacy, except what is given them by God ; and the same result would, if God so willed, be accomplished by any other instrumentality. Now prayer is just one of God's appointed means—a particular course on the part

of the moral agent, with which God, in his sovereignty, has connected a particular result. The efficacy of prayer stands on exactly the same footing with that of any other instrumentality. Active exertion, for instance, is in human affairs the ordinary condition of success; but its results arise out of God's ordination, and not otherwise. There is no conceivable case, in which a certain consequence follows on active exertion, in which the same consequence might not, if God so pleased, follow on supplication merely. Prayer is, alike with activity, simply a pre-appointed condition. Just as the doctrine of predestination opposes no obstacle to the exercise of activity, so should it oppose no obstacle to the exercise of prayer; and for precisely the same reason, that God's predestination of the result proceeds, in both cases equally, on God's foresight of the use of the means. In both cases the end is fore-ordained, not irrespectively of the means, but as the consequence of the means being employed. God, in the case of active exertion, foresees the act, and appoints the result which follows. So, in the case of prayer, God foresees the prayer,

and, on that foresight, appoints the event which forms its answer. The result is, alike in both cases, put within the power of the moral agent, through the connexion with the precedent course, appointed by Divine sovereignty. Prayer and activity are cognate instrumentalities, wisely ordained in aid of each other, that man may be thereby prompted to a course combining duty and devotion. In their philosophical character, they hold precisely the same position of commanded means towards a given end ; equally destitute of any self-acting power, but equally powerful as conditions of Divine agency.

We are not without analogies in common life, to aid us in the apprehension of prayer, in its character of a pre-appointed condition. It not unfrequently happens, that supplication for the boon is the previously expressed condition of obtaining it ; and the boon is then procured, not through the influence of the petition, intrinsically considered, but through the previously declared good pleasure of the donor, attaching such a consequence to such an act. " He shall have it, if he will come to ask it," is a well-known declara-

tion, generally applicable to the case, in which, so far from petition being used, it is the subject of complaint that the individual will not stoop to be a suppliant. Who has not known the message sent by an offended parent, that, if the erring child come to ask forgiveness, he shall obtain it? If the sovereign issue a proclamation, to rebels in arms against him, that all, who by a given day shall send in a petition for pardon, shall receive his grace, the proceeding is one which creates no astonishment, and is not marked by any seeming variance from the ordinary course of human transactions. God deals with us after a similar manner. "Ask, and it shall be given," is the message proclaimed to all. If no practical difficulty is found about compliance in the one case, as little should it be found in the other.

Nor does the answering of prayer involve any miraculous intervention, as has sometimes been alleged. It is a popular form of objection against the use of prayer, that it implies a disturbance of general laws for the sake of a particular individual, such as cannot be reasonably supposed. But the objection is an unsound one; and receives an

answer from very obvious considerations as to the Divine pre-arrangement of future events. God, in predestining all events, predestines also their order and connexion, and, by his omnipotence, so pre-arranges them, that the fate of the individual is worked out by the natural operation of the general laws. God, in his predestinations, so intermingles the individual case with the general course of providence, that the ordinary working, so to speak, of the grand machinery of the universe moulds and produces the individual destiny. He so places the individual in the channel of events, that the general current produces the personal consequences, in its ordinary flow. The trade-wind is not created for the particular vessel ; but the vessel is so placed in its course, that thereby it is wafted to its appointed destination. The mistake on this subject consists in always taking it for granted, that to answer prayer necessarily requires that the general course of events should be bent aside, to meet the individual case. Assume the converse operation, of the individual case being accommodated to the general course, and the difficulty is removed.

The proceeding implies, on that supposition, no violation of general law. Undoubtedly it implies a pre-arrangement of the individual fate ; but, in the Divine ordination, such there must be, in every case. In this way, the very doctrine of predestination, which is supposed to create the grand difficulty on the subject of prayer, is found to be actually what enables us to clear the subject from difficulties ; for it aids us to apprehend, how the Divine pre-arrangements may be so made, that God's plan towards the individual, framed in connexion with foreseen prayer, is carried out in harmony with his plans for the whole surrounding universe.

Thus prayer, when rightly considered, is seen to be no irrational or fanatical thing ; but to occupy the place of an ordinary condition of Divine intervention. It is seen, in its character of means towards an end, to be exactly in the same category with activity. And the analogy is not only sound philosophically ; it is also practically useful for the direction of every-day conduct. To fail, for instance, in the object of attainment by prayer, no more warrants a cessation of

the exercise, than at first to fail in the natural result of active industry justifies a discontinuance of exertion. In both cases, the only remedy lies in a renewed use of the appointed means. In both, there is the same call to perseverance, and patience, and hope. In both there is the same promise ; not necessarily of the exact success desired ; but, as I firmly believe, of a result more or less favourable, as God, in his higher wisdom than ours, is pleased to allot. Again, in prosecuting the duty of active exertion, our experience teaches us, that, whilst believing the issue to be of Divine pre-ordination, we follow the best practical course when we act in the same way as if there was no pre-appointment, but the means employed by us possessed an intrinsic capability of effecting our object. The reason, and it is a sound one, is, that, without derogating from the Divine fore-ordination, it is expedient, for the time, to throw it out of view, lest, in the weakness of human nature, the thought should lay a paralysing check on our activity. So also as to prayer. Though believing in the issue being pre-appointed, in the case of prayer,

equally as in that of activity, yet in this, as in the other case, we act wisely, when we pray in the same state of feeling as if the issue was brought about by the direct influence of our petitions, at the moment of these being employed. This is very clearly the course prescribed to us by the Divine Word, which, showing in this, as in all things, an admirable adaptation to human feelings, commands us to pray to God exactly as we would petition an earthly parent or sovereign, and with precisely the same expectation as to the influence of earnest and continued supplication. We have in this way both an answer for the philosopher, and a practical course for the devout Christian. Whilst the philosophical view may be always had recourse to, for obviating metaphysical difficulties, the practical course of devotion remains unobstructed. Though assured of the soundness of our philosophy, yet in this, as in other departments of human conduct, we do not, in the proceedings of actual life, keep before the mind the metaphysical aspect of the question ; on the contrary, we most commonly turn from it of set purpose, that it may not, in the infirmity

of our nature, injuriously influence our steps. We can, when need be, discuss the subject of prayer as metaphysicians: we say our prayers with the simplicity of little children.

There is perhaps no duty, as to the imperative-ness of which there can be less doubt, than that of prayer. For it is commanded in the most express terms, and times without number, in God's Word. The command is indeed so plain, that even though the philosophical difficulty was much more formidable, nay was wholly insuperable, the course of practical wisdom, not to say of Christian obedience, would be to obey the command, and to trust to the corresponding promise. To a creature conscious of need, there should be no exercise more attractive; and at first sight it might appear as if no duty was of easier fulfilment. Yet we know that, in practice, none is more frequently neglected; nor is there any, about commencing which greater reluctance is felt. The previous infrequency of the exercise becomes itself an obstacle to its resumption. Men appear deterred from going to God, by the same feeling of false shame which prevents them

from resorting to a friend, from whose presence they have undutifully kept away. I doubt not that, with many, the neglect of the duty generates an incapacity for it, which is very sincerely felt to exist, but which ought, as soon as possible, to be removed, by the employment of the proper means.

The duty is, like other duties, to be achieved by the simple expedient of attempting it ; by at first feeble, and often failing efforts, growing into steadfastness through perseverance. In the outset, a most legitimate aid will be afforded by forms of prayer, which, though sometimes spoken of slightly, as if they cramped the freedom of supplication, have been practically found of great advantage, and, in the early stage of a religious course, are simply the dictation, necessary for the spiritual child, of the new language he has to learn. Many have been led to pray, through the facilities afforded by forms of prayer, who would otherwise never have prayed. Prayer is, to the most advanced Christian, an unceasing repetition of the same thoughts ; and even to such an one, a form of prayer may at times be more available

for awakening right feeling, than the accustomed, and scarcely less formal expressions, in which every one has a tendency to stereotype his devotions. Chief, above all others, is that form of prayer which our Lord taught his disciples: so simple, yet so comprehensive; so ready for use, when a broken or harassed mind cannot frame its own petitions; so easily repeated, when its first utterance has been unaccompanied with the proper devotional sentiment, and until the full flow of its significance occupies the soul. The revelations of eternity will show to what a now unthought-of extent the Lord's Prayer has been serviceable, in originating and maintaining a life of devotion. Times without number, the very first step in the religious life has been the repetition of this prayer, with the spirit coming fresh again, which accompanied it when said at a mother's knee. The dying Christian could not enter heaven with more appropriate words, than are contained in its closing sentence, "Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever."

But forms of prayer, and the best of all amongst

the rest, might be used with more advantage, were the true mode of employing them more widely practised. The first rule to observe is that, to give the substance of prayer to the form, the mind must enter into the thoughts expressed, as fully and intently as if they were its spontaneous product. The necessity of this towards true and earnest supplication will be at once admitted. But another practical rule, of not less importance, has not been so much attended to. Even when used with the fullest sense of their meaning, forms of prayer have always the defect of generality—a want of sufficient application to the individual case. This defect is to be supplied, by always distinctly placing before the mental contemplation the specific personal necessity which at the time prevails, in connexion with the general petition, under which that necessity naturally falls. The suppliant will in this go further than to apply personally a general petition, though this itself is a step in advance. He will convert the petition, by inward interpretation, into the specification of a particular desire, applicable to a present emergency, as fully as if the desire was detailed

in words at length. For prayer is, in its essence, a communion of spirit, not necessarily requiring words for its expression ; and the direction of a desire towards God, even though not audibly uttered, is in its substance prayer. There is no conceivable want, which may not be classed under one or other of the general supplications in common use. Let the petitioner, in uttering that supplication, clearly set before his mind the specific need then pressing on him, which the supplication naturally comprehends ; and, without his uttering more than the formal words, the whole character of the prayer will be changed. The inward thought of the specific need, silently intermingling, will turn the general into a particular prayer. The general words will, by force of the inward association, express the individual emergency. So, whilst in the words he utters the suppliant does not travel beyond the prescribed form, he will, by combination of the unexpressed consciousness of his then pressing want, attain to all the reality of personal prayer.

The advantage of this proceeding is not, however, merely the increased efficacy of the form

of prayer; it is also its instrumentality towards ultimately escaping from the trammels of form. When the utterance of the formal words is carefully combined with a silent reference to the pressing emergency, the reference will not always be a silent one. Let the suppliant practise the habit of individualizing the petition, by an inward application of the general words to his existing needs, and the specific necessity will burst, by and by, into specific verbal expression. It will do so, naturally and irresistibly. Petitions for relief from felt distress or defect, uttered in the language of his own heart, will intermingle with the formal prayer, or be added at its close; till, if the formal prayer be at all preserved, it becomes at last the subordinate portion of the exercise. The course of prayer will then advance rapidly towards its destined fulness and flow. The regular habit of supplication, maintained with a direct reference to the then pressing necessity, will draw after it the occasional prayer, raised at whatever hour of the day, when conscious need impels to the resource. The habit will at last become an instinct; even the most ordinary feelings will

never be long of assuming the form of devotional expression ; the life will become a life of prayer ; the walk will be a walk with God.

It would aid materially the attainment of the great object of prayer if, amongst with furnishing forms of prayer, the right use of them was more commonly explained and inculcated ; the use of them, I mean, in the way now described—of coupling with each general petition an unexpressed inward reference to some specific personal emergency. The Lord's Prayer itself, fitted as it is, by its Divine authorship, for best of all training to devotion, is, though taught to all in childhood, not taught in the way calculated to be of most service. Too commonly, the Lord's Prayer is the very thing which the Lord warned against at the time of teaching it, " a vain repetition." To use aright this simple but expansive prayer, the suppliant should be trained to couple with every petition contained in it a direct mental reference to something then occurring in his individual history. There is nothing in human experience, fitted to be the subject of special prayer, which may not, by an easy association, be in

thought embodied in one or other of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. If the words of the prayer be said with an under-current, if I may so speak, of distinct mental reference to the existing necessities of the individual, the Lord's prayer will not only be the simplest, and yet noblest, form of devotion, but will be all through life the ready channel of the most varied personal supplication.

