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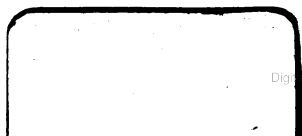
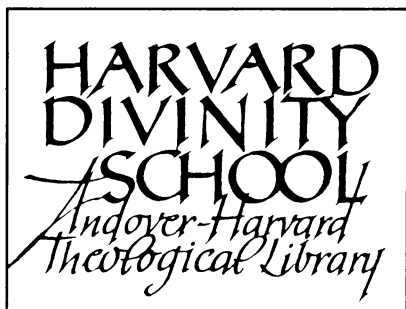
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PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY;

OR THE

SIGNS AND DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

BY THE

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GLASGOW: THOMAS MURRAY AND SON.

EDINBURGH: WILLIAM RITCHIE.

LONDON: JAMES NISBET AND CO.

1866.

BV
4501
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1866

Recd June 7, 1879

29.00

TO
THE PARISHIONERS OF BLANTYRE

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS little Volume is not designed to be a systematic and connected treatise on the practical nature of the Christian religion; but it is a selection of papers, without any close connection with each other, on practical subjects. Its design is to bring prominently forward the important fact that Christianity is not only a system of doctrinal truths to be believed, but also of evangelical duties to be practised; indeed, that the truths are only revealed in order that they might influence our heart and conduct, and that without this influence, belief in them is without real advantage.

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THE

Signs and Duties of the Christian Life.

CHAPTER I.

The New Life.

"It is the heart which makes the theologian," was the motto of Neander, one of the greatest of modern divines. His theological system has been represented as assuming that "Christianity is not so much a doctrine as a life—a new life-principle, a new spiritual creation which, like leaven, runs through and sanctifies all natural connexions, and preserves and glorifies every individuality." Although such statements must be taken under considerable limitations, yet there is much truth in them. The doctrines of Christianity, however important and essential, are not mere theories, but great practical realities, which can only have a saving efficacy by being received into the soul. A mere speculative belief in them, if unaccompanied by a spiritual influence

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upon us, is of no consequence. We cannot be Christians without a new life.

In our natural or unconverted condition, we are in a state of spiritual death, alienated from the life of God: herein consist the fall and depravity of man. There is within us an evil heart of unbelief which leads us to depart from the living God. There is within us a carnal mind which is enmity against God, and which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. There are within us no principles of holiness, no elements of Christian life. Our outward sinful actions are but the effects of a wicked disposition. Our feelings, our thoughts, our views, our faculties, are all estranged from God. It is true that in our outward life in the world we can so conduct ourselves as to obtain the esteem of our fellow-men. We can live a good moral life, act prudently among men, and abstain from vicious practices; but it is the heart which God regards and which He requires. Now, here there is a complete alienation from God. We prefer the creature to the Creator; we are in love with the vanities and gaities of life, or else engrossed in its cares and business; we feel a secret disinclination in our hearts to God; our very prayers are too often constrained and heartless services: and thus it is that the declaration of Scripture, that man is in a state of spiritual death, finds its reality and counterpart in the case of every man, until the

Spirit of the living God breathes upon him and imparts new life into his soul.

Religion, then, true and vital Christianity — that religion which alone is pleasing to God, and which will bring us to heaven—is an infusion of a new life into the soul, or, as it is otherwise expressed in Scripture, the bestowal of a new heart and a new spirit, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you.” When a man embraces the gospel with his heart, a new life is imparted unto him. Formerly he was spiritually dead, now he is made spiritually alive. And thus a great and radical change passes over him. The bent and disposition of his mind are altered. New motives actuate him, new hopes inspire him, new fears alarm him, new objects attract his love, new pursuits engage his attention, new feelings are experienced by him. He feels a new life stirring within him, a high and holy principle elevating him above the world, a love to God and Christ urging him forward to the practice of good works; a great moral revolution has taken place in his soul. I do not mean that the man is made perfect, that sin is completely subdued within him; far, very far from it; he feels sin more bitterly than he ever felt it: but

herein lies the immense difference between his present and his former state, that he now no longer wilfully lives or habitually indulges in sin, but struggles and contends against it, and desires to bring every thought and feeling into subjection to the law of Christ Jesus.

This new life is described in Scripture by a great variety of expressions. It is insisted upon by our Saviour as a new birth of the soul. "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." By this is not and cannot be meant a mere outward change, the mere external reformation of the conduct, or the renunciation of some vices; it is a great internal change; it is the infusion of a new life. The expression of our Saviour is strong, but not stronger than the reality requires. So also it is described in Scripture as a spiritual resurrection, as a quickening from the dead, as a calling from death to life. "But you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins." "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." And elsewhere it is represented as a new creation, a calling into being what did not formerly exist. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

The great Author of this new life is the Holy Spirit. It is His peculiar office in the economy of redemption

to regenerate the soul, to raise us from a state of spiritual death, to create us anew in Christ Jesus, and to dwell within us as the Spirit of grace and holiness. Believers are represented as actuated by the Holy Spirit; they live only, because the Spirit lives in them. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing." As God is the source of all natural life; so the Spirit is the source of all spiritual life.

Further, this infusion of a new life into the soul is inseparably connected with faith in Christ. It is because He lives that we live also. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit whom He has purchased, and whom He bestows upon His people. Believers are united to Christ by the Spirit dwelling within them; they are the branches of the living vine; they are the members of His mystical body. It is by believing on Christ, by receiving Him as our Saviour, by complying with the gracious invitations of the gospel, that we receive the Spirit. "He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God."

From all this it follows that there can be no real holiness, acceptable in the sight of God, apart from this spiritual life. Men are spiritually dead, and therefore cannot act as those who are spiritually alive; or, to use the emblem employed by our Saviour, the tree is corrupt, and therefore the fruit is corrupt also. And herein lies the great error of those who tell men

to love God, to do good works, to live a holy life, and that God will accept them, without first leading them to Christ the Saviour. How can a man love God, so long as his heart is at enmity against Him? How can a man do works really acceptable to God, who is destitute of religious motives? How can a man live a holy life, who has not within him a holy disposition? We must first exhort men to come to Christ, and to receive from Him spiritual life, and then we will prevail in persuading them to live a holy life; but as long as a man is destitute of spiritual life, so long is he dead in sin and incapable of holiness. There must first be regeneration before there can be holy obedience. Out of Christ there is not only no salvation, but no real holiness; nothing that God approves of and that will merit His commendation. Therefore, let us lay it down as a first principle of the gospel, as a maxim not to be gainsayed or set aside, that we must first believe on Christ and then live a holy life, and not attempt to be holy of our own strength, or seek to obtain the favour of God by our own works.

Religion is a personal concern; it is a new life in the soul of each individual believer. There are some who speak of Christianity as the infusion of a new life into humanity; but unless they mean by this that a new life is infused into every individual who embraces Christianity with the heart, they assert either what is

unintelligible or what is in reality nothing. There is no such thing as a universal regeneration of the race. The church is regenerated and sanctified only by the regeneration and sanctification of each individual member thereof. Religion is a personal concern; no man can be religious for another. We ourselves, as individuals, must be born again before we can see the kingdom of God. The gospel is certainly the dispensation of the Spirit; but this gospel must be embraced by us, the Spirit must quicken us, else it will be no advantage to us to have lived under the gospel. The change, then, must be in our own souls, the new birth must be experienced by us, else all our privileges and advantages are vain. And therefore the question which concerns us is, Have we, as individuals, felt this new life of the gospel? Do we feel in our own souls a higher, and better, and holier principle than that which actuates worldly men?

I do not know if I have been sufficiently explicit; but perhaps an illustration will help to make the subject clearer. Suppose a worldly man: he is careless about religion; he does not neglect public worship, but appears in church occasionally; he tries to banish God from his mind; he neglects prayer; he seldom reads the Bible; perhaps he sometimes takes the name of God in vain; perhaps he is guilty now and then of excess. The character thus described is very common in the world.

But a great spiritual change comes over this man; he feels a new spirit coming into him; his whole nature is stirred to its depths; he feels sin to be a frightful evil; he prays; he reads his Bible; he listens with his whole soul to the preaching of the gospel; he deserts for ever the haunts of dissipation; he speaks seriously of sacred things; he seeks to do good to men; he carries a religious spirit into all his outward actions; he is, in short, a new man, actuated by a new spirit. Sometimes the change may not be so marked and decided; indeed, sometimes it may be scarcely discernible, except to the man's own immediate friends. His outward conduct before conversion may have been unspotted, and hence the change will be more internal than external. But still, in every case, there is this infusion of a new life into the soul; formerly the man was dead, now he lives; formerly his heart was alienated from God, now it cleaves to God. It is not a change from outward profligacy to outward morality; but from irreligion to religion—a great internal, spiritual change—a new birth of the soul, the outward manifestations of which are seen in the external conduct: the life itself has its seat in the heart.

It may be useful to mention some of the more remarkable outward manifestations of this new life, so as to assist us in the examination of ourselves.

I.—The new life manifests itself in a *striving against sin*. This is the character which the apostle gives of believers: they strive against sin (Heb. xii. 4). This life is to them a warfare, a struggle, a ceaseless strife against their corrupt feelings. "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." When the man was in his unconverted state, he was seldom troubled about his sins. Occasionally his conscience did smite him; occasionally his reason and the better principles of his nature contended with his wicked inclinations. But when a new life is infused within him, it immediately shows itself by striving against sin. The man now feels within him, as it were, two hearts—the old heart, which tempts him to do evil, and the new heart, which incites him to do good. There is a strife in his soul—two principles contending for the mastery. He is wholly dissatisfied with his spiritual condition. He feels that he does not love God as he ought; that he does not pray as he ought; that he does not love his neighbour as he ought. On the contrary, that envy, and discontent, and pride, and avarice, exist within him; and hence he is always thirsting after holiness, continually aiming at a standard of perfection, from which he is far removed, pressing toward the mark, even to attain to a resemblance to his Lord and Saviour.

Are there any of my readers who feel this internal dissatisfaction; this low opinion of their religious character; this self-abhorrence and abasement; this internal struggle against sin? My friends, I congratulate you on these feelings: they give reason to hope that the Spirit has begun the good work in you; that it is the new life which causes you to perceive and feel your sins; and that it is the Spirit or the Divine principle which contends with the flesh or the depraved principle. "The flesh," says St Paul, "lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

On the other hand, are there any who are filled with a high opinion of their own holiness and good works—who think themselves holier and better than other people? Any who, like the lawyer in the gospel, come forward and ask, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and who think to get to heaven by their great, and excellent, and pious works? We pray; we serve God; we speak well of Him before men; we do many good and pious works: but all this did the Pharisees, yet they were rejected by Christ. If you had the new life within you, you would form a different opinion of yourselves; you would then feel yourselves to be condemned and perishing; that so far from having fulfilled the law, you have not kept a single letter of it; that

your very prayers and good works are an abomination in the sight of God; you have yet to learn the first lesson of Christianity, which is to know and to feel that you are a sinner. The self-righteous are as far removed as can be from the spirit of the gospel. The publican who felt and deplored his sinfulness, possessed true Christian feeling; whilst the Pharisee, who rendered thanks to God that he was holier than other men, was entirely destitute of it. Whenever we feel satisfied with our spiritual condition, and are pure in our own eyes, we have every reason to fear that there is something very defective in our Christianity.

II.—The new life manifests itself in a *spiritual performance of religious duties*. All life is sustained by food appropriate to it: our bodily life by the bread which perisheth; our intellectual life by reading and thought; our emotional life by the exercise of kind feelings; and our spiritual life by the performance of religious duties. There is a spiritual mind or disposition implanted within the regenerate, which manifests itself in the earnestness and sincerity with which religious duties are discharged. “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” The man into whose soul the new life has been infused, is awakened to a sense of the importance of things unseen

and eternal. He now prays as he never prayed before; not with his lips, as formerly, but with his heart; he pours out his whole soul before God, so that it may be said of him, as it was said of Saul of Tarsus, "Behold he prays!" Prayer is now the language of his heart—the very atmosphere in which he breathes. He also now reads the Scriptures with self-application and with faith. He seeks to discover in them the will of his heavenly Father, in order to obey it; and thus, through prayer and the reading of the Scriptures, communion is kept up between his soul and God. Thus it is that he walks with God, and feels the performance of religious ordinances to be at once his duty and his privilege. "O Lord, Thou art my God, my soul thirsteth for Thee: my soul longeth for Thee, in a dry and thirsty land wherein there is no water."

On the other hand, are there any of my readers who are destitute of this spirituality in the performance of religious exercises; who do not, it may be, neglect them entirely, but who exhibit no earnestness when engaged in them; who feel a secret disinclination in their hearts to them; to whom prayer is either a burden or an unmeaning ceremony; and reading the Scriptures either a tedious task, or the exercise merely of the intellect? Are these not proofs that you are destitute of the new life, of that spiritual mind which minds the things of the Spirit? I know, indeed, that true be-

lievers are painfully sensible of their inability to pray and read the Scriptures as they ought, and that they sometimes fall into a state of lukewarmness and religious indifference. I am well aware that there is such a thing as religious declension. But when a man habitually feels coldness in prayer; when he does not struggle and contend against it; when he does not mourn over it; when, on the contrary, he rests contented in it; when he is satisfied with lukewarmness, thinking that, although he is not so spiritual as he ought to be, yet that he has religion enough to save him;—I fear that these are evidences not of a decay, but of a want of spiritual life—not of religious declension, but of an unregenerate state; that this is not the calmness of spiritual sleep, but the stillness of spiritual death. At all events, he has abundant reason to be alarmed, lest he should never have been converted.

III.—The new life manifests itself in *having a habitual regard to invisible and eternal realities*. The life of the believer is described by the apostle as a walk of faith. “We walk by faith, not by sight.” Herein consists the great difference between the believer’s former worldly life and his present religious life. Formerly he was influenced chiefly by worldly considerations and motives: his grand inquiry was, how he might best please, and amuse, and benefit himself; but now eternal realities

assert their influence over him. He not only believes that there is a God, and a Saviour, and a heaven, and a hell; but he feels these as great realities—they are to him living truths. He walks as seeing God who is invisible; he lives to that Saviour, whom not seeing he loves; and he looks forward to the future recompense of reward. In short, the man, as it were, lives in a different world from the visible; it is invisible things that exert the greatest influence over him—he is irresistibly drawn toward them. His whole life and conduct are regulated by faith, by a firm and realising belief in spiritual realities. His religion is more of the heart than of the intellect: it is the life of his soul.

Are there any of my readers who are worldly, who are engrossed with the world and the things of the world, who are eager in the pursuit of its riches, covetous of its honours, or else immersed in its amusements, and who are living in habitual forgetfulness of the realities of eternity? My friends, there can be no surer proof that you are destitute of the new life, that you have never experienced the great change of regeneration. You are of the earth, earthy. What great alteration in your conduct would it make if there were no God, and no Saviour, and no Bible? You would perhaps practise some vices from which you are now restrained; but, in very deed, no great alteration would take place. The maxims of worldly prudence, and the fear of

disgrace, would still preserve you within the limits of morality. In short, the consideration that there is a God and a Saviour, exerts hardly any influence over you, and consequently you live without God and without Christ in the world. You are the worshippers of Mammon rather than of God. Consider that there is another world beyond the grave—a world for which you have made no preparation—a heaven in whose enjoyment you are totally unfit to participate—and a hell in reserve for the unbelieving and impenitent. The worldly disposition which animates you, which causes you to hoard up your wealth, and which hardens your heart, is the very opposite of that spiritual mind which elevates the soul above the world, draws up the affections toward God, and transforms the whole man into the image of Jesus Christ. In short, this worldly life and the new life are antagonistic principles, as opposite to one another as light is to darkness.

IV.—The new life manifests itself in a *sanctification of common duties*. Religion is like the blood in the human body, which is not confined to one or two large arterial ducts, but animates the whole system, and enters into the minutest vein and vessel. The real Christian proves himself to be a Christian in whatever he does. His Christianity is not confined to Sabbaths, or to those duties which are peculiarly of a religious nature—as

the solemn exercises of the closet, the perusal of the Scriptures, the attendance on public worship, or the partaking of the sacrament of the Supper; but it is interwoven with all his earthly business and pursuits. When engaged in the ordinary duties of his calling, he performs them as the servant of God. He feels that it is God who has given him such and such duties to perform, and therefore he looks up to Him as his Master, and from Him expects the reward of his service. Among those with whom in the way of business he comes into frequent contact, he exhibits a religious spirit. He is to them kind, affectionate, and obliging; his word is truth; his example is a living sermon; and they are led to feel, more by what he does than what he says, that he is a true disciple of Christ, that he is actuated by the Spirit of God. How truly honourable does the meanest work become, when regarded as a task which God has given us to do! It is no longer common, earthly work; it is converted into sacred work; it becomes an act of piety. "This is the elixir that turns lower metal into gold—the meaner actions of this life in a Christian's hand into obedience and holy offerings unto God." However humble may be our position in life, yet, if we be truly religious men, there is a dignity imparted to our labour in which angels would not refuse to share. Indeed, the Lord of angels himself was once a carpenter; and the work which He performed

as such was higher and nobler than the work of the mightiest monarch or the most profound philosopher. And thus by being the devout tradesman, the pious mechanic, or the religious peasant, we may glorify God among men and perform the work which He has given us to do. "Sublimar in this world," says a great living writer, "know I nothing than a peasant saint, could such now anywhere be met with. Such a one will take thee back to Nazareth itself: thou wilt see the splendour of heaven spring forth from the humblest depths of earth, like a light shining in great darkness."

But especially does the new life manifest itself in the sanctification of our relative duties. Perhaps nowhere does the Christian life show itself more clearly or more beneficially than in the religious performance of these duties. Far from overlooking them as of inferior importance, Christianity elevates, sanctifies, and refines them. It addresses itself to men under every relation of life. It exhorts wives to submit themselves to their own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord; and it commands husbands to love their wives, and to take the love of Christ to His church as their model. It addresses itself to children, and tells them to obey their parents; while at the same time it enjoins fathers not to provoke their children to wrath. Servants are commanded to be obedient unto them that are their masters according to the flesh; and masters are required to give unto their

servants those things which are just and equal. And it is very observable that the motives given us in Scripture for the performance of these relative duties, are all evangelical, and have a reference to Christ. If wives are to be subject to their own husbands, it is even as the church is subject to Christ. If husbands are to love their wives, it is even as Christ loved the church. If children are to obey their parents, it is in the Lord. If servants are to obey their masters, it is as the servants of Christ. And if masters are to perform their respective duties to their servants, it is because they have a Master in heaven.

It is thus that Christianity sanctifies all such duties: it so transforms and pervades them, as to convert them into the exercises of piety. They are no longer natural duties; they are holy actions, they are the manifestations of the new life. And thus it happens that the new life shows itself by elevating and purifying all our social relations; by making persons better husbands and wives, better parents and children, better masters and servants, than they would otherwise have been in the ordinary course of Providence.

On the other hand, are there any of my readers who are inconsistent in their religion; whose religion is, as it were, a garment only to be worn on special occasions; who, for example, are religious on Sabbaths, but not on the ordinary week-days; or who are religious in the world, but are tyrants in their own families; or who

speak well of God in the presence of others, but neglect to speak and to pray to Him in the retirement of the closet? There are many such inconsistent characters in the world; men who at one time act as Christians, and not at another. But, surely, the reason of such inconsistency is that they are not really religious men, but either self-deceivers or hypocrites; they are destitute of the religious life in the soul. True religion is an internal spirit, a disposition, a character, a part and parcel of ourselves. If a man is a truly religious man, he will appear so always and everywhere. He may indeed do many things that are inconsistent, but habitually inconsistent in any one class of duties he is not and he cannot be. However far removed he may be from perfection, he will walk up to the light which he has, and will ever appear in the world as the same consistent, genuine character. In the world as well as in the family, in the busy mart as well as in the church, in secret as well as in public, before his master's face as well as behind his master's back, his religion will appear. If, then, you are not thus wholly religious; if while the world looks upon you as a saint, your family, who know you better, have too much reason to regard you as a sinner; beware lest the reason of this inconsistency be that you are not religious at all, but that your profession is a mere pretence, designed to impose either on yourself or on the world.

