

The Main Points

Charles Reynolds Brown

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THE MAIN POINTS

A STUDY IN CHRISTIAN BELIEF

BY
CHARLES REYNOLDS BROWN



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TO

SAMUEL T. ALEXANDER

IN APPRECIATION OF HIS PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP
AND OF HIS GENEROUS LOYALTY IN
ALL THE WORK OF
OUR CHURCH

PREFACE

THIS little book is not a learned treatise on systematic theology; it is designed for the thoughtful layman rather than for the technical scholar. There are books in abundance which will meet the need of the theologian or the philosopher as this one does not attempt to do.

There are thousands of people who have lost confidence in the doctrinal statements accepted by them in earlier days as the very words of eternal life. They have an uneasy feeling because “the traditional phrases of religious speech do not set forth with unstrained naturalness and transparent sincerity the facts of their religious lives.” Some of them have thrown away all such statements and are offering their devotions at the altar of an “Unknown God.” Others with more conservative instincts have retained the phrases but with a yearning to have them restated in terms of actual life. It was with their questioning and expectant attitude in mind that these chapters were written.

The lack of full assent to certain standards impels many earnest people to count themselves outside the pale of evangelical Christianity. They have no quarrel with the ethics of Christianity, but certain doctrinal statements they cannot accept. They do not attach themselves to the so-called “liberal churches,” which are losing rather than gaining in numbers. They desire something richer and warmer than the presentation made by “societies for ethical culture.” They look to the great branches of the Church of Christ to speak to them in the tongue and in the mood wherein they live, a sure word of life.

If the evangelical churches can recognize this multitude standing beyond the group of disciples already enrolled, meet them, interest them, and lead them to the point where they shall see the religion of Jesus Christ in a more satisfying way, they will render a splendid service. If they can restate in the language of present life, clearly, reasonably, and winsomely, those great truths which the plain people regard as the staples of religious belief, they may gather in a host of those who are waiting for a gospel at once credible and vital.

It may seem presumptuous to attempt the consideration of ten capital themes in theology within the limits of a single small volume. But these pages were written for busy people. Laymen have more to do and less time to read big books than had their grandfathers. Not many of them find opportunity to read even the standard theological books of the more popular type. The pastors are familiar with whole libraries of fresh and stimulating books which, owing to the stress of other matters on their attention, never come into the hands of our laymen. There is good grain being harvested every month from the work done in theological reconstruction in the pages of the reviews. If we can take some of the results of our wider reading and bring it in every-day language to the attention of the busy people, we shall render them a useful service.

In such brief compass there must of necessity be a lack of that thorough and elaborate handling of august themes which one finds in truly theological books. But even though the twenty-dollar gold pieces are here converted into small change, they may possibly attain a further usefulness in that they can be taken and used by those who secure their doctrinal reading in small invoices.

I have here and there quoted freely from the writings of certain eminent religious teachers. It seemed right to give to the expression of my own thought on these fundamental questions the confirmation, the enrichment, and the extension afforded by the words of men who have made us all debtors to their thorough and devout scholarship.

In a time of transition and restatement like the present, no teacher of religion can speak his mind frankly and briefly, leaving out those explanations and qualifications which come in to modify and round out, and expect to carry with him the assent of the entire company. But the richer understanding of the great truths will not come by halting silence or timid distrust of fellow students with whom we may not quite keep step—it will come rather as each Christian man, striving to do the will of God and to know the doctrine, gives out openly and honestly the best he has.

CHARLES REYNOLDS BROWN

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THE MAIN POINTS

CHAPTER I

THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST

THE religious man everywhere believes in God. In our evangelical faith the Being whom we worship, trust, and serve is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is “God in Christ” with whom we sustain those relations which furnish the content of religious experience. The doctrine of the person of Christ is, therefore, at once fundamental and distinctive.

The question as to the divinity of Christ is not a mere question of historical appraisal to determine the rank of one who died long ago. It is a question of present and significant fact. The inquiry of Canon Liddon must confront us all: “Where is Jesus Christ now? And what is he?” We know with a satisfying measure of accuracy what he was when he walked in Galilee, helping the sick, the ignorant, and the sinful, but what can he do now? “Does he reign only by virtue of a mighty tradition of human thought and feeling in his favor which creates and supports his imaginary throne? Is he at this moment a really living being? And if living, is he a human ghost flitting we know not where in the unseen world, and himself awaiting an award at the hands of the Everlasting? Is he present personally as a living power in this, our world? Has he any certain relations to you? Does he think of you, care for you, act upon you? Can you approach him now, cling to him, receive from him mighty aid, not as an act of imagination, but as a substantial fact?” Has he, in a word, cosmic and eternal relations? Is there available for human need today that powerful, loving help manifested of old to men in Galilee? Surely no inquiry could be more pertinent or fruitful.

This question was not originally propounded by speculative schoolmen or by abstract theologians. The same Lord who taught men to do unto others as they would that others should do unto them enjoined his followers to define their estimate of him. “Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” “Whom say ye that I am?” He graciously blessed them when they returned an answer he could approve. The answer given by the disciples at Cæsarea Philippi thus acceptable to Jesus was: “Thou art the Christ, the Son

of the living God.” It was an estimate of the person of Christ which seemed to lift him in their minds quite out of the purely human categories where John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and the other great prophets stood.

The question is raised whether those words, uttered by Peter, do assert the divinity of Christ—whether indeed they affirm anything more than a strong conviction as to his Messiahship without entering into the more intricate problem as to his person. It may be granted that did this confession of Peter stand unsupported by other similar and stronger statements made by the contemporaries of Jesus in their effort to account for him, the doctrine of his essential divinity might never have obtained the place it holds in Christian thought. But when we trace the persistent attempt of his immediate followers, themselves members of that Hebrew race steeped for centuries in the majestic truth of the unity of God, to relate his person to Infinite Being in a manner altogether unique,—an attempt never undertaken on behalf of Paul or John or any other great religious leader of that century; and when we find that this attempt extends through the Synoptic Gospels, the fourth Gospel, the Acts, and the Epistles, we can understand why all the main branches of the Christian Church, following the lead of those first apostles, have made belief in the divinity of Christ an essential part of their creed.

The various grounds on which these great bodies of Christian believers rest this conviction are many, too many for anything like adequate statement within the limits of a single chapter. The main lines of argument which are to many minds most satisfying, may, however, be briefly indicated.

We find spread upon the pages of the New Testament the outlines of a portrait of the Christ as he stood before his contemporaries. The authors of these New Testament books were Hebrews, uncompromising monotheists to whom the very thought of ascribing divine honors to a human being was an offense and a horror. Yet when they came to know Jesus Christ, we find them bracketing the name of Christ with that of God the Father, and according to him the honors and attributes which in Hebrew thought had been strictly reserved for God alone.

The formula for baptism; the ascription to Jesus of the right to forgive sins and of authority to judge the whole earth in the great assize; the statement made by Christ that no one knew the Father perfectly save himself and those to whom he would reveal Him; the confident assertion, “Ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven,” taken with the reception given this assertion by the Pharisees, who regarded it as blasphemy in that he had assumed divine prerogatives—all this from the Synoptic Gospels serves to indicate some of

the main features in the portrait of Jesus as “eyewitnesses of his majesty” have painted it.

The form of the familiar apostolic benediction found at the close of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and his repeated ascription to Jesus Christ of divine honors in the four unquestioned epistles; the salutations at the head of other epistles which bear the names of Paul and Peter, of James and Jude; the place assigned to Christ in the work of redemption as proclaimed in the sermons reported in the Book of Acts—all these, as well as the familiar estimates upon Christ in the fourth Gospel, serve to indicate clearly the total impression made upon the minds of those who stood nearest and knew him best. The citation of “proof texts” has lost much of its former hold upon serious-minded Christians, but the whole composite photograph of Jesus as it stands upon the pages of the New Testament is such as to make clear the fact that his immediate followers did not hesitate to stand before him in reverent worship. They voiced feeling and conviction in those words which invest him with attributes divine.

The testimony of Jesus concerning himself would seem to be what lawyers term “the best evidence.” Jesus gave every indication of being sincere and honest. He was not boastful or extravagant in his habit of speech. He was sane and clear-eyed in his moral judgments, so much so that the suggestion of his being a self-deceived enthusiast wins no serious assent from thoughtful students of the record. His own Hebrew nature and training would have caused him to shrink from the blasphemy involved in applying to himself divine titles, in accepting divine worship, in assuming divine prerogatives, had he been but one of us, standing in the presence of the Omnipotent to render an account for the utterance of every idle word. The testimony, therefore, which Jesus gave of himself would naturally be of the highest significance.

He claimed to be sinless. Men who undertake to instruct their fellow men in righteousness instinctively accompany their moral appeals with some reference to their own sense of unworthiness. People turn from any pulpit in which they do not hear ever and anon the tones of personal confession. They feel that if the man is not sufficiently honest to recognize the need of moral betterment in himself as he preaches of sublime duties, he is not fit to be their moral leader. The greatest of the apostles, in one of the undisputed epistles, cries: “The good that I would, I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do. O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me!” The saintly John writes, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” James voices his own habit where he says, “Confess your

faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” Peter’s humble word of confession is, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” The moral leaders of the world uniformly confess their sense of guilt and their consequent need of forgiveness.

But with Jesus there is no record of any such acknowledgment of moral fault. He showed no consciousness of wrong-doing. No prayer for personal forgiveness was found upon his lips. He taught his followers to pray, “Forgive us our sins,” but he himself never looked heavenward to say, “Forgive me my sin.” He admitted none. He said boldly, “I do always those things that please Him.” He challenged his enemies to convict him of sin, if they could. We have no record that the challenge was ever met. This claim of moral perfection either affirms something higher than the moral limitations of humanity as we know it, or it disfigures the sincerity of a perfect man.

The assertion of his personal relation to the work of human redemption throws light upon his self-estimate. It is common for right-minded leaders to point away from themselves to some higher source of help when they would direct their fellows in the way of eternal life. Jesus came into the world to “show us the Father,” but he also invited direct allegiance to himself in a way that would have seemed absurd had he been but a man of unusual intelligence and extraordinary purity of life. Hear his words, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” “The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.” He announced himself as the universal Judge of mankind. He said the Son of man would come and sit upon the throne of his glory and gather all nations before him! In the Synoptics as well as in the fourth Gospel we find recorded this extraordinary self-assertion. How impossible to adjust such claims with a strictly humanitarian theory of his person! We shrink from placing them on lips not truly divine.

Modern scholarship does not accord to the reported utterances of Jesus found in the fourth Gospel the same title to accuracy as would be accorded to the utterances recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. It is openly asserted that the fourth Gospel is a philosophical interpretation rather than a painstaking historical document. “The author of the fourth Gospel has preserved the image of his Master, but the picture is framed in by his own meditations and reflections.”

Yet if this claim be granted in full, the truth stands that this narrative of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth came into existence at an early

period in the development of Christianity; that no such attempt was made to secure standing outside the human categories for any other religious leader of the day; that this portrait of Jesus, retouched though it may have been by the hands of second-century scholarship, met with ready and confident acceptance at the hands of men standing many centuries nearer the original tradition than do we,—men who had been nourished on the plain statements of the first three Gospels and upon the body of tradition passed on from “eyewitnesses of his majesty.” The very existence of such a document, even for those who withhold from it the tribute of actual historicity, must have great weight as a witness to the conviction touching the person of Christ, which somehow had been produced among a people steeped in monotheism, and produced within an amazingly short time after his death. It seems to be entirely legitimate, therefore, to quote some of these sayings as throwing light upon the impression he made upon the thought of his own day.

The confident use of the capital “I,” of which men grow chary in proportion to their goodness and wisdom, attributed to Jesus in the fourth Gospel, is startling. “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “I am the bread of life: . . . he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.” “I am the true vine”—the life tree of regenerate humanity—“without me ye can do nothing.” “I am the resurrection, and the life: . . . whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” “I am the door: by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved.”

What awful egotism thus to exalt himself unless he transcended our humanity! Try to put such words on the lips of any other great religious leader, Paul, Luther, Francis of Assisi, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Henry Ward Beecher—they will not stay! The mute lips refuse such claims because they know their human limitations. None of these would ever say, “Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest,” or, “Without me ye can do nothing.” None would think of saying, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” The old dilemma stands: either he was divine or, according to these reported utterances revealing his self-appraisal, he was not a sane, sincere, good man.

It is written, also, that Jesus associated himself, in a manner entirely unique, with God the Father. He told men in the same breath to trust God and trust him. “Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” He commanded them to pray in his name. “If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it.” He ranked the honors paid to him on a level with honors paid to God. “All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father.” He declared himself to be the

full, unimpaired revelation of the invisible God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." He associated himself with God in the work of salvation. "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Who is this that thus couples his name with that of the Father and says, "We"?

His final commission was, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore into all the world and baptize men into the name of God and into my name and into the name of the Holy Ghost." We have heard extravagant boasts made by men as to the extent of their earthly power, but here is One claiming all power in heaven and on earth and sending his followers to baptize believers with a formula where the divine name and his own name stand together and equal. The sum of all this testimony indicates that Jesus lived and taught in the faith that he was the Son of God in a sense which entirely transcends the filial relation sustained by believing men to the heavenly Father.

But in addition to the portrait of Christ as it stands upon the pages of the New Testament, embodying the estimate of eyewitnesses of his majesty, and the testimony of Jesus concerning himself, there is the history of the Christian Church for nineteen hundred years. The lower conception of Jesus as an extraordinary man or as the first of created beings, but not divine, has had its full chance to be heard in all the centuries since the first. Gnostic and Arian, Socinian and Unitarian have offered this lower view to those who were puzzled or repelled by the higher claim. The offer has been made by men winsome in character and possessed of unusual power in literary statement.

And what has been the result? We are not moving here in any realm of metaphysical speculation. We are not even examining historical sources so remote as those contained in the pages of the New Testament. We are scrutinizing facts of history which no one thinks of calling in question. The adherents of the lower view are but a small company. They have failed to command any considerable following or to develop the spiritual vigor belonging to those great branches of the Christian Church which hold the higher view. They have failed to give that evidence of an all-inclusive, self-sacrificing love seen in those missionary movements which clasp the whole round world in the arms of Christian interest. This vaster moral enterprise has been left altogether to those bodies of Christians who hold that Christ is divine.

The contrast between the varying spiritual results of proclaiming the higher and the lower views of Christ's person was thus recently voiced by a

prominent Unitarian: “Two curious spectacles the world sees today: an orthodoxy holding fast to discredited dogmas and profoundly in earnest; a liberalism intellectually secure, but without depth of moral conviction and half indifferent to the claims of personal religion! The world approves our position and forsakes our altars. The intelligence of the age goes the way of liberal thought; the devotion of the age goes the way of orthodox life.”

It is a severe arraignment of the confessed weakness of the liberal position in producing desired spiritual results. This frank admission of failure raises the question as to whether “dogmas,” which work so much better in the production of moral earnestness and devotion than do the denials of them, are altogether “discredited.” It raises the question as to whether the more serious and aspiring part of the world does “approve” the liberal position, since in the expression of its deeper life it holds mainly the more conservative faith.

Why is it that this lower view of Christ’s person has thus shown itself deficient in furnishing motive power? Why has history put the crown of the larger spiritual success upon the head of the higher view? “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” The verdict of history upon those who content themselves with the claim that Christ was a matchless teacher, a lovely example, a great moral hero, and its altogether different verdict upon those who find in him a divine redeemer, is highly instructive.

The rule of the pragmatist which has value, even though it be not the sole or the supreme test of truth, may well teach us something on this point. The lower view of Christ’s person, though tried for centuries with a noble persistence on the part of men at once gifted and earnest, has not “worked.” Its spiritual fruitage on the wide fields of Christian effort, where the attempt has been made to change the lives of moral failures and to make moral success more broadly and generously useful in bringing in the Kingdom of Heaven, will not stand comparison with the spiritual fruitage of the higher view.

The form, the theory, the pattern of godliness is not the most pressing need of the modern world. The imperative need is for that divine something which will lift off the sense of guilt, renew the springs of action, invigorate the lame will, furnish an unfailing source of motive and stimulus. The moral demand is for “the power of godliness,” which human experience has discovered in greatest measure, thus far, by fixing its faith upon Jesus Christ as Son of God and Saviour of the world.

Unless we are ready to part company with our confidence in the moral integrity of the universe, and with our faith in the validity of history as a moral revelation in itself, it seems incredible that, for sixty generations of believing and aspiring men, moral victory has been the reward of a delusion, and comparative failure, wherever the higher and the lower conceptions of the person of Christ have been brought into competition, the disappointing fate of the truth. To make such a claim would be to assert that for some inexplicable reason the things that are not persist in being mightier than the things that are.

The feeling of essential kinship between the human and the divine, along with the sense of profound difference, has for some reason only taken deep hold upon the moral lives of whole communities of men where that great truth has been proclaimed in the terms of the incarnation. "The supreme divinity of Jesus Christ is the sovereign expression in human history of the great law of difference in identity, that runs through the entire universe and that has its home in the heart of the Godhead."^[1] The splendid confidence that man is the child of the Infinite, in nature, in capacity for growth, in an endless destiny, seems to fade out of the ordinary consciousness unless it is perpetually sustained by a faith that "the Prototype of humanity, lying eternally in the Godhead, has appeared in an historic personality to vindicate the daring thought." And this "Eternal Pattern" of our human relations and our human capacity has been identified in the life of the Church universal with "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of man of the Gospels, the Mediator and Redeemer of the Epistles, and the Lord Christ of the historic creeds!"

[1] George A. Gordon, "The Christ of To-day," page 112.

It is confidently asserted by those who would discard all manner of external authority and refuse to accept even an historical norm, that we have advanced beyond the necessity for using the historical Jesus in the production of religious experience. They insist that "the idea of the Christ" will amply suffice for all our spiritual need.

But how did the splendid idealism of the Christian gospel get into the world? Whence came "the idea of the Christ"? How has it become the leading element in the spiritual possessions of the race? We have in our American life "the spirit of Washington" and "the spirit of Lincoln." The phrases indicate certain mighty traditions which exert a commanding influence in the development of patriotism. But we have the spirit of those noted statesmen at work in our civic life as a result of the fact that the great ideas thus suggested actually became incarnate in the persons of Washington

and of Lincoln. And the Eternal Word, the everlasting gospel of the living God, became effective when “the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” We need both the historical and the idealistic treatment of the Christian faith if it is to furnish us a sure word of eternal life.

Napoleon Bonaparte was not a theologian, but his wide experience made him a judge of men. He could estimate forces which would work lasting results. Near the close of his life at St. Helena we are told that he was reviewing the events of his own career and commenting upon the great men of history. “Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?” he said one day. No answer was given, and he continued, “Well, then, I will tell you. Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great empires! But upon what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for him. I think I understand something of human nature, and I tell you that all these were men and I am a man; none else is like him; Jesus is more than man. I have inspired multitudes with such enthusiastic devotion that they would have died for me, but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present with the electric influence of my looks, of my words, of my voice. Christ alone has succeeded in so raising the mind of man toward the Unseen, that it becomes insensible to the barriers of time and space. This it is that proves to me convincingly the divinity of Jesus Christ.”