I would illustrate these suggestions, by briefly noticing in succession the different clauses of the Lord's Prayer, indicating as to each its easy convertibility into strictly personal petition.

1. The introductory words of the prayer are words of direct personal address. "OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN," is the proper language of a speaker to an auditor. The words exclude all idea of their forming a mere acknowledgment of abstract Deity, and teach the suppliant to place himself under the feeling of personal intercourse with God. I do not, therefore, commence the prayer aright, unless I so bend the mind as to enter into an act of felt personal communication, as distinct as when I hold communion with an earthly parent or friend. I fix my mental

gaze on a definite point in space (it matters not whether in the blue sky, or in the surrounding atmosphere, or amidst the darkness of closed eyelids) ; and although I do not personify God under any sensible aspect, I direct my prayer to that point, with all the conscious reality of intercourse, with which I would address my earthly language towards a point where is one whom, though unseen, I know to sit and listen.

I address God as a Father ; but it is as that Father in Heaven, who is at once Father and King. I strive, therefore, to put on the seriousness which befits the entrance into such a presence. I pause reverentially on the threshold, and, ere I advance in the prayer, gather around my spirit the fitting solemnity of feeling. It is not with filial confidence only, it is also with the lowliest humility, we ought to say, “ Our Father which art in heaven.”

In the utterance of these words, I further feel that the prayer, as so expressed, is not the prayer of one individual only. “ Our Father ” is the cry of joint suppliants, using a common petition. I think, therefore, that I rightly follow out the

purposes of the prayer when, in commencing it with these words, I in thought associate with myself those whom I would wish to find suppliants along with me, and feel as if they prayed by my side. In this mental condition, the prayer may not only assume the character of an intercession for others, but may be felt as a prayer led by the suppliant, in which those others join for themselves. Thus are afforded the means, by an easy exercise of mind, of every individual bringing with him in spirit, to the Throne of Grace, the peculiar objects of his love. He has but to think of those dear to him, as if with him on their knees, thereby to give to his solitary devotion the effect of an act of worship performed amid affection's circle. Thus may the broken family be again around him, morning and evening. Thus may those, concerning whom it is his grief that they pray not for themselves, be made, as it were, to pray along with him. All the valued and esteemed, however distant or separated, may thus be made his fellow-worshippers. Nor is the union necessarily confined to earth. Those once so dearly prized, who are now in a better country,

and who know God as Father in heaven, in a sense peculiarly their own, may be thought of as in spirit beside him. And so, whilst there is nothing uttered but these simple words, "Our Father which art in heaven," there may be produced, by an act of mental association, the prayer of a communion of saints, triumphing over distance, and alienation, and death itself, and said at times to the Father in heaven even as if in heaven itself.

2. When I proceed to say, "HALLOWED BE THY NAME," I perform what in its primary sense is more, perhaps, an act of adoration than of supplication. The words embody a devout bowing down before God ; the reverential salutation to a Divine superior. But even the act of adoration may be deprived of the character of formal acknowledgment, and invested with personal sentiment. I strive, whilst using the words, to bend humbly in spirit before God, with a distinctly perceptible feeling, akin to that of the heavenly host, when prostrating themselves before the throne ; and, as far as I can, with a sense of then uniting with them in their worship.

The words, however, may also fitly be considered as having in them the essence of petition; a desire, namely, that God may be everywhere worshipped and revered. I strive to cherish sensibly this desire, in the pause which ought to intervene after every petition of the prayer. But I also endeavour to give to the desire an individual reference, suited to the existing exigency. When I am conscious of shortcomings in the duty of worship, of the duty having been unwarrantably intermitted, or carelessly performed, I endeavour to make the thought of this dwell at the moment in my mind, and awake a conviction of sin, needing forgiveness. If, in my neighbourhood, or my country, the worship of God be neglected, or have degenerated into idle form, or been polluted by superstitious intermixtures, the words "Hallowed be thy name," are fitly accompanied by a silent petition for the prevalence around me of a better spirit, and a purer service. If recently I have been in society, where sacred things have been trifled with, the remembrance of this may well lie on my spirit, raising an earnest, though unexpressed, supplication that, in the circle of my

friends and companions, and more especially by those of them to whom my thoughts at the time more particularly turn, God and His Word may be more revered and honoured. And if, on such an occasion, I have myself been chargeable with culpable complaisance, the utterance of these words affords a fitting opportunity for a penitent prayer, in my own behalf, for more of protective grace.

All this variety, and even more than this, of personal supplication, may be achieved by the simple expedient of a silent mental reference, accompanying the utterance of the general prayer.

3. The next petition of the prayer, "THY KINGDOM COME," is, in general expression, a prayer for the establishment of God's rule in the hearts of men ; for their conversion from what in Scripture is called the kingdom of darkness and of this world, to the kingdom of light and of God ; in other words, from a state of ignorance of the gospel, and of irreligious or non-religious living, to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and a life of gospel obedience. But the prayer, rightly used, should, like all others, primarily have refer-

ence to the case of the suppliant himself. “Thy kingdom come in my heart,” is the first application I make of it. And, in so applying it, every suppliant should prominently set before his mind his own existing condition, in respect of religious character and attainment; and accompany the words by a corresponding inward petition. If he knows himself to be still an unconverted man, “Thy kingdom come” should, in his secret thoughts, be a prayer to be brought to the state and feelings of a believer; a prayer for light and grace, to show him the way to God’s kingdom, and to enable him to pursue and persevere in it. If he be sensible of having made little progress in the Divine life, the words will embody a prayer for a greater advance, for a more rapid coming of the kingdom of God within his heart. In the best of Christians, there will be times and seasons, in which a prevalence of sin, or a coldness of spiritual affection, will produce a feeling as of the entire absence of God’s kingdom from his heart; and, in the utterance of these words, there will then rise a desire for the distinctly felt return of God’s rule. The power of temptation unsuccess-

fully resisted, or weakly yielded to, will turn the words into a petition for a keen sense of God's restraining sovereignty. In this, and in similar ways, there will be always scope for the suppliant praying that God's kingdom may come, or may come in more distinctly felt power, in his own heart; and thus may these words, "Thy kingdom come," be, at every stage of the Christian's course, made instrumental in conveying a prayer for the furtherance of his individual Christianity.

It is not, however, merely in his own heart that the suppliant ought to desire that God's kingdom may come. In pronouncing the words, my mind fitly makes a transition from my own case to that of those who stand nearest to me, of those who are connected with me by any special ties, of all for whose spiritual welfare I am bound to pray. And how wide a field is thus opened for the personal application of the prayer. With every right-thinking Christian, there is always some particular individual, often many more than one, in regard to whose spiritual condition he is for the time under special anxiety. Such an one

ought to be specially present to his mind, in uttering the words of the prayer; and “Thy kingdom come in his heart,” be its appropriate application. It needs no enlargement in words to confer efficacy on the prayer. It only needs that the pause, following the utterance of the general petition, be filled up with a definite mental reference, to give to the prayer all the force of a distinct intercession.

The scope of the petition, thus used, is boundless as the world in which the suppliant lives. By a simple mental act, without the utterance of an additional word, it may be made so expansive as to comprehend all for whom I fain would pray—my kinsmen according to the flesh, the associates of my daily walk, the friends I visit, the strangers into whose society I am thrown, the land of my nativity, the dwelling-place of my choice, the country through which I travel, the distant spot in which are those dear to me;—all persons, and all places comprehending persons, forming for the time my objects of interest, the petition may successively present at the Divine Throne. There is no limit to the prayer, short

of the coming of God's kingdom in all its fulness. The supplication may extend even to those worlds of which science tells us that they must be peopled, but cannot tell if the inhabitants are willing subjects of God's rule. Wherever there may be a spot, in which it may be surmised that God's kingdom is not yet arrived, as to that spot it may be said, with a specific reference, "Thy kingdom come."

With those of advanced years, or who may have good reason to consider their work in the present world accomplished, the words may fitly convey the Apostle's desire "to depart and to be with Christ." Only let the feeling be that which the Apostle describes, "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord," yet "labouring that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him." "In thine own good time (so let the silent qualification run) thy kingdom come."

4. The petition which follows, "THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN," implies a desire that not only God's kingdom should come, but the Divine government be permanently

submitted to and obeyed. It comprehends submission to God's will, both in doing and suffering. In regard to active duties, it is a prayer which may often have an important personal reference. There are times when duty brings with it pain, and sacrifice, and obloquy ;—when the heart sinks at the prospect of attempting it, and shrinks irresolutely from its discharge. What an impulse may be given to all right sentiment, what a quickening to conscience, what a strengthening to resolution, if, in repeating this petition, I can look duty steadfastly in the face, and inwardly vow to go forward in spite of every obstacle, saying, as with the words of a battle cry, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven !”

But, in a world of sorrow like the present, the more frequent association with the prayer is likely to be the thought of some care, or grief, or disappointment, experienced or impending. In uttering the words, the suppliant should set distinctly before his view the particular woe under which he is at the time labouring. It matters not what the cause of mental disturbance may be : worldly losses, the death of the loved, family jars, affec-

tion's disappointments, failure in the favourite aim, a spot on the fair reputation, declension of the mental powers, obscurity of the spiritual vision, want of spiritual comfort, darkness on the onward path,—whatever may form the dispensation of the moment, fitly has the words appropriated by a distinct mental reference ; and “Thy will in this be done,” is the inward application of the petition.

The words of the petition indicate the measure in which accordance with the Divine will is inculcated, and to be desired. “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” expresses the parallel aimed at between the saints below and the holy beings above. A direction of the mind upwards, to the abode of those pure intelligences, whose acquiescence in God's will is entire and unreserved, fitly accompanies the prayer. But, in so directing the mind, there may also arise a reference at once personal and touching. There is scarcely any one, to whose thoughts there may not be present the image of one loved being, now assuredly an inhabitant of the better country. How appropriate to this portion of the prayer a

silent remembrance of the departed, drawing, out of the general words of the petition, an inward desire after conformity of spirit with the beloved friend in heaven ! “Thy will be done by me on earth, as it is done in heaven by my loved one,” is the heart’s paraphrase of the prayer. Here is an application of the petition, the most winning, and satisfying, and elevating. Love has hereby given, what even love requires, a remembrance regular as the hour of devotion. A holy example is kept constantly in view, with even more than the power it had on earth. The soul is drawn upwards, as “with the cords of a man, with bands of love.”

5. The prayer proceeds from these petitions, which more immediately regard the Divine government and glory, to others which directly refer to human wants and necessities. “GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD,” is a prayer for the supply of that bodily sustenance which is the common need of the race. For although there are some who, holding it beneath a Christian to pray for any but spiritual blessings, interpret the words metaphorically, and consider them to supplicate

for spiritual supplies, their view is an over-refinement, unduly limiting the Divine benevolence, which delights to bestow on us temporal not less than spiritual blessings, and is ready to help us, not merely in great difficulties, but in the most trivial cares. The object of the petition cannot be more aptly expressed than in these words of a venerable Catechism :—" In the fourth petition, which is, ' Give us this day our daily bread,' we pray that, of God's free gift, we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them."

So interpreted, the prayer is as comprehensive as humanity itself ; for almost every one is, in some measure or another, under the pressure of a temporal want. Yet this petition, like the rest of the prayer, is too often repeated by rote, without any distinct apprehension, and as if without any probable efficacy. The correction to this error is, as before, to individualize the prayer, by a mental reference to the specific personal predicament. When used with such a reference, it will become a prayer of the most varied character. The poor man, who is threatened with a destitution of the

common necessities of life, will, in using these simple words, be praying, by inward petition, for a return of employment and plenty. He, who has any particular loss impending over him, will be praying for deliverance from that loss. He, on whom the blow has fallen, will be supplicating restored prosperity. He, whose worldly state is flourishing, will be entreating a continuance of the blessing. Nor are even those, who seem placed on a secure pinnacle of wealth and greatness, excluded from a like use of the prayer; for even to these, and sometimes most of all to these, there are embarrassments, and fears, and anxieties, their relief from which may fitly be comprehended in the prayer. Or, if free themselves from any worldly care, they may so use the plurality of the prayer, as to convert it into a joint petition with those others dear to them, whose necessities require a Divine intervention. If, by the Divine blessing, the suppliant have attained a position in which his worldly supply appears secured beyond a reasonable doubt, he may turn the prayer into a thanksgiving, and, whilst still praying against those possibilities which may endanger earth's

stablest position, or bring its comforts to an untimely termination, he may inwardly send up his praise for the grace which now enables him to "take no thought for the morrow."