I conclude this chapter with the description of the true Christian, as he actually appears in the world. The true Christian is a man who has experienced a great spiritual change, into whose soul a Divine life has been infused; who is actuated by the Spirit of God. He has complied with the invitations of the gospel, and received Christ as his Saviour. He is a man of prayer: every morning and every evening does he pour out his heart before God. He is diligent in the perusal of the Bible: he searches the Scriptures daily to know and practise his duty. He is not a perfect man, and none know and feel this better than himself; but in this consists his excellence, that he is constantly striving against his evil passions—that sin is not welcomed as a friend, but hated as an enemy. He is often thinking of spiritual realities; his heart is often in heaven, while working at the duties of his earthly calling. He walks by faith and not by sight; eternal realities exercise the chief influence over him: he is a stranger upon this earth and a traveller to heaven. He exhibits in his conduct all the fruits of the Spirit; he is faithful to his friends, kind to his neighbours, charitable to the poor, grateful in prosperity, patient under afflictions, forgiving under injuries, true and honest in his business-transactions, and upright in the whole tenor of his conduct. He does what good he can; he lives as much as possible at peace with all men; he sympathises with the afflicted; and takes a lively

interest in the welfare of his neighbour. Let us search our Bibles, and we will find that such is the character of every truly regenerate man; and then let us look into our hearts, and compare it with our own character. Unless Christianity be received by us as a living principle; unless we be actuated by the new life which the Spirit imparts to believers; unless we receive the new heart and the new Spirit; in a word, unless we be born from above, we will never see the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER II.

Self-Deception.

THE greatest care and caution are necessary in examining the evidences of our conversion. We ought to exercise a holy jealousy over ourselves, and to avoid arriving at any definite conclusion as to the safety of our condition, except on sure and scriptural grounds. Especially we must beware of trusting to imaginary evidences—to evidences which may be possessed and are possessed by the unregenerate as well as by the regenerate. The very possibility of deception in such a momentous matter is truly dreadful. To think that we are converted, while we are still in our natural state; to suppose ourselves the objects of God's love, while in reality we are exposed to His wrath; to speak peace to our souls, when there is no peace; to imagine that we are on the narrow way to heaven, while we are travelling along that broad way which leads to destruction; and to continue to the end of life in this state of deception is, as has been strikingly observed, "a mistake which requires an eternity fully to understand, and an eternity adequately to deplore."

The peculiar danger of self-deception consists in the extreme difficulty of knowing when we are deceived. The avowed sinner cannot conceal his crimes from himself; he knows that he is not safe, and that unless he repents he must perish. The believer is ever jealous over himself; he continually dreads lest he should not be in a state of salvation; he examines himself carefully and only on clear evidence does he come to any satisfactory conclusion. But self-deceivers are "pure in their own eyes." Their freedom from open immorality gives them confidence; the comparison they make of themselves with others confirms them in their delusion; their attendance at public worship, and their performance of those religious ceremonies which custom enjoins, quiet their conscience; the serious impressions which they once felt, but have now outgrown, help to delude them; and thus they live a life of tranquillity, undisturbed by any fears concerning their spiritual condition, conceiving themselves to be something, while in reality they are nothing. The terrors of the law do not awaken them; for they flatter themselves that they are not exposed to its condemnation. The invitations of the gospel do not persuade them; for they think they have already accepted the offers of salvation. They seize upon the promises without any right, and they look upon the threatenings as not addressed to them. Like the church of Laodicea, they think that "they are rich, and increased with goods,"

and have need of nothing; and know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Their peace is like that deceitful calm which mariners describe, the sure precursor of a storm. The wind is hushed, the sea is calm as a lake; and while the passengers are glad, the skilful mariners tremble; for presently the heavens are darkened, the sea becomes troubled, the storm bursts, the thunders roll, the lightnings flash, the billows rise like mountains, and every wave appears as the messenger of death.

Nor let it be supposed that instances of self-deception are rare. On the contrary, it is much to be feared that such a mistake is made by many professing Christians, especially in this age of ceremonies, of external decorum, and of zeal for the outward forms of religion. Men in our days are not so chargeable with hypocrisy or with endeavouring to impose upon others with false pretences of religion, as with self-deception, deluding their own souls; and this is a more dangerous, as it is a more lamentable state of matters. I fear that it is not a mere probability, but amounts almost to a certainty, that some who may read these pages are self-deceivers. Conversion is not so common as many suppose. Our Saviour Himself tells us that His people are a little flock; and that the way to heaven is narrow and difficult, while the way to hell is broad and easy. Let us soften these statements as much as we please; let us view them in

the most favourable light; yet the conclusion at which we must arrive is, that comparatively few are converted. If, then, we can still remain unconcerned; if we have never any doubts at all; unless we have made considerable progress in the Divine life, our security and insensibility are too evident marks of self-deception.

In this chapter I propose to point out some imaginary evidences of conversion, on which men trust for salvation, but which in reality afford no good reasons for their confidence; marks which are found not merely in the experience of the regenerate, but frequently in the experience of the unregenerate, and which consequently afford no satisfactory proof of regeneration.

I.—Many trust to their *religious knowledge* for salvation. Their knowledge of religion is correct; their creed is orthodox; they have embraced no false doctrines; and they are able to give a reason for the faith which is in them. Now, religious knowledge is most desirable and necessary; without it religion is apt to degenerate into superstition: but then it is no evidence of the presence of religion in the soul. It may be the result of education and mental application, without the assistance or exercise of religious feelings. And indeed, when persons have sat long under a gospel ministry; and especially when attention has been paid to their religious education in their youth; it is impossible that

they should be altogether ignorant of Divine things. Nay, it is quite possible that this knowledge may be accurate and minute; may embrace the whole scheme of salvation; so that we may be able to discourse eloquently and to reason correctly on the truths of the gospel. And it may not only be correct, but also in some degree founded on conviction. We may be Christians not merely because we were born so, but from a careful study of the evidences of Christianity. Our creed may be pure, and we may see clearly the foundation on which each truth rests. All this may be obtained by our own unassisted powers; but then we must remember that it is one thing to know our duty and another thing to practise it. The faith which saves is not the mere assent of the understanding to any system of doctrines; but a practical principle which leads a man to act as he believes. The doctrines of the gospel are not like the propositions of mathematics, concerning which nothing more is necessary than to assent to their truth; they are realities designed to affect the heart and influence the conduct. Christianity is a remedy which, in order to profit us, must be embraced. The extent of our knowledge, and the purity of our creed, if these have no influence over our hearts, will no more save us than they will the devils, whose knowledge is more extensive and whose belief is stronger than ours. "Though," says the apostle, "I understand all mysteries

and all knowledge, and have not charity, I am nothing."

II.—Many trust to their *morality* for salvation. This certainly is preferable to bare knowledge; and indeed, properly speaking, Christian morality and religion are one and the same thing. But what is the morality which is so much applauded in the world? It is not the morality of Jesus Christ; that embraces the whole law, and requires us to be "perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect." But the morality of the world consists merely in freedom from certain scandalous vices, but includes neither faith, nor love to God, nor humility, nor patience: it has respect to the second, rather than to the first table of the law. But we must remember that there are duties which we owe to God, as well as duties which we owe to our fellow-men; and that the former are of more consequence than the latter. Respect for our reputation, regard to our interest in life, a worldly prudence, a love of approbation, a fear of punishment whether in this world or the next, may restrain us from the practice of scandalous vices; but these are very different from the motives and principles which the gospel requires. The selfish man who attends solely to his own interests, may be induced, by reason of his very selfishness, to be moral in order to gain credit in the world. Nay, I do not see anything to prevent an atheist

from being an extremely moral man; and I believe such instances have occurred. If, then, morality can exist without piety, surely it is no evidence that our salvation is sure.

More than this: a man may not only possess a good moral character, that is, be just in his dealings, true to his word, and free from all scandalous vices; but he may be also extremely amiable, kind to his fellow-men, compassionate to the sorrowful, and affectionate in his disposition; and yet be destitute of piety. Such a man is not only respected, he is also beloved; he is not only the object of our admiration, but of our affection. Still, however, mere amiability of temper is a natural endowment, and therefore is no proof of a change of heart. Such appears to have been the character of the young man in the gospel, who came to our Saviour inquiring the way of salvation. His conduct was free from vice: he could appeal with sincerity to the moral law, and say, "All these have I kept from my youth up;" nay, he appears to have been of a very amiable disposition, for it is expressly said that "Jesus beholding, loved him;" and yet this young man, so correct in his conduct, so amiable in his disposition, so beloved by his fellow-men, wanted one thing, and, alas, it was the one thing needful.

III.—Many trust to their *regular attention to religious ordinances* as evidence of their salvation. They are a

church-going people; they are constant in attendance at the house of God; and they regularly partake of the sacrament of the Supper. All this may be well, so far as it goes. But then it is not conversion. Custom enjoins men to attend the public worship of the sanctuary; completely to neglect it would lessen their character in the world. But, surely, religion is something very different from the mere performance of its outward rites and ceremonies. There were none more exact in this respect than the Pharisees; they prayed thrice a-day and fasted twice a-week; they gave tithes of all that they possessed, even of the smallest trifles, as mint, and anise, and cummin; and yet our Saviour calls them "serpents and a generation of vipers;" and surely what was no evidence of religion in them can be no evidence of religion in us. Yea, our Saviour expressly says, "Except your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Still further, there may not only be attendance on the public ordinances of religion, but also some degree of attention paid to private devotion; and yet there may be no true religion. This is indeed a more favourable symptom; and if there be fervour and sincerity in the performance of secret prayer, it is a good evidence of piety. But then it is evident that private devotion may degenerate into formality, and be the result of mere habit. We may have been taught in childhood to offer

up our morning and evening prayers; or we may, as the result of religious impressions, long since passed away, have set apart stated times for private prayer; but it is quite possible that these religious exercises may be mere formal observances; the utterance of certain words with the tongue, while our thoughts are wandering on other subjects; and thus instead of being acts of devotion, they become a profanation of the name of God. It is spiritual worship which God demands: it is the homage of the heart, and not the adoration of the lips, which He requires. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

IV.—Many substitute for religion an attachment to the particular denomination of Christians to which they belong, and trust for salvation to their *religious zeal*. But zeal for a particular sect is not zeal for religion; and attachment to a particular tenet is not attachment to the truth. We may consider that we belong to the purest denomination in the world, and in the excess of our bigotry suppose that salvation is difficult beyond

the pale of our church. We may be intolerant to those who differ from us, and in the intemperance of our zeal lose sight of charity. But let us not deceive ourselves with supposing that bigotry, intolerance, and party zeal bear any resemblance to the religion of the gospel. Even allowing that the church to which we belong is superior to all others in purity, yet if this does not produce a corresponding beneficial effect on our heart and conduct, our connection with it will only increase our guilt by adding to our other sins the abuse of such privileges, and the resistance of so much knowledge. He who knew his Master's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. "Trust not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these." At the day of judgment, it shall no more be asked to what church we belonged than in what country we were born. All human distinctions of sects and denominations shall then be for ever abolished, and men shall be divided into only two classes—the disciples of Christ, and the partizans of the world; the children of grace, and the children of nature; the future inhabitants of heaven and of hell.

V.—Many trust to the *reformation of their conduct* for evidence of salvation. Reformation is certainly a sure evidence of repentance, and when complete and spiritual there cannot be a surer evidence of conversion. But it

is evident that a partial reformation is quite consistent with a total want of religion. The same reasons which induce a man to be moral also induce him to correct the irregularities of his conduct. Age also may have weakened the strength of his passions, or his health may have been injured by intemperance. And, indeed, it often happens that what a man calls the reformation of his conduct may only be the exchange of one vice for another; from being intemperate when young, he may become covetous when old. God demands the heart for His service; there can be no compromise between Him and sin; no man can serve two such masters, whose services are so opposite, whose commands are so much at variance. To be religious, our obedience must be sincere; we must harbour no known sin, nor habitually and wilfully neglect the performance of any duty. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

VI.—Many trust to their *religious impressions*. This is, perhaps, the most fruitful source of self-deception. Some, for example, place confidence in the strong convictions which they at one time had of the evil of sin, and of the danger to which it exposed them. They tell us of the tears they shed, of the agonies they endured, and of the awful sense they had of the wrath of God. Now, conviction of sin is very important and essential: it

always, in some degree or other, precedes conversion. Until we see ourselves lost, we will never truly come to the Saviour for salvation. Until we feel our disease, we will never betake ourselves to the remedy. We must not then despise these convictions, but nourish and cherish them as the motions of the Holy Ghost—as mercifully designed to awaken us out of our false security. But the great error lies in mistaking conviction for conversion. A man may tremble at the remembrance of his sins and at the prospect of the judgment to come, and yet never be converted. It is one thing to know our danger, and another thing actually to flee for refuge; it is one thing to see our sins, and another thing to betake ourselves to the Saviour. Convictions may arise, and frequently do arise, from natural causes. There are probably few hearers of the gospel who have not at one period of their lives been subject to these religious influences. But how often do these impressions wear away: how often do they prove as “the morning cloud and the early dew” which vanish before the rising sun. Like the stony ground hearers, we may have received the word with joy, but endured only for a time, and then have fallen from the faith. We may have healed our wounds slightly, saying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. And perhaps the result of these convictions with respect to us may have been to nourish our self-deception, and to render our state more danger-

ous and alarming than it was before. "For if," says St Peter, "after we have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with us than the beginning. For it had been better for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us." Felix trembled when Paul reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come; and even Ahab, the profane king of Israel, humbled himself and put on sackcloth under the denunciations of the prophet. Such also was the grief of Judas; so violent were his convictions that he could no longer support them; they drove him to despair, and caused him to put an end to his miserable existence.

VII.—Many trust to their *good works* for salvation. Good works, when performed from proper motives, are sure signs of a spiritual change; they are the good fruits of a good tree. But works are only good in the sight of God when they are performed from religious motives; if the motive be wrong, the work, however advantageous it may be to man, ceases to be virtuous. Now it is evident that a man may perform many good works without being actuated by religious principles. We may support charitable and religious enterprises merely from ostenta-

tion; from a desire, like the Pharisees, to appear religious and to obtain the praise of men. Or a constitutional tenderness of heart, a natural sympathy with the misfortunes of others, an instinctive kindness of disposition may induce us to relieve the wants of the miserable. We may also think that by performing good works we may merit heaven; and thus we may exceed even the people of God in them, merely from a principle of self-righteousness—from a desire, as it were, to purchase the Divine favour; and thus being ignorant of God's righteousness, or from pride and self-love, we may go about, like the Jews of old, to establish our own righteousness, not submitting ourselves to the righteousness of God; and hence our good works, instead of being acceptable in the sight of a holy and heart-searching God, become positively sinful—the offspring of a corrupt and depraved heart. “Though,” says the apostle, “I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, I am nothing.”

So far then a man may go, and yet be destitute of true religion. But wherein, it will be asked, does such a man fall short? Here is a man who has right notions of religion; who is a believer in Christianity, not merely because he was born so, but from conviction; who is blameless in his morals and amiable in his disposition; who is regular in his attendance at public worship, and even attentive to private devotion; who is sincere and

even zealous in his attachment to the church to which he belongs; who has reformed many things that were formerly amiss; who has had many serious impressions—convictions of the evil of sin and of the danger to which he is exposed; and who is liberal to the poor, and a supporter of charitable and religious institutions: and yet it is asserted that, notwithstanding all this, such a man may not be a true Christian. What can be wanting in such a character? What is wanting? Why, the very soul of religion is wanting. If the man has nothing more than what I have described, I again solemnly assert that he is not a regenerate man; that all his religion, his ceremonies, and good works are vain. He wants spiritual life: he is, as the Scriptures emphatically express it, “dead in trespasses and in sins.” There is wanting a heart loving God and delighting in His commandments. There is wanting a sincerity in religion; the man is only half a Christian; he is serving two masters—God and the world. There is wanting a living faith in Jesus Christ, not a mere speculative belief in the truths of Christianity, but a humble renouncing of self, and a simple confidence in the merits of the Saviour.

Do I address any who fear that they are deceiving themselves; any who feel that they belong to any one of these classes of self-deceivers whom I have mentioned? Your case is most distressing, most worthy of tears. You are not far from the kingdom of God, and will you

at length fall short of it? You have reformed your outward conduct; you are regular in your attendance on public ordinances; you neglect not the devotion of the closet; you perform good works; you have been the subjects of religious impressions; and will you rest satisfied with being "almost a Christian?" Have you performed so many things in vain? And will you not be decided? You are not even called to more labour; you are required to perform almost the same things which you already do, but only to perform them with greater earnestness and from purer motives. And will you, for want of this, render useless all your efforts? If I could only persuade you to a greater degree of spirituality, your religious exercises would become easier; your secret prayers would be transformed from being an irksome task, as they must now be when your heart is not engaged in them, to be a delightful privilege, a foretaste of the pleasures of heaven.

I conclude this chapter with a few advices of a practical nature.

Carefully examine yourselves. I would exhort you to spend some time in retirement for religious purposes. This, I have supposed, you do not altogether neglect, but that you already pay some attention to private devotion. Now, at these seasons think on the state of your soul in the sight of God; compare your character with that of the righteous as recorded in His Word; and do not

rest satisfied until you perceive in your soul the Scriptural marks of regeneration. "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates."

Be much engaged in earnest prayer. Your prayers hitherto may have been a mere form; you may have gone through them as a task; but henceforth be in earnest about religion; trifle not in your approaches to the throne of grace, remembering that "God is a Spirit; and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Is the salvation of your soul a thing to trifle with? Is a crown of glory—a kingdom—a thing to ask in a cold and formal manner? Pray for pardon, as a criminal condemned to death. Pray for salvation, as one exposed to endless misery.

Search the Scriptures. Let your hours of secret devotion be divided between prayer and the perusal of God's Word. Read the Scriptures, not with the mind of a scholar, but of a Christian; not in order to criticise them, but to find out what God requires. At other times you may read them for the sake of your intellectual improvement, and they are well worthy of such a perusal; but in those hours which are consecrated to your religious improvement, you ought solely to be intent upon the practical bearing which they may have upon you.

Attend diligently to the ordinances of religion. At present you may go to the house of God, and take your

seat at the communion table, merely because custom enjoins you. But henceforth go to meet with God Himself in His ordinances, to hear what He has to say to you, and to attend solely to the interests of your immortal soul. "I will go to the altar of God," says the Psalmist, "unto God, my exceeding joy." The preaching of the word is the instrument which the Spirit generally makes use of in arousing the unconcerned, in converting the unconverted, and in strengthening the graces and mortifying the corruptions of believers.

Guard against worldliness. This world is the great rival of God in the hearts of men. Beware, then, of fixing your affections upon it; of making some worldly object, whether it be riches, or fame, or domestic comfort, the chief aim of life; or, in other words, of allowing selfishness to be the ruling principle of your conduct. The gospel requires us to deny ourselves, and to take up the cross. We must live to Christ, else we cannot be His disciples.

Give yourselves over unto God in an everlasting covenant through Jesus Christ. Meditate well upon what you are about: that you must renounce the world and self, and serve God with all the members of your body and with all the faculties of your soul. Let this, then, be the language of your heart:—"Lord, I heartily accept the free offers of salvation through Jesus Christ: I take Thee for my covenant God and Father; I take Christ in all

His offices to save me—as my Prophet to instruct me, as my Priest to intercede for me, as my King to rule over me; I take the Holy Spirit for my Sanctifier; I take Thy word for the rule of my life, Thy glory for the end of my existence, heaven for my eternal home, and the enjoyment of Thee for my chief good.”