The claim that the Man of Nazareth, born of a woman, tempted in all points like as we are, schooled in obedience by the things that he suffered, crucified, dead, and buried in the days of Pontius Pilate, was the divine Son of God, raises intellectual difficulties. The lower conception seems easier to many minds. Some people, without adequate study of the grounds of Christian certainty, hastily accept it as a relief from intellectual confusion. Our intellects are not built on a scale to grasp readily and thoroughly “the mystery of godliness” before which the great religious leaders have stood in reverent awe, believing that—

“God was manifest in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen of Angels;
Preached unto the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up into glory.”

The mode of God's unmanifested existence is too high for us—we cannot attain unto it. And the brave attempt to express “the manifold helpfulness with which God has offered himself to us,” as we do in our doctrine of the Trinity, involves us in further philosophical difficulties.

But we are already bearing the burden of many unexplained mysteries in this life of ours. How states of mind register themselves upon the body in terms of health or of disease; how the phenomena of hypnotism, suggestion, and other strange facts recorded by societies for psychical research are produced; how the energy of gravitation passes from world to world without the aid of even such a medium as the enveloping atmosphere of our planet; how the wireless message leaves the source of power and goes forth bodiless, moving swiftly upon its errand until it reports and registers itself at its appointed destination; how a single atom of radium may contain energy sufficient to keep a clock ticking for a hundred thousand years; how a thousand forms of phenomena are related to Ultimate Reality, our minds are utterly unable to determine.

Therefore in view of the fact that the moral honesty and intellectual sanity of Jesus of Nazareth seem to be bound up with the acceptance or rejection of the higher claim as to his person; and in view of the further fact that the fruitage of moral energy and spiritual passion has been a hundredfold richer on those fields of human life where the higher claim has been received than upon those where it was displaced by a lower estimate of him, “it seems easier for a good man to believe that in a world where we are encompassed by mysteries, where man's own being itself is a consummate mystery, the Moral Author of the wonders around us should for great moral purposes have taken to himself a created form, than that the one human life which realizes the idea of humanity, the one Man who is at once perfect strength and perfect tenderness, the one Pattern of our race in whom its virtues are combined and its vices eliminated should have been guilty, when speaking of himself, of an arrogance, of a self-seeking, and of an insincerity, which, if admitted, must justly degrade him far below the moral level of millions among his unhonored worshipers.”

In speaking of all these doctrines, I wish to ask what bearing they have on the needs of common life? Religious beliefs are means to an end, and the end is right conduct. “The natural terminus of all experiences, bodily and mental, is action.” Our time would be wasted did we study these questions only to decide that our positions were sound and right, and then leave the consideration of them with no additional help for nobler living. The contention of Professor James that there is no difference which does not

make a difference is valid. "There can be no difference in abstract truth which does not express itself in a difference of concrete fact and of conduct consequent upon the fact." Unless the higher view of the person of Christ has some direct bearing upon conduct, it is scarcely worth while to urge it.

The practical helpfulness of this truth of Christ's divinity lies just here. The main approach to the heart of our religion is through the person of Christ. To be a Christian is to wear his name, to trust in him, to follow him, to do the will of God as he reveals it and by the aid he lends. In dealing with him, then, as "the way, the truth, and the life," are we dealing with one who stands altogether within the human category, purer, wiser, finer than ourselves, it may be, but a fellow mortal still; or are we coming into personal relations with the total helpfulness of One who does sustain cosmic and eternal relations to human need? When we accept his invitation, "Come unto me," does this movement of the inner life establish us in personal relations with One who could justly say, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth"?

It has seemed to a multitude of aspiring souls which no man could number, of all nations and peoples and kindreds and tongues, that "to deny divinity to Christ is to relegate all divinity whatsoever to the far-off, shadowy realm of metaphysical inquiry." On the other hand, to recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind, is to receive a pledge of the absolute and unutterable help of God in bearing all burdens, in meeting all temptations, in solving all human problems.

To "know Christ," with this higher view of his person, is to come into living relations with help inexhaustible. He is able to mediate unto us "the power of God unto salvation." The moral vigor, the confident assurance, the unquenchable hope begotten of this firm faith are voiced in those words of the apostle, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Look up, then, with eager, expectant faith to Jesus Christ, Son of man and Son of God, the representative Man on earth, the Eternal prototype in the Being of God of a perfected humanity! How full of moral inspiration and stimulus becomes the conception of him as the Head of a redeemed humanity! The thoughts, the desires, the determinations cherished in any brain utter themselves in effective influence upon the health, the movements, the efficiency of the whole body! Thus the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of humanity, through the concepts he holds, through the desires he cherishes on our behalf, through the high determinations of his eternal

purpose, becomes the decisive force in the life of the race to which he stands thus organically related.

Christ the true Vine, and Christian people the branches! Out of that Vine flows a stream of spiritual power, making the branches, incorporate with him by personal choice and consecration, alive with the Vine's own mighty energy, making them fruitful in terms of individual experience by the power of the Vine's own splendid fruitfulness! The graft lives and thrives by the vital energies of the larger life with which it has become incorporate, yet declaring in the manner of fruit it bears the particular marks of its own original endowment. "The blending of the human and divine in Christ is unique in its perfection but representative in its ultimate significance, for he was 'the Son of man,' the rightful heir to all that is human, in anticipation as well as in retrospect." He interprets every life to itself, and then by the spiritual dynamic of fellowship with himself aids it toward its perfect self-realization.

When men once open their minds freely and sympathetically to this richer conception of Christ, not as standing helpless among us, himself looking across the chasm of difference between the human and the divine, not as removed from us in the isolation of a being purely celestial, but as organized with us, the Eternal Mediator of that essential kinship between humanity and divinity which is perpetually requisite to a vital religion, they are in the line of spiritual advance! The larger faith, the higher appraisalment of his person, fills the soul with moral energy, with fresh hope for the race, with magnificent confidence that the Kingdom of God can be established on earth through the Eternal Headship of Jesus Christ!

CHAPTER II

THE ATONEMENT

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH has concentrated its attention upon the death of Christ. The cross is the leading symbol in Christian architecture. The main sacrament is the Lord's Supper, the perpetual commemoration of his death. The feeling that our salvation is, in some mysterious way, bound up with the suffering of Christ upon the cross is widespread.

The impulse which thus finds expression may be altogether sound, but many unreal and artificial conceptions of the significance of Christ's death find their way into religious speech. Metaphors like "ransom" and "debt" and "lamb" are carelessly used as if they were the exact equivalents of certain spiritual realities. Oriental symbols are forced to serve as scientific definitions of dogmatic truths. The rhetoric of impassioned souls is made to fill the office of logic. All this contributes to the confusion and uncertainty in many a thoughtful mind regarding the atonement.

Three main theories have been advanced as to the significance of the death of Christ for the moral recovery of the race. The first is built upon the analogies of the civil law. It is known as "the satisfaction theory." The law of God provides that "The wages of sin is death." Men have broken that law. They consequently stand condemned to death without remedy. They must pay the full price of their transgression. The justice of God is such that He can suffer no violation of his laws without meting out the appropriate penalty. But before sentence is actually executed, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, voluntarily endures upon the cross the penalty due to men for their sins and thus purchases their release. Therefore, when guilty men accept this arrangement and take advantage of what he has done for them, they are forgiven.

The second theory is cast in the forms of the criminal law and is known as "the governmental theory." God is ready to forgive penitent wrong-doers—indeed, there is no more mercy in Christ than in God, and no stricter justice in the Father than in the Son. But if God were freely to forgive guilty

men simply upon condition of their penitence, without their suffering the full penalty of their evil-doing or having any one suffer it for them, the majesty of God's government would be lowered. His administration would be despised and its restraining moral force weakened.

The demand for an atonement, therefore, lies, not in the strict justice of God, but in the exigencies of his moral government. It was not to pay the price of man's release, but to show how God hates sin, to uphold the majesty of God's government for administrative ends, and to make forgiveness consistent with the maintenance of a righteous order, that Christ suffered the penalty of our wrong-doing on the cross.

The advocates of the third theory sit in judgment upon the two preceding theories. They maintain that there can be no transfer of guilt or of merit from one to another. Debts are transferable, but guilt is personal and merit is personal; to talk of imputing either, is ethical shuffling. The familiar words, "the merits of Christ," were never used by the authors of the New Testament. And were such transfer of merit possible, would it not bring a fearful charge against any government to say that its penalties might be "bought off"? Moreover, the same sin cannot be both punished and forgiven. If Christ suffered the penalty due to our transgressions, then all possibility of forgiveness is excluded—we are free as a matter of justice.

And the claim that Christ suffered to show the majesty of God's government fares no better. Would it reveal majesty in a government, they ask, to punish the innocent instead of the guilty, even though the innocent should consent? Would it impress horse thieves for the State to arrest an innocent man now and then and impute to him the guilt of horse stealing, hanging him to show the offenders how the State hates their crime and how its majestic justice must be satisfied by some victim, innocent or guilty? Even though some innocent man with a mistaken sense of what would be best should consent to be thus hanged, such a transaction would bring a blot upon civic administration.

The claim is therefore made that Christ came into the world to teach, to live, to heal, and to bless, knowing that he would be put to death in the midst of his holy, beneficent work. He died to show us that the divine love stops at nothing—God loves men even to the point of self-sacrifice. Calvary is a revelation in time of the length and breadth and height and depth of that love which passeth knowledge. If anything will melt the hearts of guilty men, surely the sight of Christ, dying upon the cross for them, as the climax and crown of his saving life, must melt them. This is "the moral influence theory" of the atonement.

These three theories practically cover the ground in that section of our traditional theology. You have heard them all and pondered them, but somehow you were not convinced. The satisfaction idea, dollar for dollar, so much suffering endured by Christ to purchase so much forgiveness and mercy for us, did not seem like the atmosphere of the New Testament. "Strict justice is not satisfied if the innocent suffer; it requires the punishment of the guilty." The manifest injustice of it did not commend to you such ethical bargaining; you shrank from pressing forward to avail yourself of such a scheme.

The second theory represents God as bound hand and foot by the exigencies of his own government. He desires to forgive sinful men when they turn to him in penitence, but fears for the majesty of his administration. But does the makeshift named save that majesty? Does it not load it with a further burden grievous to be borne? And the sufferings of Christ are nowhere referred to in the Scriptures as having been in any sense "a punishment."

The moral influence theory does not in any sufficient way meet and explain the many texts of Scripture dealing with this vital truth. The authors of the New Testament certainly saw in the death of Christ something more than the sufferings of a martyr or the spectacular exhibition of the divine mercy. Thus all the views advanced seem to fall short of a satisfactory interpretation of the death of Christ.

We may be sure that in Christ's work of reconciliation there were "no fictions or unrealities, no transactions that were not expressive of eternal verity. Christ was not regarded by God as anything that he was not, nor are men in their relation to Christ viewed as anything but what they are. There is no unreal changing of places or imputation to any one of character that does not belong to him."^[2] These traditional interpretations seem to ignore certain moral realities, and they certainly fail adequately to interpret the message of the Scriptures bearing upon the work of moral reconciliation.

^[2] Clark, "Outline of Christian Theology," page 333.

The doctrine of the atonement must be so framed that conscience and reason will respond. Men will not accept some "plan of salvation" if it is irrational or absurd, if it ignores moral facts, or creates apparent disagreement between the character of the Father and that of the Son; nor will they rest in any view which ignores the teaching of Scripture on this fundamental question, or which fails to satisfy the profounder intimations of the moral nature, painfully conscious of its need of redemption.

In the discussion of the atonement it is well to distinguish between the fact and the human theories about the fact. However we may try to explain it, “the atonement is the work of God’s love in its bearing upon man’s sin.” The great fact is that God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, and the love of the Son impelled him to die on our behalf. There is no dispute here. But when we come to theorize upon the relation of his death to the moral laws of the universe, we find disagreement.

A man could live a worthy Christian life, however, on the great fact that God so loved the world as to give his Son, even though he found himself unable to frame an entirely satisfactory theory regarding the atonement. “Life eludes definition and analysis, and grows according to its own laws. While scholars were beating out the articles of the Creed of Chalcedon, all through the world, in serene unconsciousness, humble spirits were following Jesus in the realization of fatherhood and brotherhood. While the reformed divines by every device known to logic were packing words with ‘sovereignty, reprobation, and expiation,’ millions who never heard of a logical process were yielding to the mastery of Jesus and learning at first hand that he is the Way and the Truth and the Life.”^[3]

[3] Amory H. Bradford, “The Growing Revelation,” page 234.

The Scriptures uniformly represent Christ, not as reconciling an angry God to us, but as reconciling us to God. They show “God willing and men unwilling. Reconciliation is proposed between two parties, of whom one has a heart for it and the other has little or none. Hence, just as we should expect, if one party was willing and the other was not, we find the willing taking the initiative. God himself has given Christ to be a propitiation, and a God who will himself provide a propitiation has no need of one in the sense which the word has ordinarily borne.”^[4]

[4] Clark, “Christian Theology,” pages 234-335.

The Scriptures bear uniform testimony on this point. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.” “We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.”

The word atonement is used but once in the New Testament. The Greek word there translated “atonement” is elsewhere translated “reconciliation.” In the three passages quoted above, the word for “reconcile” or “reconciliation” is the same word translated “atonement” in this single passage. If we make the translation uniform throughout, we find that God “hath given to us the ministry of atonement.” We find Paul urging a certain Corinthian woman to be “atoned to her husband”—that is, restored to loyalty and affection toward him. The term has reference to the restoration of a personal relation which had been interrupted by wrong-doing.

The Scriptures teach that all barriers between a holy God and sinful men are cleared away when we turn from our sins and become personal believers in Jesus Christ. But if there were barriers on God’s part which demanded the death of an innocent victim before forgiveness could be extended to the penitent, Jesus does not seem to know about them. He invited men to come directly to the Father in penitent faith, asking forgiveness; and, according to his teachings, they were forgiven, not because some penalty had been paid or satisfaction made, to which their attention was directed as the ground on which to hope for pardon—they were forgiven because they came in penitence and faith. The publican prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner,”—and he went down to his house “justified,” without any reference to a present or prospective ground of forgiveness, to be purchased only by the blood of the innocent. It was a fatal omission in the parable, unless penitent and believing men are always forgiven simply because their Father desires to forgive them.

Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” “If ye forgive men their trespasses,” he said, “your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” The genuineness of our penitence and the new purpose toward God would be indicated by the forgiving spirit toward others; and this penitence and faith were made by him the sole conditions of forgiveness.

The thief on the cross prayed, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” He had already said, “We are suffering justly for our deeds.” Repentance, confession, faith, again—and Jesus forgave him, assuring him an entrance into the kingdom! It was a singular omission that he there made no reference to the connection of his own sufferings with the possibilities of forgiveness, if that suffering constituted in his mind the sole ground of forgiveness.

Jesus taught that the method of divine forgiveness finds its prototype in the method of human forgiveness. “Forgive as we forgive,” was his direction

as to the confidence in which we should pray. If ye then, being evil, know how to forgive men their trespasses when they turn to you in open acknowledgment of fault and with confidence in your generosity, how much more will your heavenly Father forgive you when you turn to him in the same way! This was the uniform teaching of Jesus.

It was his own unflinching habit with burdened penitent souls. Did he omit the very cornerstone of the gospel in teaching that the willing mercy of God is the sole and sufficient ground for human forgiveness? He had not yet died, it is true, but he knew that he was to die. He spoke repeatedly of the decess he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. It seems impossible that his confident offers of mercy were made upon a ground which in a few months would be rendered false and unsafe by his death upon the cross.

After wandering through elaborate theories and intricate reasonings about commercial exchanges and judicial experiments, about imputation of guilt and of merit where they do not rightly belong, we find it refreshing to turn back to the original Christianity of Jesus Christ. How little he seemed to know of all these elaborations! How far from their intricacy were his plain statements about forgiveness and mercy! If any man came back from the far country of wrong-doing and stood before the Father, saying, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee," he was forgiven at once, without any reference to his confidence in some scheme making it possible for a Father to forgive his penitent child. The very words "reconciliation," "atonement," "propitiation," "justification" never occur in the four Gospels at all. The Master, who spake as never man spake, lived his life, delivered his message, and finished the work which the Father had given him to do, without finding it necessary or appropriate to use any one of them.

The great forgiving love of God, unpurchased by anybody, unhindered by any governmental embarrassments, leaping the barriers which sin interposes, has been ever seeking the lost that it might bring them salvation. We have obscured it by our clever theories. We have dimmed its light by an unwarranted use of certain expressions in the epistles. These expressions were natural to the Hebrew mind, trained as it was in an ecclesiastical system where the offering of bloody sacrifices bore a prominent part. Jesus transcended the habits of thought prevalent among his own people. He moved upon a higher level than the one held by the cult and practise of the Jewish Church. When we turn to his utterances, therefore, we find no word indicative of obstacles between the free, unpurchased, forgiving love of God and the moral needs of a penitent heart.

The claim has been made that in all the references to the blood of bulls and of goats in the Old Testament we are to find types and anticipations of the one perfect sacrifice offered at last in the death of Christ. But the choicer spirits of the Old Testament knew the mind of God sufficiently to see that he forgave men then, not on account of the bloody sacrifice, but on account of their penitence and faith.

Hear David, “Thou desireth not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart!”

And Samuel, “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams!”

And Isaiah, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. . . . Who hath required this at your hand? . . . Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon . . . Cease to do evil; learn to do well. . . . Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow!”

And Hosea, “I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings!”

And Micah, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? . . . Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? . . . He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

And Jeremiah, “Thus saith the Lord of hosts: . . . I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people!”

And Ezekiel, “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. . . . All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him.”

These prophetic words are taken from the lips of the leading men in the Old Testament, the men of vision and insight. Their combined message is to the effect that the forgiving mercy of God is neither purchased nor purchasable; it is freely bestowed, upon all who seek it, as an act of grace. It cannot be said that, in speaking in this derogatory way of the idea of purchasing reconciliation by bloody sacrifices, the prophets were simply emphasizing the necessity of accompanying these offerings by penitence and faith. The prophets did not hesitate to put themselves in open antagonism to those priestly views advanced by the upholders of ritualism.

The prophets saw that the priestly class, with its theories of judicial exchange and imputation of guilt to innocent victims, with its notion of appeasing a wrath which no longer exists when sinful men face about in penitence, was confusing and misleading to the people. They stood at the high-water mark of Old Testament inspiration, pointing men, not to the wringing of the neck of a pigeon, or to the cutting of the throat of a lamb, as the ground of forgiveness, but rather to the free, unpurchased and unpurchasable mercy of God.