6. There is the same, or, if possible, greater comprehensiveness in the next petition : "AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS ;" or as, for general apprehension, it has been rightly turned, "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." For all, without a single exception, are sinners before God, in need of forgiveness ; and all require to use the prayer.

But, as commonly used, this petition has the same fault of vagueness and generality, chargeable on all our prayers, but especially on our prayers for pardon. The great difficulty with the teachers of religion has always been to carry men beyond a mere general acknowledgment, and to bring them to see and own their specific acts of culpability. A general confession of the sins of the world is wholly uninfluential as an act of penitence ; and a common prayer for forgiveness to all is little better than a formal rite. So

it is, and so it will be, with this petition of the Lord's Prayer, until something more be done than to repeat its general words.

That something again consists in combining with the utterance of the general petition a distinct mental reference to the particular act of transgression, with which the suppliant is chargeable at the time. "Forgive me this trespass," will be then the inward application of the general expression. Whatever is the sin to be confessed, flagrant transgression of God's law, forgetfulness of God in the midst of his bounties, shortcoming in duty, selfishness in conduct, irregularity of temper, pollution of thought, failure in courtesy, everything, however slight, for which, in a right exercise of self-examination, a man ought to blame himself, ought to be present to his mind, as the express subject of the prayer. The process is easy, as is a simple act of thought. The cause of the common difficulty of confession is, to no small extent, an unwillingness to put in words the details of the transgression; at times, the trivial nature of the offence makes the suppliant ashamed to speak of it. But every offence, how-

ever trivial, must be subject of recollection and regret to a right-thinking moral agent ; and simply to rest on it in thought, whilst he utters the words, "Forgive us our trespasses," will give to the petition all the substance and efficacy of penitential prayer.

Here, however, there is something to supply, even in a prayer taught by Christ. When the prayer was taught, the Divine plans did not embrace a full revelation of the Redeemer's mediatorship. It is different now. I cannot contemplate the forgiveness of sin without reference to that great work of redemption by which it was achieved. At this point of the prayer, therefore, I raise my mental contemplation to that once crucified Saviour, who now intercedes for me at God's right hand ; and, whilst uttering, "Forgive us our trespasses," with a conscious reference to my then burdening sin, I add inwardly, "for the sake of Christ."

But this part of the prayer contains not a petition merely ; it comprehends words by which the suppliant, at the same moment, accords to those who have offended him a forgiveness as full as

that which he asks for himself. The Divine Teacher has, in another place, pointed out the mode in which the act of pardon should be performed : “ And when ye stand praying (he says), forgive, if ye have aught against any, that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses.” Here the Saviour appears to enjoin that very avoidance of formal generality, and that very process of distinct mental reference to a specific case, which I have endeavoured to inculcate. I do not fulfil the precept aright unless, in uttering the words of the prayer, I set clearly before my view the particular offence under which I am at the moment smarting ; the particular offender from whom the offence has proceeded. Nor is it only great injuries with which I so deal ; I equally embrace those trivial wrongs, and petty slights, which occur in the course of daily life, and, just because they seem unmeet for a great act of self-control, are allowed to rankle in the mind, till, by brooding over them, it gives to them the character of serious evils. Thinking on any such, occurring in my recent history, I, in uttering the words of the prayer,

bestow on the particular offender a forgiveness as unreserved as I supplicate for my own transgressions : “ For if (says Christ) ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you ; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

7. The prayer, as it draws to a close, expands as if to embrace every earthly necessity. For, when the suppliant says, “ AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL,” he utters a petition, wide as are human sufferings, or human fears. “ Lead us not into temptation,” may be generalized into a prayer against impending trial of any description ; for all may be rightly brought under the Scripture phrase, and in all there is a risk of sin. “ Deliver us from evil,” is a prayer properly applicable after the blow has descended, yet susceptible of a general meaning, as extensive as are the ills of humanity, whether experienced or apprehended.

The Divine Teacher has given us, in his personal history, an example of the spirit in which this prayer should be used ; the spirit, namely,

in which humble resignation to the Divine will mingles with permitted prayer for deliverance. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt," is Christ's method of applying the prayer. Every Christian should use it, with as distinct a mental reference to his own existing calamity, as the Saviour himself expressed in these words. If a particular evil is dreaded, as likely to fall, the general petition of the prayer should, by such reference, be made a silent petition that this evil may be averted. "Let this cup pass from me," is then its inward application. Or, if the calamity has descended, the petition is, by the same mental reference, turned into an inward prayer, that in God's good time it may be removed. "Let this cup pass from me," is still its application within the heart.

As spiritual blessings are what chiefly should be sought by the Christian, it is against spiritual ills that the prayer should be chiefly directed. In uttering the words, "Lead us not into temptation," I fix my mind on any special occasion in prospect, when I fear that my religious constancy

may be shaken, or my besetting sin may overpower me, or my otherwise commendable courtesy may lead to an apparent compliance, which may practically be a denial of my Master; and I inwardly pray that God, in his good providence, may enable me to avoid the scene of peril, without dereliction of duty. When I say, "Deliver us from evil," I reflect on that form of evil which, for the time, burdens me as a moral disorder; and I inwardly pray that God may make me whole of that plague.

But it were unduly to limit the petition to confine it to spiritual ills. "Deliver us from evil," is the last clause of the prayer; and, as if intentionally, it is so placed, that no evil whatever should be excluded from the resource which the prayer affords. Only let the prayer be so used, that the mental reference may never fail to include the prevalent calamity. Nor is the most trivial of experienced ills to be forgotten; for, as to all, it is intended to send us like children to a father, to communicate our cares or our perplexities, by that act of thought which is enough for God. . And how wondrous in its encouragement

is the sympathetic mediation in which we trust ;
“ For we have not an High Priest which cannot
be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but
was in all points tempted like as we are, yet
without sin. Let us, therefore, come boldly unto
the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy,
and find grace to help in time of need.”

8. The prayer, ere it concludes, reverts to an
act of adoration. For such an act is performed,
when the suppliant says in the close, “ FOR THINE
IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY,
FOR EVER AND EVER.” Yet this act of adoration is
connected directly with the previous prayers ; for
it is because of the belonging to God of the king-
dom, and the power, and the glory, that the clause
intimates that these prayers have been addressed
to God’s throne. And the words of homage may
be so pronounced, as to express a relation in
which God is felt to stand, at that moment, to-
wards the suppliant personally.

When the rightly taught suppliant says, “ Thine
is the kingdom,” he in spirit bows down, with a
distinct feeling of acquiescence in the providential
dispensation, or impending duty, which then more

particularly presses, and calls for abjuration of his own will, and subjection to that of God.

When he says, "And the power," he thinks of God's omnipotence, as what is, or must be, exerted on his behalf, for the special aid or deliverance required by his existing circumstances.

When he adds, "And the glory," he makes the inward acknowledgment, that the acquisition of whatever boon his previous prayer has comprised, is not to be attributed to any merit in himself ; but that to God belong the honour and praise of the special blessing, received or expected.

When he says, "For ever and ever," he does not make an abstract acknowledgment of the eternity of the Divine attributes, but feels himself individually in the position of one, towards whom these attributes are to be exercised, for an endless course of being. In uttering these words, he mentally looks forward to a futurity during which he is personally to exist ; and, in spirit and desire, he puts himself under God's rule, and commits himself to God's favour, and devotes himself to the promotion of God's glory, for the

whole coming eternity. So he closes the prayer, as he would close his life.

There is added "Amen," or "So be it," with the feeling, in the heart of the suppliant, of one who bends into the dust, in the concentrated earnestness of a prayer which is now closed, and waits a favourable reply. The word suggests, and is accompanied by, the solemn and reverent pause, which is fitting to be made by him, ere he rise from his knees. In the silence of such a pause, he compresses the whole supplication into one intense feeling of earnest, yet submissive desire, directed towards God : and he rises in the assurance of faith, that his prayer has not been in vain. "After this manner, therefore, pray ye."

IX.

THE HOLY TRINITY.

IF at any time religion is scoffed at on account of its mysteries, the heathens themselves afford an immediate rebuke. A true instinct taught them that a religion without mysteries is impossible. Whatever is above the ordinary sphere of knowledge is necessarily mysterious, more or less. Atheism itself cannot exist without mysteries ; itself greatest of all.

Judging from the past history of religion, there is no conception, which is more easily formed by human beings, than that of Deity incarnate. To picture God, in the likeness of man, is that to which we find uninstructed humanity everywhere tending. Philosophy in this matter so far accords with nature, as to see an incarnation of Deity to be a perfectly possible, if not a probable event. The Being, who possesses omnipotence as one of

his attributes, may surely, if he so please, assume the human form. It might even occur to be a peculiarly gracious adaptation to human weakness, were God to reveal himself to man in a way so well calculated to fix his thoughts, and draw his affections. There is nothing unphilosophical, but quite the reverse, in the idea of "God manifest in the flesh."

If, however, a conception can be formed of an incarnate God (and none, as I have hinted, is more common and natural), a little reflection may suggest, that in this conception is involved an idea of God, analogous to what is implied in the doctrine of the Trinity. For no philosophic mind will suppose that, in the human shape which may be presented to the eyes of men, the whole God-head lies concentrated and confined, so as to be withdrawn from every other part of the universe. The Divine presence will still be as much as ever diffused through all space. Here, therefore, whilst the Divine unity is maintained, is what fitly may be termed a double personality ; to wit, that which is displayed in the incarnate form, and that which otherwise exists in the universal presence. This

indeed is not Trinity : but it involves the principle of Trinity, that is, the combination of unbroken unity with multiplied personality.

I desire that it be clearly understood that, in my present observations, I am not attempting to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, but merely to remove obstacles in the way of fairly considering it. I am not dealing with the fact itself, but with the possibility of conceiving it. I am narrating thoughts which, in actual experience, have contributed to its clearer apprehension. I think it may be shown that, in many, if not in most, of the conceptions which man naturally forms of a Supreme Being, there is involved an idea closely akin to that which lies at the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity, and which forms the great stumbling-block in the way of receiving that doctrine.

Let me take another illustration, drawn from a familiar conception. Every picture which we form of Heaven comprehends, as an essential part of it, a sensible manifestation of the Divine presence. Indeed, we scarcely have any definite idea of Heaven, beyond that of a locality in which

God is perceptibly revealed to the hosts of the blessed. This is the essence of the conception ; all besides is the colouring of fancy. Now, under whatever manifestation the Divine presence is made apparent, the idea of such a manifestation implies what may be called a double personality : to wit, that which exists in the manifestation itself, and that by which, imperceptibly to finite intelligence, the Divine presence is diffused over all space. If, to this twofold conception, we add that of Deity existing at the moment incarnate—whether of the Son of God walking the earth, or “the Lamb in the midst of the Throne”—we embrace in the idea the characteristic element of the doctrine of the Trinity ; that is to say, the combination of absolute unity with threefold personality.

It might almost indeed be said, that the same conception is involved in every act of devout supplication. For, to every such act, a certain localization of the Deity is requisite ; the presentation of God to the mind at some definite point of space. Every earnest supplication implies what may be termed a personification of the Divine

Being, meaning thereby not the formation of any picture, or the conception of any distinct form, but the apprehension of God, as a personal auditor in a particular spot, towards which the eye of faith is raised, and the prayer of faith directed. Prayer cannot be earnest, if vaguely pronounced in the universal air : it takes the character of a real and true address, only by attributing to God the personal presence, at some definite point, of one who listens to the supplication. But here is, as before, involved the idea of twofold personality; of that personal presence which is, so to speak, concentrated in a particular locality ; and of that other personality, by which, at the same moment, God is everywhere present throughout the Universe. If we add the idea of Deity incarnate, once in earth, now in heaven, the conception again embodies the characteristic element of the doctrine of the Trinity—Divine unity, and three-fold personality.