Thus make religion the great duty of your lives, and the service of God the great work which is given you to do. “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the heart.” Remember that you have to do with a heart-searching God, whose eye pierces through all coverings, whom no outward appearances can deceive, who sees your true character, and who will assign you your proper place in another world.

“O Lord, Thou who seest the hearts of all the children of men, suffer us not to impose upon ourselves, awaken us out of our false security, that, seeing the danger to which we are exposed, and the number and aggravations of our sins, we may be inclined and enabled to embrace the gracious offers of the gospel, that so we may obtain a peace, of which the world cannot deprive us, and which death itself can neither disturb nor destroy.”

CHAPTER III.

Selfishness.

SELF-LOVE, when kept in due subordination, and within proper limits, is not in itself sinful. It is a natural feeling, and, abstractly considered, is as free from blame as hunger or thirst, or any other of our natural propensities and appetites. We are instinctively impelled to seek our own happiness, and to avoid our own misery. Not to love ourselves is an impossibility. "No one," says the apostle, "ever yet hated his own flesh."

There are indeed some moralists who regard self-love as a principle which is inherently evil. They assert that every kind of action which flows from this feeling is mercenary and sinful; that we ought to love God without any regard to our own happiness; that we ought to exclude and forget ourselves; that to obey God either from fear of punishment or hope of reward is essentially wrong and false; that we ought to obey Him simply because obedience is our duty, and without regard to our own interests. Now, all such refined morality is not suited to mortals; in short, to practise it is simply

impossible. We cannot even conceive an entire abnegation of self; in describing the most self-denying virtue, we are insensibly led to adopt phrases which presuppose a regard to self, as the pleasures of virtue, the nobleness which it imparts to the character, and the deliverance which it procures from all that is mean and grovelling. We cannot detach our own happiness from the service of God. We must believe in Him as "the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" before we can serve Him. No one can exclude all regards to himself when he feels love to God. "We love him," says St John, "because he first loved us." God's love to us is the cause of our love to Him.

And this natural feeling of self-love is recognised in Scripture. God has, in His natural government by His providence, and in His gracious government as revealed in His word, connected our duty with our interest. The path of holiness is likewise the path to true happiness. By obeying God's commands and serving Christ we, in the most effectual manner possible, promote our best interests. Our ultimate and everlasting good is inseparably connected with true religion. We cannot suppose that a truly religious and good man will be finally miserable. And moreover Scripture, times and ways without number, addresses itself to our hopes and fears, by promising us rewards if obedient, and threatening us with punishment if disobedient. Our self-love is appealed

to; and thus a proper regard to one's happiness is not only not forbidden, but permitted and warranted.

Observe, however, I do not assert that self-love is ever, in any possible circumstances, a virtue. It is an instinctive feeling, common both to the righteous and the wicked; it is a quality which as regards morality is purely negative; in itself it is neither good nor bad. We are not commanded to love ourselves; not to do so is simply impossible. There is no positive virtue in a man loving himself, seeking his own happiness, avoiding his own wretchedness, or promoting his own interests. All this may be lawful, and proper, and prudent, and natural; but I do not see how it can be called virtuous. There may be nothing wrong in it; but neither is there any element of moral good.

Thus, then, self-love, abstractly considered, is neither a virtue nor a vice. Sin lies not in the feeling itself, but in its unlawful exercise. When kept within moderate bounds, it is innocent; but when it passes beyond these bounds, it becomes sinful. When it becomes the ruling principle of the conduct; when a man in his actions has his own interests always in view; when he overlooks the interests and claims of others; when he makes self his deity, and when his own happiness is the ultimate end of his being: then self-love degenerates into selfishness, and becomes essentially evil. It is natural to love ourselves; it is sinful to love ourselves only, or to love our-

selves too much. It is natural to love happiness; it is sinful to make this the only or the chief object in view.

Selfishness, or inordinate and vicious self-love, manifests itself in a great variety of forms, and assumes different names according to the objects toward which it is directed: as *avarice*, when a man's great desire is to amass riches for himself and family, to scrape together a little more of earth's dust, to exalt himself above his neighbours; *sensuality*, when carnal pleasure is the object of pursuit, and when the chief inquiry of life is, "What shall I eat, and what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed?" *ambition*, when a man covets the honours of this world, and is eager to hear the fame of his name spread far and wide; *self-conceit*, when a man prides himself upon his intellectual powers or attainments, looks down upon others as his inferiors, is eager of the praises of his fellow-men, and to whom there is nothing more agreeable than flattery; *self-righteousness*, when a man prides himself upon his virtues, his high attainments in religion, his unspotted character, his strict integrity, and whose boast is that of the Pharisee, that he is not as other men; *vanity*, when a man flatters himself on account of the accidents of birth, station, or wealth—blessings which were not due to his merits, but to mere chance or favour, and which are possessed by the vilest of men; *self-deceit*,

when a man extenuates his faults or perhaps regards them as virtues, giving them new names, calling covetousness prudence, meanness economy, extravagance liberality, conformity to the world a good and social disposition, a love of pleasure innocent mirth, pride a proper regard for one's character, ambition a generous desire of excellency, censoriousness impartiality, severity justice, bigotry and intolerance zeal for the truth, and indifference to the truth the mark of a liberal and candid mind.

But it is not only in the various forms of actual vice that selfishness is seen. It has penetrated into the inner sanctuary of religion: it has taken up its abode in the very temple of God. Even in our religion, selfishness is often seen; it frequently arrays itself in the garb of piety. The religion of many professing Christians is of a low and selfish form. Thus, for example, some are religious for no other reason than from a desire to escape misery. They have heard of hell, and they tremble at the thought of it; they dread the vengeance of God; and thus, in order to avoid suffering, they betake themselves to religion. Others are religious in order to get to heaven. They are captivated with the descriptions of heaven; they are eagerly desirous of personal happiness; and hence they desire to get to heaven, much in the same way as a man desires riches or earthly prosperity. In short, the religion of many is a religion of

self-love, having their own happiness as its object. Now I do not say that there is anything wrong in this; it is perhaps the natural actings of self-love in the territory of religion, and it is difficult to fix the boundaries between selfishness and lawful self-love; but there is nothing great, disinterested, self-denying, Christ-like about it. Perhaps also the first feeling of the awakened sinner, the first impulse which draws the soul to Christ, is the desire of personal safety; the first question is, "What must I do to be saved?" But certainly a Christian has made but small attainments in religion, unless he has learned to ask another question—a question in which self is lost sight of—the question of devotion to the Saviour, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Self-love is not to be discountenanced or overlooked in religion; it is not to be condemned or repressed; on the contrary, it is repeatedly recognised in Scripture; but it is not an exalted principle of action; it is at best but sanctified prudence. Pure religion leads a man to mortify his selfishness, in a measure to overlook himself; to consecrate himself to the service of Christ, and to the good of his fellow-men. To tell a man that if he does not believe on Christ he will go to hell, whereas, if he does believe on Christ he will be happy for ever, is right, and Scriptural, and necessary; but it is appealing to the inferior principles of our nature. But to tell a man that God so loved him that He sent His Son to save him,

that Christ died for him, and that Christ wishes his services in return for His gifts; that he can show his gratitude by working for Christ; that as Christ sacrificed Himself for him, so he ought to sacrifice himself for Christ; that salvation is not a mere deliverance from hell, but a deliverance from sin; and that heaven is not only the abode of happiness, but the abode of purity; this, I think, is a higher platform of Christianity; this is a more unselfish religion; this is more Christ-like and Divine. Then is religion purified from selfishness; then do men cease, in any evil sense, to be lovers of their own selves.

Having made these few remarks on the nature of selfishness, let us now consider, secondly, the evil of selfishness.

For one thing, selfishness is the direct opposite of that disposition which the law of God commands us to cultivate with regard to our fellow-men. "All the law," says St Paul, "is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "All things," says our Saviour, "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Observe in both these passages the appeal is to our self-love; that as we love ourselves sincerely, so we should love our neighbour sincerely; and that as we exact from others, so we ought to render to them. Self-love is not forbidden, but recog-

nised; it is inordinate self-love—loving ourselves to the exclusion of others—which is here condemned. Our love to ourselves ought to be the measure of our love to others; a disinterested love—a love which seeks their good, and endeavours to promote their happiness; a universal love—a love which embraces the whole human race; an active love—a love which manifests itself not merely in kind wishes and kind words, but in kind deeds, in active exertion; a sincere love—a love which is divorced from all forms of hypocrisy and pretence. Love is the essence of all virtue—the fulfilment of the law. Any action which is destitute of love is sinful; every action which is influenced by love is, to the extent that it is so, good and virtuous. Nor can any one be truly religious without love to man. If love to God dwell in the breast of any, it will pervade his whole character and conduct. “If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” The selfish man, then, breaks the law of God: he is destitute of the spirit of all true obedience; he wants that element in his spiritual character which renders his actions virtuous, and for want of which he cannot do a single action which is truly good.

And as selfishness is opposed to the law, so it is equally opposed to the gospel. The spirit of the gospel harmonises with that of the law; it also is based on

love. "A new commandment," says our Saviour, "give I unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Love is the new commandment of the gospel; because although an old commandment, although the very essence and fulfilment of the law, yet it had been lost sight of by the traditions and carnal ordinances of the Pharisees. In their eagerness to pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, they had forgotten that love was the one great thing which God required. Hence it was that our Saviour brought this affection prominently forward, buried, as He found it, among a heap of ceremonial observances. "God," He says, "requires love. He that hateth his brother, is a murderer. This is My commandment, Love one another, as I have loved you; let My love be the measure of yours." Yes, love is the great disposition which Christianity seeks to produce: supreme love to God and love to other intelligent beings. Faith, hope, and love are the three cardinal graces; but the greatest of these is love. Love is salvation—a deliverance from sin, our restoration to the image of God. The man purely selfish, whatever he professes to be, is not a Christian: he wants the very spirit of Christianity, he is an entire stranger to its benign influences; however great his pretensions, however numerous his religious exercises, Christ owns him not as His disciple.

And surely I need not add that selfishness is opposed

not only to Christianity, but also to the character of its great Author. This remark, I am sure, must approve itself to every mind. No selfishness was found in Jesus Christ: He lived not for Himself, but for others; His whole aim was to do good to His fellow-men; on all occasions He sacrificed Himself, and at length He consummated the sacrifice by His death. We read in history of men dying for their friends—of great, and noble, and generous spirits sacrificing themselves for the good of others; but, except in the one solitary instance of Jesus Christ, we never read in history of a man voluntarily dying for his enemies. Love converted that bitter taunt of His enemies into a reality—“He saved others, Himself He cannot save.” It was love which rendered His saving Himself a moral impossibility. His death was a great act of self-sacrifice; He died, because He loved. It was the glorious reward of saving countless myriads of the human race—of rescuing them from sin, and Satan, and misery, and hell, that caused Him to triumph over all His unparalleled sufferings, to endure the cross, and to despise the shame. The character of the selfish man, then, is diametrically opposed to the character of Jesus Christ; he is an antichrist—an opposer of Christ; without a particle of that loving, generous, disinterested spirit which actuated the Son of God.

The love of Christ ought to be the measure of our love to others. “As I have loved you, that ye also love

one another." This is the high and holy standard held up for our imitation. This is, so to speak, that lofty mountain of love which we must climb. And the same high and holy standard of love is also held up to us by the apostles. "Hereby," says St John, "perceive we the love of God (that is, of Christ) because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Our love ought to be stronger than life and death; even our lives ought not to stand in the way of others' good; even these, if called upon, we ought to lay down after the example of Christ. And the words of the apostle Paul are stronger still. His intense love for his own nation found vent to itself in these striking words: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not; my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continued sorrow in my heart: for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. ix. 1-3). I cannot tell what Paul meant by these words; whether he meant that he was willing, after the example of Christ, to sacrifice his life for the sake of his countrymen; or whether, as our best expositors interpret the passage, that he was willing to sacrifice even his salvation—to be eternally separated and cut off from Christ—if such a tremendous sacrifice would promote the salvation of the Jews. Not that such a thing was possible, but allowing it to be possible, he was willing to pay that

enormous price. His love for others swallowed up every consideration for himself; he, as it were, lost entire sight of himself in his earnest longings for the salvation of others.

Selfishness is the root of other vices. St Paul, in giving a catalogue of those vices which will prevail in the last days, places selfishness at the head, as being the first in point of order and the cause of all the rest. All the sins which follow in the list are but the bitter fruits of selfishness. "Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. iii. 2-4). Selfishness is in itself essentially evil, as being opposed both to the law and to the gospel—to the second great commandment of the law and to the new commandment of the gospel. And it is not only evil, but the parent of evil. Many of our sins against God proceed from an undue love of ourselves. Hence arise discontent with our condition, impatience under suffering, presumptuous dependence on ourselves, dishonourable thoughts of Divine Providence, distrust in God's word, and entire forgetfulness of God's glory. And so also almost all our sins against our neighbour, when closely examined, will be found to arise from selfishness. Cove-

tousness is the greed of selfishness, pride the elation of selfishness, ambition the longings of selfishness, insolence the vanity of selfishness, envy the murmuring of selfishness, falsehood the timidity of selfishness, hatred the daring of selfishness, revenge the joy of selfishness, ingratitude the forgetfulness of selfishness, uncharitableness the arrogance of selfishness, evil-speaking the depreciation of selfishness, bigotry the intolerance of selfishness, and self-righteousness the mock piety of selfishness. In short, selfishness in one form or another appears to enter into almost every vice, and like a malignant poison corrupts every action which it pervades.

Such are the evil effects of selfishness. It is the root of sin. It is the parent of many vices. There are some who go further and assert that selfishness is the real principle of sin—that positive element in an action or feeling which constitutes it sinful. Whether this is the case I do not pretend to affirm; it seems to me to be too narrow and restricted a view of sin. There are many disinterested and amiable characters in this world; beings who seem to be destitute of every particle of selfishness, who are always ready to oblige others and to give up their own wishes in order to please their fellow-men; whose kindness and generosity are unbounded and wholly disinterested; who, in a word, appear to live not for themselves, but for others; but who yet manifest no decided religious feelings; to all appearance, these unselfish beings

are destitute of love to God. And if this be so, then it cannot be affirmed that selfishness is the essence of sin. There is no sadder spectacle in the moral world than this; than to see a man who loves his fellow-men, who showers blessings around his path, who is generous, kind, and loving, susceptible of the most benevolent impressions, who causes the widow's heart to sing, and all with whom he comes in contact to be glad; but yet in whose heart the love of God is not; who has never consecrated himself to Jesus; who, although he loves the creature, yet does not love Him who is altogether lovely. And yet we believe that there are such instances in the world. A man, then, we think, may be unselfish, and yet destitute of true religion.

Such cases, however, are rare: but external morality combined with selfishness is a more common case. A man who is strictly moral, free from every stain of immorality; who has preserved himself from wild and unrestrained passions; and who seldom commits actions which appear to him to be sins, may yet be wholly immersed in selfishness. He may be living only to himself; seeking his own happiness in entire forgetfulness of others; strictly honest indeed, but having done few generous and disinterested actions; free from vice indeed, but equally free from virtue; not hurried away by the warmth of passion, but intensely cold and selfish. Such a man may be respected, but he cannot possibly be loved;

his coldness chills the affections of all towards him; his selfishness effectually repels their advances. Speak not of his outward morality; his deep-seated selfishness has removed him further from God than are the publican and the sinner. And if ever, through the converting influences of the Spirit, he comes to a true knowledge of himself, he will find that his whole life has been but one course of sin—that he has been wholly estranged from God—that, in short, selfishness has cut him off from God—and hence he will regard this disposition as the greatest depravity, even although his outward conduct may have been strictly moral and pure. How many professing Christians are there whose first principle of action is selfishness, whose whole life has been but one uninterrupted course of self-seeking, forgetful alike of the claims of God and man! How many are there who, in the language of the apostle, seek their own and not the things which are Jesus Christ's!*

But a caution here is necessary. We do not mean from anything that we have said to affirm that believers are wholly delivered from selfishness. Such a state of perfection is not attained in this world. Their freedom from selfishness is only partial. Indeed, there may be some truly religious persons in whom selfishness is often visible. Before conversion, they may have formed many selfish habits; and these habits are not uprooted all at

* See on this subject Müller "On Sin."

once, but only by degrees. Some people also may demand too much of Christians, not only the extinction of selfishness, but the extinction of self-love. But what we affirm is that Christianity is opposed to selfishness; that a believer will not quietly and knowingly indulge in this spirit, but will contend and struggle against it; that he will confess and mourn over it before God; and that the more he is actuated by the Spirit of Christ, the more will selfishness be mortified and overcome within him.

What a sad view does this prevalence of selfishness give us of the human race! Sunk in sin, because sunk in selfishness; in a state of moral depravity, because they have made themselves the end of their existence; cut off from God, the source of universal benevolence and the Author of all holiness; lovers of their own selves, instead of lovers of God. Nothing can be more mean and degrading. Nothing more abhorrent to the whole virtuous universe. Nothing more opposed to the character of our Lord and Saviour, whose whole life was one uninterrupted course of self-sacrifice, a renunciation of His own will, and whose death was at once the triumph and the martyrdom of love.

If we are, in truth, what we profess to be; if we are the real followers of Him who is love incarnate; we have already in part overcome our selfishness. We are not our own; we are the property of another; we are bought

with a price. We must not then live to ourselves, as if we were our own masters; we must live to Christ, whose servants we are. Let His great love for us—that love which for our sakes endured the agony of Gethsemane and the shame of Calvary—constrain us to live no more to ourselves, but to Him who died for us. Let gratitude act upon the better and sanctified principles of our nature, and cause us to resolve to spend and be spent in the service of Him who loved us in life and in death. Let us devote our ransomed lives to our great Deliverer and King. Let His glory in the world—the sanctification of His name, the advent of His kingdom, the universal obedience to His will—be the foremost subject of our daily prayers and the great object of our lives.

And, finally, let us live for our fellow-men. Next in importance to love to God and Christ, is love to man. All true believers are, or at least ought to be, ministering angels to the human race; following the footsteps of their Great Master in doing good; and, in imitation of Him, devoting themselves for the welfare of others. And, indeed, although in living to others, personal happiness is not our object, yet we will obtain this blessing in a far purer and larger degree than if we made it our chief object, and lived only to ourselves; we will enjoy the happiness of doing good—the pure pleasure of benevolence—the consolation of knowing that we have not

lived entirely in vain in this world; and in the next world we will receive the reward of those who have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, and ministered to the wants of the destitute, and to whom the Judge of all the earth will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

CHAPTER IV.

The Love of the World.

IN this chapter I would direct the attention of the reader to an exhortation of the apostle John—"Love not the world," 1 John ii. 15. Its meaning is apparently obvious: Set not your affections on the world. Make not anything connected with this world the aim of your existence. Always give a preference to the claims of religion. Let God and not Mammon be your master.—And perhaps there is no exhortation more necessary or more appropriate in the present day. The besetting sin of this age and nation is *worldliness*—an inordinate love of the world, and of the things that are in the world. This sin has infected all classes of society and all trades and professions of life. The poor as well as the rich, the peasant as well as the noble, from the least of them even to the greatest of them, every one is given to worldliness. And what makes matters worse is, that a fair profession of religion may be kept up under it. If a man be openly immoral, if he be a drunkard, a profane swearer, a fornicator, or a cheat, he must give

up his Christian profession; but he may love the world intensely, and yet be looked up to as a religious man. The church has, as it were, come to a compromise with the world, and men live in entire forgetfulness of the apostolic warning—"Love not the world."