We have heard “plans of salvation” and “schemes of redemption” put forward, which were travesties upon the divine character. A popular evangelist has been accustomed to represent the atonement after this fashion: A father and son had become estranged by the son’s wrong-doing. The young man left his home in anger, vowing he would never come back until the father softened toward him and asked for his return. The heart-broken mother sought with all her love to induce him to come home, but he refused. She pleaded with the father to request the return, but his patience had been sorely tried by the dissolute habits of his boy, and he would not yield. The mother grew sick unto death and a message was sent in her name, imploring the boy to come home and see her before she died. He still remained obdurate, until the father sent a message in his own name, and then the son came. But still the father and son were unreconciled—they stood on opposite sides of the mother’s death-bed, proudly unwilling to speak to each other. She saw the gulf between them, and at last reaching out, took the hand of each, clasped them together, and, holding them in her own hand, passed away. The hands which she had clasped together in her dying love the father and son could not now unclasp in enmity. So hand in hand they knelt and implored forgiveness, human and divine, and thus were reconciled. She who in life had failed to reconcile them, at last reconciled them in her death.

And this terrible story of a father's haughty, unwilling pride was supposed to show how God, who so loved the world as to send his only Son, is induced to forgive his wayward but returning children! What a caricature of him concerning whom Jesus said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father!" Against all attempts, whether they are made openly in the name of the devil, or covertly in the name of what would call itself evangelical, to put a blot on the Father's face, which shines and has always shone with forgiving welcome for the man who turns away from his wrong-doing, we strongly protest.

The death of Christ was an event in history, but it was the revelation in time of something eternal. The Scriptures speak of Christ as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." This utterance of the Spirit lifts the atoning work of Christ up into timeless and cosmic relations; it expresses that eternal heartache and heart-break of the Father over the wrong-doing of his children. It indicates an element in the divine character which suffers and makes sacrifice in the work of rescuing the children. The love of God in Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, leaves the ninety and nine and goes forth redemptively at personal cost, seeking the one that is lost.

Jesus pictured this divine effort for our recovery as the act of One who, having life in himself, imparts himself in the act of sacrifice. "This is my body"—broken and given for us! "This is my blood"—washing away our sins and renewing our natures in holiness!

"The blood is the life." Its office in the human body is to cleanse and to feed the organism. The moral life of man, now become diseased and feeble, is cleansed and renewed by the outpoured life of Christ. His offered life, taken by us in grateful appropriation, removes the stain and nourishes the weakened nature into moral health.

This is atonement indeed. It is as though he opened the veins of his own nature, strong and holy, in willing sacrifice, infusing into sinful but penitent, receptive humanity that new life which effects our reconciliation with God. Thus in the simple, accurate language of Scripture, "we are saved by the blood of Christ." It is our union with the holy life of Jesus, offered and poured out for the world's redemption, which restores us to the favor and the likeness of God.

We are aided toward a right conception of this sublime truth by an Old Testament picture of redemption through suffering, wrought out in terms of human experience. The prophet Hosea married a woman to whom he gave his entire affection. She was a fickle, shallow creature. She presently turned

away from her husband's devotion to cultivate unholy intimacies with other lovers. Hosea recognized the bitter tragedy which had fallen upon his home, but in the greatness of his moral nature he loved her still. When a babe was born in that house, hers but not his, he rose up in anguish of heart and gave the child a name indicative of the sad situation—"Lo-Ammi," "not my people." Finally the unfaithful wife left him and became openly dissolute. She sank lower and lower, until she was bought and sold as a common slave.

But Hosea never ceased to love her. When he saw her exposed for sale in the slave market, though his affection had been outraged, he loved her in all her pitiable degradation. In the great compassion of his heart, he went up and bought her from her owner. He took her to his home and reclaimed her from the life of shame.

Here you have the word of vicarious suffering made flesh. Here is the work of atonement dwelling among us full of grace and truth. When Hosea paid that slave dealer the price of an immoral woman, he suffered such agony of heart as any man of honor must were the woman one he loved—he became sin for her! When he walked down street with the disgraced woman at his side, leading her to his home, he was wounded for her transgressions, he was bruised for her inquiries! When he shared with her the pain and sorrow of her wrong-doing, the chastisement of her peace was upon him and by his stripes she was healed. This devoted husband, so foully wronged, took up his cross and faced toward Calvary, redeeming the sinful woman he loved by his agony and bloody sweat!

Sin is an offense against love; it is contempt for holy affection. Redemption is accomplished by the patient energy of that tender, persistent love which will not give up its claim nor accept defeat. Here in the sublime action of this prophet of old stands revealed that redemptive power enduring pain and mortification, insult, and disgrace, that it may recover the sinful soul from its wrong course! There is not an artificial note in it from first to last! And this painful story of the tragedy in Hosea's home, and of his suffering in the recovery of the guilty woman, affords us light, when we study the vaster tragedy wrought in the world by human sin. It aids us in interpreting the divine compassion, revealed in the self-sacrifice of Christ in its bearing upon the moral recovery of that world.

The universe is full of this vicarious principle. One thing lays down its life for another. The vegetable world lays down its life that horses and cattle may live and be useful in ways impossible to oats and corn. The lower forms of animal life, the cattle, the sheep, and the fowls, lay down their lives that

human life may be fed and made effective. Everything is bought with a price.

Men lay down their lives, sometimes in single heroic acts of martyrdom, sometimes by years of patient, self-denying service. The physician robs himself of sleep, hurries through his meals, carries the anxiety of a hundred households at a time, and dies all too soon, having laid his life on the altar of the community's improved health. School-teachers lay their nerves, their health, and sometimes the gentler qualities of character, on the altar of education for restless, thoughtless boys and girls. Railroad engineers, watching the track with eagle eye, enduring that nervous strain which cuts into life with sharp strokes, ready to be the first to meet the washout or the broken rail, are types of sacrifice, denying themselves for the comfort of those who sleep securely in the Pullmans. Husbands and wives, easily able to support themselves and attain a competence for old age, suffer and sacrifice for the comfort, education, and well-being of their children. "All this is of the nature of atonement, and there is no corner of the world where the letters of this word may not be spelled out, like a dim and broken inscription on the fragments of human life."^[5] Everywhere the vicarious principle is at work. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

[5] Van Dyke, "Gospel for a World of Sin," page 135.

When we reach the summit of all being, we should not expect to find the Creator ignoring this vicarious principle with which he has filled the world. We are prepared by our survey of these phenomena to accept the doctrine of atonement. He, too, suffers and sacrifices for his children. The throne of God is not cold marble, melted at last by what was seen on Calvary—it has been from the first a throne of self-sacrificing mercy. The "Lamb which is in the midst of the throne" is a "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." "Law and grace are co-ordinate and harmonious expressions of one and the same reality, the opposition of God to sin, and his desire that his creatures may be free from it."

The vindication of this doctrine of atonement is to be found in actual life. The wise men sometimes confuse us with their philosophic efforts at the adjustment of the benefits of the Saviour's sacrifice of himself, but the active participants in the work of saving a world that groans and travails in pain entailed upon it by wrong-doing bring us a sure word of interpretation. "Nothing short of this experience of earnest service and unflinching sacrifice for the triumph of God's will and the good of man can interpret to us today

the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ. Every man who has tried to do these things in any degree knows full well that there can be no salvation either from sin or from the misery sin entails on guilty and innocent alike save by the vicarious sacrifice of some brave, generous servant of righteousness and benefactor of his fellows. The doctrine of atonement is self-evident to every man who ever fought entrenched and powerful evil, or sought to rescue the wicked from their wickedness. To those who have never touched the fearful burden of human sin and misery with so much as the tips of their dainty and critical fingers, the doctrine of vicarious suffering, like all the deeper truths of the spiritual life, must remain forever an unintelligible and impenetrable mystery.”^[6]

[6] Wm. De Witt Hyde, “God’s Education of Man.”

The divine nature in all its self-relationships must of necessity contain moral mysteries beyond our ken. The various theories of the atonement have been attempts to rationalize and comprehend what still eludes while it entices our utmost effort of thought and aspiration. But when the returns are all in from all the theories, we still resort for moral help to the cardinal fact that God so loved the world as to give his Son. “The old idea that Christ died because God was insulted and must punish somebody fades out. The conception of the death of Jesus as a mere exhibition of governmental severity for the sake of keeping order in the universe becomes too narrow. The measuring of the precise amount of Christ’s suffering as a *quid pro quo* for an equal amount of penalty incurred by human sin no longer satisfies the moral sense. The cross itself, with its simplicity, its generosity of sacrifice, its evident reforming and regenerating power upon the heart—the cross itself leads the race upward and onward in the interpretation of its message.”

CHAPTER III

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

THE whole attempt to define the divine force in the life of the world is attended with difficulties insuperable. The mind of man is not built on a scale to apprehend infinite reality. We may believe in God the Creator, and affirm that he is "the Father." When we advance to a belief in "Jesus Christ, the Son of God," we encounter further perplexities. And when we proceed to declare our faith in "another Comforter who shall abide with us forever," we may feel ourselves involved in hopeless mystery. There are many earnest Christians who, if they gave frank utterance to their conviction, would say that the truths regarding God the Father and Jesus the Son bound their religious horizon; and so far as any experience of practical help is concerned, they have scarcely heard that there is any Holy Ghost.

This is due in part to the intellectual difficulties involved in the fuller belief. The bravest attempts of competent theologians do not answer all the questions arising out of the doctrine of the Trinity or even set that doctrine forth in perfect clearness. But the Scriptures afford such satisfactory instruction as to the moral needs and special privileges of men in regions where it is possible to verify the statements by actual experience, that we feel ready to trust them, when they speak of other matters which cannot be at once submitted to the test of experience, provided always that nothing impossible or irrational is offered for belief. The doctrine of the Trinity may be accepted as a teaching of that Book, which in moral and religious matters has become authoritative; reflection and experience may serve to make it satisfying to mind and heart.

This truth appears in such passages of Scripture as that where Jesus gave his followers the formula of baptism. They were to baptize men "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." At the baptism of Jesus, the voice of the Father commending his Son to the attention of men, and the Spirit descending upon him as a dove, embodied the same triune conception. In the fourth Gospel, Jesus is represented as saying, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter." "The

Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.” The apostle says, “Through him”—that is, through Jesus Christ—“we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” And the familiar apostolic benediction, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all,” brings before us constantly the conception entertained by those early Christians regarding the nature of God.

Shall we think of God as being three distinct persons, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? This is the heresy of tritheism. Shall we say that one true and living God manifests himself, now as Father and then as Son and again as Holy Spirit? This is the heresy of Sabellianism. The forms of life with which we are familiar do not afford adequate illustrations. As we ascend the scale of being, life grows more complex. The lowest forms of life, composed of single cells, dividing themselves when reproduction takes place and performing all the functions of their lowly calling in that single cell, are readily understood. A mollusk is more elaborate, but its mode of life remains simple. When we come to the mode of man’s existence we are faced by many an unsolved mystery. We do not, therefore, count it strange that Jesus indicated, in his matchless teaching, that there are mysterious self-relationships and an infinite richness of Being in the nature of God, baffling to our present nomenclature and our present discernment.

The doctrine of the Trinity stands as an expression for the eternal self-companionship which God enjoys within his own nature, and for “the manifold helpfulness with which he offers himself to the world.” The Son embodies the eternal human life of God, divine in character, human in its resemblances; the Spirit represents the active, loving communion between the Father and the Son. “If Christ is the eternal Son of God, God is indeed and in essence a Father: the social nature, the spring of love, is of the very essence of the eternal being: the communication of his life, the reciprocation of his affection dates from beyond time, belongs, in other words, to the very being of God.”

The picture drawn by Wilberforce is suggestive. You hold in your hand a flower. You find there, first of all, that mysterious thing which we call “life.” No man hath seen “life” at any time. But this life manifests itself in a visible form. The flower is white and of a certain shape. Then, proceeding from the hidden life and from this revealing form of the flower, is a fragrance which fills all the room where we are sitting. The life, and the revealed form of that life, and the invisible fragrance which proceeds from them, are three, and yet there are not three flowers, but one flower. This is only an illustration, and

an imperfect one. We cannot press it at all points, for even the intricacies of flower life would not bear the total strain of portraying the divine life. It aids us, however, in our appreciation of what the Scriptures mean in speaking of one God, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

I have referred in this general way to the doctrine of the Trinity, as being an appropriate introduction to the study of the work of the Holy Spirit. In the progressive revelation the Divine Being has made of himself, one person reveals another, as his children are educated into deeper fellowship with himself. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. “No man hath seen God at any time.” Jesus, the Son of God, came revealing him! “This is my beloved Son: hear him,” was the word of the Father. “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,” was Christ’s account of himself. The advent of the Holy Spirit reveals the deeper meaning of the life and work of Christ! “He shall testify of me,” said Jesus. “He shall take the things of mine and show them unto you.” There came a richer understanding of God the Father, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea; and there came a richer understanding of Christ the Son, when the Holy Spirit entered the hearts of believers at Pentecost. The earlier revelation was not destroyed but fulfilled. Thus we are baptized and initiated into the love of God, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

When we read the Gospels and the book of Acts, we find that men, who had believed in God the Father from infancy, who had followed Christ, hearing his words, and feeling his influence, received something more as they came to the fulness of religious privilege. In the upper room, Jesus breathed on them, and said, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit.” He bade them tarry and wait for “the promise of the Father.” “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem,”—in the heart and center of the old dispensation, in the enjoyment of religious experience already attained—“until ye be endued with power from on high.”

After his ascension they all continued in prayer and supplication for ten days. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, and suddenly they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Something additional came, a fresh and vivid experience of the presence of the Divine Spirit. They became conscious of that quickening, transforming, guiding, abiding Presence known as “the Holy Spirit.” When we likewise know the Father as revealed in Christ, and follow the Son in the shaping of our conduct, there comes to us the sense of a personal Presence dwelling within our hearts, taking the things of Christ, his words, his deeds, his life, his death and resurrection, and showing them unto us. Their richer meaning

is spiritually revealed, and thus we are guided into a fuller knowledge of the truth.

In the Dresden gallery, the “Sistine Madonna” hangs in a room by itself; no other painting is deemed worthy to share its honor. Opposite the picture stands a bust of Raphael, as though he too had taken his place among the visitors to study his own work. Suppose that the living Raphael should stand among the beholders and interpret his picture to them! Nay, more, suppose that Raphael could stand within each beholder, enabling him to look upon the picture through the artist’s eyes and to interpret it by the spirit of the artist—how much each man’s appreciation and understanding of the masterpiece would be increased by such an interpreter within!

This may indicate the office of the Holy Spirit! What man knoweth the things of art, save the spirit of an artist? “What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God,” as he dwells within the receptive heart of the believing Christian.

The “Holy Ghost” is the Scriptural name for the presence of the Divine Spirit in that body of people who, believing on Christ, are seeking to follow him into the richer experiences of Christian life. This is apparent in the book of Acts. “The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul,” when an extension of the Church’s work was proposed. “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us,” they said, in rendering the finding of a Church Council. “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” said Peter to Ananias, when he made a false statement to the Church. It was this sense of a Divine Presence that gave the Church its authority and power.

The Holy Spirit convinces men of their need of salvation. “When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” When men have been shown the way of salvation plainly, they do not always face about and begin to live Christian lives. They may not feel their need of salvation. The offer is reasonable and winsome, but it meets no response on their part, because there is no sense of lack. It is the office of the Spirit to convict men of their need, and to that end, his power is sought in the work of the Church.

When men have faced about and have accepted Jesus Christ, the Spirit bears witness with their spirits that they are the children of God. When any one makes a sincere attempt to follow Christ, it is borne in upon him that he is in the right way. He knows his acceptance into the divine family, not through some coldly reasoned process, but by a glad sense of inner warmth

and peace; and this Spirit within the heart, bestowing the feeling of worth and peace, is one with the Infinite Spirit, whose work for righteousness is from everlasting to everlasting. This “witness of the Spirit” is achieved, not apart from but through the exercise of the mental and spiritual faculties in the man’s own nature. The sense of acceptance, which develops in all healthy Christian experience, is the manifestation of the presence of the Spirit in the individual soul.

The indwelling presence of the Spirit changes the whole nature of the believer progressively. “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.” The characters of men are changed in some degree by environment, by the homes they live in, by the work they do, and by the society they meet. They are changed still more from within, because the inner state of mind and heart gives to, or withholds from, the environment its complete opportunity. The character is changed profoundly by the presence of the Comforter, the Guide, the Friend, who abides with the believer, leading him into all truth and into holy life. The transforming power of the Spirit is the most blessed aspect of his work. How many people know a warmer love for God, a greater interest in devotion, a greater compassion for men, an increased sympathy, tenderness and helpfulness consequent upon the indwelling presence of the Spirit!

“The fruits of the Spirit” grow out of the man thus related to the divine Energy with a glad spontaneity. The life “bears fruit of itself,” as Jesus said, we scarce know how. “Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, mildness, and self-control” become the natural, essential expression of the indwelling Spirit. These gracious qualities come by indirection. The life which bears these fruits is diffused in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

The Spirit guides us into all truth. The communication of truth from God to men did not close when the canon of our Bible was complete. God had many things to say unto the world which it could not bear. The work of revelation was limited by the material offered to the Spirit. In the richer understanding of the Scriptures, in the unfolding history of the Christian Church, itself a process of revelation under the tuition of the Spirit, in the great lessons learned by the accumulation of Christian experience, as interpreted by moral reason, the Spirit has been guiding the world into a fuller heritage of truth.

“Revelation is not only an eternal possibility, but an eternal necessity: it can be limited to no race, no time, no condition, and to no phase of faith.” The promise was not to any age or to any set of men, one of an

instantaneous vision of all truth, but of a gradual, progressive unfolding—"He will guide you into all truth." We are all "confident that God has more truth yet to break forth out of his holy word." The total history of an ever-expanding Christian experience, and the richer understanding of the whole divine message, become the appointed channel for this guidance of the Spirit.

Our trust for the future is in this holy guidance, promised to us in "the continuous leadership of the Holy Spirit." Problems confront us; unsolved as yet in any of the books. No man is wise enough to map out the future movements of the religious life of mankind. The Church does not adequately represent the Spirit of Christ. The Ritualist would make it a matter of forms, rites, and sacraments. There are clear thinkers, who would make it solely a place of intelligent, moral instruction. The Socialist would make it a place where economic questions are discussed and the wage-earner aided in his struggle. It seems to many of us that the Church is meant to be something more than a priest or a teacher or a divider over men. It is plain that if the Church is to be a power in the twentieth century, it must be something other and greater than it is today. Our trust is not in the cleverness of any plans thus far devised, but, rather, in a fuller measure of that continuous Leadership of the Spirit confidently promised to the Church which is devoted to the will of God.

The Day of Pentecost was no mere detached wonder, standing at the opening of a new dispensation to command attention. It was a specimen of the way in which the powers of an unseen world may be called to the aid of our own moral forces in establishing the kingdom of God. The discouraged hearts of men, turning back from spiritual ministry to their fishing, were summoned afresh to noble tasks by the Risen Christ, and then established in that finer purpose by the outpoured Spirit. The tongues which had been timid and denying were now invigorated, and made to speak the word with all boldness, as the Spirit gave them utterance. There came to the enfeebled community of believers, not the false stimulus of wine, but the mighty baptism of divine power, which filled all the city with its teaching, and sent forth a new church on its conquering career.