I repeat that these illustrations are not intended to present a true representation, or definite conception, of the Holy Trinity : their use is merely to show, that our natural appre-

hensions of God are so far from excluding the idea of multiplied personality, that this very idea is almost necessarily involved in all. We hence learn that, whilst the doctrine that there is but one God is an essential doctrine of true religion, we cannot apply to the subject those narrow ideas of what constitutes unity, which the human mind is so apt to form, in the ordinary course of its thoughts. We are so accustomed to the material unity, the characteristic mark of which is the visible accumulation of a definite quantity of matter into one locality, that our minds insensibly connect with every conception of unity some such picture as this. We must soon, however, perceive that this is not the unity of God. Indeed, material unity itself, when duly reflected on, is seen to be often composed of a plurality of elements, each of which is transfused through the whole, so that no part can be conceived without it, and of each of which we yet think and speak as a separate existence. Extending our views beyond objects purely material, our narrow conception of unity receives still further correction. Perhaps, *à priori*, no kind of

unity is more unlikely, than would be formed by the combination of elements so discordant as those of mind and matter ; yet we find, in the familiar connexion between soul and body, these elements, to all appearance, wholly separable by death, and yet, during life, interfused into unity the most absolute, with perhaps, at death itself, some connecting, though unseen bond, preserving the oneness for the destined union of eternity. When, from such familiar experiences, we pass to the possibilities of a world of spirits, we meet with increased facilities for receiving the conception of absolute unity combined with multiplied personality. In the case of an omnipresent spirit, nothing is more easy than to fancy a personal manifestation at one part of the universe, and a different personal manifestation at another and a different point, yet all the while the unity unbroken, or even the bond which preserves it an all-pervading essence, which constitutes a third, though impalpable personality. I again do not present this conception as advancing the mind towards the true idea of the Divine Trinity. Perhaps no conception, formed by a finite intel-

ligence, will ever quadrate with the reality. But it may serve to show how inconsistent with reason is the conduct of those, who find, in the truth of the Divine unity, a ground for holding the doctrine of a threefold personality in the Godhead to be excluded from the possibility of belief.

The truth is, that a right consideration of the Divine unity is the best of all preparations for receiving the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. For the mind, which seriously ponders how impossible it is clearly to conceive the mode of God's existence in unity, soon arrives at the inference that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be rightly rejected, merely in consequence of a difficulty in apprehending it. If this be a good objection to the one doctrine, it will equally lie against the other, and so lead to a denial, not merely of the Trinity, but of the very being of God. If the mode of God's existence in unity be a mystery wholly impenetrable, the like (perhaps no greater) mysteriousness of the mode of his existence in Trinity, should be no obstacle to our receiving the Scripture teaching on the subject, to the extent to which that teaching goes.

It is with this, as with all other topics, touching on God's existence and attributes ; God's revelation concerning himself is necessarily expressed in language accommodated to human capacity, and, from the nature of the case, can but obscurely shadow forth the reality, as known to higher intelligences, or, perhaps, only to God himself. We can only talk, or be talked to, concerning God, in the language of men. Our expressions, therefore, although correct for all practical purposes, can never be taken as enunciating the literal reality. When we speak of God seeing or hearing us, or stretching forth his hand to strike or heal, or feeling towards us the emotions of pity or anger, we do not thereby represent God as possessed of human organs or affections ; we merely use the most appropriate language in our power, to indicate his proceedings towards us. This is universally the case in what we say concerning God ; indeed we could not do otherwise if we would. The most strenuous opponent of the doctrine of the Trinity can employ no other language. But not only is the language never to be construed literally. It

equally follows, that it never can convey more than an obscure and imperfect conception of the thing represented. Both results alike follow from an incapacity to compass the literal reality. When we say that God hears and sees us, we not only do not mean that God hears or sees after the manner of men, but we convey no intimation how God does what the words represent. This also holds universally; equally with the language used by the believers in the doctrine of the Trinity, and with that employed by their antagonists.

The doctrine of the Trinity is presented to the mind by its expounders, exactly as other doctrines concerning God. When we speak of three persons in the Godhead, we do not use the word "persons" in the ordinary sense of the term, as applicable to individuals of the human race; far less do we speak, as has unjustly been represented, of three persons in one person; which might rightly be called a contradiction in terms. All that we mean is, that, in revealing God to us, Scripture presents, under the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three distinct objects of conception,

to which, using the most approximate language in our power, we give the appellation of persons ; thereby intimating, as nearly as words can express it, the distinctness declared by God's Word, yet all the while believing, on the authority of the same Word, that there is one only God, in whose mysterious essence all Three are comprehended. I have sometimes wished, that, in place of the word "persons," some other expression, such as "personalities," had been used, merely as giving to the term more of the indefiniteness proper to the conception. But it matters little what may be the language employed, so that its true import be understood. The language used to set forth the existence in Trinity of the one only God, simply intimates that the unity of God, unlike all other, as the nature of God is unlike all other, comprehends what we find no other words to express than "Three persons in one God ;" not thereby making plain to the mind the manner of the Trinity, more than of the unity, but only going as far as our limited intellect can, to follow the conception.

The idea formed is in the highest degree inde-

finite and obscure ; the mind cannot resolve it into a distinct image ; if it try to do so, the result will be either utter confusion of thought, or conceptions that are contradictory, and irreconcilable. But this is what happens with all the conceptions which man forms concerning God ; with all the conceptions of God formed by the most intellectual opponent of the doctrine of the Trinity. Take, for instance, God's attribute of omnipresence. If the mind attempts to produce a clear and definite image of an omnipresent Being, it altogether fails of its object. Nothing results but a shadowy and confused idea, in which locality clashes with ubiquity, in a way to show the effort to be at once hopeless and forbidden. Turn from the idea of omnipresence to that of omnipotence, and the difficulties of the subject increase rather than diminish. No human intellect can achieve a clear conception of creation out of nothing ; any endeavour to present to the mind a picture of the working of God's power always leads to the only image which created beings can realize, the combination, namely, of might with materials ; and so the effort either lands the inquirer in an idea at

variance with the reality, or leaves him tossing in a darkness which he cannot pierce. The like will be found the case with all the Divine attributes; eminently so with the Divine affections, as to which any attempt to go beyond the imperfect analogy of human feelings issues in obscurity the most distressing. The truth is, that, if we would not be atheists altogether, we must train ourselves to rest contented with those dim and undefined conceptions of God, which alone it is possible for finite creatures to possess. We must train our minds to receive conceptions which we cannot attempt to follow out into clearness, without running into thoughts at variance with the true idea of Godhead; for such will ever be the case, when the finite endeavours to compass the Infinite. If the philosophic believer in one only God were to suspend his creed on the possibility of working out a clear idea of God's mode of existence, and were ready to abandon his belief, whenever his attempt at clearness of conception issued in apparent contradictions, he would soon make utter shipwreck of faith. The theist would become an atheist. The mind, which sought an impracticable

clearness, would be obliged to take refuge in the darkness of universal scepticism.

This result is, in the ordinary case, avoided by a mental process, which every one, who watches the operations of his own mind, will recognise so soon as stated ; I mean the process of transition, made, as the case requires, from the practical view of the subject to the philosophical, and the converse. Practically, God is regarded as holding towards us a relation similar to what might be held by a superior being of our own species, as hearing, and seeing, loving, and being angry with us. By this practical view, which is fully authorized, indeed is the only one open to us, the believer receives enough, at once for duty and devotion. When he turns from the path of practical conduct into the field of speculation, his mind makes a transition to a different view of God, regarding him now as the Great Spirit, who exists in a mysterious Omnipresence, without aught which resembles human perceptions, or human passions. This may at first sight appear a transition from one view of a subject, to that which is opposite and contradictory. In reality,

it is only the transition which must always be made by a finite mind, in its conceptions of the Infinite; a transition from one imperfect conception, to another equally so, both being approximations merely, but approximations on different sides. The philosophical view of God is an attempt to picture him as he exists in himself, irrespectively of his relation to ourselves; correct, so far as it goes, though ending in nothing beyond a vague and general conception. The practical view of God is an attempt to apprehend him in his relation to man, which naturally results in attributing to God's dealings the motives and affections which characterize the like dealings amongst men; because the only mode, in which we can form a conception of God's dispositions towards us, is to take the analogy of those human feelings which are the only subjects of our experience. This transition between the practical and philosophical idea of God, though a transition between conceptions apparently conflicting, is the transition which is made by every one, who has advanced beyond a mere recognition of the existence of a First Cause, and regards the Infinite

Jehovah as his Ruler, his Benefactor, and his Judge. It is warranted and sanctioned by the whole tenor of Scripture, which is found, in almost every page, making this very transition, from the grand but obscure view of the eternal I AM, to the touching delineation of the Father, the Master, and the Friend.

It is a similar process of transition, by which those who believe in the Trinity extricate their ideas on the subject, and avoid all practical difficulty. When revelation tells that in the unity of the Godhead there exists a mysterious distinction, which it expresses in language usually applicable to three separate Persons, the believer takes the language, and uses it, just as he employs the language indicative of the Divine affections, not as expressing what the words literally import, but as denoting the revealed mode of the Divine existence, as nearly as human words can accomplish. He thinks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as he would of three distinct persons, for so his Bible presents them to his view. Practically, he acts on this conception, by adapting his prayers and his conduct to the reve-

lation given him of the relation and offices sustained, by these Divine Persons respectively, in regard to human salvation. He knows and feels, all the while, that there is no such separation as the common use of the terms supposes to take place amongst men, or even amongst created intelligences of the highest order. To him there is still only one God, in whose unity this threefold personality mysteriously exists. The idea thus given him of God is a dim and incomplete conception, which he cannot, with all his efforts, work out into clear apprehension. It is an idea which necessitates a transition from one conception to another, from the clear idea of threefold personality—clear, because accordant with human experience—to the dark apprehension of absolute unity in which threefold personality is comprehended. But the well-instructed believer sees that this is nothing else than happens in regard to every conception of God, as revealed to man, in man's own language; for, in every case, there must be precisely this transition, from the clear idea given by the accommodated expressions, to the obscure conception of the actual reality. The

believer, therefore, willingly assumes the place of a finite and subordinate intelligence. He receives and follows out the revelation, as alone such intelligence can. He regards the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the light of three Divine Persons, for so his Bible presents them ; yet, swayed by the same sovereign authority, he meekly bows down before the Throne, and, with humbled heart and brow, though, it may be, with perception dim as when the cloud filled the temple, he gives glory to the Three Persons as One God.

It is not within my present design to enter at length on the Scripture proofs of the doctrine of the Trinity. My object here, as elsewhere, is to deal with the subject generally, and in the way of removing difficulties, rather than of expounding a system. I would merely sketch, in a few rapid sentences, the process of thought, by which it may be easily credited that a mind anxious after truth may have been brought experimentally to full belief in the doctrine.

The idea of God the Father is received without any difficulty. This is the generic idea of the

Supreme Being, from whom all things proceed. The name is what the heathens themselves gave to their chief divinity. The native tendency of the mind, even when professedly enlightened by the Christian revelation, is not to proceed beyond this idea; and, perhaps, for a considerable time after it has become sincere in the pursuit of truth, it adheres to this, as to its only allowable conception of God.

But, in diligently perusing the Scriptures, especially of the New Testament, it is found impossible to resist the influx of fresh convictions, which, one after another, arise. It is soon perceived, that He, to whom is given the epithet of the Son of God, has had the name bestowed on him for reasons which cannot be exhausted by any views of mere humanity, however exalted. The Bible is seen to indicate a relation, sustained under this title, anterior to the creation of the visible universe. A pre-existence in a state of glory is perceived to have belonged to the Redeemer. A superiority to all created beings is seen attributed to him, in a way not to be questioned. In Christ's appearance on earth, comes

to be discerned the incarnation of an intelligence above the highest of angels. Here, perhaps, for a time, the mind makes another pause, content to give to Christ a place above all creatures, but still a place inferior to that of God.