But again, when we think on this exhortation, we may perhaps have some difficulty in comprehending the precise idea the apostle intends to convey. What is this world which we are forbidden to love? And accordingly, in point of fact, different notions have been attached to the term world, and, corresponding with these, different interpretations have been assigned to the apostolic prohibition. There is the monkish notion, that we should forsake the world entirely. There is the puritanic notion, which sternly condemns all the amusements and enjoyments of the world. The views of some are too lax, while those of others are too severe. Perhaps we may by reflection attain to some definite idea, some plain and positive understanding of the nature of that world which we are forbidden to love.

In Scripture, there are many apparently absolute statements which must be taken in a limited sense; things are absolutely forbidden which are only to be understood as comparatively forbidden. These statements are strongly expressed, in order to impress us with their importance; they can lead only the inattentive into error. For example, of this nature is that exhortation

of our Lord:—"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you:" the design of which exhortation is not to inculcate sloth in our worldly duties, or to teach us that we should not labour for our daily bread; but to impress upon us the importance of religion, the supreme necessity of labouring for the bread of life. So again when our Lord says, "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself;" and when St Paul says, "Be careful for nothing:" the design of such exhortations is not to inculcate imprudence, carelessness, and want of foresight; but to repress all over anxiety and foolish forebodings, and to teach us trust and dependence on Divine providence. Now I consider the exhortation of St John, "Love not the world," as a statement of a similar description. The apostle does not intend that we should look upon the world with absolute contempt or indifference, shunning its society and neglecting its duties; for such conduct would not only be positively wrong, but in a great majority of cases simply impossible. But he means that we should not love the world immoderately; that we should not seek our chief happiness in it; that we should not prefer things transitory to things eternal.

If, then, the exhortation of the apostle is to be understood not in an absolute, but in a limited or comparative

sense, it may be profitable for us to inquire what is not and what is included in the expression, "Love not the world."

Evidently by the world is not here meant the *external and material world*. We are not here or anywhere forbidden to love that fair and beautiful world which God Himself has made. The apostle does not here seek to repress in any degree those rapturous emotions, those feelings of joy and love, with which we ought to look on nature's landscapes, and to contemplate those wonderful laws which regulate the universe. In this sense the world is to be loved. It is the work of God—the manifestation of His perfections. These landscapes were painted by His fingers; these laws of nature were ordained by Him. And especially in the season of summer, when all nature is clothed in its brightest garments, when the flowers are arrayed in a glory surpassing that of Solomon, and when all the lower animals appear so glad, are we to shut our eyes to so gay a scene, to look upon all with an ungladdened heart, and not to enjoy those beauties which are spread in such abundance and variety before us? Not so: the true and enlightened Christian loves this world; he loves it, because he sees in it the impress of his heavenly Father; the works of nature lead his thoughts upward to the God of nature; and he feels that that God who created the heavens and adorned the earth is his God and Father in Christ Jesus. Every

work of God is beautiful, and is to be loved; and thus we are to love the world, meaning thereby the external world.

And as the external world is not here meant, so neither are *the inhabitants of the world*. The apostle does not here forbid us to love our fellow-men. Such a prohibition would be in direct variance with the whole scope and spirit of Christianity. Christianity is a religion of love. Its great law is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:" "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." And this love must embrace all mankind. We are to look upon all men as our brethren, as the children of the same God and Father. Sinners as well as saints, unbelievers as well as believers, enemies as well as friends, ought to be the objects of our love. Our love must be restricted by no peculiarities, limited by no bounds, cooled by no aversions, and quenched by no injuries: it ought to resemble the love of God, who is kind to the unthankful and to the evil, and who showers the gifts of His providence upon the unjust as well as upon the just. Even the sins and vices of others should not destroy our love for them. While we hate their sins, we should pity themselves, and aim at their conversion; we are not their judges, but their brethren. This is true, living Christianity; a principle of universal love—a love free and unchecked. Every inhabitant of the world is the object of our

love; and in this sense also we are to love the world, meaning thereby the human race, that race whom the Son of God came to redeem.

Nor are we here exhorted to *forsake the world*. The admonition, "Love not the world," does not mean that we should flee from the society of the world as a hateful thing—that we should shut ourselves out from the world. This was the meaning given to the term world by many in the first ages of the church. Christians then felt deeply that the world was a scene of temptation, and that living in the world they were in great danger of making shipwreck of their faith. The allurements of the world continually met them, open persecution frequently assailed them, and earthly cares weighed heavily upon their spirits; and instead of boldly and manfully encountering these difficulties, their courage failed them, they shrank from the combat, and, in order to preserve their religion, they forsook the world, they betook themselves to dens and caves and deserts, "the world forgetting and by the world forgot." But such a notion is not derived from the word of God: there is no command in Scripture telling us to withdraw from the world and to betake ourselves to the desert. The world, this scene of temptation, is the post of duty. To forsake it is wrong and cowardly: it is as if the soldier should desert the field of battle, or as if the scholar should forsake the school. In this world, we must live Christian lives:

here we must stand up for the honour of our Master, Christ; here we must fight the battles of the Lord; the shop must not be deserted for the hermit's cell, the busy market must not be exchanged for the desert, and the society of the world must not be abandoned for the nunnery or the monastery. "There are no fires that will melt out our drossy and corrupt particles like God's refining fires of duty and trial, living, as He sends us to live, in the open field of the world's sins and sorrows, its plausibilities and lies, its persecutions, animosities, and fears, its eager delights and bitter wants." Christ prays for His disciples, not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil which is in the world.

That view of the subject which denounces all *the amusements and enjoyments of the world* is also, I think, at variance with Scripture. The exhortation, "Love not the world," does not mean, Take no pleasure in the world. Shun its amusements. This, or something approaching to this, was the meaning which certain good, though I think mistaken, men attached to the term world. Christianity is not asceticism. There are many good things in the world—many innocent enjoyments and pleasures—and these are given us by God to use and to enjoy. We all require recreation; this strengthens us for our work, and enables us the better to perform it; and lawful recreations are provided for us

by God. The apostle Paul tells us to use the world, and not abuse it. We ought then gratefully to enjoy the gifts of Providence; not to despise them or denounce them, but with thankful hearts to use them as God intended them to be used. We must not hoard up our riches, like the miser, but use and spend them with thankful hearts for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, the good of our neighbour, as well as for our own comfort. There is nothing morose, nothing harsh and forbidding in Christianity. Only we must beware of abusing the gifts of God's bounty, of converting them into the instruments of sin, and of employing them for a purpose the opposite of that which God intended by them.

Still more at variance with Scripture is the notion that *we should neglect or omit our worldly duties*. There are indeed some who thus interpret the words of St John. They consider our worldly and religious duties as incompatible, so that a man cannot be actively engaged in business, and at the same time possessed of a high religious character. But such a notion is wholly unscriptural. We have worldly duties given us to perform. Most men must work for their own bread. And even those who are rich, and placed beyond the fear of want, ought to employ themselves in some useful occupations; as, for example, in the cultivation of science and the acquirement of knowledge, or better still, in active

exertions for the welfare of their fellow-men. Now, our worldly duties must not be neglected. Sloth is a heinous sin, ruinous both to soul and body. Our whole time cannot be spent in prayer and religious reading; but we must devote a very considerable portion of it in performing the duties of our earthly calling. God has placed us in this world: He Himself has assigned us our proper spheres of labour; our worldly duties are caused by the arrangements of His providence. "Let every man," says the apostle, "wherein he is called, therein abide with God." Nay more, these worldly duties, when performed in a religious spirit, out of a regard to God who has assigned us these duties and as His servants, are themselves converted into religious duties—the duties which we owe to our Heavenly Father. And thus in conscientiously performing these duties, we are as much engaged in doing the work of God as when we are reading His holy word, or offering up our prayers before His throne of grace.

Once more, we are not enjoined to *desist from all attempts to better our worldly position*. The apostle, when he says, "Love not the world," does not mean that we should not seek to improve our earthly condition. We are nowhere forbidden to do so in Scripture. On the contrary, true religion will lead a man to improve himself. It will urge him to do every work that he undertakes as well as he possibly can, conscientiously as to the

Lord. And when any favourable opportunity presents itself of getting on in the world, religion does not forbid him to embrace it, but rather leads him to regard it as a direction and opening of Divine providence. "Godliness," St Paul tells us, "is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come." In short, religion is no impediment to a man's advancement or success in the world, provided his profession or trade be lawful; but, if it has any influence that way, it promotes it, by procuring the blessing of God upon his labours, and by imparting to him that sobriety, honesty, and diligence, to which success is generally attached.

So far, then, I think the statement of St John must be limited. But although this is the case, yet there is something very real and positive in this exhortation of the apostle. It is a very wide and comprehensive saying—a saying the full meaning of which we may not be able fully to grasp. Let us accordingly endeavour to understand it positively—what is implied in this exhortation, "Love not the world."

And the first and most obvious meaning of this exhortation is that we should *avoid the vices of the world*. This meaning is plain and its truth incontrovertible. Everything that is positively sinful in the world must be avoided, because it is sinful—in direct opposition to the laws of God. All those vices and lusts which are

practised by the men of the world must be hated. "Be not conformed," says St Paul, "to this world." Imitate not its corrupt example: conform not yourselves to its sinful practices. And these vices of the world are thus enumerated by the apostle John: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." By the "lust of the flesh" the apostle means all sinful pleasures—all debauchery and excess, all drunkenness and gluttony, all uncleanness and sensuality. By the "lust of the eye," he means all inordinate desire of riches—all gambling and covetousness, all cheating and injustice, all oppression and extortion. And by the "pride of life," he means all inordinate and unholy ambition—all pride and vain glory, all haughtiness and insolence. These three classes of sin—sensuality, covetousness, and ambition—are the chief forms of worldliness; these are not of the Father, but are of the world. It is the world which presents the temptations to these sins; and hence, in this great and important sense, we are not to love the world, meaning thereby the vices and temptations of the world.

It is also implied in this exhortation that we *should oppose ourselves to the degrading maxims of the world.* The world has a morality of its own; but its morality is not the morality of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is pure, heavenly, and divine; that

is earthly, sensual, mean, and grovelling. The maxims of the world's morality are founded on utility; actions are regarded as right or wrong, according as they do or do not advance our worldly interests. Very little regard is paid to the inseparable distinctions between virtue and vice. For example, with the world, now-a-days, riches are everything. Hence we call a family respectable, if it is only rich; we speak of good society, where everything may be present but real goodness; and we honour men, not according to their religious or moral worth, but according to their position and riches in the world. To lawful authority obedience is due; rulers are set over us in the Lord, and respect must be paid to their station; but the esteem which we have for others, and the respect which we pay to them, should be founded on better things than mere birth, fortune, or success. This adoration paid to rank and riches is nothing but pure idolatry offered up to Mammon. Religion, truth, virtue, honour, learning, these are real estimable qualities; these ought to command our respect and love. Let us then rise above the maxims of the world; let us bring them to the test of the word of God; and let us regulate our conduct by the moral precepts of the gospel, and by the holy example of our Lord and Saviour. As He was not of the world—no partisan or apologist of the world, so let us not be of the world; and by opposing ourselves to its low maxims, by looking with disapprobation upon all

those shams, and falsehoods, and wrongs which are countenanced by the world, by manfully resisting their influence and freeing ourselves from their bondage, let us obey the precept of the apostle, "Love not the world."

This precept further implies that *in the performance of our duties we should be indifferent to the opinion of the world.* We must follow the dictates of our conscience, and do what we think is right, whatever be the consequences. Duty is ours, and results are God's. We are God's servants; we are not the servants of the world; we must seek, then, to please God and not man. And so long as we have the approbation of God and of our own conscience, we need not care what the world thinks of us. We should be indifferent to the praises of the world. It is very right indeed to endeavour to secure the good opinion of good men; but to perform our duties solely with a view to please men, to make it the great object of life to secure the favour of others, is a very unworthy motive. So also we should be indifferent to the censures of the world. Many are deterred from doing right, because the world would laugh at them or chide them; many are ashamed of Christ for fear of the scorn and ridicule of men; many have, for fear of giving offence, accommodated their religion to the sinful maxims of the world; many have yielded to the railleries of their friends, and have done those things which were contrary

to the dictates of their conscience. But let us rise above this slavish fear of the world. Let us act as Christian men, bravely and manfully performing our duties, undeterred by the world's frowns, and uncorrupted by the world's praises. When any duty is before us, let not the opinion of the world trouble us for a single instant, but in God's name, and as His servants, let us do our duty. Oh, that we could imbibe somewhat of that noble, free, and independent spirit which actuated the apostle Paul, when he uttered these grand words: "With me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; He that judgeth me is the Lord."

But what, perhaps, the apostle chiefly intends by this exhortation is that *we should not seek our chief happiness in the world*. "Love not the world," that is, love it not immoderately. Love it not more than God. Our hearts are too narrow to embrace two such objects as God and the world. If we love and serve God, if we desire above all things His approbation, if we seek our portion in a better world, then does this world lose its hold over our affections. Whereas, if we make it our chief pursuit and the great object of our lives to enjoy the pleasures, to secure the riches, or to obtain the honours of the world, the love of God cannot dwell in our hearts. We either seek our chief happiness in this world or in the next; we either cultivate the favour of the world or seek to

serve God; we cannot do both at the same time. "No man," says our Lord, "can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will cleave to the one and forsake the other; ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Hence the apostle adds to his exhortation, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." God demands the chief place in our affections: He requires that we should love Him with all our hearts; He will not admit of a rival; and hence He enjoins us not to love the world. Observe, it is not merely the love of sinful objects which is here condemned—the vices of the world; but the immoderate love of lawful objects—the good and desirable things of the world—the comforts and conveniences of life—loving them more than God, fixing our chief affections upon them. If we love any object more than God, that object becomes our God. If our heart is divided between God and the world, we shall lose the favour of God.

As the conclusion of the whole matter, and as embodying the entire spirit of the apostolic exhortation, we *should live to Christ in the world*. The world is not our master; but Christ is. If we be indeed believers, we are the servants of Christ. "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men." Now this gives us the victory over the world. The believer is Christ's servant, and as such he performs his duties without regard to the opinion, or maxims, or customs of the world. Nay,

more than this, he is delivered from being tempted by the sinful and foolish pleasures of the world: his feelings are so elevated, that all these pleasures are to him insipid: he has lost his taste for them. So also the riches of the world lose their charm, and the honours of the world lose their glitter. It is not this world, but the next, which exercises the greatest influence over him; his affections are fixed on heaven, not on earth; he walks by faith, not by sight, "looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal."

Such, then, is the meaning of the exhortation of the apostle, "Love not the world." Avoid its vices. Shun its low maxims. In the performance of duty, be indifferent to its opinion. Seek not your chief happiness in it. Live in it as the servants of Christ.—Let us thus live in the world as the servants of Christ—true, active Christian lives. Christ has abundant work for us to do in the world; let us do that work to the best of our ability, and with a sole regard to His approbation. "If the Son makes us free, then are we free indeed:" His love will be implanted in our hearts instead of the love of the world; there will be within us a living principle of action, which will cause us to renounce everything that is mean, and false, and bad, and to cultivate everything that is true, and honest, and just, and pure, and

lovely, and of good report; there will be a spiritual light kindled within us which will clearly point out to us our duty, and, without being puzzled with difficulties, we will be able at once to comprehend and to practise the precept of the apostle, "Love not the world."

CHAPTER V.

Power of Prayer.

PRAYER is very simple in its nature: it is merely asking God for such things as we want. At least this is the chief notion of it; and this view carried out includes all the different parts of prayer—adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition, and intercession. There is nothing mystical about prayer; far less are any extraordinary qualifications requisite. The Syro-Phoenician woman, who asked the Lord to cure her daughter, prayed. The publican, who implored forgiveness in the temple, prayed. The sailor in the storm, who besought the Lord to still the wind and to calm the billows, prayed. All that is requisite is the feeling of want, and the belief that God hears and answers. Thus, then, prayer is communion with God; it is the exercise of the child of humanity, coming in his wants and sorrows to his heavenly Father, unburdening himself of these wants and sorrows, and looking up with child-like confidence to God for His paternal assistance, blessing, and active sympathy.

Hence it is that *faith* is essential to prayer. Before

we can pray, we must believe that God hears us and will answer us. "All things whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," says St James; "for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Not that this faith implies a confident persuasion that we shall obtain the precise things we ask; because such a persuasion may rest on false grounds, for we may ask what is injurious to us, and what God has not promised to bestow. But by it is meant a firm belief that God hears prayer, and that He will grant our requests, so far as they are really for our good and agreeable to His holy will. And especially has this faith a respect to the Lord Jesus Christ, inasmuch as He is the only medium of access to God the Father, and as it is His merits and intercession alone which impart efficacy to our prayers.

And then another quality, which is evidently essential to prayer, is *sincerity*. Without this there is no prayer, but a feigned petition, an act of hypocrisy, an attempt as foolish as it is impious to impose upon God. To confess sins which we do not feel, or of which we are unconscious; to make professions of humility when we are proud, of sorrow when we are impenitent, and of gratitude when we are unthankful; to ask for blessings which we do not desire; to make promises which we

have no intention of performing; to go through a form of set phrases and expressions, without any feeling of want or wish to be heard: this surely is not prayer; this is coming in the spirit of falsehood into the presence of the God of truth. And yet we are often chargeable with this offence. For example, in the secret prayer which you this morning offered, were you perfectly sincere in what you said, or did you pray without thought, and without any wish or expectation of an answer? When you confessed that you were a miserable sinner, did you really feel so? When you implored God for His Holy Spirit to deliver you from selfishness, worldliness, and covetousness, to mortify your ambition, and to teach you self-denial, did you really wish God to take you at your word? Think on this. Think how essential sincerity is to prayer. Think how insincerity converts prayer into an act of hypocrisy, an abomination in the sight of God.

Now real prayer, asking for those things which we want, with all sincerity and with a full persuasion that God hears and answers, is a mighty weapon. It gives man, the worm of the dust, power with God even to prevail. It is the repetition of that mysterious transaction, of which we read in the book of Genesis, Jacob wrestling and prevailing with the angel of the covenant. Think on our blessed Lord's own words, "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find; knock, and

it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him." Thus expressing the freeness, the readiness, and the liberality with which God answers prayer. We are not straitened in God: He has promised, in the most liberal manner, to give us what we ask; He will do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. But we are straitened in ourselves, by reason of the weakness of our faith, the narrowness of our desires, and the lukewarmness of our piety. "If any of you lack wisdom," says St James, and the same is true of any other blessing, "let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." Now I am persuaded that we do not feel this; at least we do not act upon it; we do not believe what Christ says about the mighty power of prayer, otherwise we would be oftener going to Him with our requests, and, like Hezekiah, spreading them out before the throne of grace.

But what are we to pray for? What are those blessings which we are at liberty to ask from God? Now, certainly all spiritual blessings are appropriate subjects

of prayer—pardon, holiness, faith, love, humility, penitence, the gift of the Holy Spirit; these we may ask without any hesitation, and without any fear of a refusal. And undoubtedly these are the chief subjects of prayer. It is our higher and spiritual life, that is the all-important concern; it is the regeneration of the soul, that is the one thing needful. This should be the constant burden of our prayers. We should be continually imploring God, out of His infinite mercy and love in Christ Jesus, to save our souls, to forgive us our innumerable offences, to bestow upon us the graces of the Spirit, to shed abroad His love in our hearts, to make us grow in grace, to prepare us here for heaven, and at length to bring us to it hereafter.