Men have sought to change themselves from sinners into saints, from moral deadness into moral power, by all manner of efforts. Baptismal rites and anointings, incantations and magical ceremonies, ablutions in sacred rivers, and pilgrimages to Jerusalem or to Mecca, ascetic practices and hideous self-inflictions have all been tried and found wanting. The change

from moral feebleness to moral vigor is effected by receiving into the life, through repentance and faith, the very Spirit of the Living God!

Men may admire the example of Christ and endorse his teachings; the form of godliness they may cordially approve, but remain all the while consciously deficient in the power of it. The spiritual tonic enabling them to make progress toward the ideal that summons them will come, not by passive waiting, but by active effort. When once they have turned away from their sins, and offered to Christ a consecrated life, the word of the Lord is “take.” “Take ye the Holy Ghost,” Jesus said, as he breathed on his disciples in the upper room. The word translated “receive,” in the ordinary version, is elsewhere translated “take.” “Take this and divide it among yourselves,” Jesus said, as he passed them the cup. “Take ye him and crucify him,” Pilate cried to the mob. The term indicates active, voluntary appropriation. It is after this manner that men are to “take the Holy Ghost.” The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not to be passively awaited, but actively claimed. Whensoever men will, they may “take” the blessed presence of Him who bears witness to their salvation, sanctifies their heart, and guides them into all truth.

The vindication of our belief in the Holy Spirit comes by a deepening Christian experience. To the natural man, these truths are unintelligible mysteries. “When set up as independent propositions, they are often meaningless or self-contradictory. But to the spiritual man, they develop themselves out of experience in doing the will of God. No man can strive earnestly to do the will of the Father, without gaining thereby an ever-increasing reverence for the divine character of the Christ, who revealed the fulness of that loving will as a world-transforming, spiritual power, and for the divine quality of the Spirit in the hearts of all our fellows who have caught from Christ an enthusiasm for the life of righteousness and love.”

CHAPTER IV

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

WE can understand why many Christian people are troubled over the work done by those scholars who are called “higher critics.” The Bible has been their lifelong friend. Its familiar stories and psalms were taught them in childhood. Its parables and precepts have been subjects of delightful and rewarding study during all the years of their maturity. Its promises and assurances have been their comfort in many a dark hour of sorrow and discouragement. It has become to them “the Book of books,” not by any decree of council, but by a life of sacred experiences. They hope to meet death with its confident words sounding in their ears the blessed messages of hope.

Therefore, when modern scholars undertake to examine critically its component parts, that they may arrive at just and rational views as to the method of their production; when they try to estimate the limited and local elements mingling with what is an enduring message from the Eternal, and in doing this disturb long-cherished opinions, the more conservative type of mind is disturbed. It seems ungracious, as if some student had undertaken a critical examination of his mother, pointing out that the dear woman suffered from certain limitations and upon certain occasions had spoken without the highest wisdom. The very suggestion of such a discriminating inquiry seems to certain people impertinent.

We may sympathize with this attitude as a sentiment. It is more profitable to have the minister use his strength in urging upon his people the actual teachings of the Bible, than to have him devote himself mainly to a critical examination of the process of its production. But if that dear mother referred to had been set up as without fault or human imperfection; if the claim had been made that in all points she was infallible; if her children, who had been taught this, began to discover that this was not true; and if their faith in her and in the whole system of holy influences which she had proclaimed was thus seriously impaired; and if their discoveries led them at last to question both the intelligence and the honesty of those who made

such claims, then it would be the duty of reverent, thoughtful, and careful men to come forward with competent instruction. The time has come for men to distinguish between that which is absolute and infallible, and that which may render an inestimable service, even though it stops short of infallibility.

The extreme conservative, advancing, untenable view of the Bible, becomes one of the chief enemies of the faith. "If his view were simply unscholarly, we might endure it by thinking of something else; but it is the chief hindrance to faith with well-meaning men and the great point of attack by opponents of Christianity." The Bible, even though not technically infallible, is beyond all question the Book of books, and it is in the interests of faith, and of securing a larger usefulness for that book, as a practical influence on the human heart, that reverent and thoughtful men are endeavoring to place our confidence in it upon foundations which stand sure.

The positive service which modern scholarship has rendered the Bible is to be found mainly in these four considerations. It has closed the debate upon certain vexed questions which once troubled the heart of Israel, and now trouble it no more, by relieving once for all the inadequate moralities and precepts of an earlier day from the impossible task of doing duty as permanent standards.

It has served to correlate Bible study with all other study by its frank acceptance of the principle of growth. The earth grew, languages grow, institutions grow—each one of these mighty trees, with branches now innumerable, was once a grain of mustard seed. And in similar fashion the Bible grew.

It has added immeasurably to the human interest of the book by bringing out more clearly the fact that the Bible was not dropped down from the sky to become the priceless heritage of the race, but was slowly wrought into the experiences of real men as they, too, faced duty, grappled with temptation, knew the guilt of wrong-doing, and, through divine help, entered into the joy of spiritual deliverance.

The modern method of Bible study, by its more accurate appraisal of the original documents, has also increased that sense of perspective which aids us in offering to the world with scriptural sanction those moral and religious judgments which the best reason and the best conscience of the age approve. It has also helped us to lay aside, with direct scriptural warrant, certain theological views, which have become more or less discredited on

philosophical grounds, thus linking the real teaching of the Bible with that cancellation of the inadequate wrought by development.

The fact that this work is being done by Christian men is full of encouragement. Confused souls that had wandered into a far country of doubt, into a region entirely apart from any genuine faith in the Bible, are being brought home by that “natural and discriminating criticism of the Old Testament to which Christ himself has shown us the way in the Sermon on the Mount.”

The very facts which are being brought to the attention of the churches by constructive Christian scholars were once brought out with a great flourish by Thomas Paine and by Robert G. Ingersoll, as being death-blows to Christian faith. They did it bitterly and sneeringly, for their aim was to destroy. It was an easy task for any clever mind to triumph over the belief in the equal and absolute inspiration of every part of the Bible. In a once popular lecture on “God and His Book,” certain passages cleverly culled from the Old Testament made it seem as if the God we worship was not a righteous being. Modern scholarship has made this line of attack impossible. If such notions were advanced today it would be so plain that they were directed at a man of straw rather than at any live figure of religious faith, as to rob them of any disturbing force.

The claim has been made that the Bible is in every part the infallible word of God; that these words are His words as truly as though He had spoken them with his own mouth or written them with His own hand; that His having dictated them to inspired men is what gives them their authority.

This view is untenable, as any one can see who reads the Bible without evading the facts. It rests upon an outside theory, rather than upon anything the Bible says about itself. The passage often quoted in support of it means, simply, according to the better rendering in the Revised Version, that “Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.” The writer is not attempting to pass upon the infallible inspiration of this entire body of writings—he could not do that, for some of them were not then in existence. He is not setting the seal of inspiration even upon that portion of the New Testament writings which had been written, for no authoritative collection had then been made. He is simply stating that all writings which are given by inspiration of God are profitable. He is indicating the spiritual edification to be gained from any writing “inspired of God.”

The claim of infallibility and finality is sometimes made to rest upon the closing verses of the book of Revelation. "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life." But as considerable portions of the New Testament were composed after these words were written, and as no recognized collection had been made during the lifetime of the author of them, he certainly was not seeking to set a defensive seal on all the Bible or on the New Testament, but evidently had in mind simply the protection from mutilation or addition of the single book of Revelation which he himself had just written.

If we turn to the plain facts we discover how impossible is the claim of infallibility. In his twenty-seventh chapter Matthew quotes a verse from the Old Testament and states that it is from "Jeremy the prophet." But it is not found in Jeremiah; it is in the eleventh chapter of Zechariah. Matthew, quoting from memory with no manuscript copy of the Old Testament beside him—such manuscripts being at that time heavy, cumbersome, and expensive—made a slip. Mark, in his second chapter, refers to something that David did, as he states, "in the days of Abiathar the high priest." When we turn to the account of the event in First Samuel, however, we find that Ahimelech was high priest. Paul, in the tenth chapter of First Corinthians, refers to a certain slaughter of Israelites and states that there "fell in one day three and twenty thousand." When we turn to the twenty-fifth chapter of Numbers, where the occurrence is recorded, we find the number given as "twenty and four thousand."

The report as to the inscription placed upon the cross of Christ is significant. We might suppose that the sacred importance of the occasion, the fewness of the words, and the threefold repetition of them in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin would have so fixed them in the minds of those who saw them that there would have been no discrepancy in the accounts. Mark says the inscription was "The King of the Jews." Luke says it read, "This is the King of the Jews." Matthew records it, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." And John gives it, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The general idea in all is the same, but the wording is different in each of the four records. As a matter of fact, the inscription contained certain words and no others; and three of the four cannot be exact reports.

Such variations do not affect the real value of the Bible, but they show conclusively that the claim of infallibility is not founded upon fact. Infallibility means freedom from all error or disagreement, and not merely a

high degree of accuracy which approximates perfection. “The Scriptures never claim absolute accuracy for all their statements or in any way ask us to expect it from them; and careful reading is sufficient to show that accuracy has not been attempted. There are frequent divergences between parallel narratives, as in Kings and Chronicles and in the four Gospels.”^[7] The assumption that inspired men were lifted to the point where their very words were chosen for them by the Holy Ghost stands disproved in these divergences, which could not have occurred had the utterances been divinely dictated.

^[7] Clark, “Outline of Christian Theology,” page 35.

The claim is made that if the words were not dictated, if slips of memory did occasionally creep in, still the message itself represented infallibly the mind of God. The facts do not warrant this assumption. The inspired man is not always one and the same thing, any more than the educated man is always a man possessed of just such a degree of wisdom. Inspiration results from the inbreathing of the Spirit of God, and this varies according to the receptivity of the man. The original apostles were surely inspired men, but “it is certain that the inspiration vouchsafed them did not make them infallible in their ordinary teaching or in their administration of the Church. They made mistakes of a very serious nature. It is beyond question that a majority of the apostles took at the beginning an erroneous view of the relation of the Gentiles to the Christian Church. They insisted that Gentiles must first become Jews before they could become Christians; that the only way into the Christian Church was through the synagogue and the temple. It was a grievous and radical error; it struck at the foundations of Christian faith. And this error was entertained by these inspired apostles after the day of Pentecost; it influenced their teaching; it led them to proclaim a defective gospel. This is not the assertion of a skeptic, it is the clear testimony of the Apostle Paul, as we find on reading the second chapter of his letter to the Galatians.”^[8]

^[8] Washington Gladden, “Who wrote the Bible,” page 210.

When we examine what certain Bible writers actually said, we find this view of the incompleteness of their knowledge borne out by the record. Jesus himself set the example for reverent scrutiny of the sayings of “them of old time.” To Moses was attributed a certain law of divorce. If a man married a wife and she found no favor in his eyes, he could give her a writing and send her away and marry another. But Jesus said frankly that this was wrong. “Moses gave you that law on account of the hardness of

your hearts”—on account of the low state of morality at that time. It was an advance on the polygamy and the irregular unions with which the Israelites had been familiar, but it was not the will of God touching marriage. In place of this temporary provision Jesus named those principles which place the whole relation of husband and wife on a holier foundation.

Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” This law when it was given was not ideal, but it represented moral advance,—an eye for an eye was better than a head for an eye; measured and limited retaliation was an improvement upon unrestrained vengeance. But in place of this grim law of retaliation Jesus gave his command about overcoming evil with good. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” Jesus set aside whole sections of Old Testament teaching as not portraying the mind of God.

We are pursuing the same method. We compare all Scriptural teaching with the mind of Christ and we discount what does not accord with his words. In the one hundred and ninth Psalm the author prays that his enemy may die and “his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow; that his children may be continually vagabonds and beg; that they may seek their bread in desolate places; that none may extend mercy to him or favor to his fatherless children; that his prayer may be counted as sin and the sin of his mother may not be blotted out.” No Christian would dare to kneel before God and pray in that fashion touching the wickedest man alive. The prayer of the man who wrote that Psalm does not conform to the mind of Christ and we quietly set it aside.

In the book of Ecclesiastes the pessimist utters his wail of despair: “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man has no pre-eminence above a beast: . . . all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” “The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward. . . . For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” Here is as flat a denial of the claim that God has made us “a little lower than the angels,” and that if we believe in him we “shall never die,” as might be found on the lips of an infidel. We know, however, that this

was the writing of a skeptical, pessimistic, unbelieving man, and we never think of accepting it as an authoritative statement as to human destiny.

In First Corinthians the apostle states that in his judgment it is better for a man to remain single; that it is better for a father not to allow his daughter to marry. He coarsely suggests that marriage at best is a kind of concession to human weakness—"If they cannot contain, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." He urges as his reason for this counsel that domestic life interferes with serving God. "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife."

We do not accept that as authoritative teaching! We marry in fulfilment of the divine purpose, invoking upon our unions the blessing of God. We are glad to see our children wisely and happily married. We believe that men and women serve God more acceptably by establishing homes and becoming fathers and mothers of believing families. Paul's hard words about marriage are in disagreement with sacred and elemental human instincts implanted by the Creator for holy ends, and they are out of line with the mind of Christ. Jesus indicated his purpose and wish for men when he said, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh." What therefore God in his purpose hath joined together let no man, in the supposed interests of the unworldliness of celibacy, put asunder.

These passages are cited to show how, in forming a code for our governance from the Scriptures, the mind of Christ is the final standard. "It is the spirit of the Bible reaching complete expression in the person, teachings, work, and sacrifice of Christ that is becoming the rule of Christian faith and practise, displacing the rule of that literalism which, by giving equal authority to all parts of Scripture, neutralized in so large degree the authority of Scripture as a whole." By this practical attitude we refuse assent to the claim that infallibility belongs to every portion of the Scriptures.

If the writers of these documents had been infallibly inspired, then the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts would have contained the veritable words of God. But we have none of these. We have copies, and the various copies on hand do not always agree. Scholars tell us that, in all, over one hundred thousand variations occur in the oldest and best manuscripts we have—variations which crept in from time to time through the process of transcribing these sacred writings.

These differences are not always trifling. The first eleven verses of the eighth chapter of John and the last twelve verses of the sixteenth chapter of Mark are entirely omitted from the best manuscripts. We would be forced to ask which one of these many copies is the infallible one or which among the many variations in the readings is to be received as the exact word of the Spirit. No sure reply could be made.

Furthermore, the common people do not read even these copies in the original—they read translations. The translators never claimed to be infallibly inspired in rendering Hebrew and Greek into English. They used their best scholarship, but wise and good men often differed as to the exact meaning of certain phrases. When the Revised Version was made, we saw that questions had to be determined sometimes by majority vote. Among the varying opinions as to what should be the English equivalent of some ancient phrase, which one should we select now as the infallible rendering? It would require the gift of infallible inspiration to decide.

And furthermore, we should need infallible interpreters, inasmuch as the real meaning of the English passage must be brought out before we can deal with it practically. We should here again be left without infallibility, as no special school of interpreters has ever claimed to have the gift of infallibility.

This claim of infallibility for the Scriptures was never made until the fourth century. It has been disputed through all the history of the Church. Martin Luther, who first gave direction to Protestant thought, did not hold to it. It will not bear scrutiny. The making of such a claim leads to evasion of the facts, to playing fast and loose with the simple truth. It has induced unbelief much more than it has stimulated faith.

The Bible is the record of the progressive revelation which God has made of himself through the religious experiences of a chosen people. It is the “record” of a process conducted by the Spirit of God. The record contains history, biography, poetry, drama, song, sermons, letters, and other forms of literature, because they all throw light on the spiritual experiences of the chosen people.

It deals with a “progressive revelation,” for God spoke as men were able to hear. He revealed himself more fully as they made moral advance. Revelation was an educational process, and from the nature of the case had to be progressive. We are not surprised that Moses did not have the moral insight of John, nor that the author of Ecclesiastes failed to see the truth of immortality as Paul saw it when he wrote First Corinthians. The author of the one hundred and ninth Psalm, praying his bitter prayer and calling down

misfortunes on the widow and orphans, had not advanced to where James stood when he defined “pure religion and undefiled” as visiting the fatherless and the widow in their affliction and keeping one’s self unspotted from the world. There is progress here because the Bible was given, not by having its words mechanically dropped from heaven, as if by dictation, but by being wrought into the moral experiences of men by the Spirit of God. The Old Testament especially “gives evidence of a gradual discovery of God on the part of men, which is accounted for in the record and can be best explained in fact by a deliberate and gracious self-revealing on the part of God.”

The revelation was made through a long and varied course of religious experience. “Not in writing, but in living history, in actual life God shows himself to men.” By what he did for those who trusted and obeyed him, he became known.

It was accomplished through a “chosen people.” However it came about, the Hebrews were by original constitution strong on the religious side, as the Greeks were strong in philosophy and art, the Romans in law and government, and the English in commerce and administration. God chose them to make their characteristic contribution to the total life of the world through their religion. He increased their original five talents by providential experiences, by the work of the Spirit in the hearts of their leaders, and by that gracious unveiling of himself to their aspiring gaze, which culminated at last in sending his Son to be born in Bethlehem of Judea.

This definition of the Bible, not original with me, but summarized from the expressions of many scholars, seems to cover the ground. The Bible is a record of the progressive revelation which God has made of himself through the religious experiences of a chosen people. This does not assume infallibility—there have been slips of memory, errors in copying, incompleteness of view, limitations indicating failure to perfectly apprehend the mind of Christ as it stands at last revealed in the Gospels. “The free and natural method of the Bible has opened actual experience to our sight and gives us the divine realities in human life in all their freshness and power, and this quality of livingness is worth more to us than what we call inerrancy would be.”

But this definition of the Bible does assert that the Scriptures contain a veritable revelation from God. It asserts for the Bible substantial authority in that any man may find there such light and guidance as will enable him intelligently to worship, as will put him in the way of receiving unutterable

help, as will enable him to shape his conduct in glad conformity with the will of God.

The man who holds this view of the Bible reads his way through mistakes and variations; through imperfections of moral insight standing on a lower level than the mind of Christ; and in it all he is undisturbed. He judges the Bible, not by single separate statements, as the claim of infallibility would compel us to do; he judges it by its trend and drift, by its useful message to man, and by the conclusions to which it brings us.

This view provides for progress in revelation and rejoices in studying the gradualness with which men came to understand the mind of God. The immoralities of Samson; the cruel treachery and lying of Jael, which are frankly praised; the skepticism of the author of Ecclesiastes; and the immoral, or at least unmoral, atmosphere of the book of Esther, are all acknowledged as being the utterance of earnest men speaking the best they knew, but not embodying the pure thought of the Father. "These writings, when they were composed, were at the front of the religious life of their time and led it forward," but they are to be judged today in the fuller light that has come to us by our knowledge of the mind of Christ.