But the Bible allows not the inquirer to stop here. From almost every point it pours intimations, from some it issues the most express declarations, leaving no alternative save to ascribe to this exalted Being the possession of proper Divinity. Titles, attributes, and offices, are declared to belong to him, peculiar to Godhead. Equality with God, in the most absolute sense, is ascribed to him. Plain statements of his participation in the essential divinity of the Most High conclude all reasoning on the subject. "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." The mind at last settles into the conviction, that Christ was indeed what the Bible expressly names him, "God manifest in the flesh."

The step which remains is perhaps the most difficult of all. For the language employed concerning the Divine Spirit may, with less violence, be interpreted into the expression of an influence merely. But here too, ere long, the diligent student of the Bible finds statements and implications, which cannot be fairly met by any stretch of metaphor, or otherwise satisfied than by the conception of a third mysterious personality. The Holy Spirit is spoken of so frequently, indeed almost so invariably, in the terms applicable to a distinct and separate agent, that, when once the mind escapes from those limited notions of the Divine unity, which nature teaches, and revelation corrects, it finds that it cannot stop short of the apprehension of a third person in the Godhead. The same process of reasoning, which establishes the personality of the Son, legitimately carried out, establishes also the personality of the Spirit. The argument becomes unanswerable, when the name of the Holy Spirit is found, in express words, united to those of the Father and of the Son, so as to attribute personality to all equally. The Saviour proclaims the doctrine,

with the authority of a Divine promulgation, when he gives his parting precept ; “ Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

Thus the mind becomes established in the faith of the Trinity. It believes the doctrine, because the Bible teaches it. But it believes according to the Bible, not according to any theory of man’s devising. It rejects, as wholly forbidden, all attempts to frame a clear delineation of the reality, by the likeness of earthly things ; which it sees only to lead to inextricable contradiction, and to be, by this itself, shown to be prohibited. It regards as presented to its view three several objects of contemplation, of which it is to conceive, with reference to office and operation, exactly as of three several persons ; for so the Bible reveals them. In prayer and meditation, it thinks and expresses itself as of three persons, of whom each maintains a separate place and agency in the work of human redemption ; of the Father, as the ruler and lawgiver of the world ; of the Son, as the mediator between God and man ; of the

Holy Spirit, as the indwelling teacher, and sanctifier, and comforter of believers. Under the instruction of the same Divine Word, it passes from these contemplations to that of the one only God, whose mysterious essence comprehends and fuses the distinctions into unity the most absolute. The transition is at first difficult ; but the mind soon perceives it to be necessary, and in kind not different from that which it made without objection, before it believed in the Christian doctrine, when it passed from the personal view of God, as one who saw, and heard, and smote, and healed, and loved, and was wroth, to the thought of the universal presence, “ without body, parts, or passions.” And thus the advancing Christian, whilst maintaining in his prayer the whole measure of gospel reference to the Father whom he has offended, the Saviour who died for him, the Spirit who descends for his sanctification, closes his act of worship by ascribing, from the heart, “ Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, One God.”

X.

CHRISTIAN MORALS.

AN ingenious, but paradoxical author of the last century maintained it to be the strongest evidence of the Divine origin of Christianity, that the virtues enjoined by it were directly opposed to the qualities considered to be such by man in his natural state, or by even the most enlightened heathens. The position is true to this extent, that some virtues, and these of the highest order, are recognised by Christianity, which were unknown to the heathens, or esteemed by them weaknesses. But, generally speaking, it is an unsound, and therefore an unsafe method of teaching religion, to represent it as enforcing a strange, and before unknown morality. So far, at least, as concerns the intercourse between man and man (I refer not at present to higher duties), the conduct enjoined by religion is, generally speaking,

what the men of the world, when exercising a calm and impartial judgment, themselves approve and recommend. I say, “when exercising a calm and impartial judgment;” because I do not take, as expounding their system of morals, either their conduct when under the influence of sinful passion, which their better judgment condemns; or the idle bravadoes, by which they sometimes make a boast of vice; which are often the mere outbursts of a thoughtless moment, for which afterwards their heart bitterly reproves them. The virtues which, when nothing obstructs an unprejudiced decision, the world at large stamps with its approbation, are just those which religion inculcates; active industry, considerate prudence, unostentatious charity, amiable temper, inflexible integrity, high honour, unaffected purity.

This is not merely an homage to virtue, on the part of those who do not practise it themselves. There is, up to a certain point, a true approximation between the social duties as practised by the Christian, and the same duties as exhibited by an upright man of the world, who, in the religious sense, is still an unconverted person. The com-

mon duties of life regard, for the most part, worldly relations : and the conduct appropriate to these relations is, generally speaking, accurately dictated by those considerations of natural reason, sound policy, and instinctive morality, operative in directing the affairs of the present life. The immediate object of these duties is the wellbeing of existing society ; and their discharge by the religious man having thus far a common end with their fulfilment by others, they naturally follow a common course. The religious man must attain worldly success by the same industry which is successful with the man of the world. He is trusted on account of the same integrity. He avoids unnecessary risks by the same prudence. He conciliates affection by the same generosity of disposition, and the same amiability of temper. As superior or inferior, as parent or child, as friend or associate, the duties lying on him, rightly performed, will issue for the most part in the same outward conduct, by which the due maintenance of these relations is characterized in society at large. The consideration is not unimportant. It tends to remove a difficulty, which

sometimes lies in the way of entering on a religious course, as if it led into a field of action marked by repulsive peculiarities. It also tends to correct an error committed by some religious persons, who signalize their entrance on a religious course by an abandonment of ordinary avocations, and a disruption of ancient bonds, in order to the exclusive substitution of devotional observances, and spiritual ties. Conversion, undoubtedly, will produce a marked change on the outward aspect of the life, as well as on the inward motives. The converted man will openly join the people of God ; he will be regular in his observance of religious ordinances ; will be forward to assist in all efforts for the diffusion of gospel light, at home or abroad ; will bestow his care and ministrations on the souls, as well as bodies, of men : will always, when occasion requires, be ready in society with an avowal of his faith, “ not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” But with all the distinctive lineaments of a true believer, his common relations, and common duties, will remain as before, to be maintained and discharged as much as ever, and only to be characterized by a firmer

hold, and by a purer and more diligent fulfilment.

The true difference between the Christian and others in respect of common duties, is not in the outward character of the duties, but in the principle which actuates their performance. Here there is a vital distinction. There is an element in the conduct of the Christian, wholly wanting in that of the others. The motives, by which the man of the world is incited to duty, are not necessarily mean or grovelling; they are often lofty and high-minded: but they comprehend no conscious reference to God, or God's purposes; to what God has done for him, or what God expects him to do. If religious sentiments to any extent influence his conduct, they are the vague reflections of early education, or of the general enlightenment of Christianity, without any distinct perception of the Divine source of light. His system of morals is a collection of abstract rules, deriving their authority from a sort of traditional law, not from the command of a sensibly existing, and sensibly present Lawgiver. His incentives to action are all influences from the

world around. He acts as if he were all his own, and this world were his all. Scripture, with one emphatic touch, depicts the entire character : “ God is not in all his thoughts.” By the Christian the same duties may be performed, and with precisely the same outward aspect ; but the impulse is wholly different. There is connected with the outward conduct a succession of inward feelings, all directly pointing to God, and his responsibility to God, and the destiny which God has assigned to him. The thought of God is, with the Christian, diffused through the whole of duty : he seeks to perform it all, as with God sensibly present, to direct, restrain, and encourage ; and marks his advance in virtue by the growing clearness with which his view of God, as the object of all duty, is maintained, and the growing comprehensiveness with which a reference to God intermingles with his daily conduct. Considering himself as the servant of God, not only here, but hereafter also, he has in view the acquirement of those dispositions, and the formation of those habits, which will fit him for his existence in a higher state ; and so his perform-

ance of this world's duties is also purposely a preparation for the world to come. Above all, he is under the conscious influence of the evangelical motives to obedience ; those, namely, which are drawn from the contemplation of his redemption by a crucified Saviour ; gratitude for the mercy which bought him at so great a price ; a sense of the increased obligation, laid on him by such wondrous grace ; attachment to the Divine Friend, who loved him, and gave himself for him. Christian morality, without gospel motives, is a contradiction in terms. The love of Christ is the grand foundation of Christian morals.

A right apprehension of the nature of Christian morality affords an explanation of a remark, which has been often thought strange and uncharitable, that a man may exhibit the strictest correctness of conduct, and the greatest amiability of disposition, and yet be as far from a state of grace, and of safety for eternity, as the most profligate of his fellows. The observation has been sometimes made in terms unwarrantably offensive ; but there lies at the bottom of it a great truth, that the full amount of virtue, neces-

sary for the wellbeing of the present world, may characterize the individual, and yet there be wanting that direct and conscious reference to God, and God's will, and God's purposes, not for time only, but eternity, in which lies the essence of Christian morality. It is not that the qualities possessed are not good and laudable. They are not merely apparent, but real excellencies. Relatively to the present world, they are undoubted virtues, and often virtues of a high order. Nor are they necessarily dictated by mere considerations of worldly interest; they are often the fruits of a severe code of duty, carried into effect at the sacrifice both of interest and happiness. It is not the less true, that the duty is not done directly to God, nor through constraint of the love of Christ. The duty is not religious duty, because not proceeding from religious principles. The morality is not Christian morality, because not flowing from gospel motives. And however rightly it be rewarded in the present life, by success, and honour, and affection, it cannot warrantably expect to share in the eternal inheritance, for which neither the appointed way has

been taken, nor the commanded preparation made. The distinction is one, which may be paralleled in the affairs of ordinary life. I can picture an individual, sent to a particular locality, with a special duty committed to him, so passing his time as to acquit himself of all the claims possessed on him by those immediately around, yet failing to accomplish, or even to attempt, the particular object of his mission, and so becoming justly liable to censure, or even punishment, at the hand of those to whom he was accountable. I can conceive him an useful, and also a most agreeable, member of the society in which he is placed for the time, and day after day passing smoothly along, with nothing to interrupt his happiness ; yet, all the while, the grand object of his position in that spot neglected, and the penal consequence of such neglect rightly falling on him at last. Similar to this is the condition amongst us of the man of morality without religion. He may be satisfying the claims of the world in which he lives. He may be exemplary in all the worldly relations, an amiable, agreeable, useful member of society, as happy as earth

permits. But, viewing him in his relation to God, and as having an immortal soul given him to train for the services of a higher state, he is all the while performing no duty at all, nor advancing a single step towards the great end set before him. He is a negligent servant, a disobedient child, a rebellious subject, justly amenable to condemnation.

It is a trite observation, that the character of an action is determined by the character of its motive. I have alluded to the diversity of moral character, given to the same outward act by a difference in the inward sentiment. The converse of the proposition equally holds good ; and actions, which are as different in outward aspect, as is religion from the want of it, may yet, from the identity of inward affection, be properly placed in the same moral category. Actions outwardly religious may, by force of the impelling motive, or intermingling sentiment, possess the essence of worldly-mindedness. I do not merely allude to the case of the hypocrite, who assumes the mask of virtue, whilst sin is in his heart. Even those, who are sincerely religious, require to be

greatly on their guard, lest they carry into their religious conduct the same unregenerate feelings by which they had been previously characterized. The natural passions are, even after conversion, so strong in the best, as, in some instances, to appear as if they were entirely unchanged, and were merely transported into another field of exercise. Hence it happens, that the naturally passionate temper shows itself in a fiery, contentious zeal, impatient of any difference, even in trifles; that the naturally bustling and intermeddling disposition pushes itself forward in administrative offices, or the spiritual concerns of others, with indelicate obtrusiveness; that the naturally censorious spirit indulges in idle gossip, and uncharitable comment, on the spiritual state of those around; and that a turn for pleasurable excitement exchanges the whirl of worldly amusements, and the circle of fashionable gatherings, for an incessant round of what, without a breach of charity, may be said to be little else than religious dissipation. The topic is one deserving of being seriously pondered by religious persons. It is not merely that, by such transference of the

natural passions to the religious course, discredit is done to religion ; the religious character of the individual is, if not lost, essentially lowered ; and, unless by force of rigid self-examination, and a fresh resort to renewing grace, he may permanently remain under the delusion of being deeply religious, when he is only much busied about religious matters.