And yet I am not sure if we know what we are asking, when we pray for spiritual mercies; I am not sure but that it might be said of us what our Lord said to the sons of Zebedee, "Ye know not what ye ask;" and that we would be grieved if God granted our requests. For example, one of our most common prayers is that God would save us—pardon our sins, and at length bring us to heaven. Now, how would an answer to this prayer affect many of us? "I will grant your request," might God say to one. "I will save you; but as it is impossible to save you, unless I save you from sin, and as I see that you are worldly and selfish, I will take from you such and such an object of desire; I will re-

move from you that beloved child; and if this will not do, I will send you bad health and appoint you long days of suffering and sickness." "I will save you, but you are covetous; I will take away your money; I will lessen your position in the world; I will strip you of your fine linen, and fine house, and fine table; I will reduce you from affluence to poverty." "I will save you, but you are ambitious; I will therefore cross all the fair designs you scheme; I will disappoint all your expectations; I will mortify your self-conceit and pride; I will blast your earthly gourds; I will cause you to be looked down upon by your fellow-men; I find it necessary to teach you humility and contentment, and the other gentle graces, by a severe and expensive discipline." "I will save you, but you are self-righteous; I will therefore take away your reputation; I will expose to the world your weaknesses, your infirmities, your follies; I must lessen you in self-estimation; I must convince you of sin; I must disclose to you your wretchedness, your misery, your blindness, and your nakedness." Now, how would we relish this; and yet it is essential; for the sun can sooner be turned out of its course, than a soul can be saved from hell without being saved from sin. Verily we often know not what we ask. The sons of Zebedee asked to sit on the right and left hand of Christ in His kingdom; but in making this request, they in reality asked the bitter cup and the bloody baptism

of Christ. So we ask to be saved; in making this request, we may be in reality asking for misfortune, trial, sorrow, disappointment, loss, suffering, bereavement, in a word, the blasting of our earthly prospects. Not that such discipline is always necessary for salvation, but in our case, for all that we know, it may be necessary; at least, certain it is, that self-denial and the cross are necessary; and that Gethsemane and Calvary are on the road to glory.

Certain, however, it is, that there is one blessing which, if we sincerely want and ask, God will give it to us, though perhaps not in the way which we expect or desire. If we want to be made good and holy; if we really feel our sins, and really wish to be made believing, loving, and good, such blessings God will confer upon us. He will give the Holy Spirit to them who ask Him. Here there is no restriction, no limitation. In praying for temporal mercies, we must do so in uncertainty whether we shall obtain them, and in submission to the Divine will; for it is often impossible for us to know, if the mercies we ask are really for our good. But in praying for the Holy Spirit, we labour under no such uncertainty; for we are well assured that this gift is essentially good for us, both as regards this present life and as regards the life which is to come; always proper for God to give and fit for us to receive. We cannot desire the Holy Spirit too earnestly, pray for

Him too fervently, or expect Him too ardently. Hence, if any one really desires the Holy Spirit; in other words, really desires to be delivered from the power of sin, and to be made good and holy, he shall have the petitions that he desires of God, yea, he already has them, for he who desires the Spirit is already under the influence of that blessed Agent.

And hence we may see how the Holy Spirit is necessary to teach us to pray aright for spiritual mercies. We must feel our spiritual wants, before we can pray with sincerity; we must be anxious to obtain holiness, before we can truly ask it of God. Now it is the Holy Spirit that makes us feel our wants, and implants within us a true and living desire after holiness. Hence it is said that the Spirit helps our infirmities, and makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. This He does in our hearts; He intercedes within us; those desires, and earnest longings, and thirstings, and fervent aspirations after spiritual mercies; that hunger of the soul which can only be satisfied with the bread of life; that feeling of want which God only can satisfy; that spiritual dissatisfaction which aspires after greater attainments; all these elements of prayer are produced by the influences of the Holy Spirit, and are the intercession which He makes for the saints.

But what shall we do if we feel no such spiritual desires? Are we to express them in prayer as if we

actually felt them? By no means: pretence and affectation are always wrong, but especially in prayer. What then? Are we to abstain from prayer? God forbid. Our coldness and spiritual deadness, our present inability to pray, ought not to keep us from prayer. We ought to come to God, and speak to Him about this coldness and deadness; tell Him of our hard hearts; confess that we cannot pray; and then it may be that the spirit of prayer will descend upon us, and we may find spiritual desires rising within our breasts; and thus we may be able in all sincerity to pour out our hearts before God; for prayer itself has a sanctifying efficacy; and it is the frequent experience of Christians that prayers commenced in coldness end in fervency and earnestness. "It is a mistake," observes Tholuck, "a dangerous error to suppose that man should pray only when his heart prompts. What shall one do when his heart dies away and incites him no more? Knowest thou not that the soul is stimulated to prayer by prayer itself? Hast thou never yet experienced that happy state when the soul, grieving over its inward barrenness and coldness, casts itself down and begins with frigid feeling to pray, and this very prayer transforms the heart of stone into one of flesh, and thine affections begin to swell within thee, and to pour themselves out more and more freely, and the words flow forth in richer and richer abundance, and thou canst find no end to them, and thou art overpowered and criest

aloud: Yea, verily, O God, Thou canst do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

But we are not limited in our prayers to spiritual mercies: we may "ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as for the soul." Whatever may be the opinion of some divines on this point, I cannot see how it can for a moment be questioned, that we are permitted, and indeed enjoined, to pray for temporal as well as for spiritual mercies. The very first petition in the Lord's Prayer, which has a reference to ourselves, is a petition for temporal mercies: "Give us this day our daily bread." It is putting a false gloss upon the passage to say that it is spiritual bread which is here intended. The examples are numerous in the word of God of prayers for temporal mercies, which were offered up and graciously answered. And in most of the promises made to prayer, there is no restriction or limitation. Whatever we want, we may ask in prayer. "Ask, and it shall be given you." "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask, believing, ye shall receive." "Verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you." Not that these promises mean that God will always give us the precise things which we ask; for such an answer to prayer might often be to us a misfortune and not a blessing. But they at least imply that we are permitted to ask what we please, in submission to the Divine will.

Now here we do greatly err; we do not use this blessed privilege as we ought. There is among some a feeling as if it were inconsistent with God's dignity to tell Him of our common daily wants; to ask temporal blessings of Him, at least temporal blessings which some may judge unimportant. I find no such restriction in the word of God; our confidence and our behaviour should be that of children, coming to our Heavenly Father, and telling Him all our wants, however trifling these wants may seem, and perhaps in reality are: speaking to Him as we would to a bosom friend; asking of Him everything that we want; and expressing our desires in the language of prayer.

But here we are met with the objections of philosophy. "Prayer for spiritual mercies and prayer for temporal blessings, the bestowal of which depends upon the will of man, all this is very proper and reasonable; but the unbending laws of nature raise an insurmountable barrier to many prayers. The sailor in the storm may as well pray for the sun to go out of its course, as for the storm to cease; for the laws of wind and storm are fixed and invariable. In short, prayer for temporal mercies is necessarily limited; at the utmost, it can only extend to spiritual influences exerted on the minds of others, but cannot possibly extend to matters wherein the laws of nature are involved."

Now I do not say that there is no difficulty in the

objection. On the contrary, I frankly admit that there is a difficulty; that there is an apparent opposition between the immutability of natural laws and God's answers to prayer for temporal mercies. Nor do I wish to divest religion of mysteries and difficulties: there is ample room for the exercise of faith. At the same time, I cannot agree with that solution of the difficulty, advanced by certain divines, that the entire use of prayer is the indirect effect, the reflex influence which it has upon our minds by making us more submissive, more patient, and more humble, but that we are not to expect a direct and immediate answer; that, for example, when we pray for health in the time of sickness, we are not to expect health in answer to prayer, but patience to bear our sickness. This appears to me to destroy the true nature of prayer. If we are permitted by God to pray for health, we are entitled and encouraged to expect the very blessing for which we pray, and not some other blessing, however desirable that may be. To be permitted to pray for health, and yet to be told that we are not to expect it, but something else, is a contradiction; why not pray for the other blessing directly? What is this but to destroy the very nature of prayer? How different is the Scriptural account of prayer from that which a cold theology teaches! Tell a man that the only effect of prayer is its reflex influence upon himself, and that it is in vain to expect the blessings which he

asks, as the laws of nature are uniform; and you destroy every devotional emotion within him; you convert prayer into an imposition. But tell him that he has a Father in heaven; speak to him of the love and care and kindness of that Father; tell him that God will be influenced by his petitions, even as any earthly friend; that he is at liberty to ask anything that he pleases from God, and that if he ask in faith he will receive it, provided it be really for his good; tell him, in short, that God is his wisest, greatest, kindest, and most liberal benefactor; and omit not also to speak of the love, and sympathy, and merits of that Friend who intercedes for him within the veil; and then he will feel that prayer is no fiction but a reality; and he is enabled to exercise a child-like reliance on the care and love of that God, without whom a sparrow cannot fall to the ground, and by whom the hairs of his head are all numbered.

The above objection is not insurmountable. The opposition between the permanence of natural laws and prayer is apparent, not real. Both truths may be admitted. We may believe that, except in miraculous dispensations, the laws of nature are fixed and invariable. And we may also believe, without any contradiction, in the power of prayer. The laws of storms are probably as fixed as the law of gravity which binds the worlds to their orbits; but the sailor who cries for help can, in a hundred ways, be saved by that God whom wind and

storms obey. Indeed, the great miracle of Providence is, that it performs its operations, and works out its designs, without requiring to have recourse to miracles or sensible interpositions. And thus it is that prayer, which is so often a stumbling-block and an offence to the wise men of this world, because they cannot reconcile it with the permanence of natural laws, is the refuge and the support of all who submit their understandings to the teachings of the word of God. God reveals Himself, not to our intellectual wisdom and pride, but to our child-like faith and trust. "The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way."

We are living in another world than the mere natural and intellectual: the world of spirits is around us and within us. God is far nearer to us than we believe or suspect. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." With our natural senses and faculties we discern nothing but the world of sense—the effects of the laws of nature—the mere external operations and movements of matter. But could the veil be taken from our eyes, we would find ourselves, like the servant of Elisha, also in a world of spirits; we would see, not only one human mind influencing another, but influences from above and influences from beneath, all exerting a mighty power upon us, and either drawing us to God or tempting us to evil. And if this be so, surely prayer must be most necessary for our security; and surely also it must be

true that God, who sees all things, and can do all things, and loves us as a Father, hears and answers prayer; and then, as the apostle argues, "if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."

But there is another difficulty, and to some minds a still greater objection to this power of prayer—the objection which experience adduces. Perhaps all who have in any measure put in practice the course inculcated in this chapter; who have acknowledged God in their earthly concerns, and asked Him for those temporal mercies which they want; who have in all sincerity and earnestness expressed their desires to God in prayer; yet have often found that their prayers are unanswered and their desires disappointed. You may, for example, have prayed earnestly and waited long for a particular blessing, and yet that blessing may not be granted you. What then? Will you lose your faith in prayer? Will you give up making known your requests to God? God forbid. God does hear your prayers, even when He refuses your requests. What you wanted might have been injurious to you, and therefore God in His mercy disappoints you. "Ye ask," says St James, "but ye receive not, because ye ask amiss." In praying for temporal mercies, we must do so with submission to the Divine will; and if we do not receive them, far from murmuring or repining, we ought rather to thank God

for the refusal. He knows what is best for us; we do not know ourselves. Like children, we stretch forth our hands to grasp objects which would be hurtful to us; and hence our merciful Father removes these objects beyond our reach. God is daily teaching us in His providence our constant dependence on Him, and is constantly inculcating the duty of submission. Hence then, like children, we should take a firm hold of our Father's hand, and suffer ourselves to be led by him, though it may be often by a way that we know not—often the way of discipline and chastisement. But God forbid that we should ever by any disappointment lose our confidence in God as a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God. And even although we may not clearly discern His hand in our earthly circumstances, yet let us ever go to Him in prayer, being fully persuaded that, whether we discern it or not, all our circumstances are ordered by the Lord.

The lesson taught us in this chapter is very obvious; that we should make known all our wants, whether for the soul or the body, to God; that we should ask Him for everything we require; that we should tell Him all our desires, and difficulties, and perplexities; that we should speak to Him without reserve; believing firmly that He hears our prayers and will answer them. Only these two things must be remembered, that we pray with sincerity, really desiring the blessings which we

ask, and with submission, remembering that, especially as regards our temporal concerns, we may ask what is injurious to us, and therefore what God in His mercy refuses.

CHAPTER VI.

Living to Christ.

LIVING to Christ is not only an essential duty of Christianity, but, in point of fact, it is the whole of Christianity; the sum and substance of all its practical duties. It is the character, the conduct, and the life of the Christian. We are not our own, we are the property of another, we are bought with a price; and hence it is our incumbent duty not to live to ourselves, but to Christ, whose servants and property we are. The demand made upon us is the entire devotion of our hearts and lives; the consecration of all our powers to the service of the Redeemer. This Christ requires of every one who professes to be His disciple, and He will be satisfied with nothing less. He will not admit of a rival in our affections; the obedience which He demands is unreserved and universal; the love which He requires is supreme. In short, the essence of practical Christianity is self-sacrifice, that is, devotion to the Saviour.

Opposed to living to Christ is living to ourselves. Selfishness and self-sacrifice are the two great anta-

gonistic principles; the one the revolt of the soul from God, and the other the return of the soul to God; the one the cause only of that which is evil, and the other the source of everything that is good; the one terminating at last in spiritual death—in the final extinction of all that is holy and godlike—and the other leading to the realms of eternal life. Hence the apparent paradox of our Saviour, with which He enforced the duty of self-sacrifice: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it” (Matt. xvi. 24, 25).

Now, if we take a calm and dispassionate survey of the Christian world, and inquire which of these two principles prevail, I fear that we will be constrained to confess that selfishness is the more common. Most men live to themselves; the ruling principle of their conduct is self-love; they seek their own happiness, their own good. They make something connected with self the chief object of pursuit. This world, and not Christ, occupies the throne of their affections. They are eager to advance their own interests, or those of their friends, and that in entire neglect of the claims of Christ upon their affections and lives. They reverse the command of the Saviour, and seek first the things of the world, expecting that the kingdom of God and

His righteousness shall be added unto them. Even their very religion is a religion of self-love; it is either that they may escape punishment, or else that they may indulge themselves in a certain sentimental piety. And thus the complaint of St Paul concerning Christians of his time is far more applicable to Christians in our days: "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

In our day a spirit of worldliness has crept into the church, and prevails to an alarming extent among professors of religion. The altar of Mammon is set up in the temple of God. The world is in a state of perpetual excitement; competition prevails to an extent hitherto unknown; and thus it happens that religious men are insensibly drawn into the vortex, and their good impressions are overwhelmed with the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. Hence the great inconsistencies of professing Christians. It would seem that a man can now be religious and worldly at one and the same time. Thus we see one man, eager in the pursuit of riches, completely engrossed in business—and yet professing to be a believer in, and perhaps thinking himself actuated by the principles of that religion which asserts that covetousness is idolatry, and that Heaven's gates are for ever barred against the avaricious. We see another surrounded with all the luxuries of life, attentive to outward display, completely

taken up with earth's vanities, entirely devoted to worldly ease—and yet all along professing and declaring himself to be a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth. We see a third aiming at fame and popular applause, doing all his works that he might be seen of men, seeking the honour which cometh from man in preference to that which cometh from God—and yet believing that he is a disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus. Religion demands crucifixion to the world; it asserts the impossibility of serving both God and Mammon; it requires self-sacrifice.

This is certainly an age of much religious profession. A profession of religion, provided it be not of a high standard, is even creditable in the present day. But what the church has gained by the increase of its members, it has lost in their purity: the standard of Christian life has been lowered. Lukewarmness almost everywhere prevails; and men are satisfied with their religious attainments, although far below the requirements of the gospel. To be a true Christian, according to the standard of the present age, is to abstain from doubtful practices, to live a moral life, to attend public ordinances, to pay some attention to the devotion of the closet, to have family worship, to give to missionary societies; but how far short do these mere external duties—this respectable religion of the world—come of the standard of the Bible? of the demands of the

gospel. According to the Bible standard, to be a true Christian is to live not to ourselves but to Jesus Christ; to devote all our powers, and all our time, and all our riches to Him; to live only for His glory; to be influenced by invisible realities; to walk by faith and not by sight. According to the modern standard of Christian life, a man may live to himself; but according to the Bible standard, he lives not to himself, but to Him who died for him.

But let us not remain with generalities; let us descend to particulars.

Living to Christ implies *entire devotion to His cause*. We cannot live for any object without being devoted to it. The man who lives to the world, is devoted to the world. The man who lives for riches, is eager in the pursuit of them. So the man who lives to Christ, is devoted to His cause. Now there is a great want of this devotion in the present day. Men are only half Christians. They do not cleave to religion with all their hearts. Their ardour is soon cooled, and the world contends with Christ for the possession of their hearts. They, indeed, profess great attachment to the cause of Christ; but whenever a duty is required of them which demands self-denial, then they begin to make excuses and refuse compliance. They have learned the art of making their religion agree with their interest. So long as no sacrifice is demanded of them, they will

be religious; but whenever the path of religion and the path of worldly ease diverge; whenever interest comes into competition with the claims of Christ, then their religious zeal on a sudden declines, and interest prevails. They will follow Christ when He leads them by an easy path; but they forsake Him when He requires them to deny themselves and take up their cross. But the man who lives to Christ, devotes himself entirely to His service: he follows Him in the gloomy valley as well as among pleasant pastures. When called upon, he is ready to take up the cross and to crucify the flesh. He feels that he is not his own. The faculties of his mind, the feelings of his heart, the members of his body, his riches, his time, his talents—all that he has, and all that he is, are devoted to the interests of Christ, and are employed in obedience to His demands. And thus, however painful it may be, he is always ready to renounce his own wishes, and to act contrary to his own interests, whenever the cause of Christ requires him to do so. “Ye are,” says the apostle, “not your own; ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

Living to Christ also implies *singleness of intention*. We must live to Him wholly and to Him only. “The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of dark-

ness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Now it is a want of this singleness of intention that is the great mistake of professing Christians. They live as if that were possible which our Saviour positively asserts to be impossible; they endeavour to serve both God and the world. Their affections are divided; they possess different passions pulling them different ways; they wish to serve Christ, but at the same time to hold by the world; to obtain their good things in this life, and to enjoy heaven in the next. But the man who lives to Christ, lives no more to himself. He possesses that single eye which our Lord so highly commends, that unity of affection, that singleness of intention, which makes him a consistent and stedfast believer. He has one purpose at all times in view; one object which on all occasions he pursues; one ruling passion which regulates his whole life. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of his existence. One Master commands his services. To one Leader he is entirely devoted.

Living to Christ further implies *religious earnestness*. Religious earnestness is the great want of the present day. If men were as earnest in their religion as they are in their worldly business, or in the pursuit of

science, the church would be very different from what it now is. There is no want of religious profession, but there is a great want of spiritual life. The church is like the appearance which Ezekiel saw in the vision of the valley of dry bones, after part of the transformation was effected, after the bones had come together, and the flesh had come up upon them, and the skin had covered them, but before any breath had entered into them. We look upon the modern standard of Christian life as the highest that can be attained, and regard all nobler aims as unsubstantial and enthusiastic. But the man who really lives to Christ has devoted himself to His service with an intensity of purpose. He has, as it were, thrown his whole soul into the cause of Christ. He walks as if heaven and hell, and all the realities of eternity, were present before his eyes. It is these invisible realities which govern his life. Oh! if we but realized religious truths as we ought, and as we shall realize them in a future state; if we but felt those things to be true which the Bible reveals; if our eternal interests weighed upon us as our temporal interests do, and with a force equal to their importance; we would be inspired with an earnestness, compared with which the fervour and the zeal of the most earnest in the present day would appear but as lukewarmness and indifference.