This view finds the authority of the Bible, therefore, not in some theory erected about it from without, but in the actual verities it contains. Its authority rests upon "its ability to hold before the minds and hearts of men a picture of God, of man, and of their mutual relations, which reason, conscience, and affection approve as true." By its authority we mean "the right which the highest moral and religious truth has to satisfy the reason and to bind the conscience of man." The Bible does this, and possesses its authority by virtue of what it can do for the moral life of men.

The solemn contention that "we must accept it all or reject it all" is foolish and wicked. We have been seriously told that if men are led to doubt a single statement in it, they cannot depend on any of it. The folly of such an assumption is instantly apparent. Here is a man who for twenty years has taught the truths of religion from a certain pulpit. Thousands of people have listened to him. They brought their children and urged them to listen attentively. Was this preacher infallible? No one ever thought of making such a claim. He would have been the first to repudiate it. He would not have called himself an inspired man, though the Holy Spirit helped him to preach his sermons and live his life. But if, in attempting to quote, as he said, from Zechariah, he had uttered a verse from Jeremiah; if in giving statistics he had named twenty-three thousand as the number of men slain upon a certain occasion, when really twenty-four thousand were killed; if in

citing an event of history as occurring in the administration of John Adams, he had mistaken that for the administration of Jefferson; if some of his scientific statements had been invalidated by later discoveries, would that fact discredit all his teaching? Would any sane man say to his children, “If this teacher has ever made a slip in memory, or has not been perfect in his scientific knowledge, we cannot go and hear him; his moral and spiritual value is destroyed. We must accept all or reject all.”

The foolishness of such an attitude would make it impossible. His teaching during all those years may have been taken in the main from the Bible, but it was his own interpretation and understanding of the Bible. He was neither infallible as a student nor as an interpreter, yet men may feel confident that if all who came into his church during those twenty years had gone out to practise the precepts he gave them, they would have been led safely in the way of righteousness.

There can be worth, truth, and authority, great, splendid, and useful, without infallibility. The Catholics feel that unless the Church is infallible she cannot teach the people. Many Protestants feel likewise—that unless the Bible is infallible it cannot teach the people. Both are wrong; God alone is infallible, and neither the Church nor the Bible is God. But both Church and Bible can teach with authority and helpfulness if the moral conclusions which are reached through this revelation made by God, through the religious experiences of a chosen people, show themselves valid as tested by human experience.

We are told that it is dangerous to allow men thus to read the Scriptures and make discriminations, deciding that this passage is the absolute truth of God and the other is due to the human limitations of the writer. But men have never been relieved from the peril of making just such decisions. Men, of like passions with us and enjoying only such guidance as is now open to us, have made many such vital decisions. Men had to choose what books should go into the collection and what ones should be left out. Questions arose. The “Epistle of Barnabas” was regarded by Clement of Alexandria and by Origen as being inspired Scripture. Barnabas is named with Paul in the Book of Acts as an apostle, and is described as “a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost.” The oldest manuscript we have of the Bible, the Sinaiticus, found by Tischendorf in 1859, in the convent near Mt. Sinai, contains this epistle of Barnabas. But even in the face of such claims men decided, upon what seemed to them sufficient grounds, to leave it out of the canonical Scriptures. Other books, which to some minds have less claim to inspiration, were allowed to stand within the canon.

In giving us an authorized edition of the Scriptures, men have had to decide, from the varying copies, which reading should be accepted. Men have had to weigh opposing considerations in making translations. Wise and good men have differed and certain decisions have been made by the weight of a majority vote.

It does not seem to have been the divine purpose to relieve men from the responsibility and the peril of deciding vital questions of faith. Young people and older people should be given sound, wholesome principles of judgment, and then bidden to do their Protestant duty of reading their Bibles for themselves. There is no place where men are relieved from the responsibility of such decisions except in the Roman Catholic Church, and even there at the outset every man must make for himself the momentous decision that the Pope is infallible, and that he is therefore warranted in committing all questions of faith and morals to the papal judgment.

Making discriminations in a book of Scripture no longer regarded as infallible in every point, but as being the record of a progressive revelation of divine truth, may be attended with risk, but life must be lived in the midst of such perils. Every man must decide many points for himself, with the best light obtainable, but at his own risk. There is no way of making life a personally conducted tour, where one may resign his individual responsibility to church or priest, to creed or book, thus relieving himself from the task of making decisions.

The Bible finds the great vindication of its authority in human experience. Men hold fast to it because of what it has wrought in the realm of Christian life. "It is not important that the Bible should be verbally inspired and technically infallible; but it is important that men should find God in it and through it. And that God can be thus found even without profound learning and critical apparatus is the concurrent testimony of the saints of all ages." The spiritual fruitage of the careful study of these pages, which is beyond all gainsaying, stands fast as an actual demonstration of the true inspiration which entered into the production of them.

"You go to the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. You take a guide, perhaps Stephen, an ignorant colored man, formerly a slave. You know nothing of him but this, that he has guided hundreds of travelers before you, and has guided them safely. You enter the mysterious passages. You pass from one chamber to another. Passages diverge in all directions; still you follow through the great darkness the feeble lamp of your guide. You descend precipices, you climb ladders, you come to a river, and cross it in a boat beneath an overhanging roof of rock. You go on, mile after mile, until you

seem to have left forever the day and the upper air. Immense darkness, perpetual night, undisturbed silence brood around. You are miles from the entrance; if your guide has made any mistake, you are lost.

“But you follow him with entire confidence. Why? Do you believe him to be plenary inspired? Do you think him infallible? Not at all. But you trust in his long experience. He has guided travelers safely for years and that is enough. So the Bible has guided the footsteps of travelers seeking truth and God. It has brought generation after generation out of darkness into light. It points out on either side the false paths which lead to death. It speaks with an authority far higher than that of theological infallibility. It is full of the Spirit of God, which is the spirit of truth, and its power is not dependent on the theories of inspiration which men may devise, but on its own immortal life, its sublime elevation, its power of bringing the soul to God and to peace.”^[9]

^[9] James Freeman Clarke, “Common Sense in Religion,” page 98.

The Bible contains the word of God, but it cannot be claimed that every word and syllable in it is the word of God. Here in these writings is a veritable message from God to men. Its fruits are seen in the changed lives of those who receive its heaven-sent good news! It accomplishes its supreme work when it conducts us into the presence of Jesus Christ. We then trust for present and eternal salvation, not in the Bible, but in the mercy of God, made effective to us through the redemption of Jesus Christ, into whose presence and fellowship this sure word of the Spirit has brought us.

The Bible guides men into the experience of the forgiveness of their sins, into moral renewal by divine grace, into all the help that comes through prayer, trust, and obedience. It profitably equips and furnishes men for every form of good work. These are matters of present and personal experience. And touching its utterances regarding matters which lie beyond the range of present experience, we may say this: If some man for forty years has been telling us the truth touching matters where we could verify his statements in nine hundred and ninety-nine instances, when he makes his thousandth statement touching some matter where we cannot submit his utterance to verification, we feel inclined to accept his word and rest confidently upon our faith in his already ascertained integrity. The Bible has established itself in human confidence by its faithful guidance, bringing men moral peace and spiritual renewal; and as rational beings they trust it even when it speaks of matters which lie at present beyond their ken.

CHAPTER V

THE UTILITY OF PRAYER

THE moment we believe in God we are face to face with a strong presumption in favor of the utility of prayer. If he is the Almighty, he can hear. If he is a moral being, he will make reply. This argument was suggested by the psalmist of old, "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" The man who believes that God is and that he is a God of character, by that faith affirms his further confidence that "he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Prayer reduced to its simplest terms is the natural, affectionate intercourse between a father and his children. The Gospels assert that "these two mysterious beings, man and God, have such a kinship between them that their relationship to each other can in no other way be so well named as by the terms 'father' and 'child.' This conception makes room for that infinite distance between God and man which so profoundly impresses all whose minds dwell upon the subject. Between the man of power, knowledge and wide range of interest, and the infant whose face is breaking into its first intelligent smile, the distance is well-nigh immeasurable, though it in no way destroys the genuineness of the kinship between them. Toward the Infinite Father our path is to be trodden in the same way the child treads the path toward equality with the human parent."^[10]

^[10] John P. Coyle, "The Imperial Christ," page 74.

The method of prayer is not found in the action of criminals entreating a judge for mercy, or of courtiers beseeching their king for favors, or of adepts seeking to manipulate certain mysterious forces in the world for personal ends. It is found in the form and the spirit of family life. "When ye pray, say, Our Father." Prayer is the act of a child entering into companionship with his Father. Prayer is thus natural and rational. The man who never speaks to his Father is morbid! If you, with all your imperfections, love to have your children come to you; if they are benefited by coming; if you give them bread and fish, instruction and help, affection and companionship, when

they come, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him!

The definite promises of Scripture encourage the habit of prayer. The Bible speaks of the moral needs and privileges of men with accuracy and authority. Its words about prayer are clear and confident. It never seems to be feeling its way. It walks with firm tread, as in the light of ascertained facts. "Men ought always to pray." "Ask, and ye shall receive." "Seek, and ye shall find." "Knock,"—if you desire to advance where the way seems closed,—“and it shall be opened unto you.” The utility of prayer is steadily assumed.

Two familiar passages illustrate what perseverance will accomplish in the face of unfavorable conditions. A selfish man was in bed at midnight, angrily unwilling to be disturbed, but because his neighbor persisted in knocking, the crabbed fellow arose and gave him bread to set before those guests who had overtaken him with an empty larder. An unjust judge, who neither feared God nor man, was so moved by the persistence of a poor widow—a type of helplessness in a corrupt court of law—that simply through dread of being wearied by her continual coming, he gave her justice. These are arguments *e contrario*. If perseverance in the face of such adverse conditions gains its end, how much more will persevering prayer secure its object when directed to the benevolent Father! These are samples of the many confident assurances the Scriptures offer us regarding the efficacy of honest prayer.

A further encouragement to our faith in the efficacy of prayer arises from the example of Jesus. Even those who refuse assent to the claim that he was the Son of God regard him as the best man that ever lived—in fact, a perfect man. It is significant that this perfect man was preeminently a man of prayer. Humanity at its best prays. The Son of Man, whose moral achievements have never been surpassed, spent whole nights in prayer. His habit of prayer was so manifestly helpful that his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray." We have no record of their saying, "Lord, teach us to heal," or, "Teach us to preach." They saw that his power to heal, and to speak as never man spake, sprang from his sense of vital fellowship with the Father, sustained by prayer. They asked therefore that they might be taught to pray.

Jesus left one prayer so beautiful, so comprehensive, so satisfying to the human heart, that it is being repeated this very day in more than three hundred languages by prayerful men. When the representatives of all religions met in a parliament at the World's Fair in Chicago, the "Lord's

Prayer” was by universal consent adopted as the form of petition for the opening of the sessions. Jews and Gentiles, Cretes and Arabians, Buddhists and Christians, Mohammedans and Hindus, all spoke to the Father through those simple words, as in a language to which they were born.

Jesus, the author of this universal prayer, made the most confident promises as to the efficacy of prayer. He saw life whole, and with clear-eyed intelligence he set his seal upon the noble utility of prayer. The whole life of this perfect man was bathed in prayer. He prayed even when his enemies were unjustly putting him to death. The disciple cannot do better than be as his Lord. When men grow so wise that they do not pray, scoffing at the idea of prayer accomplishing anything, we may well compare their moral intelligence and spiritual effectiveness with that of Jesus; and then recall the fact that his confidence in prayer never wavered.

Another strong presumption in favor of the value of prayer arises when we turn to the long, broad lines of human experience. The scientific way of reaching the truth is not to sit down and reason out in advance what ought to be the fact, what is possible or probable in this great world of which we know so little; the scientific method is to go and see. Human beings have always had the habit of prayer. There have been cities without walls, without schools, without markets, without books, without many things that we ordinarily associate with city life, but never a city without its places of prayer. Prayer is the persistent, incurable habit of the race.

The fact that it is thus widespread and has endured through all the centuries indicates that it has utility. When we find a fin on a fish, a wing on a bird, an “instinct” in an animal, the fact that it is there indicates that it is useful—it would not otherwise have been retained. Useless organs disappear or become rudimentary. Unless prayer sustains some vital relation to man’s well-being it would not have thus endured. The fact that the race always has prayed and the fact that a greater volume of intelligent prayer is being offered in this twentieth century than ever before raise a strong presumption that such an exercise of one’s powers is rational and useful.

In the face of this persistent habit of mankind, it is instructive to recall the testimony of a distinguished evolutionist that in Nature we have found it to be true that “everywhere the internal adjustment has been brought about so as to harmonize with some actually existing external fact. The eye was developed in response to the outward existence of radiant light, the ear in response to the outward existence of acoustic vibrations, the mother’s love came in response to the infant’s needs. If the relation established in the morning twilight of man’s existence between the human soul and a world

invisible and immaterial is a relation of which only the subjective term is real and the objective term is non-existent, then, I say, it is something utterly without precedent in the whole history of creation.” If the capacity of man for fellowship with God through prayer were real only at our end of the line and unreal at the other, then it is an utter break in the whole method discovered in the ascertained uniformities of Nature. “The lesson of evolution therefore is that through all these weary ages the human soul has not been cherishing in religion a delusive phantom, but in spite of seemingly endless groping and stumbling, it has been rising to the recognition of its essential kinship with the ever-living God.”^[11]

^[11] John Fiske, “Through Nature to God,” pages 189, 191.

And what has been the broadly ascertained result of this widespread and long-continued effort to realize kinship with God through prayer? The cumulative answer comes back from multitudes of praying men—hearts have been renewed, affections purified, wills strengthened, aspirations lifted; great and gracious answers of peace have come; added security and confidence have been enjoyed. We need not turn to those exceptional and surprising “answers to prayer” sometimes collected into books of anecdote. Curious coincidences have sometimes been urged as foundation-stones for confidences in the efficacy of prayer. Fortunate occurrences have been overworked in the supposed interests of a conquering faith. In this consideration I would ground my faith in prayer rather upon the broad and ordinary lines, where there are uninterrupted answers coming back to men as they pray. The spiritual results of the habit of honest prayer are so well ascertained as to lend strong aid in lifting this exercise into the place of dignity and the region of high confidence where it belongs.

These four presumptions, then, taken from the natural implications of our belief in God, from the confident promises of those writings which contain Supreme Court decisions and form the common law of spiritual life, from the habit and the teaching of Jesus, and from long lines of human experience, must have weight in determining any one’s attitude toward prayer.

Two objections to prayer on rational grounds are made,—one from a scientific and the other from a philosophical point of view. The claim is made that an answer to prayer would involve the interruption of the established order; it would mean, therefore, a violation of law. In the presence of the unbending constancy of the physical system which surrounds us, impressing the average man with its moral indifference, prayer

seems like an irrational proceeding. It appears to some minds as the act of a puny being urging upon the Omnipotent that the great through traffic of the world be side-tracked in order to give his local train the right of way.

The other objection is to the effect that if God is wise and good, he will do what is best for us, and for every one, without our asking—indeed, to ask him for anything implies a certain solicitude as to his appropriate action. “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” Then why should we ask? It is an impertinence in that it calls upon him to change his line of action in obedience to our suggestion. All the lesser questions which arise are really comprehended within these two fundamental ones.

In regard to the first, that an answer to prayer involves the violation of law, we sometimes frighten ourselves unnecessarily by writing the word “Law,” with a capital letter, and then imagining that it is “a kind of second-hand deity of itself,” never to be interfered with by any one in heaven or on earth. All this is purely verbal. “Natural law” is simply a phrase to indicate the regular, orderly habits of the Creator who is above all and in all things. We have noted some of his cosmic habits as being regular and we call them “laws.” But God is not bound by them. He has not tied his own hands by certain of his own habits. On the whole he apparently deems it best to observe them regularly, that his creatures may depend upon his activity in certain matters—the rising of the sun, the return of the seasons, the growth of seed, the bodily conditions of health and disease—with solid certainty. These habits are wise and good or he would not have adopted them. But to fancy that he will not and cannot vary his action; to imagine, for instance, that he could not reinforce and quicken that energy which we lightly call “the healing process of nature” in the case of the sick; to deny his power to help by some unusual movement of his silent energy for the relief of one of his children in an emergency, would be to make him less than God.

Praying people are sometimes unnecessarily frightened by a pretentious phrase—“the uniformity of nature.” There is such a thing, but no one knows enough to define it. No one would undertake to name all “the laws of nature.” The interrelation of spiritual forces with physical forces is but dimly understood. We are feeling our way toward an understanding of the total “uniformity of nature” which includes all such interaction, but that perfect knowledge is at present too high for us; we cannot attain unto it. It is therefore dogmatic assumption to claim that the few things we have learned about “natural law” entirely block the way and make it impossible for God to answer the prayers of his children.

These scientific laws, which are often held up as bogies to frighten the children of the Father out of their confidence in him, are simply the best we know thus far about some manifestations of an Eternal Energy. The truly scientific man does not undertake to say what may or may not be possible in realms where his knowledge is confessedly incomplete. He does not deny the possibility of miracles, or the possibility of answers to prayer—it is purely a matter of evidence as to what does actually occur.

This must be so in the nature of the case. We have been surprised so many times that possibly we may be surprised again. There are more things in this world than men have dreamed of, and more things wrought by prayer than hasty philosophies allow. Men were saying fifty years ago that it was scientifically impossible to run a heavy street car through the streets, loaded with a hundred people, heated, lighted, and moved by a current of electricity from a single wire. They said it was scientifically impossible to talk from New York to Chicago and have the familiar tones of a friend's voice recognized, or to transmit by electricity a signature preserving its well-known individuality. They said it was scientifically impossible to telegraph with accuracy for hundreds of miles across the open sea without wires. They said that the present phenomena of hypnotism and healing by suggestion, recognized by scientific men as beyond a peradventure, were scientifically impossible. In all these and in many other cases they were mistaken in their presuppositions. We are constantly learning more about the subtle, invisible forces in this world. We are not prepared offhand to decide upon what is or what is not impossible, or to pass upon the claims that many of the earth's wisest and best men have made regarding prayer, without painstaking investigation.

When I begin to pray for my own physical health, for the recovery of some sick friend, for success in my undertakings, for moral peace and strength, or for any legitimate object, I set in motion new forces. They begin to act not in violation of law, but in accordance with a higher law; they introduce a new element to be reckoned with. The man drawing water out of a well, where the force of gravitation would cause the water to remain, is not violating a universal law, he is bringing to bear another force which alters what would have been the natural position of the water. Human energy and volition are constantly playing into the great natural order, realizing purposes which would not have been realized if the system had been left to itself. The man who prays puts in operation a kind of energy, invisible as electricity or as the atmospheric waves which make possible wireless telegraphy, or as the force that acts in the influence of thought upon digestion, but just as real. Prayer is the act of a man bringing up his need by

a moral act and linking it with the offered help of God. This brings to bear upon the situation a new force.