The grand error of professing Christians is one which they have borrowed from the heathens,—that of placing religion in formal religious observances. Religion is too much dealt with as if a duty of a separate character, superadded to other duties, in place of being, what it truly is, the spirit which should pervade all duties whatsoever. The formal observances of religion must, indeed, be fully maintained ; they are the regularly recurring supply, without which the spiritual life would lose its vitality, as necessary towards spiritual vigour, as the daily food towards the maintenance of the bodily strength. But, just as the bodily sustenance is mainly intended to fit the frame for the daily labours, so are the formal observances of religion designed to infuse

the strength of religious principle into common duties. The true Christian will make pre-eminence in common duty the sign, and the glory, of his religion. He will be, more than others, active in business, strictly just in his dealings, scrupulously faithful in his engagements. He will be noted as an example in the discharge of all the social relations. He will be known as beyond his fellows candid, charitable, courteous. He will possess a sensitive feeling of honour, which will effectually exclude from his conduct all that is unhandsome and mean. In his deportment and manners, he will exhibit the graceful kindness, which is the mark of moral elevation. He will maintain a constant cheerfulness, as an obligation of Christian love, by which, even whilst darkness is about him, and the thorn is at his breast, to charm all around through the sweetness of the strain ; or rather, as by the song of the lark, rising above the lower clouds, to tell that a bright dawn has opened on him, and to lead men to look up to the heaven, towards which he visibly soars.

To turn religion into the channel of ordinary

duties, not only conduces to the right discharge of these duties, but is the best and safest method of promoting spiritual progress, and of securing advance in the Divine life. It is a great mistake, which is sometimes made, to suppose that, whilst ordinary duties must be gone through as an appointed task, it is not by means of these, but exclusively through the devotional observances, to which escape is made from them, that the believer attains to a higher spiritual elevation. Whilst devotion is indispensable to draw out of duty its spiritual effect, duty, on the other hand, affords materials for devotion, which give to it substance and reality. The religion of the cell is notoriously imaginative and unreal. It is amidst the rough exercise of active life, that devotion acquires health, and vigour, and natural growth. There is not a step in the evangelical course, which will not be more wholesomely taken amid the exigencies of ordinary duty, than in the unchecked license of retirement. The conviction of sin, and the consequent humility of the penitent, are more genuinely produced by the application of a daily standard, and the consciousness

of daily failure, than through any mere excitement of feeling, which, as fancy may awaken; fancy may also soothe. The exercise of religious principle, day by day, and hour by hour, in restraining the outbursts of natural temper, and the movements of natural selfishness, more truly give to the life the character of a Christian warfare, than all the conflicts of a spiritual solitude. The every-day duties, performed in a religious spirit, secure a succession of religious acts, a formation of religious habits, comparatively free from the interruptions of varying moods, and intermittent feelings. Religion is saved from the peril of becoming a romance of self, full of fanciful alternations; it is a practical work, interfused through the whole of life. Prayer is no burst of temporary emotion, but the never relinquished resource, the staff of the daily pilgrimage, needful for every step, resumed every day, and leant upon all the day long. God is kept continually present, because inwardly appealed to, as director of the commonest task, counsellor of the slightest difficulty. Christ becomes the friend of the daily walk, never lost sight of by the Christian, be-

cause always at his side, companion, not of the perils only, but of the pettiest incidents of the journey.

There is a twofold life, which, for a large portion of his history in the present world, is maintained by the Christian. There is the outward course, which, though ever and anon showing a divine influence sparkling on the surface, like the turn of a stream breaking into sight beneath sunshine, is, to human view, for the most part, a course of sedulous discharge of common duties, distinguished only by greater faithfulness and assiduity. There is the inward life, which draws from events and employments, seemingly the most indifferent, the means of spiritual growth, by every act and occurrence being turned into an occasion of direct reference to God. Whilst the Christian may, to all appearance, be only engaged in the common pursuits of the mass, he is, all the while, making a spiritual progress, not the less real, that it may not be visible to the general eye, concealed, it may be, by a retiring modesty, such as made even his Divine Master shrink from the mention of his preternatural deeds

of kindness. The heart is always rising to heaven, from the midst of every-day avocation, and ordinary intercourse, although not a look or gesture reveal the momentary prayer. Communion with God is intermingled with converse amongst men ; though no man know it. The drudgery of the daily task is made within the silent breast a continual spiritual exercise. Beneath the cheerfulness which is maintained as a duty, there is proceeding a conflict with sin, which, though never a sigh break forth, is causing the combatant to ache for the rest and holiness of the better inheritance. So the believer nourishes and sustains " the life which is hid with Christ in God." So he becomes, not almost, but altogether, a Christian. So he follows out into fulfilment the grand precept of the faith : " Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

XI.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

PERHAPS nothing is more characteristic of the literature of the present day, than the improved method of writing history. In place of, as formerly, building up an elegant narrative on a scanty foundation of fact, the great object is to reach the actual truth, by a diligent search into contemporaneous documents. An importance, previously unknown, has thus been given to family muniments, and private correspondence, and trivial, if only ancient, documents, as to every-day transactions ; and the diaries of eminent persons, and at times even of those who played but a subordinate part, are viewed in the light of valuable materials of an authentic record.

There is one description of diary, in regard to which public opinion is not so unanimous : I mean the diary which records the spiritual course

of a religious person ; or what has been called, by an intelligible form of expression, the experience of the believer. With a large class, this is a popular kind of publication ; and carries with it much of the same value as is attributed to the contemporaneous materials of civil history. With another class, the very same work is looked on with distrust, if not with contempt, being considered as little better than a piece of sentimental fiction ; a memorial of the reveries of weak, though well-intentioned piety ; a journal of the successive fancies of a devout, but dreamy solitude.

It is in this, as in other cases, in which criticism merges in partisanship ; the value of the thing spoken of is on the one side overrated, on the other unduly depreciated. It is, on the one side, not always remembered that a diary, which is chiefly occupied with inward feelings, has not the same security for accuracy, because not having the same check on self-delusion, with one which deals mostly with outward events. There is an insufficient allowance made for the error, or exaggeration, to which every record of mere emotion is liable. But, with all fitting deduction on this

account, there is still a reality in the religious feelings recorded, to which, on the other side, sufficient justice is not done. Suppose a record to be kept of the feelings and emotions passing through the mind, during a day of ordinary life ; or that these had a self-registering power, like that possessed by certain scientific instruments. In such a record, there would probably be much that was overstrained, and much that was trivial ; yet no doubt would arise as to the genuineness of the sentiments ; and whatever might appear unusual or fantastical would be readily ascribed to the weakness of human nature, or the peculiarity of individual temperament. There is no just reason why the record of religious feelings should not receive the same allowance, and be judged of with equal fairness.

It is true with regard to all diaries, that to journalize systematically the passing emotions and feelings is attended with a measure of danger to personal character ; and the religious diary is, as well as others, amenable to the observation. The individual, who is kept constantly before his own view, the centre of a picture drawn every day

afresh, becomes too much his own hero, and is apt to acquire a self-importance and egotism, unfavourable to the maintenance of Christian humility. The self-imposed duty of regularly chronicling his feelings creates a tendency to magnify into importance things in themselves immaterial, lest otherwise his journal should be without fitting contents. And to make it readable, even by himself, emotions are heightened in the colouring, in a way bordering at times on want of candour. The minute dissection of his motives and affections is apt to change the process of self-examination into a piece of morbid ruminating, which issues in false and distorted views of his character and conduct. Above all, it is scarcely possible for any one, by whom such a record is kept, to avoid the lurking thought, that, at some period or another, perhaps after he is laid in the grave, it will meet the eye of others; and the prospect of this leads, perhaps unconsciously, to a style and manner of representation, more nearly allied to self-display than to self-improvement. So much there is in this to endanger the single-mindedness and simplicity of

the Christian character, that I have sometimes thought, that the only form of such a journal, which would be perfectly safe, would be that in which the entries should only afford to the individual himself the means of recalling past seasons and frames,—undecipherable by others.

But with all this reasonably said, by way of practical warning and guidance, Christian experience remains a great fact, equally capable with other facts of being traced and recorded. The work of salvation has as much of practical, and, so to speak, of registrable existence, as any in which man can be engaged. To him who is in earnest in preparing for eternity, the process has the character of daily labour, renewed every morning, and continued till night falls down. In this spiritual work, there are aids and alliances, hindrances and perils, successes and reverses, as capable of being marked and noted down, as any which advance or retard a man's ordinary progress in the world. Grace from above, or assaults from without, support under temptation, or sore struggling against it, the companionship of Christians, or allurements of the world, clearness of

apprehension of things divine, or confused perception of the objects of faith, duty accomplished, or sin incurred, cheerfulness or depression, affix their successive marks, and contribute varying incidents to the spiritual history, with all the force of reality. With some, the occurrences of the religious life may be striking and remarkable, deserving of being recorded, as objects to others of interest or information. With others, the course may have been one of quietness and routine : yet even here, there is an experience, which, though not perhaps worthy of a formal record, is, to the individual himself, a proper subject of serious retrospection, and, as the case may be, a source of penitent humiliation, or of thankful praise.

The doubts which have been thrown on the reality of Christian experience, have mainly arisen from that want of participation, which renders us incredulous of feelings which we ourselves have never possessed. Yet so true to nature are the feelings of the spiritual life, that to make them understood and appreciated requires little else than to adopt a nomenclature more familiar to the world. Take, in illustration, that self-

abasement on account of sin, to which Christians have frequently given utterance, in language so strong as to seem to many the offspring of a diseased imagination. In this, as in every expression of strong emotion, there may often be exaggeration; yet, even in its intensest exhibition, the world would not improbably do it homage, if, deprived of the religious character, it were simply presented as a conscious shortcoming from a lofty standard, an exquisite sense of perfection, a quick apprehension of all the shadings of error. The nice perception of his own corruptions, shown by the Christian, is what the world would probably applaud, if exhibited by an heathen moralist, without mention of God, or with God dimly shaded under the name of virtue. Self-reproach on account of failure in duty is what the world highly commends. Remorse on account of ingratitude, or breach of faith, towards those from whom beneficence has been experienced, forms a favourite picture in works of fiction, as indicating a mind which retains a high-wrought sensibility, amidst much of wandering from the path of right. In such a case, the strength, or even the extrava-

gance of the language is only held to exhibit more clearly the intensity of the feeling. When the Christian then comes to perceive, in all its reality, his position towards God, as a bountiful Benefactor, against whom he has grievously offended, it ought not to be wonderful that his accusing conscience should employ the strongest expressions in which to utter his self-upbraidings. Or if the Christian, day by day, carefully examine the state of his heart and feelings, it is no marvel if the scrutiny detect changes and aberrations, to which others are not sensitive, by whom a similar inquiry is not practised, or practised much less diligently. And if the language of the Christian appear at any time to stretch beyond the tone of healthful sentiment, it were the part of candour and fair-dealing to look on this as but the consequence of a more than usual depth of emotion, and jealously to watch any tendency to censure, lest the source of the tendency lie in the lower level of the reprover's Christianity.