To these observations it may, perhaps, be objected,

that all this is very well for ministers; that they ought certainly thus to live to Christ; that they are called to do so; and that they have nothing else in the world to do. We own that we in the ministry ought thus to live to Christ, and we deplore that we come so far short of this our duty; but you err grievously in supposing that this is peculiar to us. What is our duty is also yours. One law shall judge us both, and indeed the duty is easier in one respect to you than it is to us. We are not, indeed, engaged in worldly business, but we have peculiar temptations from which you are free. With us religion is a profession, and we are tempted to regard it merely as such; to overlook our own souls in caring for yours; to preach to others and to forget to preach to ourselves. But you can live to Christ in the world even to better purpose. Our duties are already of a religious nature; but you can convert the ordinary, secular duties of the world into religious by living to Christ.

The great determining motive for thus living to Christ—the inducement which causes the believer thus to devote himself to the service of the Saviour—is *the love of Christ*. “The love of Christ,” says the apostle, “constraineth us to live no more to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again.” The self-sacrifice of Christ is the cause of the self-sacrifice of the believer. Think on the greatness of His self-sacrifice. Represent to your-

self the Son of God leaving the bosom of His Father, uniting Himself to mortal flesh, living in the world, working incessantly for the good of men. Go to Gethsemane, and there contemplate Jesus suffering the mysterious agony and bloody sweat, falling to the ground, offering up strong crying and tears, wrestling with the powers of evil. Go to Calvary, look up to the cross, and there see Jesus suspended, suffering the agonies of His most cruel death, execrated by an unbridled populace, and apparently forsaken by God. Ah! ye strong crying and tears, thou bloody agony of the garden, thou crown of thorns, thou cross of Calvary, thou pierced side, thou bitter cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" ye speak to us of a Saviour's love. Every incident of our Saviour's life was a proof of love; every agony of His death was an effect of love. Herein indeed is love—love in all its purity, love without a bound, love without a parallel, the greatness of which no angelic mind can comprehend, and the wonders of which eternity itself will not be able to disclose.

Now observe how strongly such a motive acts upon the true believer. He believes and realizes the love which Christ has to him. When convinced of sin, he saw the misery from which he must be rescued; and when he actually came to the Saviour, he realized the sufferings which were endured for his deliverance. Hence it is that gratitude arises from this sense of the love of Christ.

“We love Him because He first loved us.” The believer feels that he is not his own. Love has purchased him, constrained him, transported him, carried him as it were out of himself. His life has been rescued from a death most terrible, and hence he consecrates his rescued life to the service of his great Deliverer. His life is a thank-offering for the blessings of redemption; and all his actions are but the outward expressions of his gratitude. The language of his inmost soul is, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” What shall I do for Him who has done so much for me? And thus constrained by the love of Christ, he lives no more unto himself, but unto Him who died for him and rose again.

It is this motive which renders obedience to the commands of Christ easy, and transforms the most difficult of duties, even that of self-sacrifice itself, into the most delightful of services. Thus believers in ancient times rejoiced, not only that they were called upon to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for His sake. Indeed, if our obedience does not proceed from love to Christ, it ceases to be virtuous; it is the obedience of a slave; it is entirely negative and destitute of moral worth. It is love that puts life into obedience, and renders it acceptable unto God. This makes the yoke of Christ easy, and His burden light. If we really love Christ, we will readily obey His commands; we will heartily consent to that statement of the apostle: “His commandments are

not grievous." Love to Christ transforms our duties into pleasures, and our exercises of self-denial into pleasant services. What will not gratitude do for one whom it loves? What works will it not perform? What sacrifices will it not make? This gives enlargement of heart to the believer, and transforms the service of Christ into perfect freedom. To live to Christ, to consecrate ourselves to His service, is happiness, that He should be pleased to accept our poor and worthless services as the evidences of our gratitude.

It would be repeating ourselves to insist upon it that living to Christ is *the source of religious comfort*. It is strange that the path of self-denial should at the same time be the path of happiness; and that self-sacrifice, the most difficult of duties, should at the same time be the truest joy. All this arises from the motive of the true believer's obedience—love to Christ. It is not until the love of Christ constrains, and, as it were, possesses a man, that he derives much pleasure from religion. We must make a complete surrender of ourselves to Christ; there must be no mental reservation, no drawing back, no exception; we must give to Christ ourselves and everything which we possess. The half Christian, the man who endeavours to serve both Christ and the world, who tries to make religion agree with his interest, who shrinks from self-denial, loses much of the happiness of religion; to him the description of religious joys

is unintelligible; he has never felt in its true force the love of Christ; he wants that element in religion which converts its painful duties into easy and delightful services.

“Live, while you live, the Epicure would say,
 And seize the pleasures of the present day.
 Live, while you live, the sacred Preacher cries,
 And give to God each moment as it flies.
 Lord, in my view let both united be;
 I live in pleasure, when I live to Thee.”

And as living to Christ is the source of religious comfort, so it is also *the cause of Christian usefulness*. We are not to imagine that by living to Christ, we cease to live for the benefit of our fellow-men. Far from these being incompatible, they are in reality closely and inseparably connected; I had almost said that they are one and the same duty. It is by living to Christ that we do good to others. No man can live to Christ without imitating His example, and His life consisted in doing good. His cause in the world is in reality the cause of humanity; it proclaims good-will to man; it is true philanthropy—a philanthropy which embraces the eternal as well as the temporal interests of men. We may well suspect the reality, or at least the purity of that piety which does not excite us to do good to man. “All the law,” says St Paul, “is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Live to Christ, and in doing so you will do good to others; you will visit the fatherless and the widows in

their affliction; you will seek the good of others that they may be saved; your religion will be purified from selfishness; and you will desire the salvation of your neighbour even as your own.

Here is the true object for which to live. Life without an object is a miserable dream—a poor and despicable thing. If we would act as rational beings, we must have some object for which to live—some end to reach—some pursuit to engage, and on which to concentrate our faculties. Let this object, this end, this pursuit, be the glory of Christ. Live to Christ, and then what a change will this make upon life! It will not be a mere temporary thing—a pursuit after objects fading and transient—a vanity, a nothingness, a dream. It will be redeemed from vanity; it will be inseparably linked to eternity; it will be the beginning of heaven on earth. All those actions done with a view to promote our own interests will perish with life; but all those actions done for the sake of Christ will endure throughout eternity, and be rewarded with the Divine approbation. It is only when we live to Christ that we in reality live. For what purpose, think you, were we sent into this world? Was it merely to live to ourselves, to trifle away our few short years in folly and in vanity, and then to die? No; it was to live to Christ; to employ all our energies in His service; to be devoted to His cause.

Live, then, to Christ. Make His cause your cause; throw yourself into His service; be devoted to His glory. Let the advancement of His spiritual kingdom, in the salvation and holiness of those around you—the promotion of a true and living Christianity in yourself and others—be the great object of your life. This is the true dignity of man; this only is a life worth having. Shall it be said of us, when we come to die, that our lives were worthless; that it would have been as well, or far better for the world, if we had never been born? Must our years be spent in sloth, and our talents perverted and abused? Reader, arouse yourself! Know you not that you are bought with a price? You are not your own. You are called upon to live to Christ. Live to yourself, and you shall die. Live to Christ, and you shall live indeed. May Christ shed abroad His love in our hearts, so that we may be constrained to live to Him. May the Spirit teach us what we owe to Christ, what claims He has upon our services and our lives. May He awaken us from our spiritual sloth, and so quicken us from death, that we may really live while we live. Come, Thou Spirit of the living God, and breath upon us, and we shall live!

CHAPTER VII.

Christian Liberty.

WE all know what is meant by liberty, and what a great blessing it is, although, perhaps, we may be unable to give an exact definition of it. It is the opposite of servitude, bondage, oppression. We know what slavery is. The prisoner, who is not at liberty to go where he will, who is enclosed within the four walls of his narrow cell, is in bondage. The slave who is entirely subject to the will of his master, who is as much his property as any of his other goods, who can be bought and sold at the caprice of others, is in cruel and unjust servitude. The subject of a tyrannical government, who cannot speak as he thinks, who cannot worship God as his conscience tells him, is destitute of that liberty which is the common right of all men.

But there is a slavery of the soul far more oppressive and degrading than that of the body; there is a bondage more to be dreaded than a prison, the rigour of an earthly task-master, or the oppression of a cruel tyrant. That

man is in bondage who is a slave to superstition—who, it may be, torments his body and afflicts his soul, who goes through a thousand vain ceremonies, because he thinks thereby to atone for his sins. That man is a slave who is hurried along by passion—whose vices have obtained the mastery over him, who cannot abstain from the intoxicating cup, or avoid the alluring bait. In a word, every unconverted man who tries to banish God and religion from his mind, is a slave—a slave to guilty fears, and unruly passions, and the world, and sin, and Satan—a slave even while he promises himself liberty, and thinks that by casting off the fear of God and the restraints of His law, he has freedom to do as he pleases. “He is the freeman whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves beside.”

One of the great offices to which the Lord Jesus Christ was anointed, was to proclaim liberty to those who were in slavery. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” He came not, indeed, as the Jews expected, to deliver an oppressed people from bondage and tyranny, but He came to deliver the human race from the bondage of sin, and Satan, and hell, and to bestow upon them liberty from their sinful passions, and from their guilty fears, and from the

world, and from all that the world contains, and from themselves.

In this chapter, I propose to point out a few particulars in which this Christian liberty consists, in order to excite those who have not obtained it eagerly to seek after it, and to exhort those who already in some measure experience it to stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ has made them free.

L.—There is liberty from ritual enactments.

In the early ages of Christianity, believers were in danger of being brought into subjection under the law of Moses. There were then numerous teachers, who taught that the observance of the Mosaic law was necessary to salvation. Now the law of Moses was certainly a heavy burden; it was, as St Peter says, “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.” Its numerous rites, its costly offerings, its various washings, its endless distinctions between the clean and the unclean, all rendered it a laborious service. But Christians are freed from this. St Paul especially was called upon to maintain this liberty. It was his constant doctrine that the law of Moses was not binding upon the Gentile Christians. He continually opposed the Judaizing teachers who taught otherwise, and warned his converts not to be led astray by their doctrines, or to give up that liberty which the gospel had conferred upon them.

“Stand fast, therefore, in that liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not again entangled with the yoke of bondage. Behold I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.” And he warns them against the insidious attempts of certain false brethren, “who came in privily to spy out their liberty which they had in Christ Jesus, and to bring them into bondage.”

It is true that we are in no danger of being led astray by Judaizing teachers, or of being brought under the yoke of the law of Moses; but there are many who are still in bondage under ritual enactments. Such slavery prevails largely in the Church of Rome, nor is it absent from the Protestant churches. Thus, for example, we find some who are completely enslaved to ceremonies; who cannot pray except in a certain posture of body, in a particular church, or in a certain form of words; who set such a value upon ceremonies and forms as if they were matters essential to salvation. We find others who are slaves to vain scruples, whose religion has degenerated into certain superstitious rites, and expends itself in a scrupulous attention to childish trifles.

Now, the enlightened Christian is delivered from this slavery to ritual enactments. He rises far above these formal observances. He regards and honours them, indeed, as matters of order, and therefore has no scruple in performing them; but he does not look upon them

as matters of faith, or as of any importance to salvation. And thus, in things indifferent, he becomes all things to all men, and can accommodate himself to the rules of that particular class of Christians with whom he worships. "Let no man," says the apostle, "judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath-days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." In using, however, this Christian liberty, we must be on our guard, lest we offend the weak; we must not needlessly hurt the prejudices of others, lest we injure their souls. For example, one man thinks a certain action sinful; another man sees no sin in it; yet out of deference to his brother, it may be the duty of the latter to abstain from it. A weak Christian, in the days of the apostles, thought it sinful to eat meat offered in sacrifice to idols; a more enlightened Christian saw no sin in it; but still it was the duty of the enlightened Christian to abstain, lest he should offend his weak brother. "Take heed," says the apostle, "lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak." Preserve your liberty; but let it always be exercised with charity.

II.—There is liberty from guilty fears.

Guilt upon the conscience is a cruel and hard task-master. A man who is a prey to guilty fears—who feels

that he has offended God, and deserves punishment—whose conscience warns him of an approaching retribution—who sees ever before him the dreadful day of judgment, and himself a criminal at the bar of the great Judge, with no plea to offer, and no excuse to make—who cannot think on the past without remorse, nor look forward to the future without alarm—is in cruel bondage. And sometimes there is a still crueller bondage; when some heinous sin lies upon the conscience unconfessed and unatoned for; the world knows nothing about it, suspects nothing about it, but the man knows it too well. There, *there* it is upon the conscience, cleaving to him, clinging to him, gnawing upon his heart, like the undying worm. The sin is there, too heinous to be extenuated, too black to be overlooked. What peace can that man enjoy? What freedom has he? He fears that he may yet be found out. He fears the judgment-day, when his sin and his shame will be openly proclaimed.

Now, the Christian is delivered from this slavery to guilty fears. The grace, and love, and power of his Saviour have been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. He receives it “as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” He believes that that precious blood which was poured forth on Calvary obliterates all the stains of guilt; that a full atonement has been made for sin; that pardon, and peace, and reconciliation flow

from the cross; and that guilty though he be in himself, he may be justified through Christ—that although his sins may be very numerous and aggravated, yet there is forgiveness for him through Christ; and thus believing on Christ, accepting Him as his Saviour, and trusting to His grace and merits, he is delivered from his guilty fears. “There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit: for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death.”

III.—There is liberty from the power of sin.

True liberty is incompatible with sin, and a sinner is a real slave. “Whosoever committeth sin,” says our Saviour, “is the servant of sin.” A man who is a slave to sinful passions; who knows not what it is to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, is under cruel bondage. These passions are his taskmasters; they make him toil and groan in their service; and the only rewards which they bestow upon him are a troubled conscience and a fearful looking for of judgment. So also the man who has yielded himself up to some ruling passion,—whether it be avarice, or ambition, or sensuality, or the love of pleasure, is a slave. He is always kept at work, always disappointed and discontented, and always a prey to corroding cares. But miserable beyond these is the man in whose breast two opposite passions

rage—such as avarice and ambition; these pull him different ways, and in attempting to please the one master, he offends the other. Avarice says, Keep; and ambition says, Give. Avarice renders the man miserable, when he is generous; and ambition equally wretched, when he is mean. Thus the sinner is a slave; he is dependent upon the world, upon his caprices, upon his health, upon his friends, upon his life; all these are so many chains which bind him; he has no power over himself, but yields to every temptation, and falls an easy prey into the hands of every foe.

Now the true Christian is delivered from this slavery of sin. Christ has made him free, and “if the Son has made him free, then is he free indeed.” He walks in the liberty of the gospel, even “the glorious liberty of the children of God.” He is delivered, in part at least, from the power of sin; his passions are subdued within him; the fetters of his captivity are broken; sin is no longer his master, but is treated by him as a foe. All this is effected by that great change which passes over every man who truly believes on Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is bestowed upon him, as the Spirit of holiness; a new heart is given him and a right spirit is put within him. Thus his disposition is changed; and he now hates those vices and sins, in which he formerly indulged. He has now no desire for sinful pleasures—no taste for them; and thus temptation has lost much of

its influence over him. The riches of the world have lost their value, and the pleasures of the world are stripped of their fascinations, and the honours of the world appear vain and trifling. He regards his time on earth as but a moment, and looks forward to those riches, and pleasures, and honours which are at God's right hand. Thus sin has not dominion over him; the law of God is written upon his heart, and His fear is put within him; the world is crucified to him and he to the world; he obtains the victory over his sinful passions, and "no longer lives the rest of his time in the flesh to to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." This is true liberty; not licentiousness, but holiness; not freedom to follow the inclinations of the flesh, but freedom to follow the inclinations of the Spirit; the higher powers of the mind obtaining the mastery, and bringing all the lesser powers into subjection; the conscience and the reason bearing rule, and not the passions.

IV.—There is liberty from the law.

There are many who are in bondage under the law, and the law is the hardest of all taskmasters. Many go about to establish a righteousness of their own, and attempt to merit salvation by their own works. With this view they groan, and toil, and labour; they pray, they read, they do good works, they give alms, they fast, they mortify themselves, they go through a burdensome

routine of religious ordinances, in order to recommend themselves to God. But all in vain: they are slaves, and their good works are burdensome tasks. Their obedience is that of a slave, done from the mercenary motive of reward, out of constraint, and without love to the great Lawgiver. There is no liberty here, no enlargement of soul, no pleasure in obedience, no loving, cheerful heart. God is regarded by them, not as a loving Father who pities His children; but as a hard task-master who is jealous about His work, who pays His servants for what they have done, and punishes them for their neglect. And then there is the constant dread that after all they may come short of heaven, that their righteousness and good works may be rejected, that all their toils and labours may be insufficient, that their failings may obliterate their merits, and that God may be strict to mark iniquity, and rigorous to punish. This is a state of bondage, an oppression greater than that of Pharaoh. If you endeavour to obtain heaven by your own righteousness, you are attempting to work far beyond your strength, you are entering upon a task which you will never accomplish. It is one of the saddest things in the world to see a man mistaking the way of salvation, and endeavouring to merit heaven by the works of the law.

Now believers are delivered from such servitude. "They are no longer under the law, but under grace."

They see that the salvation which Christ has procured is complete, that His merits are sufficient to obliterate all their sins, and that heaven and all the blessings of salvation are already purchased and freely bestowed upon them. They are thus enabled to receive salvation, not as a reward for services performed, but as the gift of God. They have not to toil and labour in order to procure the Divine favour. They are no longer under the law as a rule of works; no longer under that covenant which says, "Do this and thou shalt live;" no longer subject to the exactions of that taskmaster who is continually calling, "Pay me what thou owest." Love to God is the principle of their obedience. They feel deeply grateful for the blessings of redemption, and out of gratitude they consecrate themselves and all that they have to the service of Christ. Thus their obedience is no longer servile, but filial, loving, cheerful, and pleasant—the obedience of loving children. God is regarded by them as a Father who smiles upon His children, chastens them when disobedient, and receives them into the arms of His love when penitent. Thus they are enabled with joy and freedom of spirit to live true Christian lives; and trusting to the merits of Christ, and out of gratitude and love to God, they endeavour to keep the Divine commandments. Christ's yoke is easy, and His burden is light. His service is perfect freedom. His law is transformed into the law of gratitude, and the holi-

ness of believers is just another name for their happiness.

V.—There is liberty from a spirit of bigotry.

The bigot who is bound to the tenets of his own sect, who looks upon all who differ from him as ignorant or wicked, who considers that he and those who agree with him are the only true people of God, who would think it impiety to worship God with any other sect of Christians, and would far rather remain at home than go to the church of any other denomination except his own, is a slave; he is a slave to his own bigotry. He is so narrow-minded, that he cannot look beyond the limits of his own community. Like the inhabitants of some secluded glen who have seldom wandered beyond its limits, they please themselves with the thought that they are a peculiar people, that all knowledge resides with them, forgetting that beyond those mountains which bound their little valley, there is the wealth, and wisdom, and learning, and intelligence of a whole world. Nothing so much cramps the mind as bigotry. Let us preserve our own opinions; let us defend them, if we will; let us assert and maintain our liberty to hold them; but let us respect the opinions of others, and especially guard against that bigotry which exaggerates small points of difference, and converts mole hills into mountains.

Now the enlightened Christian is free from this spirit of bigotry. He may be warmly attached to that class of Christians to which he belongs; loving his fellow-worshippers with a peculiar love; yet he has learned to overlook all those small points on which opposing sects differ, and to unite with St Paul in saying, "Grace, mercy, and peace be upon all them who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." His is the truly liberal mind which seeks for the disciples of Christ in every sect, and delights to hear the gospel, wherever and by whomsoever it is preached. It is sad to think that Christians should differ on points so minute, and especially should attempt to convert things indifferent into things essential. Such sects and denominations shall be unknown in another world; for, if indeed believers, we shall meet together on one common ground as Christians, and shall regard all those points, about which we now so eagerly contend, as the quarrels of children. Thus the enlightened Christian is no bigot; and his attachment to the congregation with which he worships, however deep, and sincere, and ardent, does not savour of intolerance.