When we thus stand amazed on the one hand at the results accomplished by certain invisible forces with which we are slowly becoming acquainted, and when we turn on the other hand to the confident words of a Master in the kingdom of the spirit, we are not disturbed in our faith by these would-be scientific objections as to the efficacy of prayer.

A man standing in his noblest attitude before God, turning the whole of his inner life Godward, bending the full energy of will and affection toward the attainment of some holy end, is wielding a force not easily estimated. As President Eliot of Harvard said, "Prayer is the transcendent effort of human intelligence." Jesus did not use scientific language; he used popular language, but he made this point clear—for moral ends, for the purpose of rich spiritual development, God has within his keeping certain great aids which are only obtainable by that noble exercise of the highest faculties which we call prayer.

We are in no wise disturbed by the fact that we have not reduced the possibilities of this prayer force, acting within the larger uniformities of God, to an exact science. We have not reduced to an exact science the influence of a mother's love upon her children, or the effect of a good name upon one's prospect of success, or the physical benefits of a cheerful habit of mind. We have not reduced to an exact science the forces at work in a wheat-field—they are too intricate for our present knowledge. Perfect intelligence would know how many grains in each bushel would sprout and grow, but no man can tell. Perfect intelligence could indicate why certain prayers are answered and why some are not, but such complete understanding of all the forces to be considered is not within our reach. But even though in all these fields our knowledge stops far short of completeness, enough is known to encourage the effort—mothers love their children; a right-minded man guards his good name; sensible people promote health by good cheer. Farmers sow in the confidence that they will reap; and thoughtful people keep on praying, assured by the promises of Christ and by an ever-increasing volume of religious experience, that prayer works its own beneficent results.

The other objection raises the question as to why a wise and good God should withhold action until we ask. How can we indeed ask him to vary what must already have been perfect action!

Such *a priori* objections might be carried into other fields as well. Why does a good God withhold from his children a wheat harvest until they have plowed and sowed and reaped? Why does God hide away treasures of gold in the hills, locking it up in quartz, scattering its grains through the clay and sand, covering it with mountains? He does it because toil is good for men. It would have been a doubtful kindness to lay these values in heaps ready to man's hand. All things have been done and are being done now for the moral education of the race. In all that God does, whether in the renewal of the spiritual life, or in healing the body, or in ordering the seasons, he has in mind the moral improvement of his people. Benefits are conditioned upon appropriate effort because of the moral ends which are thereby served. Blessings wait upon our asking, because men nowhere receive more effective moral education than in waiting upon God in prayer. The soul never stands in such dignity of privilege, never asserts its richest prerogative so fully as when, standing face to face with its Maker, it talks with him of the things that belong to its peace.

This is a strange objection to prayer! Why does a wise and good God, knowing our needs, require us to come and ask him before he grants his help? That is to say, why does he not proceed to do what is best, leaving us free to spend our time with some one else, instead of spending it with him?

The objection vanishes the moment we remember that all things are ordered with reference to strengthening the moral bond between the Father and His children. If any one of you is a father, why do you love to have your children come to you, talk over their affairs with you, ask you for what they want, sometimes wisely and sometimes unwisely? You know that their coming and the consequent reinforcement of the bond between you and them is not only a joy to you, it is for the lasting advantage of the children. Thus a wise and good God, for the same sacred ends, withholds certain blessings until his children obediently and lovingly come to him in prayer.

It is an unspeakable loss for children never to have known the companionship of the earthly father and mother. It a greater loss for a man never to know, through heart to heart communion, the companionship of a heavenly Father. Therefore, because of the incompleteness of our moral nurture without this experience, God has made certain benefits, temporal as well as spiritual, conditional upon our coming to him in prayer. He has ordained this method of securing blessings untold, that we may be attracted and encouraged to know him whom to know is life eternal.

Prayer will bear the scientific and the philosophic test, and its realities can be stated in the language of the schools. Yet the simple, familiar

language Jesus used puts it more clearly and effectively. As a boy you did not stand outside your father's door when you were conscious of some need which he could supply. You did not tarry, reasoning, in metaphysical fashion, that if your father were wise and good he would do what was best; or that any suggested deviation would be a violation of the family order which must be right since he established it. You went in and asked. It was better for you to ask, even though your requests lacked wisdom. The eight-year-old boy who asked for a shotgun did not get it, but he received something better than a shotgun through that hour of companionship with his father. Except ye become as little children in your method of procedure, ye shall in no wise enter into the deeper meaning of prayer.

Practical men have sometimes turned away from prayer as a thing well enough for women and children, but having no attraction for clear-headed men of affairs. But they in the stress of this work-a-day world, feel the need of something to lift their lives to a higher plane of thought and action. They need to know him whom the wisest of men called "the Father." If they would go in, not troubling themselves about the particular range of their requests, not embarrassing themselves by scientific and metaphysical questions that once seemed to block the way, but becoming as little children speaking to their father, the philosophy of prayer would be cleared of its difficulties by blessed personal experience.

Two things ought ever to be borne in mind: the chief object of prayer is not to get something. The claim has been made that if we have faith we can get anything we want. Jesus had faith. He prayed, "Let this cup pass from me." It did not pass. He drank it next day upon the cross. But he continued in prayer until he could say, "If I must drink it, not my will, but thine, be done." The purpose of prayer is not to enable a man to stand before God and say, "Not as thou wilt, but as I will." Its deeper purpose is to bring him into that harmony with God, where he will say, "Thy will be done."

That of itself is a mighty answer. What better thing could come than that he should be made able to say to the Perfect One, "Thy will be done." This would not mean mere passive acquiescence in the inevitable. It would imply conscious self-devotement to the will of God. Jesus prayed until he could say, "Thy will be done." He then added, "Rise, let us be going," as he went forth to do the Father's will. The prayer that brings us into voluntary harmony with the divine purpose has in that very fact achieved a gracious answer.

We are not intent upon having our own way in every situation, nor do we suppose that such a result would be for our highest good. God has not

resigned the management of the world into the hands of his fumbling children, whether they stand or kneel. It would be a strange family where the will of the children ruled the home. Many a prayer fails to bring the specific thing sought. “The prayer of faith shall save the sick,” yet the writer knew there would come a last sickness when each would die, even though prayer for his recovery might be offered. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth *much*”—much, but not everything which imperfect knowledge might ask.

The universe is not a democracy where the people rule even though their wishes be expressed in prayer. It is a kingdom where God rules in a fatherly way over the lives of his growing but immature children. It would be a calamity if every ignorant prayer were answered; if the world were wholly managed by our wishes rather than by his higher wisdom. The chief purpose of prayer throughout is not that of getting our will done, but the enjoyment of that richer privilege of being with the Father, and of being brought into active harmony with his holy will.

Jesus looked ahead to the time when the clamorous, insistent type of prayer, intent upon its own ends, would pass. He reminded us that men are not heard for their much speaking. He said, “In that day ye shall ask me nothing.” The petitionary element would be overshadowed by the sense of holy companionship. When you are praying you are in the highest company possible. The fact that you are there in conscious fellowship with the heavenly Father is a rich reward for your act. “Hours are well spent when they are spent with Him.”

When you fail of obtaining some specific request it does not destroy your faith in prayer, nor incline you to cease. The eight-year-old boy who failed of the shotgun did not stop associating with his father. The parent who in pleading for a child’s life looked up defiantly, silently vowing that if the child died she would never pray again, thought better of it; she saw that such an attitude was not in the spirit of prayer. She gratefully recalled the fact that a higher wisdom controls all things, and that whatever the issue, she enjoyed an unspeakable advantage in that she was brought by her prayer into closer fellowship with the Father.

The other consideration is that prayer is not a mere intellectual exercise or an effort of the will; prayer is ethical and must be the act of the entire nature. It is the “effectual fervent prayer” of a righteous man that “availeth much.” The assurance is given to “the rightened man who is in line with the laws under which he makes his experiments.”

“When ye pray, say Our Father.” We ask as his children. We make our requests with filial freedom and confidence, but they proceed from a filial nature. We stand in reverent, obedient trust before him in uttering even the first two words of genuine prayer. We must find our places in his house, at his table, in his service as obedient children, before the total nature can look up and say, “Our Father.” Even the sinful man, in order to pray for his own forgiveness, must come in penitence, cherishing that new purpose which enables him to say, “Father, forgive.”

Jesus added further, “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.” His name was to be used, not as a formal endorsement, or a graceful conclusion of the request. “The thought is not that of using the name of Jesus as a password or a talisman, but of entering into his person and appropriating his will, so that when we pray it shall be as though Jesus himself stood in God’s presence and made intercession.”^[12] To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in his spirit, and to pray for the things he would pray for.

^[12] A. J. Gordon, “The Ministry of the Spirit,” page 147.

And what did Jesus pray for in his recorded prayers? Not for wealth, ease, fame, personal pleasure, or even success, except along moral lines. The Lord’s Prayer contains but one petition for material blessing, and that modestly limits itself to asking one day’s bread for immediate need. The other five petitions are for the hallowing of God’s name, for the coming of his kingdom, for the doing of his will on earth, for forgiveness, and for deliverance from evil. This furnishes us what might be called the “norm” of appropriate petition. The model prayer moves chiefly in the realm of moral things and all prayer offered in the spirit of Christ will lay the emphasis there.

We have Scriptural warrant for praying in regard to interests other than those directly spiritual, but always with an eye to the bearing of those benefits on the coming of his kingdom in our hearts and in the world. The material advantages sought are subordinate to the spiritual benefits which stand as the supreme ends to be gained in prayer. Pray for health, for intelligence, for opportunities, for the success of legitimate plans, but always that in and through these you may the more perfectly glorify God as a useful servant of his holy will! To pray with this subordination of private interest to the larger demands of the coming kingdom is to pray in the name of Jesus Christ. This indicates that prayer must be ethical and that it can only be effectively offered by those who are bringing their lives by personal

consecration into right relations with the King of the kingdom. When it is thus offered, the hand of the petitioner is knocking at a door which opens on the treasure-house of the Unseen—and he may do it in the confident assurance that “to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”

CHAPTER VI

THE QUESTION OF CONVERSION

THE doctrine of conversion has been helpfully taught and it has also been taught in ways that have wrought confusion and harm. The simplicity of Scripture has been forgotten, and notions have been advanced which have discouraged and repelled men who ought to be rejoicing now in the Church of God and in the salvation of Jesus Christ. The mischief has come from setting up certain select types of Christian experience and making them the sole standard. Some classical character, John Bunyan perhaps, or some ungodly man in the community, or some woman with a great capacity for religious feeling, has been fixed upon and people have been told that the experience of such an one was the accepted method of entrance to the kingdom. The bold intruder who would climb up some other way was set down as a thief and a robber.

The one selected as possessing the true type of religious experience had felt burdened, guilty, desperate. He then repented with great sorrow and heartfelt contrition. He looked up and saw the mercy of God in Christ. He accepted it by a single, instant act of faith. Immediately the burden of guilt rolled away and there came a full sense of relief in his heart. He at once moved out joyously with a glad sense of peace. And this was regarded as genuine conversion, as “getting religion,” while “other less picturesque lines of entrance were held as doubtful and probably spurious.” Thus the mind of a whole community has often been directed toward a single and perhaps abnormal type of experience as the necessary, inevitable road into the kingdom.

This has produced many unhappy results. The people whose experiences were thus dramatic have been encouraged to relate them, giving all the details. No stories, not even religious stories, are apt to lose anything in the telling; and without conscious desire to exaggerate or deceive, these friends went about telling the glad story and gradually reading back into the experience more burden, more heartfelt joy, more sense of wondrous uplift and of instant acceptance with God, than was originally there. All this had a

tendency to beget a sense of superiority over those whose modest experiences were not so thrilling.

It put a false notion into the minds of children and young people as to what ought to be expected in seeking conversion. It produced apathy in those who were made to feel that no steps could be taken toward leading Christian lives without this dramatic experience at the start. Henry Clay once said, "I am not a Christian. I wish I *were*. Some time I hope I shall be." He was waiting for something to happen to him, as lightning might fall out of heaven. He reasoned that none but God could send those thrilling experiences, and he was waiting passively until they should come, all regardless of the fact that whosoever will may come, at any time, anywhere, without reference to those accidents of emotional experience.

What is conversion? We will not ask John Calvin, John Wesley, or John Bunyan, great and good as these men all were, but take the highest authority. The word of Jesus was, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The word which Jesus used for "convert" means literally "to turn around" or to change the purpose of. We use it in common life. We "convert" the dry-goods box into a dog-house by laying it on its side, cutting a hole in one end, and roofing it over. Now instead of holding muslins it shelters a dog, because we have changed its purpose. The English "converted" the Old South Church into a riding-school during their occupation of Boston during the War of the Revolution. They moved the pews about and made stalls where they stabled their horses. Conversion meant a radical change in the use to which the building should be devoted.

Thus Jesus looked upon men, and recognizing the fact that, in varying degrees, they had all gone wrong, he said to them in effect, "You are living for the wrong things. You are moving in the wrong direction. Except you turn around and start with fresh, sweet, clean purposes like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom." The total change of purpose and direction in the life of the man is conversion.

Here is a man who wishes to attain the sort of character that is the essential element in the kingdom of heaven. But he is going in the wrong direction; every year he is becoming more selfish, less responsive to God's Spirit. He must turn around; the character which takes men into the kingdom lies the other way. He must face toward unselfishness, purity, kindness. This facing about is the human side of his conversion.

In another passage, this entrance into the kingdom is called a “new birth.” It stands in the fourth Gospel—in the synoptics Jesus never spoke of the beginning of the Christian life as being “born again”—and in this one instance the Master is represented as holding converse with an expert theologian. Nicodemus was a master in Israel, trained in theological phraseology.

Jesus met the woman at the well, the man born blind, business men like Zacchæus and Matthew, fishermen like Peter, James, and John, little children and others, and upon none of these occasions did he speak to them about the necessity of taking the first step by being “born again.” He told them that to enter the kingdom meant to follow him, or to enter a door he opened, or to accept an invitation to a feast, or to receive something offered as a gift. Yet certain evangelists have met young and old, hardened sinners and little children, with that strange demand which staggered the Hebrew theologian, “Ye must be born again.”

This phrase about the “new birth” indicates in a vivid way that every man needs the gift of new life from God. “Conversion” is the human act of turning to God, and “regeneration” is a theological term employed to indicate the fact that God gives new life to all who turn to him in faith. “A man is born again by a new beginning in the soul’s life, whereby God produces a life morally similar to his own.”

In the case of religiously reared children, there should be nothing dramatic or John Bunyan-like in their conversion. When they apply for admission to the Church, in response to the question, “When did you become a Christian?” they often say, “We do not know.” May they never know! Alas for those who stray so far away that they do know the day and the hour when they turned back!

Is it necessary, then, for the children of Christian parents to be converted? Are they ever “born again”? It is necessary for every life to turn to God. It is necessary for every nature to receive the gift of new life from God. The religiously reared child may never know the day nor the hour when the inner life of trust and obedience emerged into self-consciousness—it is not important that he should—but he will know that there has been a turning to the Father and that there has been the corresponding gift of life bestowed by him.

The normal development of the child’s religious life is like the development of his relation to his parents. The babe is born into the family and yet at the beginning his relation to the father and mother is simply a

physical fact. The baby two days old could not be said to have love, trust, and obedience toward the parents; there is no sufficient consciousness there to sustain this experience; and yet this constitutes the essence of sonship in the family. The baby is born the child of the parents as a physical fact; he must afterward become by his own personal decision loving and obedient; he must develop for himself those qualities which constitute sonship.

Were the child asked, “When did you begin to love your parents?” he could not tell. He would say, “I do not know; I was born into an atmosphere favorable to that form of life, and as a part of my normal development I learned to love, trust, and obey my parents.” He knew nothing of prayer, obedience, or trust in the heavenly Father. These, too, had to be learned by experience. And the natural voluntary entrance upon these forms of experience should constitute the conversion of every child in a Christian home. The parents who fail to furnish that persuasive atmosphere in the home into which the child shall come, and under the gracious stimulus of which he shall grow, are robbing the child of his appropriate birthright.

There are certain years that are physically crucial, as all physicians know. There are years of mental crisis, as all teachers know. And the life of the spirit has also its times and seasons. If the years from twelve to eighteen are passed without this conscious turning to the Father and the deliberate consecration of the life to Christian ideals, it is a great loss. The period of adolescence is “a day of the Lord” for those whose work is that of Christian nurture—the night cometh when no man can work such satisfying results.

The Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Episcopal Church take it for granted that the children of their own people will be confirmed and become communicants when they reach the proper age. It is a wholesome practise. The absence of the finer qualities of religious life in many Catholics is not due to this habit of expecting the children of the Church to come one and all into the Church; the lack is in the quality of Church life to which they are invited.

In a Christian home it should never become an open question with the child, “Shall I be a Christian or not?” any more than it should ever be an open question with a girl, “Shall I be virtuous or not?” The Christian life is to be regarded by parents, by teachers in the Bible school, by the pastor, and by all concerned in the child’s welfare, as a foregone conclusion. It should be presented as the only natural mode of life.

The fearless and thorough application of the principles which Jesus taught will save to all our Protestant churches many of the children

consecrated to God by devout parents in Christian baptism. The conception of the world as a penitentiary, where God is the warden and men and women are criminals seeking pardon and freedom, has repelled and outlawed the children of the kingdom and the cause of Christ has suffered grievous loss. The attempt to cast Christian experience in the forms furnished by such a conception results in mistaken ideas of religious doctrines. "When ye pray, say, Our Father!" This fundamental conception of the divine life and of our own relation to it is to rule all our thought. This world of men is meant to be a divine family. The object of all God's dealing with us is to induce us to accept that fact and take our places in his family. The Father is seeking to bring his children, not by compulsion, but by their conscious choice to recognize his love, to accept his commands, and to live the filial life.

"Ideally and intentionally all men are children of God, practically and actually they are not." In your own home the birth of your child made him your son as a physical fact, but when he was eighteen years old his sonship did not rest merely on the physical relationship. It consisted of the elements of love, trust, and obedience out of which he had built his real sonship by right choices. If he had been taken away from you the day after he was born, and had never seen you again until he was eighteen years old, the fact of physical relationship would have remained, but true sonship would have been lacking.

Sonship is born of moral experience. God is our Father in that he is the Author of all lives, but true sonship toward God is attained by moral experience in the heart of each man. As the child must learn consciously to take his place in the human family and be a good son and a good brother, so every child born into the divine family must take his place through the love, the trust, and the obedience he comes to exhibit toward the Father. This deliberate turning to God by definite choice and the acceptance of one's place in his family constitute conversion.