In contrast to such sorrow for sin, is often found a description of spiritual joys, which, in like manner, those, who have not themselves had

a similar experience, are apt to brand as fanciful or fanatical. But if a course of moral regeneration be itself a reality, why, as it has its peculiar triumphs, should it not also possess its appropriate joys? Success in any pursuit is always attended with satisfaction. Should it not equally be so, in the case of sin subdued, and holiness advanced? Here, again, it is only necessary that the phraseology be changed, to have the truth admitted in different words. The description of Christian joy would readily receive credence, were the language in common use by the world to be employed, and the happiness to be simply attributed to triumphant rectitude, and virtuous complacency. It is the spiritual hue of the expressions which, with those who possess no sympathetic feeling, awakens a doubt of the reality of the thing expressed. But the joy of the Christian is not the less genuine, that it rests on a spiritual basis. His peace of conscience is not the less sweet, that it flows from an assurance of forgiveness, procured through the atonement of Christ. His complacency is not the less satisfying, that it arises from the possession of God's

favour, bestowed for the Redeemer's sake. Nor is the triumph of his virtue less exalting, that he joins in the Apostle's acknowledgment, "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

Communion with a spiritual world is a mystery to those, whose conscious experience is confined to a world of sense. Yet a surrounding spiritual world is, to every one without exception, as much a reality, as that material creation which is the object of his bodily perceptions. God is present with every one, in each moment of his existence; and, to the mind which can at once read every other, the simple presentation of a thought is as much of a true communication, as is the same thought presented in human speech to a mortal auditor. Christ is, through the omnipresence of his Godhead, at the side of every disciple; and, in a like interchange of thought and of sentiment, there may be as true a converse with the Saviour as that maintained on the way to Emmaus; of which those, whose eyes were for the time holden, said afterwards, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"

The Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of every believer ; and, however undistinguishable they may be from the suggestions of his own mind, there are sudden thoughts, and alarming apprehensions, and clear perceptions, and guiding views, which are nothing else than the whisperings of this faithful monitor. Of the angels, the Bible says, with a question which contains the force of a strong affirmation, “ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation ? ” It tells, on the other hand, of a host of evil spirits, under the rule of one great power of darkness, to whose assaults and seductions a constant resistance is a part of duty. The Word of God at once declares the truth, and inculcates the corresponding precept, when it uses these magnificent words ;—words which, if occurring in the writings of some sage of classic antiquity, would have stood to all posterity as a grand specimen of philosophic eloquence : “ Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers ; against

the rulers of the darkness of this world ; against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day ; and, having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth ; and having on the breastplate of righteousness ; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace : above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God : Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints." Doubtless, the realization of this surrounding spiritual world must be maintained and acted on, under the guidance of practical wisdom. There is the possibility of forbidden wandering into the spiritual country, from the path of earthly duty. Supposed spiritual communications may improperly take the place of reason and conscience. Mistakes may be made, which lead to spiritual arrogance, or unduly lessen the sense of personal

responsibility. Yet not only is the conception a true one ; it is also calculated to give a character of importance and dignity to the course of the humblest believer. The poorest and meanest Christian is the hero of a great adventure. He is a warrior in divine panoply, sent on a high mission ; whose solitary path is watched with the deepest interest by beings of exalted intelligence ; for whose capture or protection hosts are in array on either side ; who must bear himself with the courage and vigilance of one on whose arrival at the distant point the highest expectations wait ; and whose welcome will be the acclamation of rejoicing myriads, as if "the shout of a king was among them."

Christian experience is a form of human experience ; it will, therefore, exhibit all those varieties, to which the differences existing between one human being and another, in character, temper, and circumstances, naturally give rise. No error can be greater, than that of chalking out a particular course, which every Christian must run, under penalty of his Christianity being called in question. In reality, there will be as much

difference between one individual and another, in distinctness of spiritual apprehension, liveliness of gospel hope, and steadfastness of Christian duty, as there is in clearness of intellect, cheerfulness of disposition, and steadiness of conduct, with reference to the matters of ordinary life. After the same analogy, the difference, which exists between one Christian and another, is found in the same Christian at different times. Exactly as in ordinary life, the believer will at times appear as different from himself, as though he were two distinct individuals. His distraction by worldly cares, or participation in perilous enjoyments, the character of the society in which he lives for the time, his condition of bodily health, the strength or weakness of the nervous system, sometimes the very changes of the atmosphere,—these, and a thousand other influences, not easy to be expressed, yet not the less sure to be felt, will so affect his spiritual state, as to make him run through all the vicissitudes of exaltation and depression, of clearness and perplexity, of hope and fear, of sunshine and cloud. Hence the practical rule, that the Christian ought

not to decide on the soundness of his spiritual condition, according to the character of his temporary spiritual frame. Hence, perhaps, a still more important lesson, as to the mode in which he should perform the duty of self-examination; namely, that it ought not to consist of a minute analytical dissection of sentiments and feelings, which will probably lead into distempered fancies, but in one prompt and decided glance at his existing course, followed by an instant resort to prayer, and self-denial, and renewed diligence in common duty.

The same variety, which is exhibited in the life, will also be exhibited in the death of Christians. It is the error of some religious persons to look, in the death-bed of all whom they hold true Christians, for a display of high-wrought joy, in the prospect of passing into a better state; and if such be not found, to experience a feeling of disappointment, as if the tone of the Christianity was lower than they had a right to anticipate. In reality, the aspect of the scene will, even with the best, vary indefinitely with individual peculiarities of condition and character. There is

such variety in the form of the disease which God makes the instrument of dissolution, as gives a corresponding diversity, not only to the outward expression, but even to the inward frame. It is not merely that bodily pain may so engross the sensibilities as to leave little room for other perceptions, or, on the other hand, freedom from suffering afford scope for ampler communications. The spiritual condition may itself be largely influenced : a scarcely perceptible increase in the fever of the pulse may communicate increased intenseness to devout emotion ; or the unmarked dislodgement of the grosser elements produce a keenness of apprehension, which expatiates in clear recollections, and vivid hopes ; or, again, the conscious, though, by those around, not fully apprehended, prostration of the bodily energies may incapacitate for aught except awaiting the end in silence. Nor is it always the condition of the dying one which determines the character of the death-bed. The relation of those around to the sufferer, the familiarity which facilitates, or the restraining delicacy which impedes the mutual communications, may yield an impress to the

scene, derived in reality from the spectator. I speak not of those spiritual agencies, mysterious yet real, which may communicate to the same identical chamber as much diversity of circumstance, as lies between the groans and struggles of the continuing fight, and the procession of the conqueror homewards. So great is the difference of aspect exhibited by the Christian's death-bed, as largely to subordinate the importance of the death to that of the life, and to raise an impressive warning against trusting the believer's assurance, or the believer's testimony, to the contingencies of the closing hour.

It is with the death as with the life of the Christian :—as that, probably, is the best life, which consists in a steadfast progress through common duties towards the higher inheritance, so that, perhaps, is the most desirable death where, without any of that excitement which belongs to the earth he is leaving, rather than to the heaven he is entering, the Christian meets the event as a natural and expected occurrence, and sinks to the rest which closes a wearied day, without a thought of dread for the morrow. It is the last and best

act of God's goodness, when "so he giveth his beloved sleep." If Christians were what they ought to be, death would have less the aspect of an extraordinary and startling event. To die will, indeed, be always a solemn and serious thing. The thought of passing into the immediate presence of God cannot be unattended with awe. But to one who has been living in communion with the spiritual world, the familiarity of the idea takes away from the apprehension of the reality. I knew a venerable man, a minister of God's Word, and who had faithfully served him in the gospel of his Son, whose life, prolonged to ninety years, was spent in an active benevolence, which still keeps his memory in honour. With the soundest evangelical sentiments, and a piety diffused throughout the whole of life, he combined a warmth of kindliness, a geniality of disposition, which won the affections of old and young alike. His activity did not fail him till a short period before his death; and his time thereafter was almost wholly engrossed with his Bible, and devout meditation over it. He was seized, a few years before he died, with a malady which at the

time was thought to be mortal. Those who surrounded him were surprised at the absence, in one so eminently religious, of the expressions which seemed appropriate to the occasion : the truth was, that death was to him an occurrence so continually looked for, as, when it seemed to come, not to produce any marked emotion. His death, when it at last arrived, fully agreed with his life. He felt on a sudden what appeared to him his Master's call. The old man went to his knees and prayed—he, the old man of ninety, prayed—that, if God had further work for him on earth, he would leave him longer here, if not, that he would take him to himself. The answer to the prayer was immediate. Death came to him as he knelt. He died without a groan or sigh. It almost seemed as if he realized the transition of the ancient patriarch ;—“He was not, for God took him.”

XII.

THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

THE desire of certainty is one of the most natural of desires. A state of doubt is always a state of unhappiness, and one from which escape is sought at almost any cost. There is utility in this desire. It prompts to the pursuit of intellectual researches, by the painfulness of unsatisfied inquiry. It inspires a struggle out of a position of inferiority and privation, by the feeling of insecurity which such a position creates. It urges an incessant progress upwards, towards a region of clearness and stability.

Yet this very desire of certainty often leads into error. Like other desires, it tempts to forbidden gratifications. Rather than remain in doubt, the mind frequently puts up with a groundless or

precipitate persuasion, rushing to the enjoyment of certainty at the cost of truth. To satisfy the craving, theories are formed, on a partial induction, to which is given the character of settled principles. A false certainty is fixed upon opinions, not yet supported by sufficient evidence. The progress of knowledge is thus impeded, by a premature confidence in an incomplete investigation. Nor are the interests of morality uninjured. The pleasure, which is found in certainty, seduces into dogmatism, and self-sufficiency, and contentiousness about trifles, which are all deviations from virtue, as well as obstructions to truth. That division into sects and parties, for which the Christian world has to mourn, is perhaps in some measure traceable to the gratification of the feeling of certainty at the expense of charity, in things indifferent, or not yet fully revealed.

The safety of the soul for eternity involves a question so momentous, that none can wonder at the desire, if possible, of placing the affirmative on the footing of an absolute assurance. But the same craving for certainty leads here into similar errors. The assurance is entertained in circum-

stances in which it is not warranted ; and is frequently based on false and deceitful grounds. A speculative theory concerning universal redemption ; an unwarranted application of the Atonement, as having placed the individual case beyond doubt or fall ; a strong impression, drawn from a state of heated feeling ; a supposed communication from above, flashing at once across the mind ; a rash inference from the sentiment of a moment to the perseverance of an eternity ; these, or the like, have often been the foundation of a certainty, illegitimate in its character, and perilous in its consequences to soundness of spiritual health.

And yet the world at large is strangely forgetful of the general passion for certainty, and unfairly intolerant of its intermixture with spiritual things, when it brands the whole subject of the assurance of faith as a fiction of fanaticism. It applies a different principle here from everywhere else. It here connects both desire and duty with a condition of uncertainty and suspense. It decries as folly the idea of obtaining, in the present life, any correct apprehension of the soul's destiny in

a future state. Its tendency is to place all, with respect to their condition in another world, on the same level of ignorance, that it may place all in the same comfortable condition of hope.

The error does not lie, either in desiring the assurance of safety, or in endeavouring to obtain it; it lies in the way and mode in which the desire is followed out to its gratification. The great mistake is in the kind of assurance sought to be obtained. What is usually aimed at is the absoluteness of mathematical certainty. Salvation must present itself to the mind, as fixed and settled by an immutable decree; otherwise the mind is not satisfied. The redemption of the individual must be seen in the aspect of a past and concluded fact, having all the absoluteness of any past fact in his history.

This description of assurance it is impossible to obtain, consistently with man's position in the present world. To the Divine mind, in whose pre-ordination the event is already fixed, the salvation of the individual has all the certainty of a concluded fact; to the view of the individual himself, it can only possess the probability, higher

or lower, attached to an event yet future. To fix it, one way or another, he has only moral evidence, no demonstrative proof. He cannot, like God, see the certainty of the case; he can only gather his conclusion from an accumulation of circumstances creating a reasonable belief. But, according to the rules by which human belief is regulated, the persuasion may pass, through all gradations, up to an assurance as firm as the mind may entertain. There will never be mathematical, but there may be moral certainty. The prospect of the heavenly inheritance is, relatively to human contemplations, not dissimilar from the prospect of earthly advancement, lawfully desired, and legitimately pursued. The heaven, which the believer aims at, cannot be held absolutely secured, until it is actually entered. But assurance of the result may be as legitimately entertained, as, in regard to the objects of ordinary life, is the assurance of the natural consequence following the appropriate course. In both cases, the feeling may vary, through all degrees of strength, from the faintest hope, up to the fulness of undoubting belief. But neither ex-

treme is excluded, either from the one case or the other.