VI.—There is liberty from the fear of death.

Death is an irresistible enemy whose coming is dreaded by men. The worldly are afraid of it as that which puts an end to their enjoyments, deprives them of their riches, and turns their gladness into mourning. The rich and

noble dread it as the thief which steals, and the moth which corrupts their earthly treasure. And then there are the awful consequences which follow after death—the dread tribunal, a fearful eternity, an unknown futurity. There is the recollection of sins, the dread of punishment, the thoughts of hell. All these things render death terrible to worldly men, and cause the bravest of them to tremble when they think on the tomb. Thus they are kept in bondage; like criminals condemned, waiting the execution of their sentence. And even many true believers, many humble and diffident Christians are afraid of death. They doubt the sincerity of their faith and the reality of their conversion; they dread, lest when weighed in the balance they should be found wanting; and thus, as the apostle expresses it, “they are kept through the fear of death all their life-time subject to bondage.”

But confirmed Christians are delivered from this fear of death. They rise superior to the dread of dying. Jesus Christ has conquered for them this last enemy; He has vanquished death and the grave; “He has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil.” Thus death is to all believers a vanquished enemy; it is completely subject to the power of the great Redeemer; its sting, which is sin, is taken away; its nature is changed, and it is transformed from being the king of terrors into the messenger of peace which calls

the soul to heaven. Thus then the confirmed Christian, the assured believer, he who like Paul can say, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He will keep that which I have committed unto Him," is not afraid to die; he knows that death is to him great gain, and that when he is absent from the body he is present with the Lord; and although an impenetrable veil of mystery hangs over the future world, yet he places the most perfect confidence upon the love of his Saviour, and thus believes that, whatever the nature of that future world may be, it will be to him a world of happiness; and hence it is that often like the apostle he entertains "a desire to depart and to be with Christ." Thus it often happens that believers meet death, if not with satisfaction, yet without dismay, and are enabled to unite with the apostle in saying, "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

VII.—There is liberty from ourselves.

A man may be a slave to himself. Selfishness is just a refined kind of slavery. The man, in seeking his own happiness alone, is not living as God intended him to live; he is isolating himself from his fellow-men; he has renounced the true God, and has set up in His stead the idol of self; he does not answer the end of his being. Indeed, it is hard to discern any virtue in a selfish man;

there is no disinterestedness, no genuine love, no large loving heart in him; he possesses a servile, mean, mercenary spirit; he is bound up in himself, and is a slave to his selfish feelings. He who is not able to deny himself, has not yet learned what it is to obtain the victory over himself, and to walk in the perfect liberty of the children of God.

But the advanced Christian is delivered from this slavery of selfishness. This is the highest form of liberty—the noblest idea of Christianity. The man has obtained the victory not only over the world, but over himself. He lives not to himself. He consecrates himself to the service of God and to the good of men. The love of Christ constrains him to live no more unto himself, but unto Him who died for him. His is that genuine, noble spirit which loses sight of its own happiness, in order to promote the happiness of others. “Ye have been called unto liberty,” says the apostle, “only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” The highest and purest form of Christian life is this unselfishness—that virtue so illustriously displayed in the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, who renounced the glories of heaven for the good of others, and sacrificed Himself for them. The mind can rise to no higher conception of Christianity than Christ upon the cross, suffering the cruelest agonies, and yet feeling all the time that, if He would, He could escape all these.

Saving others, and yet refusing to save Himself. Talk not of the shame of the cross, for never did Jesus Christ appear more glorious, more divine, more perfectly free, than when asserting that liberty which He had over Himself, according to His own declaration—"I have power over my own life, and I have power to lay it down."

CHAPTER VIII.

The Hope that maketh not Ashamed.

HOPE is one of the most powerful principles of human action. It urges us forward, encourages us in labour, emboldens us to encounter difficulties, revives us when depressed by disappointment, and enables us to surmount obstacles which otherwise would have overcome us. It is hope which excites the sailor to contend with storms, the soldier to "endure hardness," the student to burn the midnight oil, and the merchant to risk his all on some advantageous speculation. And as hope is the great mainspring of human action, so it is the source of much of our pleasures. Life without hope would be insupportable, or at least insipid. We live more in the future than in the present. The present soon satiates us; and our happiness consists not so much in possession, as in expectation and pursuit. Nor is hope less the soother of sorrow than the parent of joy. There is no condition so dark that hope cannot brighten; there is no one so immersed in misery whom it cannot console. The sad look forward to days of happiness yet in store

for them; the disappointed to future success; the sick to recovery of health; the bereaved to a happy reunion with departed friends; and those whose earthly hopes are blighted, to future joy in another world. This feeling, in a sanctified form, enters largely into the character of the Christian. Hope displays to him the glories of heaven; it holds out to him the rewards of the faithful; it encourages him in a patient continuance in well doing, fills him with joy unspeakable, and not merely comforts him under the sufferings of life, but causes him even to rejoice in tribulation as the source of future happiness.

Hope may be defined to be the desire of some good, united with the probability and expectation of obtaining it. Christian hope is hope whose objects are spiritual mercies: it is the desire and expectation of those blessings which God has provided in His word. It is essential to hope that its object be future; because what we already possess we do not hope for, but enjoy. "Hope," says the apostle, "that is seen, is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." A blessing to be hoped for must be desired—we must wish to obtain it; and as it must be desired, so also it must be expected. There must, at least, be the possibility of obtaining it, and we must in some degree look forward to its possession. It is this union of desire and expectation which constitutes hope. Christian hope is

founded on the promises of God ; it arises from faith in these promises and in God's faithfulness in fulfilling them. Thus faith and hope are inseparably conjoined—faith believes the promise, and hope desires and expects its fulfilment.

The chief object of Christian hope is heaven; all those blessings which God has promised to His people in a future state of existence. It is, as St Paul expresses it, "the hope of the glory of God;" or, as he elsewhere terms it, "the hope of eternal life." It is not the desire and expectation of earthly blessings; these a Christian may innocently hope for, but they are not the special objects of Christian hope. Hope looks with the eye of faith above this world; it pierces into those regions which lie beyond the grave. Heaven with all its security and rest, with all its glory and bliss, is the great object of the Christian's hopes. He looks forward to a future world, where he shall obtain eternal salvation; where he shall be delivered from the dangers which beset his spiritual condition; where he shall be saved from hell; where he shall be freed from all the discomforts of his earthly state—from poverty, disease, want, wretchedness; where there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain. Nor does he regard heaven merely as a deliverance from danger and evil; he looks forward to it also as the consummation of the happiness of his moral nature; where he shall be delivered from

sin; where all his powers and feelings shall be completely sanctified; where he shall be made perfect in love; where he shall enjoy communion with the Father of his spirit, and see the Lord Jesus as He is, and be admitted into the society of those angels and saints who surround the throne.

Christian hope arises chiefly from two sources. From a personal trust in Jesus Christ; and then it is hope arising from faith. And from the experience of the Spirit's work in the soul; and then it is hope arising from experience. Both of these sources of hope appear to be alluded to by St Paul, when he says, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." His is the first species of hope—hope arising from having access by faith to God through Christ. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope:" this is the second species of hope—hope arising from experiencing the saving benefits of the gospel. The one arises from the testimony of God in the Word, and the other from the feeling of what passes within our own hearts. The one has reference to the work of Christ; and the other has reference to the work of the Spirit.

The first species of hope is derived from faith, and

this arises from a personal trust in Jesus Christ. "We have access," says the apostle, "by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." By reason of our sins, we have forfeited all title to heaven; we have brought ourselves under the curse of a broken law; and are liable to that punishment which the law pronounces against transgression. Now the atonement of Christ is the remedy which God has provided for us. God here declares Himself to be reconcilable; He reveals Himself as the just God and our Saviour, who has taken vengeance on our sins in the person of our Substitute, and who is ready to pardon all who repent and believe the gospel. A full and ample remedy has been provided for us: mercy, peace, and salvation flow from the cross of Christ; and all are freely invited to accept and embrace this remedy. When, then, a sinner, awakened to a sense of his sins, feeling himself to be condemned and perishing, believes in this remedy which God has provided; when he realizes the truth that Christ has really died to atone for sins, and that whosoever believes on Him shall be saved; and when he himself actually comes to God through Christ, and confides in the merits and mediation of the Saviour—then it is that hope springs within his breast. He sees that he is not lost, but may be saved, and through the atonement of Christ he hopes to be saved. And the stronger his faith, the stronger

is his hope; the clearer his views of the gospel remedy are, and the more firmly he believes in its efficacy, the greater will be his hope that he will be saved by it. Thus, for the sake of illustration, a sick man is told that if he take a certain remedy he will infallibly be cured; that it has already cured thousands who were ill of precisely the same malady; that no one who tried it ever found its virtue to fail; if, believing this testimony, he takes the remedy, then he hopes to be cured; and just in proportion to his faith in the remedy will be his hopes of ultimate recovery.

The second species of hope is derived from experience; and this arises from the experience of the Spirit's work in the soul. "Experience worketh hope." The remedy which the gospel reveals is not merely a deliverance from punishment; it is chiefly a deliverance from sin—a restoration to holiness, as well as to the Divine favour. Now the Holy Spirit is promised to sanctify believers, to deliver them from sinful passions, and to implant within them holy virtues. There is a certain character described in Scripture as belonging to God's people; there are certain feelings mentioned as actuating all true believers; and marks are given us by which we may distinguish them. If, then, a Christian, on a careful examination of his heart and conduct, perceives a correspondence between himself and the character of believers as recorded in the Word of God; if he can discern in

himself the rudiments of the new creature; if he experiences that sorrow for sin, and deadness to the world, and spirituality of mind, and love to Christ, which characterise all God's children—then hope arises within him; he is led to trust that he is a child of God, that he has passed from death to life, and has experienced the great change of regeneration. And the clearer these evidences of conversion are; that is, in other words, the more holy he is, so much the stronger is his hope of salvation. To adopt the illustration already given: If the sick man not only confides in the efficacy of the remedy which he has taken, but feels that it is actually producing a cure within him; that the painful symptoms of his disease are lessening, and his strength gradually increasing; that health is again flowing into his veins, then his hopes of ultimate recovery will be greatly increased. Formerly he hoped from a belief in the efficacy of the remedy provided; now he hopes from an experience of the remedy producing a cure. The one is hope arising from faith; the other is hope arising from experience.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the regenerate is in Scripture represented as the earnest of heaven. "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." The graces of the Spirit are not only the seal which God puts upon His own people—the mark by

which they are distinguished, but they are to them an earnest of heaven. An earnest is a bestowal of part in kind, as a pledge or assurance of the bestowal of the whole. The earnest of the harvest is the first-fruits of harvest. So the earnest of heaven is the first-fruits of heaven; the same in kind with the happiness of heaven, differing only in degree. Such, then, is the connection between the work of the Spirit in the soul and heaven—between grace and glory. Grace is the earnest of glory; grace is the bud, of which glory is the fruit; grace is glory begun on earth, and glory is the perfection of grace in heaven. The difference is not in kind, but in degree. Believers, by the indwelling of the Spirit, already enjoy part of the happiness of heaven; they are already saved; they are already blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Thus, then, the fruits of the Spirit are a pledge given us by God that those on whom they are bestowed shall be admitted into heaven. He who gives grace, will also give glory. He who begins the good work, will also carry it on until it is completed in the day of Christ Jesus. "God," says the apostle, "hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."

If we were more attentively to consider these two kinds of hope—hope arising from faith in Christ, and hope arising from the experience of the Spirit's work—we would find that they both resolve themselves into a

sense of the love of God in Christ. "Hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us." The love of God to us is felt and realized, when by faith we believe in Christ's atonement; and our love to God is felt, when we experience within us the work of the Spirit. Now it is on this love of God that the believer founds his hopes. He is enabled, by the teaching of the Spirit, to realize the great truth that God loves him and is a Father to him; that he is no longer under the law, but under grace; no longer a criminal at the bar of judgment, but a son belonging to the household of God; that his peace and security are in his Father's hands; and that thus no enemy can injure him, and no real evil can befall him. It is this vivid realization of the love of God in Christ which produces the highest and purest form of Christian hope. After all, it is not so much by pondering over our own states and frames that hope is strengthened and sustained, as by looking upwards with confidence to God, fully trusting in His love, just as a little child confides in the love of an affectionate parent. "There is no fear in love; for perfect love casteth out fear; for fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love."

It must be evident from the above remarks that Christian hope admits of various degrees of perfection.

Hope, like every other Christian virtue, exists in various stages of growth. Sometimes it is so small and weak as scarcely to be discernible; as when a sinner, distracted with fear and doubt, filled with sin and unbelief, receives some faint impressions of the gospel remedy—doubting lest his state be past recovery, and yet hoping for mercy in Christ. At other times it rises to full assurance; as when the far advanced Christian lives under a constant sense of the love of God, and already possesses the temper of heaven. Hope is not always a feeble and variable expectation of future happiness: a state of uncertainty rather than of confidence. It is described in Scripture as “the anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast;” it is called “a good hope,” and “a hope which maketh not ashamed;” and believers are exhorted to aim at the full assurance of hope. Paul’s hope of heaven amounted to absolute certainty. He seems never for a moment to have doubted the reality of his salvation. There was no fear in his love, no doubt in his confidence. “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.”

Having considered the nature and sources of Christian hope, let us next attend to its *properties*.

Christian hope is *sure and stedfast*. “Which hope we have,” says the apostle, “as an anchor of the soul,

both sure and stedfast." And again, "hope maketh not ashamed." The Christian's hope shall not end in disappointment; it is built upon a sure foundation; he shall not be ashamed of his confidence. How different is this from the hope of worldly men! How often are their hopes doomed never to be realized; and even when they do succeed and obtain the object of their wishes, yet how far beneath their expectations do they find it, how little real comfort does it afford them! But such are not the hopes of the Christian; they shall never be disappointed. They are founded on the faithfulness of God and on the immutability of His promises; they are all sure and certain in Christ Jesus. God is faithful and will fulfil His promises, and He is able to satisfy all our expectations. And when these promises are fulfilled; when the believer's hopes are gratified; he will assuredly find that the blessings conferred have gone far beyond even his most ardent expectations; that heaven is a far holier and happier place than he imagined; and that God has done to him exceeding abundantly above all that he either asked or thought.

Christian hope is *purifying*. "He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself even as He is pure." The connection between hope and holiness ought never to be overlooked. The Christian's hope, however certain, has no tendency to make him careless or negligent; its tendency is precisely the reverse. The object of hope is

pure, and therefore its influence is purifying. For what is it that the Christian hopes to enjoy? It is a heaven of holiness, communion with God, freedom from sin, and the society of holy spirits; and a man cannot desire these things without being himself holy. To be much engaged in meditating on heaven will raise a man's affections from worldly pursuits, and strengthen all that is pure and holy within him. Besides, this hope resides only in the pure breast. If a man continues in sin, and yet hopes withal to be saved, his hope is that of the hypocrite, which shall perish. Nor can Christian hope be otherwise maintained than by a walk and conversation becoming the gospel. Hence, then, hope and holiness produce and strengthen each other. The Spirit who dwells in the believer, and is the Author of his holiness, also bears witness with his spirit that he is a child of God.

Christian hope is *humble*. It is far removed from presumption or self-righteousness. It is always conjoined with humility and self-abasement. Whilst the believer hopes, yet his hopes rest not on his own merits, but on those of the Redeemer. He feels himself to be sinful and vile, and that he comes far short of his duty; that sin pollutes everything which he does; and that as to righteousness of his own, he has none. But along with this humility of mind there may be a holy confidence. While the believer is filled with the deepest self-

abhorrence, his confidence in the merits of the Redeemer may be strong and unshaken, his sense of the love of God may be vivid and abiding, and his personal experience of the Spirit's influences may be sensible and real. The deepest abasement of spirit may co-exist with the most perfect assurance of salvation. Thus, no one was so deeply conscious of his own imperfections as the apostle Paul, and yet no one was so assured of his salvation. He was pre-eminent alike for his humility and for his confidence. He calls himself "less than the least of all saints," and "the chief of sinners;" yet he also affirms that "he knows whom he has believed," and that "there was a crown laid up for him." He had a full measure of peace, and joy, and hope in believing. Whilst filled with a deep and humbling sense of his imperfections, he cries out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" he immediately adds, in the full assurance of hope, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Christian hope is *joyful*. Believers are represented as "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God." Joy is, indeed, the natural and direct effect of Christian hope. The believer looks forward to heaven as the end of his sorrows and the beginning of his joys. He regards it as the rest to his cares, and the consummation of his happiness; and the stronger his desires after it, the greater his joy at the prospect of obtaining it. Indeed, the joy

of the Christian varies with his hope; if his hope is great, so will be his joy; whereas, if his hope is weak, he will be a prey to distressing doubts and fears. A Christian with a good hope of heaven cannot but be joyful; he is the heir of a glorious inheritance; he is the expectant of a crown of glory. Peace, and joy, and hope, dwell in his breast, even a peace which passeth understanding, a joy unspeakable and full of glory, and a living hope entering into that which is within the veil. And thus, believing in Christ as his Saviour, and feeling within him the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and realizing the love of God, he is enabled to go on his course rejoicing.

Christian hope is *invigorating*. It infuses strength into the mind, and by so doing lessens the difficulties of the Christian life. Hope urges the believer forward, animates and cheers him in the warfare of life, enables him boldly to contend with his spiritual enemies, and encourages him to perseverance and increased exertion, by holding out to him the rewards of the faithful. Whereas, without the hope of salvation, the Christian life would be a depressing service, a continued and hopeless struggle against sin, a vain striving after holiness, the painful practice of self-denial without any real advantage. "If," says the apostle, "in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." And although these words primarily apply to Christians ex-

posed to persecution, they are in some degree applicable to Christians in every relation; all require to carry the cross, and the cross without the expectation of the crown would be a heavy burden. Hope, then, is the Christian's strength; the greater his hope, the stronger is he—the more able to resist temptation, and the more encouraged to a patient continuance in well-doing.

Christian hope is *active*. It proceeds from spiritual life, and is active in the performance of good works. "Blessed," says St Peter, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope." Christian hope gives no encouragement to sloth. We might conceive at first sight that this was its natural effect; for if a man be assured of heaven, what need has he for diligence, wherein lies the necessity for active exertion? Now, I do not insist upon it that the more certain our hopes of any good thing are, the more diligent will we be in the use of means to obtain it; that hope itself always gives encouragement to exertion; that this is an active principle of our nature. This would be repeating what has already been observed concerning the invigorating nature of hope. But what I would here observe is, that as hope proceeds from spiritual life, so it urges the believer forward in the performance of good works. He does not attend to his own interests alone; the love of God shed abroad in his

heart has overcome his selfishness; and he prays, and hopes, and labours that others may obtain an interest in that salvation of which he is a partaker. Hope animates him to do all the good he possibly can to his fellow-men. He feels that the gospel remedy is for them as well as for himself; that the influences of the Spirit are not limited; and that it is not the will of his heavenly Father that any of them should perish. He knows that none can be too far gone in sin to be beyond the reach of the remedy; that none can be too hardened in iniquity whom the Spirit cannot sanctify; and thus he possesses that charity which hopeth all things.