How was the Prodigal Son converted? What did it mean for him to be "born again"? He was in the far country, hungry and ragged, mean and degraded. He finally came to himself, realizing that his mode of life was mistaken and evil. He thought of the "bread enough and to spare" in his father's house. He announced a new determination—"I will arise and go to my father." He was ready to confess his wrong and ask for a place of service. He carried out this decision and, in coming to his father, he was born into a new life. The father's welcome and forgiveness, surpassing all that he had dared to hope; the father's companionship, joyously offered for his encouragement in the new mode of life; the new conditions in the

father's house, widely different from those in the swine field, and more inspiring than the situation of a hired servant, all yielded their help. But there was also something new in the prodigal: a new purpose, a new hope, a new courage, a new sense of his relation to the father—in a word, “a new life.” He was born again!

It is the plain duty of every wayward soul thus to “come home.” It rests with him to tell the Father that he has done wrong, to ask forgiveness, and to begin to do the Father's will. It is the part of every one to meet the Father in his house, at his table, to speak to him in prayer; and on the whole wide field of human effort to strive to do the Father's will. This is being born again; this is entering upon Christian life. In all this the man is aided by that spirit of grace which is not far from any one of us when once we invite his help. Therefore “regeneration may be defined as that work of the Holy Spirit in a man by which a new life of holy love, like the life of God, is initiated.”

It was the habit of President Finney, one of the most successful evangelists in the history of American Christianity, to speak strongly against the idea that men cannot be converted whenever they will; that they must wait until something mysterious is done for them with which they have nothing to do. No man can come to Christ “except the Father draws him,” but the Father is always drawing him. There must be an “effectual calling” before a man can enter the kingdom, but the call is ever sounding forth. The Word, the Spirit, the Church, the man's own conscience, all unite in saying “Come.” All things are now ready for Christian life and service, and it is the plain duty of every man to come home and begin to live the filial life. No theories about substitution, imputed righteousness, or other dogmatic mysteries, dimly understood or half rejected; no expectations as to emotions similar or superior to a set of emotions vouchsafed to some other returning sinner, can for a moment stand in the way of that plain obligation resting on each man to come home. It is not his first business to understand “all mysteries and all knowledge;” it is not of great significance that he should have feeling enough to move mountains; but it is of the first importance that he should rise and go to the Father. This every man can do, and when he does this he will enjoy the experience of conversion.

The Church has sometimes seemed to care more about its theology than about the religious life of the people. It has seemed more intent upon keeping its dogmatic theories all in running order than upon helping people to live as their Father's children. When notorious sinners who have broken every one of the Ten Commandments, about face, it may well be like breaking up the fountains of the great deep. But the turning of a child or of a

clean, upright man to the Father will not be so. If he has been telling the truth, keeping himself pure, acting the part of kindness, living in reverence toward God and in useful service toward men, without any dramatic experience, these things show the work of the Spirit unconfessed and unrealized. His conversion will be the clearer recognition of his place in the Father's family and a clearer sense of fellowship with the Saviour who aids men in maintaining that place by consistent Christian conduct.

I have sought to make it simple, because Jesus made it simple in his teaching and in his own method of converting men. It may seem as if too large a place is given to human ability. I have not dwelt at length on regenerating grace. I shall have occasion to speak later of the results of conversion in the chapter on Salvation by Faith. I have tried to make this point clear, that whenever you want to become a Christian you can. You need not wait for a day or an hour when something will happen to you. Do your part, and God will do his. If you face about and turn to the Father, you may be assured of his recognition. If you ask him to forgive you, he does it. If you implore his gracious help in living a new life, you will receive it.

How much emotion you may experience will depend upon your temperament. To doubt that a man is forgiven when he turns away from wrong and asks forgiveness is to doubt the moral character of God. When once you take your place in the Father's family and begin to do what he would have you do, he accepts you and aids you by his grace. These gifts of recognition, of forgiveness, and of divine grace make "a new life." And that is what we mean by being "born again," by being converted and becoming as little children in the family of the Father.

CHAPTER VII

SALVATION BY FAITH

ON first reading it might seem that three divergent views of salvation are put forward in the Scriptures. Paul preached “salvation by faith.” “By grace are ye saved through faith.” “The Gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” These are among his best known and most characteristic sayings.

James preached “salvation by works.” “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” “What doth it profit, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? . . . Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar? . . . Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? . . . Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” His words seem to set the matter of salvation before us in quite another light.

John preached “salvation by love.” “Every one that loveth is born of God.” “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love.” “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us.”

These three views, however, are not antagonistic but rather complementary views of the same reality. Genuine faith will utter itself in works; effective work in the kingdom can result only from that moral attitude toward God which we call faith. The good work described by James can be done aright only when it is done in love. And love, to be real, must stand before God in the attitude of faith, and toward men in the attitude of service. Thus in any complete view of salvation, faith and work and love proceed hand in hand.

The confusion has been wrought chiefly by making faith to mean “theological opinion.” Men are not saved nor lost by opinion. There is no

saving grace in belonging to a certain theological party. Salvation is the renewal and development of the moral life, the acceptance and cultivation of a filial relation to God. This is not accomplished merely or chiefly by holding correct opinions. Indeed, “the gentle virtues are not plants that bloom only on the soil of orthodoxy. They flourish with a wonderful disdain of ecclesiastical restrictions on the unhallowed domain of heresy; nay, are sometimes found blooming into a strange luxuriance on the outlying wastes of heathendom.”^[13]

^[13] John Caird, “University Sermons,” page 4.

The notion of salvation by opinion has wrought mischief by giving people the impression that eternal destiny might turn upon the acceptance or refusal of some dogma, instead of turning as it does upon moral renewal and the acceptance of a filial relation to God. On their death-beds, confused souls have been urged to say that they believed Jesus was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, as if that expression of theological view might work a magical change in their future prospects.

Faith is a moral attitude toward God. It is a state of trust and self-commitment, a condition of open receptivity toward the mercy God waits to bestow upon all who will accept it at his hands. Conversion is the voluntary, conscious turning of the soul to God, and when this is done, God bestows upon the life thus offered and opened to him forgiveness, recognition, and help. Forgiveness for past sins, recognition as members of the divine family, and help in walking as children of the Father: these are the constituent elements of salvation. We receive them by faith, by simply taking them as God offers them.

Your own child has his standing in your family, not by works, not by the value of any service he renders you. He has it simply by accepting your love and enjoying the help you give him for living his life as a son. He has no thought of trying to earn it; he simply takes it through his confidence in you. By your love, that is, “by grace,” he has his place in your home through faith. And that is what Paul said. Salvation is the acceptance of one’s place in the family of God. You do not earn it. It is not withheld until the value of your service entitles you to demand it by right. You simply take forgiveness, recognition, and help as they are offered. “By grace are ye saved, through faith.”

But we have done wrong. We cannot be dealt with as children who have remained obediently in the Father’s house. Let us say then that your boy has left your home. He is living in some far country with evil associates. He is

going further and further in his wrong career. What do you do? You entreat him to come home. You assure him that you are ready to forgive him, to receive him as your son and to help him live a new life if he will only turn from his wrong way. You offer him salvation by faith.

But he insists that he is not good enough to come home; that his life is stained with evil; that he has insulted you by his course of conduct. He urges that he be allowed to remain where he is until he has ironed out the moral wrinkles and become good enough to return. He promises you that when this has been accomplished he will come. He advances the view of salvation by ethical culture or by good works.

But you insist that he shall come home at once, not because of any desert on his part, but because you love him and desire to bestow on him forgiveness, recognition, and help and thus work with him for his salvation. If he accepts your favor without waiting to earn it, he is saved by faith.

The parable of the Prodigal Son yields a simple, usable theology. A messenger to the far country would have reminded the prodigal that his father still loved him and stood ready to forgive him if he would return home and take his place again in the family. And when the son turned his back upon evil, and made open confession, the father forgave him instantly and accepted him into the family. He began at once to aid and bless him in his new life at home. "Bring forth the best robe," he cried, "and a ring and shoes, and kill the best calf; for this my son was dead and is alive again. He is saved by his faith in his father's love and by his return home." This is the scriptural view of salvation—not by works nor by opinion nor by ceremonies, but by faith in the great fact that God is ready to forgive his children who have done wrong, to restore them to the family, and to aid them in living lives of righteousness.

We expect good conduct of our children, as a result of their standing within our love, but they take their places in the home by an act of faith. Their present good conduct is prompted by that normal and wholesome relationship. This indicates the relation between faith and works. We are members of the divine family, not because of what we have done in giving a tenth of our income to the Lord, or in showing ourselves kind and pure and true in our dealings with men, or in being faithful attendants at church; we are members of the divine family simply because we accepted the invitation of his love. We turned to the Father, we opened our hearts and received his forgiveness, recognition, and help; and now the good service we render flows out of this relation established by our confidence in God's grace.

The truth of salvation by faith was recognized by the psalmist. "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are . . . a broken and a contrite heart." Forgiveness could not be purchased by burnt offerings. The man who needed it could not earn it by any kind of service. He could only come with a contrite heart, and freely accept it. Salvation by faith was the appointed way.

The truths of religion have been obscured by priestly forms. Men were offering sacrifices and burnt offerings, they were washing their cups and pots, tithing their salt, their pepper, and their mustard as if these were matters of life and death. Jesus must come and make known afresh the everlasting gospel—God so loved the world as to give his Son; and men are saved by believing on him, by taking what he freely gives, and by following him in lives of service.

The Roman Catholic Church overlaid religion with cumbrous forms until it became again a thing of penance and ceremony, of mortifications and masses to earn the favor of God. Again it became necessary to clean house and burn the ecclesiastical rubbish. Luther came and on his painful pilgrimage saw what a caricature of the gospel the Roman system was. He aroused Germany and all the more aspiring parts of Europe with his doctrine of "salvation by faith." The forgiveness, the recognition, the help of God are never bought from a priest, nor purchased through ceremony, nor earned by penances; they must be freely accepted as the gift of God.

In our reading of history we find no great revival of religion, except through the simple, fearless preaching to a sinful world of this gospel of "salvation by faith." It was the theme of Paul and of Chrysostom, of Luther and of Wesley, of Edwards and of Finney. Salvation was proclaimed as the free, unpurchasable gift of God, and faith was defined as the human act of taking it.

We find an effective illustration of salvation by faith in Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables." Jean Valjean had been a galley-slave. He felt that all men despised him and that society would never forgive him for having committed crime. He was released at the end of his sentence, but he found the taverns turned him from their doors, men refused to employ him, the very dogs snarled upon him if he sought to sleep in their kennels. He went to the Bishop's house and the good man took him in. The Bishop called him "Monsieur," treated him as a man, gave him the best place at table, and the choicest room in his house. The Bishop knew the man had been a galley-

slave, but he forgave him, recognized him as a brother man, offered him help in the living of a new life.

Had Jean Valjean earned it? He had never done anything for the Bishop. Did the convict gain that benefit by his theological opinions? Heaven knows what his opinions were—they taught no theology in the galleys. The Bishop freely offered his favor and Jean Valjean accepted it. It was a sure word of gospel truth for him. It was the beginning of his salvation. He saw in this servant of God a picture of God's own willingness to forgive and to help men who have done wrong. He accepted this heaven-sent good news and pressed forward into Christian service. The beginning of it all was the Bishop's preaching, by word and by deed, the simple doctrine of salvation by faith. By grace, not by opinions, nor by ceremonies, nor by works, but by grace, are men saved through faith.

Men have erred in thinking of faith as something which the soul could exercise once for all, a single assent to some plan or proposition upon which the man became a saved man forever after. Faith is a constant moral attitude toward God. "The just shall *live* by faith." It is the abiding relation of the soul to God.

How plain this is when we turn to the method of Jesus! How did he save men? He went to the home of a stingy, grasping, unjust tax-gatherer, who had not even asked him to come. Zacchæus did not know how much he needed Christ, so Christ invited himself as a matter of grace. It touched the heart of the publican. "This great teacher, whom men call the Son of God, comes to me, recognizes me, sits down at meat with me whom men despise because I am a publican!" In the course of their conversation Zacchæus sees life in a new way. He becomes a changed man under the influence of Christ's fellowship. Before Jesus goes away the sinful publican is moved to say, "Lord, if I have taken anything from any man falsely, I restore him fourfold. I have lived a grasping, stingy life, but now the half of my goods I give to the poor." And Jesus said, "This day is salvation come to this house. Zacchæus also is a child of Abraham, a member of the family of God."

Zacchæus had not earned his salvation. He turned away from his wrongdoing. He announced a new intention for the future. He gladly accepted the forgiveness, recognition, and help that Jesus offered. The work of moral recovery is not obscured by any insistence upon penance, ceremony, or mortification. There was no demand made for any particular opinions about substitution or governmental expedients or the like. The one thing that had value was the straightforward acceptance of that gift of new life which Christ offered and ever offers to those who will take it at his hands. And it is

this gift of new life freely offered and freely received which brings renewed character and a filial relation in the family of the Father.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

IN certain quarters we hear men speaking in glowing terms of Christ and then with the last half of the same breath denouncing his Church. We are told with hearty confidence that it does not matter whether people have ever been baptized, taken communion, or belonged to the Church—that on the whole it is better for them not to have done any of these churchly things.

It might be well to remind those who laud Christ and deride his Church that this was not his own attitude. The Church of his day does not seem to have been so sincere, so efficient in humane activity, nor so well-stocked with simple, every-day righteousness, as is the average church of our own time. Yet it was his custom to enter the synagogue on the Sabbath. He observed the appointed feasts of the national Church. He utilized the opportunities it offered for moral effort.

And this same Jesus, who taught “the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man,” at the close of his life sent his apostles “to disciple all nations, and to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” The only place where this command is being taken seriously is in the Church of Christ. The same Jesus who told men to love God and to love their neighbors, instituted the Lord’s Supper and gave the command, “This do in remembrance of me.” The only place where this command is being obeyed, and the sacrament regularly and devoutly observed, is in the Church. There would seem to be a certain confusion in the minds of those who praise Christ and then denounce his Church as a needless incumbrance in the modern world.

Jesus announced in definite terms his purpose to build a Church. He saw many coming and going who held various theories about him, and in varying degrees cherished admiration for his work. Close beside him was one who loved him, trusted him, and in a degree understood him. In response to an inquiry from the Master, this man made a promising confession of his faith. In this personal attitude Christ saw the hope of the

future. In recognition of it, he said, alluding to Peter's name, which means "a stone," "Upon this rock of personal loyalty and trust I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The Scriptures speak of "the Church of the living God," a body of people sustaining a special relation to him. They call the Church "the pillar and ground of the truth." It is "the household of God," the family circle of the heavenly Father. It is "the body of Christ," the visible organism through which Christ works; the field for the manifestation of his glory; the chosen instrument for accomplishing his moral purpose; the transforming agency by which the common materials of human life are taken up and ennobled by the spiritual energy resident in the Church.

The Church is the body of Christ. What a glorious conception! It is a revealing-place for the Spirit of Christ. In the attitude of its members toward one another and toward the need of the world, men are to see the love of God. The Church furnishes eyes and lips, hands and feet, for the Spirit of Christ. Its members see the opportunity and speak in clear tones the gospel of hope. They go upon his errands of mercy and labor effectively for the relief of human need. The Church is a transforming agency where earthly men are taken up and, by the force of that transfiguring Spirit which dwells in all bodies of true believers, they are changed into energy of a higher sort. The relation which the physical body of Jesus sustained to his Spirit of old is now sustained by his Church. In proportion to its consecration, its faith and its responsiveness to the touch of his Spirit, the Church attains this high estate.

The Church serves to keep alive the sense of God in the world. Its very buildings serve this purpose. You pass along a certain street in your city calling the attention of visitors to the residences of its various citizens. You pass a church and inform your friends that this is "the house of God." He, too, is resident there, mingling his thought and energy in the city life. The building itself and the services there maintained make men conscious of his presence. Men felt the love of the Father when Jesus stood among them, and to produce a like experience today is one of the offices of the Church, which is his body.

The Church stimulates the sense of devotion and of obligation to do God's will in all the relations of common life. Ethics rest upon their surest foundation when right and wrong are seen to be distinctions between that which is and that which is not the will of God. And in proportion to their sense of companionship and cooperation with the Author and Rewarder of good, are men made strong to practise right precepts.

The Church is the organized Christianity of the community. In fulfilling its office as the visible body of Christ, it brings the hands, the feet, the eyes, and the lips together and organizes them for united action. If the Christian religion is to assert itself, every practical man can see that it must be organized. Every one who believes in the value of that religion should be in the organization. “An impartial examination of the influence of organized religion upon society abundantly discloses the fact that the most continuous, steady, frank, and powerful force in ethical fields is exercised by the substantially uniform moral action of our churches. Society confidently counts upon organized religion to champion every thoroughly ethical question which arises. Society invariably turns to the churches when some extraordinary issue demands an untiring, undaunted advocate.”^[14]

[14] E. Winchester Donald, “The Expansion of Religion,” page 278.

Political beliefs are made effective by organized parties. Wage-earners make their cause known and further its interests as they stand together in organized effort. The combination of commercial interests into trusts is one of the signs of the times. The man who believes in the religion of Christ, but does not belong to the Church is disobedient to the teachings of the New Testament and is absurd in his attitude. If you had met a man on Broadway during the Spanish War, carrying a musket, but with no uniform, insisting that he was a soldier on his way to Cuba, your first question would have been, “To what company and regiment do you belong? Where is your uniform?” He might have replied, “I do not belong to any regiment; I make no professions and wear no uniform. I simply wish to go out by myself and do what I can against the Spaniards.” The folly of his position would have made you laugh. He would not only have failed in doing his own best; his example and presence, had he been allowed to go to the front, would have been demoralizing to the army itself.

In like manner the men who sympathize with the purposes of the Christian Church and yet lack the clear-sighted manliness to come in and identify themselves with some part of its organized activity, forfeit a large measure of their own usefulness and allow themselves to become a hindrance to the most effective work. The Church is religion organized and ready to take the field.

The Church is a school of Christian character ready to do its work. There are those who insist that they do not need to attend church—they can be religious at home. They could teach their children at home, but on the whole the public schools are more effective. The teachers are not all sages, but they

render a service which could not easily be supplied in any other way. He would be a foolish man who would turn away from schools, colleges, and public libraries on the ground that a little learning might be hammered out on his own little anvil at home. Men can be religious at home, but how many of those who habitually absent themselves from church spend an hour, morning and evening, on Sunday, in reading the Scripture, in prayer, in serious attention to some phase of Christian duty and privilege? The ministers are neither sages nor angels, yet they are competent to teach the people among whom they live, scriptural and helpful views of life and duty. Religion is their major study. It would be strange if the Church were not able, by its music, its lessons, its prayers, and its sermons, to lift the thought and aspiration of a congregation to higher levels.

The Church is here because of the necessities of the people. "The new life of service and sacrifice, brought to the world by Christ and begotten in us by the Spirit, at once demands a socially effective organization and expression, that those who share this life may be bound closer together; that the enthusiasm of it may be kept alive; that the members who share it may be increased; and that those who are losing it may be brought to share its blessings and its privileges." Without such an organized expression of its real life and purpose for the world, the religion of Jesus could not exert its wholesome sway over the hearts of men.