The analogy of ordinary life is here more than usually applicable,—indeed, may be applied almost literally. Imagine the case of one, in the common walks of life, who has offended a generous friend by a long course of misconduct, and has thereby forfeited the wealth and honour which had been designed for him, but to whom there comes a message, promising that, if he own his guilt, and pursue an altered career, all that he has done will be forgiven, and all he has lost restored. Suppose, to bring the parallel closer, that the friend is at a distance, and that the promised restoration is not to be bestowed till an interval has elapsed, spent in a prescribed course of duty, at the end of which the penitent shall be admitted to the presence of his benefactor, to have his pardon pronounced, and his acceptance openly proclaimed. Suppose that the offender, melted with the kindness of the message, enters, in penitence and thankfulness, on the appointed course, and, perhaps, amidst many relapses, succeeds in forming new habits and dispositions,

and maintains a character of growing excellence, strengthened and encouraged all the while by kindly communications, and generous tokens of remembrance, from his distant friend. It cannot be denied that, in such a case, there may reasonably exist an assurance of the expected restoration, rising to the height of certainty itself. The conviction of being in the appointed way to the promised result, and the consciousness of acquiring by degrees the prescribed character, coupled with implicit reliance on the faithfulness of the benefactor, will, in the natural progress of things, give birth to a feeling, which the name of hope would inadequately express. The individual will possess assurance, in the true sense of the term; perhaps an assurance subject to many fluctuations, from the varying state of his mind, or of his conduct, and apt to be overshadowed, or temporarily lost, when perverse or thoughtless acts bring back a sense of unworthiness; but still assurance, renewed with the renewal of virtue, and strengthening with the strength of perseverance. As the character becomes formed, and the course of duty steadier and more unbroken, and

the tokens of favour arrive in greater number and frequency, the assurance will become proportionally confirmed. As the time draws near for hastening to the presence of his benefactor, the joyful termination of his career will assume the aspect of greater sureness ; and, although a momentary feeling of fear may come across him, this will be only the agitation of natural emotion, and will not prevent him from going on his journey, in the full belief of a welcome. The last messenger from his friend will find him looking forward to his departure with joyful expectation ; and the hour of meeting will carry him to the arms of love, full, it may be, of contending feelings, but without a doubt as to his acceptance and his happiness.

I have now stated a conceivable case in common life, in language, I trust, not unintelligible or inappropriate. But the same words identically might be used to describe the process, by which the Christian attains assurance of his safety for eternity. God is the offended Benefactor, who has pledged to the penitent offender forgiveness and acceptance for the Mediator's sake ; and ex-

actly the same assurance of a welcome reception, in an heavenly home, may be entertained by every one who, accepting the offer, has entered on the course prescribed ; substituting the spiritual and heavenly for the carnal and worldly, and, amidst all discouragement and failure, struggling towards higher attainments. He may fall into renewed transgressions ; but, seeking anew for pardon, through the same all-prevailing name, and returning to the path of holiness, he knows that he is still in the way. Doubts and fears may come across him, when thoughtless speech, or imprudent conduct, discredits his profession, or does dishonour to his Saviour ; but his confidence is restored, when supplication for grace renews the vigour of duty, and awakes an unashamed acknowledgment of his Divine Friend. The sureness of the inheritance becomes clearer, as the grace of God shows itself towards him in an increase of light, and aid, and spiritual joy. The lengthening of the course brings with it a strengthening of the confidence. The prolonged experience of God's favour makes his reception by Him, in another sphere, a prospect on which there rests no

dread. And so the assurance of his salvation; becoming stronger and stronger, bears him onward through all the trials of life, supports him in the hour of dissolution, and carries him, without a doubt of his acceptance, to the bosom of his God.

This is that assurance, which is called the assurance of faith, and fitly so called, because faith in God's promises forms its entire groundwork. When exhibited in its true light, it is seen to be no dream of fanaticism, but the very feeling which, according to the analogy of daily life, and of human intercourse, issues out of the connexion between a promised end and a prescribed path. Nor is such assurance to be treated, as it too frequently has been, as a singular and special boon, conferred only on a few eminent believers. This, indeed, might be well said of it, if the mathematical certainty, which is sometimes looked for, were truly its essence. But, viewed in its true character of moral assurance, having in it degrees of strength proportioned to the growth of grace, it is, or ought to be, a very common concomitant of the Christian course. It may, in all cases, be fitly

spoken of as a Divine gift, because it is the result of a connexion divinely appointed. But the appointment is one of those general arrangements, which have a wider scope than the case of some specially favoured individuals. The assurance of faith is intended to be co-extensive with faith itself, and to form the privilege and stay of every genuine Christian, though it may be in a measure varying with the spiritual progress, and the allotted peculiarity of position.

I do not intend it as an inference from these observations, that the assurance of faith can in no instance have place, except where there has been a lengthened course of spiritual advancement. I feel how naturally it may be asked, whether no room exists for the assurance, in those cases in which the prayer for pardon cannot, in the nature of things, be followed by a course of active duty, as in the case of death-bed conversion. The analogy of ordinary life may here, again, assist in supplying an answer. Suppose an individual on his death-bed, conscious of having grievously transgressed against an earthly benefactor, and tortured by the thought of his guilt; there is no

difficulty in conceiving a message of forgiveness sent to him, so fully accredited, and so accordant with all he knows of the generous feelings of his friend, that he rests with undoubting confidence in the assurance that he is pardoned, and dies in peace. Now, though such a case does not accurately exemplify the relation of man to God, there are elements of similarity sufficient to show, how God's message of pardon may reasonably produce a feeling of assurance in the mind of the dying penitent. Nor is entire reliance on pardon having been procured, in answer to penitent prayer, excluded from the life, more than the death; or in the one case, more than the other, absolutely incapable of being obtained, antecedently to the confirmation afforded by a renewed course. All penitent suppliants are authorized to believe that, in answer to their prayer, they have obtained, for Christ's sake, "the remission of sins that are past." To him, however, who has still before him the trials and temptations of life, the conviction of forgiveness for past sins is but the starting-point of a fresh career. There may still be a fall from grace. There cannot be any absolute certainty of

final safety. Exactly as in ordinary human affairs, it is still to be said, that the general character of the course will best impress the probable nature of its termination. To the dying man, to whom the past is now all, that assurance of pardon, legitimately entertained by every penitent suppliant, is at once the commencement, and the completion, of salvation. Yet no rational man will postpone on this account the time of repentance to the hour of death. None can securely reckon, either on the opportunity, or the power, of raising, at death, the prayer of penitence and faith. A moment's unexpected blow may hurry out of existence, nor afford the delay of a single thought. Physical pain may preclude mental exercise. Physical weakness may render the departure an unconscious transition. Death-bed conversion is, in its nature, a peradventure. It forms the exceptional case, not the normal exhibition. To him who, in the faith of the gospel, maintains a course of holy living, "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of God," assurance springs as a natural product, though in varying measure of abundance. The assurance of the

gospel is, speaking generally, to be found in a walk and conversation, such as become the gospel. This is the assurance, rational in its source, sound in its foundation, safe in its effects, permanent in its comforts, which God places before every believer, as the object of his prayer and endeavour ; to the attainment of which every believer may look forward, in the natural course of God's working.

There is a key afforded, by the same analogy of common life, to those diversities in the assurance of faith, exhibited by different individuals, or experienced by the same individual at different times. A difference in temperament, or in circumstances, may produce a marked distinction in their feelings of confidence towards God, between those who are equally God's children ; just as those, who are equally the objects of friendly interest to an earthly superior, may have very different feelings as to the certainty of his favour. The timid and nervous will doubt, where the confidence of a stronger mind, or more resolute disposition, remains unshaken. The humble will fall short of their rightful claim ; the presump-

tuous will go beyond it. The cheerful will take a happy view of this, as of all things else ; the depressed will involve in the same gloom both earth and heaven. The varieties thus exhibited, in the case of different individuals, are paralleled by similar variances in the case of the same individual, produced by those changes in circumstances, or conduct, or mere physical condition, to which every one is liable. Such fluctuations of feeling occur in daily experience, with reference to an earthly friend. Absence, forgetfulness, conscious transgression, will break the course of our confidence, till the bond be knit by renewed pardon, and restored intercourse. A fall from wealth and honour, though the thing of all others which should lead us to seek the aid of friendship, is sometimes that which causes us to sit down in a moody dream of its loss. A depressed or nervous condition of the physical frame will produce the most unreasonable doubts of our friend's affection ; which yet a single act of kindness, a word, a smile, a remembrance, may dispel like breaking sunshine. It is the same changeable frame, which forms the residence of that

higher feeling, which we bear towards that Friend who is closer than any brother ; no marvel, that the assurance of his love is subject to similar vicissitudes.

The same wholesome analogy instructs how the feeling of assurance, lost for a time, may be restored. Consider what is the course proper to be followed in common life, in order to regain confidence in a friend's affection. It is not to sit down in wayward gloom, or to give up the mind to a current of idle imaginings ; but simply to recur to those instances of kindness and goodwill, which form a reasonable warrant for continued trust ; and if conscious transgression be the cause of doubt, to combine with this a frank confession of blame, and a resolute return to what is right. To him who, whilst renewing his course of duty to his friend, at the same time fortifies his mind, by dwelling on the proofs of affection which his friend has afforded—perhaps, in spite of his misconduct, continues to afford—the almost inevitable result will be a gradual revival of confidence, diffusing itself imperceptibly through his heart, till, ere he is aware, his position of security is

retrieved. Thus, precisely, ought the believer to act, when his confidence towards God has for a season forsaken him. He ought not in this case, any more than in the other, to give way to an unreasoning, and therefore an unreasonable despair. His course is simply to recur to his experiences of God's love and kindness. No believer is without many such in his history ; and, if all besides fall from his remembrance, he has the "unspeakable gift" of God's Son, given up to death for his sake, as a topic on which to dwell, and to find it inexhaustible. He is to enter on a work of rigid self-examination, in order to discover those sins which, in consequence of the inevitable connexion established between sin and woe, may be disturbing his peace, even when not palpable to his perception. He is to betake himself, more faithfully and unremittingly, to a course of active duty, and devotional observance ; yet he is not to be looking to his excellencies for his assurance ; for the analogy of ordinary life teaches, that a renewal of anxious questionings, and minute inquiries concerning these, will only be a renewal of former agitation and doubt. He is to combine

patience with perseverance, inasmuch as haste for the attainment of peace is the surest preventive of its arriving ; and it is according to the very nature of peace, not to be obtained forcibly, but to steal insensibly into the mind. To the believer who thus works and waits, the assurance of God's favour will, in the general case, return, by a process as natural, perhaps as imperceptible, as that which brings back to him his confidence in the affection of an earthly friend ; and he, who for a season tossed about in the terrors of a night which seemed never to end, will gradually sink into a repose, from which, ere he is aware, to awake to the possession of light and sunshine.

One other, and a parting statement. It seems as though, with some Christians, it were necessary for the comfort of the spiritual life to have assurance of salvation always consciously before them, in the form of an intellectual perception ; and hence their condition as to safety is, by such persons, made the subject of continual inquiry ; and frequently, from the fluctuating nature of human feelings, of very anxious and agitating thoughts. So much are these in error, that the highest kind

of assurance is in reality that, in which the feeling of certainty so takes possession of the mind as to exclude all question, and even all thought, on the subject. The happiest condition of affection is where the mutual reliance is such, that a formal inquiry, whether it exists, never once occurs to the mind. The members of the family, in which true love resides, go out, and come in, perform the appointed duties, enjoy the unceasing intercourse, without any heart putting to itself the question, whether it loves and is beloved. The assurance is such, that the inquiry never arises. So, with the believer, the highest condition of assurance is that, in which the feeling becomes so fixed and habitual, that the subject never presents itself, in any formal shape, to the mind. The question, whether the soul be safe for eternity, is unasked, and unanswered, because no doubt occurs regarding it. The believer performs his duties, enjoys his privileges, bears his afflictions, with heaven as undoubtedly before him, as is home at the termination of the path leading to it, to the member of the household wending from his daily toil. And how is such assurance attained? Sim-

- ply by the renewed mind being so completely formed, that the believer is, in very deed, a child of God, a member of that Divine family, to which heaven and earth are but several parts of the same wide mansion, which is, to all equally, the house of a Father. The question, Does my Father love me, no more occurs to such an one, than to the dutiful child who lives in everyday intercourse with a tender and bountiful parent. Assurance, with such an one, loses the character of intellectual apprehension, because it has put on the higher character of uninterrupted feeling. He looks forward to the future life, with the same absence of emotion, as when viewing the continuation of a known and experienced course. Heaven is but a higher point on an upward path. Death is but a change of place
- in the same domain; the arrival, in company with Christ, from the dusty way, at the evening habitation of repose. The song of the Christian in dying is his song through life prolonged: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod, and thy staff, they comfort me."

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