Christian hope is *sustaining*. It supports the believer in affliction and at death. "We glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed." To the worldly, afflictions are only evil. They submit to them from painful necessity; and instead of producing patience, and experience, and hope, they give rise to discontent, distrust, and despondency. But afflictions lose much of their bitterness to the believer; he looks forward to a happy issue out of them; he balances the sufferings of this life with the glory of the next, and finds that the one is light and temporary, and the other weighty and eternal; and thus they appear to him as the temporary inconveniences of an inn in his journey to the kingdom of God. Nay more, he knows and

believes that his afflictions will be productive of good; that they will increase his happiness here and his glory hereafter; that in this life they will produce within him the peaceful fruits of righteousness, and in the next life they will work out for him a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory. Thus it is that hope enables him even to glory in tribulation, to thank God for suffering; and, amid all the ills of life, although poverty, and bereavement, and sickness, and disappointment be his earthly portion, yet, like the prophet of old, to rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation. And when the believer comes to die, hope cheers and supports him; he feels it to be the anchor of his soul, both sure and steadfast; the glories of heaven shed their lustre over the dark valley; and thus he is enabled to resign his spirit into the arms of the Saviour, with the humble expectation of eternal blessedness in another world.

Such, then, is the nature, and such are the properties of Christian hope. It is one of the chief graces of the Christian; one of those seraphs who minister to the heirs of salvation. But the thought occurs, that there may perhaps be some of my readers who are strangers to this Christian hope. Perhaps every one expects some way or other to get to heaven; no one thinks himself doomed to eternal misery. But, reader, is your hope founded on the promises of God, as revealed in His

Word? If not: if there is no promise to which it can appeal, it will be sure to disappoint you. How many are there who hope to get to heaven without any reason, who have never come to Christ, nor experienced the influences of the Spirit! Ye vicious ones, think you that you are prepared to be admitted after death into the presence of a holy and pure God? Is Christ the minister of sin? Ye careless ones, think you that you will get to heaven, although you live in entire forgetfulness of God, and your hearts are enmity against Him? Ye impenitent sinners, suppose you that because Christ died for sin, that you will be saved without holiness and without repentance? There is not one promise in the whole Word of God made to the impenitent; not one blessing for which they can reasonably hope. How many are there whose hope shall make them ashamed; who will find, when they come to die, or when they stand before the tribunal of their Judge, that they have trusted to a lie, and built their confidence on a false foundation. There is a place where hope never enters—an abyss which it never penetrates with its rays; and what must be the misery of that state where hope, the refuge even of the most wretched, is for ever fled and gone. “The righteous hath hope in his death, but the hope of the hypocrite shall perish.”

CHAPTER IX.

The Secret Joy.

It is a common objection to religion that its tendency is to make men unhappy; that it is an enemy to cheerfulness and innocent mirth; in a word, that it is a gloomy and unhappy spirit. And it must be confessed that the moroseness of some of its professors have afforded too much cause for this charge. But, in reality, no objection is more groundless. The most superficial acquaintance with religion may teach us that, far from being the cause of melancholy, it is the source of pure happiness; and that if in any instance its professors are unhappy, the fault lies not with the gospel, but with themselves. Christ was "anointed to preach glad tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, to comfort all that mourn, to give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." His gospel is indeed a gospel, good news, glad tidings of great joy; and therefore, if really understood and fully believed, its natural tendency

is to fill us with joy. The true believer has every imaginable reason to be happy. God is his Father—all his sins are forgiven—he shall not come into condemnation—he is eternally united to Christ—his disorderly passions are subdued—the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, dwells within him—all things work together for his good—afflictions are blessings in disguise—death is the messenger of peace, and heaven is his eternal home—the present is full of comfort, and the future is radiant with glory. Surely he of all men has reason to rejoice and to be exceeding glad. Nay more, to rejoice is his duty as well as his privilege. God commands him to rejoice. For him to be gloomy and sad is not only a grief, it is also a sin; it is ingratitude to God, the Giver of all spiritual blessings; it is undervaluing His benefits; it is mistrusting His love; it is a reflection on religion.

Joy is that feeling of delight which arises from the possession of present good, or from the anticipation of future happiness. Religious joy is joy connected with religious blessings. It is not the mere pleasure arising from health, from an exuberance of animal spirits, from outward prosperity, or from the society of friends. It is not that happiness which is experienced from the gratification of our tastes or the fulfilment of our earthly hopes. All this may be innocent and lawful; but it is not religious joy, it is not "rejoicing in the Lord." This

joy does not arise from temporal, but from spiritual mercies. It is joy arising from the possession of spiritual blessings, or from the anticipation of future glory. The Scriptures make frequent mention of it, and represent it as one of those precious benefits which in this life are bestowed upon believers. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

Religious joy arises chiefly from four sources. From the relation in which believers stand to God; and then it is the joy of love. From the interest which they have in Christ; and then it is the joy of faith. From the indwelling of the Holy Ghost; and then it is the joy of holiness. And from the hopes which they have of heaven; and then it is the joy of hope.

The first species of joy is the joy of love, and this arises from the relation in which believers stand to God. "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice." "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." "Rejoice in the Lord," says the Psalmist, "O ye righteous." "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." The character of God, when rightly seen and appreciated, is

calculated to awaken high emotions of admiration and delight. His power is unbounded and irresistible, His wisdom is infinite in its resources, and His goodness always induces Him to do what is for the best. His holiness and His justice are indeed perfections which naturally excite awe and terror, but these are united with infinite mercy which causes Him to be always willing to receive the penitent. The glorious harmony of His perfections constitutes a character which is at once majestic and amiable, the object of love as well as of veneration, the source of boundless joy and confidence. And if such is the character of God considered as He is in Himself, how delightful must it be to believers when they reflect on the relation in which this glorious Being stands to them. He is their chief good, the everlasting source of their happiness. God is their loving Father. He will withhold from them nothing which is really for their good. He loves them with a love far excelling that which the kindest parent bears to his children. This consideration causes everything to be seen in a new and more delightful aspect. Even the beauties of nature appear more lovely; the thought that their Father has created them, imparts additional loveliness to the earth and sublimity to the heavens. In Providence, they recognise the hand of God in everything, and place the most perfect confidence in His wisdom and love. "Mercies acquire a sweeter relish; afflictions lose half

their bitterness; life rises in value, as the gift of love for purposes of infinite importance; death is divested of its terrors; the present is the seed-time of grace, and the future is the harvest of glory." They are surrounded on all sides with the presence of God, and in that presence there is fulness of joy.

The second species of joy is the joy of faith, and this arises from the interest which believers have in Christ. "Whom having not seen ye love; in whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Believers are united to Christ, as the branches are united to the vine, or as the members are united to the body; and, in consequence of this union, they have a saving interest in all that Christ has done and suffered. For their sins He died, and for their justification He rose again. They are in a state of perfect safety; they shall not come into condemnation, for Christ has died for their sins; His glorious atonement is theirs. True, indeed, they are encompassed with infirmities, and often fall into sin, but Christ pleads for them at the Father's right hand; He presents His own merits in their behalf, and God bears with their infirmities, and forgives their sins. All the benefits and all the grace which Christ has purchased belong to them; they are safe under His protection; no evil can befall them, no enemy can injure them. When they look to themselves; when they think on their own weak-

nesses and defections, they see nothing but cause for sorrow, and alarm, and despondency; but when by faith they look to Christ, they see good reasons for comfort and joy. Their sins may be numerous, but His merits are infinite; their weaknesses may be many, but His strength is almighty; their heart may be treacherous, but His grace is sufficient; and thus, looking not within but without; relying simply on the all-sufficiency of the glorious atonement, living by faith on Christ, they are enabled to go on their Christian course rejoicing.

The third species of joy is the joy of holiness, and this arises from the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. "The kingdom of God," says the apostle, "is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." And again: "Now the God of hope fill you with all peace and joy in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." Joy is also described as one of the precious fruits of the Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." The Holy Spirit is the great and good Comforter; and His office is not merely to sanctify, but also to comfort believers. "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever." Now the Spirit, as the Comforter, dwells in believers: He consecrates their hearts as His temples and fills them with His presence. There He resides as the Spirit of grace and consolation; and, by His sacred

influences, He diffuses peace, and joy, and hope. He implants within them those feelings and desires, from which joy and gladness arise. He mortifies their unruly passions, those great disturbers of our peace. And the graces which he forms within them, apart from all those rewards which accompany them, are essentially and inherently blissful. From this, then, much of the joy of believers arises. Their happiness springs from their holiness; and the more holy they are; the more they have of the Spirit's influences, the more happy will they be. Joy does not arise so much from condition, as from character. It is not what is external to the soul that makes us joyful, but that which is within; not outward comforts, but the internal disposition. On the one hand, a man may be surrounded by all the blessings of life, and yet a fretful, discontented spirit may prevent him enjoying them. Whereas, the possession of Christian virtues will render a man happy, even although his outward state should be unfortunate. Thus it is that the Spirit dwells in believers as an unfailing source of happiness; as a spring of consolation and joy; or, as our Saviour describes it, as a well of water springing up unto eternal life.

The fourth species of joy is the joy of hope, and this arises from the hopes which believers have of heaven. The former kinds of joy arise chiefly from the possession of present good; this arises from the anticipation of

future happiness. Hope is the source of human joy. It transports us to fairer and more blissful scenes; it surrounds us with various expected pleasures; and causes us to enjoy in some measure the happiness which it anticipates. But how often are earthly hopes doomed never to be realized; how often do we meet with disappointment and bitterness! But the hopes of believers shall never be disappointed; they are founded on the immutable promises of God; they are "living hopes, entering into that which is within the veil." And what is the object of Christian hope? It is not some mere temporal blessing, success in such an undertaking, or domestic comfort and happiness. It is heaven with all its glory and bliss. It is the eternal enjoyment of God. It is a happiness perfect in its degree and eternal in its duration. This causes believers to rise above this world and all its sorrows and pleasures. Its pleasures are too low to make them happy; for they have infinitely more exalted pleasures in anticipation. Its sorrows are but for a moment, and are conducive to their spiritual good. With heaven always in their eye and as their sure possession, they cannot but be happy, happy that ever they were born, happy especially that they were begotten again to such lively hopes. These hopes are founded on their union to Christ and the interest they have in His merits; they are implanted and increased within them by the Holy Spirit; they arise from the

discernment of the Spirit's graces in the soul; and the stronger they are, so much the greater is the joy to which they give rise.

Having considered the sources of religious joy, let us now consider its *properties*.

Religious joy is ordinarily *calm*. Occasionally, indeed, it is strong and elevated. Believers are sometimes filled with a transporting sense of the love of God; they are admitted into the most delightful communion with Him; their affections are excited; they are in a state of holy ecstasy; and their joy is indeed "unspeakable and full of glory." We are not, like too many, to look upon these ecstasies and raptures as the effects of enthusiasm. Often, indeed, they are, but sometimes they are the experience of the far advanced Christian, who has outstripped others in the way to glory, who possesses the full assurance of salvation, and in this assurance enjoys much of heaven upon earth. But ordinarily spiritual joy is calm. The true believer may experience little of strong emotion, while his soul may be firmly resting on the merits of the Saviour. But he does experience a calm joy and satisfaction arising from the hopes of forgiveness through the merits of Christ, from the peaceful disposition implanted within him by the Spirit, and from the glory which he expects in heaven. His joy bears a resemblance to the peace of the Saviour—that holy composure and serenity of mind, that deep and calm

joy which enabled Him to perform the work of His Father with pleasure, and to encounter His unparalleled sufferings with resignation; a joy and a peace which He bequeathed to His disciples as His parting gift: "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." And again, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you."

Religious joy is *serious*. The charge brought against religion that it is an enemy to cheerfulness and innocent mirth, arises, in part, from its being opposed to thoughtlessness, frivolity, and giddiness. Some professors of religion, wishing to repudiate this charge, join without restraint in the amusements of the world, under the pretence that religious people ought to be cheerful. Believers indeed ought not only to be joyful, but outwardly to appear so; but their joyfulness being religious, must partake of the seriousness of religion. Their happiness is not derived from the amusements of the world, but from spiritual pleasures. It is a chastened joy; a joy mixed with some degree of fear, not indeed of slavish fear, but of reverential fear and awe. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling."

Religious joy is often *interrupted*. We are not to suppose that believers experience joy without interruption. Their state is indeed always safe; they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of Christ's

hands. The Holy Spirit, who has begun the good work in them, will carry it on until it is completed. But still the sense of their safety is often obscured. It is, however, to be observed, that if their joy is interrupted, the fault is entirely their own. It may arise from some sin which they have committed, and not repented of; or from sloth and spiritual declension; or from carelessness in religious duties; and therefore it is that God, as a chastisement, withdraws from them the sense of His love. Thus it was with David, in consequence of transgression; he lost for a season that sensible impression which he formerly enjoyed of the favour and love of God; and hence his prayer to God was, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit."

Religious joy is *abiding*. The sources from which it springs are unfailling. The interest which believers have in Christ, their relation to God, the indwelling of the Spirit, and the happiness in reserve for them in heaven, are always the same. In the new nature implanted within them by the Spirit, they have within themselves a fountain of happiness ever flowing. "Their joy no man taketh from them." Yea, like all the other fruits of the Spirit, it is continually increasing. As their faith increases, so does their hope; and the stronger their

hope, the greater is their joy. In many cases indeed this growth in grace is interrupted; but when the believer is watchful over his conduct, and guards against declension, the work advances with rapidity; he is continually pressing forward from one spiritual attainment to another; his corruptions become weaker and weaker, whilst his graces expand and improve; his peace becomes more settled, his hopes are surer, and consequently his happiness is greater. And when death puts an end to his earthly existence, this joy in the Holy Ghost will grow and flourish; it shall then be planted in a more genial soil, beneath a more friendly sky, and will shoot forth with freshness and with vigour. "In God's presence there is fulness of joy, and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Religious joy is *purifying*. It possesses a sanctifying tendency. It arises in a great measure from holiness—from the possession of Christian graces; and thus the believer is urged to endeavour to be more holy, in order to receive more of this blessed joy. He knows from experience that sin is misery and that holiness is happiness; and therefore, as he wishes his own peace, he carefully avoids the one and cultivates the other. And, besides, it is religious joy that imparts pleasure to obedience; this makes the yoke of Christ easy and His burden light; this transforms His service into perfect freedom, and transmutes even sacrifices and acts of self-denial into

delightful exercises. The believer is enabled to cultivate holiness, not merely from a sense of duty, but because holiness is his delight; to cherish and practise Christian virtues, because he experiences pleasure in their exercise. Thus religious joy produces holiness, because it imparts pleasure to obedience; and holiness nourishes and sustains religious joy. "The joy of the Lord," says Nehemiah, "is your strength."

There are peculiar seasons, when religious joy is greater than at other times. Thus it is generally greater when engaged in the performance of the solemn exercises of religious worship. In them, the believer holds fellowship with the Father and with the Son. In reading the word of God, he experiences much pleasure. This opens up to him the love of God the Father to mankind, the wonderful mission and atonement of Christ, the agency of the Holy Ghost, the privileges of believers, and the joys of heaven—all which are objects of the most delightful contemplation. In prayer, he holds communion with God: he addresses Him as his Father in heaven; he makes known to Him all his sins and wants, his perplexities and sorrows, his wishes and hopes, with full confidence that he is heard and will receive a gracious answer. In public worship, he goes to meet with God, and often experiences that the sanctuary is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. And, especially, when he takes his seat at the holy table of

communion, his affections are sensibly drawn toward the Saviour, he forgets for a season the cares and business of the world, he then enjoys in some degree the composure of heaven; like John, he leans upon the bosom of his Saviour, and like Peter he exclaims, "Lord, it is good to be here."

Religious joy is also generally more sensibly felt at the time of special manifestations after spiritual desertion. God sometimes withdraws from His people the consolatory sense of His love; and they lose that joy, and hope, and comfort, which they formerly experienced. They are led to entertain the most desponding fears concerning themselves; to dread that they have been all along self-deceivers, that they were never converted, that all their former hopes and joys were delusive, and that God has for ever withdrawn His grace. What joy, then, must they experience when God again manifests Himself to them as their covenant God and Father, and when He again receives them into the arms of His love. Just as a child, who has offended a beloved parent, and has for a time been subjected to a father's displeasure and a father's frown, experiences a most lively sensation of pleasure when his father again smiles upon him and restores him to his love; such, but far higher in degree, is the pleasure which the believer experiences, when God manifests Himself to him after a night of desertion and temptation. "For a small moment have I forsaken

thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

Near death also, religious joy is sometimes most sensibly felt. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Very often does He communicate to them rich supplies of His grace—sensible tokens of His love, so that their fears are exchanged for lively hopes, and their trembling is converted into joy. They feel that their Saviour is present to comfort and strengthen them, and then only it is that they understand why Scripture so often speaks of the death of believers as falling into a gentle sleep. Thus they are enabled to meet the last enemy with a holy resignation, and to express their humble hopes of eternal happiness. Death, which appeared to them at a distance as the king of terrors, is now converted into the messenger of peace, and they are enabled to adopt the language of the Psalmist, "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."

The chief means of obtaining, as well as of preserving religious joy, is living by faith on Christ. Faith is the great instrument of the happiness and holiness, as well as of the forgiveness of believers. It is that which

unites us to Christ, and until we are so united we can experience no religious joy. It is also by faith, by constantly looking to Christ, that this joy is to be preserved and increased. If we are always looking to ourselves, we will see nothing but what will perplex and discourage us; whereas, by looking to Christ, we will find comfort and joy. Let us, then, look more to Christ; let us trust Him entirely and unreservedly with our spiritual interests; let us endeavour to know what it is to live upon Him by faith, and to draw out of His fulness grace for grace. In Christ we are complete; there is a rich supply for all our wants—wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. All that we need is in Him; His blood cleanseth from all sin; His strength is made perfect in weakness; His grace can overcome all our imperfections; His peace can comfort us amid all our sorrows; and His joy can satisfy every craving of our souls.

We must also guard against seeking our chief happiness in any creature good. God is our portion. He demands the chief place in our affections, and He will not admit of a rival. If we seek our chief happiness from any inferior source, we will lose that which springs from Him. And this is the cause of the fears and perplexities of many religious professors. They have something which they prefer to God; some object which they make the chief end of life in preference to His glory;

some sin which they will not forsake, or some duty which they will not perform. Now in such a state we cannot expect religious joy. The Scriptures know nothing of that kind of comfort which renders a man easy in his sins. Our iniquities are like clouds, which conceal from us the light of God's countenance; and as long as we continue to indulge in them, instead of having any reason for joy, we have cause to doubt the reality of our conversion.

And, further, we must be diligent in our religious duties. Religious joy comes in the path of duty; it is the experience of the active, working Christian. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember Thee in Thy ways." God rewards His obedient children with the smiles of His approbation, whereas lukewarmness and sloth are sure to create a want of joy. When a religious professor performs the duties of the closet in a careless manner; when he attends public worship merely as a form, or to have his taste gratified; and when in his daily duties his thoughts seldom or ever turn to God; it is no wonder that his religion does not make him happy. If then, reader, you want this religious joy, you must be diligent, and earnest, and zealous about religion; you must lay aside your cold formality; you must pray with sincerity, read the Scriptures with care, and attend public worship with a desire to profit; in a word, you must live and act with a full

conviction of the reality and importance of the truths of revelation.

Be diligent, then, in seeking this joy. Be assured that it is your own fault, if you are unhappy in your religion. There is nothing in the gospel which has a tendency to make you so; it is entirely glad tidings of great joy. Your sins are the cause of your unhappiness; the lukewarmness of your piety, the worldliness of your hearts, the vain endeavour to serve both God and mammon, divided affections—these are the clouds and mists which conceal from you the rays of heavenly joy; and so long as these continue, you have reason to doubt the sincerity of your religion. And, therefore, I exhort you, as the first step toward this joy, to come to Christ as if you never came before; to make a hearty surrender of your soul to Him without any reservation; no longer to be halting between two opinions; but to make religion the great duty of your life, God the object of your supreme affections, and to endeavour to the utmost of your ability to cultivate that faith, and love, and holiness, and hope, which are the great and the only sources of religious joy.



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