Organized religion would be more effective had it not broken itself into so many pieces. We deplore the multitude of denominations and the consequent struggling churches. The demand for variety will remain. Certain temperaments enjoy more ritual, other temperaments less; some are more hospitable to new ideas, others, less; some trust the people more and have simple democratic forms of government, others prefer the rule of presbyteries or of bishops.

But this demand for variety has been overworked. It has multiplied sects needlessly and has created ugly rivalries. The sects are not abusing one another as once they did, but in many a city and town there is an unseemly scramble for the ear and the support of the people. In a public conference one pastor boasted that he had just induced three Methodists, two Presbyterians, four Baptists, and one Episcopalian to forsake their former affiliations and become members of his sect. He spoke of it as a victory. But getting four soldiers transferred from Company A to Company B does nothing to strengthen the army. It may weaken the army if changes are so frequent as to subvert discipline. In many communities there is an

undignified, unchristian strife to get the lion's share of the religiously disposed people.

The demand for Christian unity is imperative. The platform laid of old was "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Might we not stand together on that fundamental basis?

"One Lord"—we have different theories about the person of Jesus Christ, and about the effect of his death. But look abroad among Catholics and Protestants, the orthodox and the liberal, in all parts of Christendom it is that "One Lord" who holds sway over the thought, the aspiration, and the obedience of men.

"One faith"—there are many opinions, but the one moral attitude toward God which is saving in its effect is an attitude of trust, obedience, and love; and that type of faith in the mercy of God as revealed in Christ is common to all Christians.

"One baptism"—not that of water, be it by little or by much, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit, cleansing and renewing the heart, of which water is merely the outward sign. This is the common reliance of all true Christians.

On these fundamentals we are one. This might not serve as a sufficiently definite basis for Church unity, but the mere reference to these familiar words and the substantial agreement in all the churches touching their significance indicates how the divisions have come mainly by emphasizing things which are not essential.

The formal attempts at Church unity have thus far been disappointing. But we can serve the good cause by keeping to the front the vital things whereon we agree and by leaving non-essentials in the rear until the statute of limitations can be pleaded against them. "It is in spiritual passion and action and not in speculation and argument that human beings find themselves marching side by side in the same great cause, their hearts beating to the same hope and harmony. There is no measuring the power of a common passion for righteousness to consume differences, to enlighten willing minds, to fuse and unify self-sacrificing energy." Through this growing passion for righteousness, which overshadows doctrinal differences, we may confidently expect that the Church of the future will be nobly careless about many minor points where wise and good men differ; it will be earnestly insistent upon the weightier matters of character and service.

In our home missionary and foreign missionary work the divided Church has brought criticism and defeat. "If the grocery trade were carried on in country towns as the religious business is, there would be ten stores where only three are needed, each one full of a cheap, defective stock of goods and on the verge of bankruptcy. If education were carried on in the same way, there would be one school where all the teachers were Democrats, another where they all believed in the nebular hypothesis, another where they were all anti-expansionists perhaps." The fundamental things which schools are set to teach form one body of elementary instruction. The message of the churches to a sinful world needing the mercy of God in Christ for its forgiveness and renewal, for its upbuilding in righteousness and guidance in useful service, is essentially one.

In foreign missionary work especially it is hard to understand why we have not been ready to divide and conquer, to assign certain fields to certain branches of the Church by mutual agreement, rather than duplicate or overlap our efforts. It is confusing to a non-Christian community to be called upon to decide upon the claims of Christian baptism by a handful of water or by a tankful; to pass upon the claims of a man who was ordained by a bishop and the claims of one who was ordained by elders. The differences which we have wrestled over and found petty here at home need not be exported to harass other races of Christian pilgrims.

And in home missionary work the denominations have been foolish and wicked in multiplying organizations in small towns that every style of sectarian appetite might be furnished with the special meat for which its soul lusteth. An unholy rivalry between the branches of Christ's Church and the petty insistence of his followers upon their particular forms to the detriment of the wider interests of his kingdom, have repeatedly lessened the Church's power of moral appeal.

But in spite of the shortcomings of the Church, which those within understand and lament, there is a great, glad sense of privilege in being a part of this organized Christianity. We have the sense of sharing in a great, corporate life. "We belong to the Church." The words are spoken so lightly, and yet how much they mean! My hand "belongs" to my body. It is incorporated with it for good or ill, for health or for pain, to participate in its service, to share in its weariness and to advance with it into whatever joy or honor may come. The man who "belongs to the Church" becomes thus vitally incorporate with the body of Christ.

It is a loss to any soul to lack this sense of union with the great body of aspiring men. It must be strange for any one to travel in Europe, visiting the

mighty cathedrals reared by religious aspiration; beholding masterpieces of painting and sculpture wrought out under the stimulus of religious emotion; hearing the music of the best oratorios, or the opera of “Parsifal,” with religion for their theme; and to feel throughout that he is a stranger and a foreigner in his relation to the mighty kingdom where all this was produced. He is not a naturalized citizen in that kingdom of God which stands for so much enrichment in the world’s history. The noblest life cannot be lived thus detached. Healthy and vigorous religious life “must find institutional expression. To talk of spiritual life apart from the Church, its worship and its service, is like talking of patriotism while refusing allegiance to any country.”

Here we have an institution into which Jesus Christ wrought his own purpose—“On this rock I will build my Church!” Here we have an institution commended by one of the most forceful and useful men of his generation, as “the pillar and ground of the truth!” Here we have an institution to which some of the best minds and noblest hearts in history have gladly given the service of their lives—Augustine and Origen, Francis of Assisi and Thomas à Kempis, Savonarola and Martin Luther, John Knox and John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and Charles G. Finney, Horace Bushnell and Henry Ward Beecher, Dwight L. Moody and Phillips Brooks! Here we have an institution which, with all its faults, has stood through the ages for “the struggle of the spiritual against the physical, of faith against force, of the poor and obscure against their haughty oppressors, of that which is founded in the divine order against that which springs from human self-will!” Here we have an institution which at this hour is more openly pledged to the highest spiritual ideals and more steadily engaged in urging them upon the people than any other institution on earth!

In the presence of an institution founded by Christ, served by many of the noblest spirits in history, consecrated to the realization of the highest ideals, how blind it seems for any one possessed of a ray of spiritual aspiration to say, touching the worship and the instruction, the fellowship and the service of this mighty institution, “I have no need of you.” The systematic cultivation of the sense of the Unseen, the habit of waiting upon the Lord of strength for the renewal of one’s strength, the joy of mingling one’s aspirations with those of his fellows in a hymn, a song, a prayer, or an aspiration, the wide opportunity for the investment of one’s abilities in active service—all these are demanded for the fullest and noblest type of life. Into the enjoyment of all this the Church sets before us an open door.

The Church organizes and socializes that all but universal aspiration of the human to relate itself consciously to the Unseen. It is an aspiration as old as time and as wide as the world. The soul which willingly secludes itself from that endeavor suffers unspeakable loss.

I have listened reverently to the service of the Mass according to the Roman Catholic ritual in St. Peter's at Rome; I have heard a hundred men chanting the service of the Greek Church in the Cathedral of the Kremlin at Moscow; and I have heard a choir of Indian boys sing the same Gregorian chants in a Russian mission on the west coast of Alaska. I have witnessed the midnight service on Good Friday at the Cathedral of the Greek Church in Athens, and I have heard the call to prayer from the minaret and have seen devout Moslems prostrate in worship at the Mosque of St. Sophia in Constantinople. I have studied the stolid faces of the Chinese in their joss-houses in old Shanghai; I have watched the Buddhist priests conducting the worship of devout Japanese in the great Hongwanji Temple in Kyoto, and I have watched the tear-stained faces of devout Jews pouring out their hearts in prayer before that fragment of the old temple enclosure at the "Jews' Wailing Place" in Jerusalem.

In every case the mode of worship and the language in which it was expressed were utterly unlike my own, yet the spirit of what I saw in them all was akin to what I find in my own breast. In the sense of dependence upon and of kinship with the Unseen, in the deep yearning and longing after an effective fellowship with the Divine, we were all one! How incomplete and abnormal I should feel if in all my purposes and habits I had no part with them in this widespread and persistent hunger of the heart! The deepest and truest instincts of my nature bid me turn to the Church which organizes and socializes this universal aspiration.

We were told in advance by the Founder of the Church that it would have its faults. The tares grow with the wheat. Animals get into the fold, which look like sheep but are not. Men say, "Lord, Lord," whom Christ does not own, for they hear his sayings and do them not. Men who remain out of the Church waiting until it shall clear itself of its faults will stay out some time. The only way to have a perfect Church is to stop admitting human beings as members.

But those who stand apart from the Church on such grounds are absurd in their action. The man who desires an education does not wait until he finds a school where all the professors and all the students know everything. He does not look for one where the pupils all learn their lessons perfectly and never forget them. He finds an institution where the teachers are

intelligent, earnest, and sincere about their work; where the students are serious in their desire to learn; and with such a school he casts in his lot. The Church is a school for christian character and the “disciples,” as Jesus called them, the learners or pupils, are under the personal tuition of the Master and of that body of influences established in his Church.

The excuses offered for remaining out of the Church are weak. The men who say they “are not good enough” to join the Church would imply that a boy should never go near a bicycle until he has learned to ride. The Church stands with open doors to welcome those who are conscious that they are “not good enough,” and aid them in the attainment of that higher, holier life which rises before them as a commanding ideal.

The man who insists he can be “just as good outside of the Church” is stupid. If all men followed his selfish method, there would be no churches. Churches are sustained and made effective by the loyal service of their members. Their ministers are taken from the membership of the churches. If all remained outside, there would be no churches; people would be married by justices of the peace, buried without the Scripture lesson or the prayer; there would be no body of believers to welcome the little child with the sacrament of baptism; there would be none of these useful centers for worship and instruction, for religious fellowship and charitable activity.

There are few people in all the millions of our population who would welcome such a condition. They would not wish to live a year in a churchless city. Real estate would fall in price; public morals would be lowered; children and adults would suffer incalculable loss if the churches were closed. Yet thousands of people live in such a way that if all men acted as they are acting touching the Church, the nation would be churchless. The man who remains outside on the theory that he can be just as good a Christian without assuming the responsibilities of church membership is a coward and a shirk.

Yonder, at the Pacific Mail Dock in San Francisco, lies the great steamer *Manchuria*. When she comes up to the pier, she has the look of one who has accomplished something. She has come all the way from Hongkong through storm and wind. She has brought her precious freight of passengers, business men returning to their families, missionaries returning for a visit to the homeland, scientists who have been opening up new regions by exploration. She comes, carrying in her hold a splendid cargo of tea and silk, teakwood and lacquer, and all the riches of the Orient.

And down under the water, huddled out of sight, are a few barnacles clinging for their lives to the side of the ship. They seem to say, "We, too, are here! We also have made the voyage of seven thousand miles." They feel that somehow they share in the *Manchuria's* honor.

In like manner Christian civilization under the moral leadership of the Church of Christ, with all its precious freight, with messages of hope and love, with a mighty cargo of help for nobler, fuller life, with its sailing list of devoted men and women, bearing upon their shoulders the cause of human progress, moves out to other lands, invades the frontiers, discharges holy influences in every community, carrying within it the hope of mankind. There are in every community many who never enroll themselves as passengers, never become members of the crew, never walk its decks as professing to share in the movement. Like the barnacles on the *Manchuria* they selfishly cling to this Christian civilization which holds advantages for their business, which ministers protection and help for their children, which nobly conserves all that makes life worth living, yet they refuse to share in its deeper responsibilities. They are barnacles stuck on from without; they are parasites and non-producers in this work of Christian progress.

We have laid such stress upon individualism, in this new country of political equality and of unparalleled personal opportunity, that we have but dimly apprehended the value of institutionalism. We need a deeper sense of the fact that the individual only realizes himself through combination with other individuals in institutional life.

When the Hebrews returned from Babylon and undertook the rebuilding of the walls, their sense of corporate life was deepened. "Every man built over against his own house," but with the glad sense that the portion of wall laid in place by his own hands helped to guard the commercial and domestic interests of all the other men in the city; and he in turn relied for his own completer safety upon the work of all his fellows as they built over against their houses. The very task of thus performing that individual service in the accomplishment of a vast design gave the sense of moral solidarity.

This sense of participation in a larger movement uncovered for each man an abiding source of motive and stimulus. When he took his particular brick, the act seemed insignificant—the brick was only a bit of burnt clay. But when the brick went into a wall, relating itself to millions of other bricks; when the wall surrounded a city as its main defense; when the city was Jerusalem, the headquarters of the Hebrew people who have woven themselves into the higher life of the world as no other nation has, then the simple act became invested with a mighty significance.

The building of one's personal activities, simple though they were, into the far-reaching, solid wall of a divine purpose ennobled them. Every man, as he laid his tale of bricks in place, felt that there was being worked out, now in joy and now in tears, now in rapid progress and now in painful but educative delay, now through the stately ceremonies of the priest, now by the living word of the prophet, now by the ordinary service of the consecrated layman, now on the banks of the Jordan and now in the valley of the Nile, now along the shores of Galilee and now by the rivers of Babylon, a great divine purpose for humanity. Each man who yielded his life to the impulse to serve, was aiding in the consummation of that vast design. In like manner the individual who builds his life into some great institution like the Christian Church adds immeasurably to its significance by thus incorporating his personal activities with a world-wide and age-long movement for the moral welfare of the race.

The perfect Church is yet to be. The Church has never yet had offered to it that abundance or that quality of material which would enable it to build worthily "the body of Christ." To fulfil the high purpose expressed for it, the Church must reach the point where its face shall shine with the splendor seen on the holy mount of old; its lips must speak forth matchless words which embody the thought of God; its feet must be swift to go on errands of love and its hands nimble and strong to work the works of Him who builds it. For all this it demands material abundant and worthy, offered in loving consecration. It needs energy and intelligence, affection and devotion, money and service placed at the call of the Spirit of Christ, who is building the Church as the body of his habitation. What a sacred honor to offer one's life, in whole-hearted consecration, to be thus taken up and built into that body which shall stand forth as the dwelling-place of the Divine Spirit! In that glorious consummation it will be seen that "the Tabernacle of God is with men."

CHAPTER IX

THE HOPE OF IMMORTALITY

ONE can scarcely ask a more searching or a more practical question than the one propounded by Job—"If a man die, shall he live again?" In making our plans, in determining our principles of action, and in furnishing the heart with motives, we are profoundly influenced by the answer given to this inquiry.

Am I to live my threescore years and ten and then become extinct? Or am I to live straight on, this earthly period of existence being merely the first term in a course of education that will have no end?

The reply which each man makes is to be read, not in some high-flown sentiment uttered upon occasion, but rather in the things upon which he sets his heart, in the courses of action he maps out. It may be well to eat, drink, and be merry, in open indifference to loftier interests, if tomorrow we die and come to the end of it all. But if the results of our choices and deeds are endlessly carried forward in personal consciousness, then life is another matter. In view of the vital interests bound up with the reply we make to Job's inquiry, it is wise to consider carefully the grounds upon which thoughtful men base their hope of immortality.

There are no "proofs of immortality." Even for those who accept the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a historical fact, this notable victory over death does not "prove" that all men will rise again. The plain declarations of inspired men and of Jesus himself touching the future life are not "proofs"—they depend for their force upon the measure of moral faith we cherish toward them.

If we should accept the claims of the spiritists, who on a notable occasion professed to hold communion with the departed spirit of Senator Sherman when the newspapers had erroneously announced his death, only to discover the next morning that he was still alive and aboard ship instead of lending his ghostly presence to needy seance-holders, we should still be without proof of our personal immortality.

“The fact that some men have survived death does not prove that all must. A flock of sheep come to a river. A number of them swim safely across and bleat to their brethren behind, telling them as plainly as can be that they still live; nevertheless the sheep who have not yet tried the river seem a good deal excited. The question with them is, not whether others have survived the beat and wash of the stream, but whether they shall survive. That is not proved and in the nature of the case cannot be. An intelligent member of the flock, having known the weakness of many of its brethren who report that they have safely crossed the flood, and wisely judging its own superior strength, might feel comfortably sure of survival. Spiritism, even if accepted as authentic, cannot yield demonstration. It still leaves those who have not tasted death in the sphere of moral faith.”^[15] From the very necessities of the situation, therefore, our belief in immortality cannot rest on proofs. It must rest on faith in certain considerations. It may be just as well—“the best things are felt rather than proved.”

[15] George A. Gordon, “Immortality and the New Theodicy,” page 6.

But if there is no actual proof of the truth of the positive claim, neither is there any proof of the correctness of the negative position. It is well to rid our minds of the idea that the denial of immortality is based on actual knowledge. One of the most eminent scientific men of the nineteenth century, Thomas H. Huxley, said, “Science has not a shred of evidence that the soul does not live on after death. When denial of that claim is made, it is sheer theory and assumption.”

The denial of a future life is never based on knowledge; it is simply a negative form of belief. In order to declare the doctrine of immortality false, men would have to ransack all space and know to a certainty that there are nowhere in conscious existence those human beings who once walked the earth. But no one has this knowledge; no one can have it. Whatever reasons there are for holding this negative form of belief are to be carefully considered, but its adherents need not try to throw dust in our eyes by pretending that it is a case of knowledge against faith. The field is open, and that form of belief, positive or negative, which shows the best grounds for its expectation, is free to take possession.

Into this open field I introduce four lines of argument. The first I call psychological. The wish to live on after death, the all but universal instinct for immortality, is highly significant.

“It must be so—Plato, thou reasonest well!—
Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
This longing after immortality?”

We have pushed our investigations back until some scientific men make bold to say that the human race has been on the earth for one hundred thousand years. Among those prehistoric men we find the custom of burying the trinkets, the weapons, the tools of the dead man with his body—mute testimony to their belief that he would need them in that future life to which he had gone. For a hundred thousand years, it may be, this belief in a hereafter has persisted.

May we not apply the doctrine of “the survival of the fittest” to forms of belief? If all men want to breathe and keep on wanting to breathe for a hundred thousand years, does it not argue that there is air answering to that need? If all men hunger and keep on hungering for a hundred thousand years, does it not raise the presumption that there is food for them? The Creator does not perpetually send these native and universal desires upon fools’ errands. The divine appointments have somehow kept faithful tryst with the profound and persistent needs of human nature. If the longing after immortality has been developed, has persisted and grown stronger through the operation of these forces which have their way with us, without an actual reality standing over against that desire, it introduces an extraordinary break in the method of the universe.

More than that, it has been the human mind at its best, which has insisted most strongly upon the truth of immortality. The great poets—Homer, Virgil and Dante, Milton and Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning—how they sang of the life beyond the grave! The great philosophers—Socrates and Plato, Kant and Hegel—writing their names indelibly upon the pages of serious inquiry, how they clung to the idea of the persistence of the spiritual element in man! The great founders of religions—Zoroaster, Mahomet, Jesus of Nazareth—how strong was their faith in the world to come! The great statesmen, who by the impress of their personalities have molded the lives of nations—Cicero and Cromwell, Lincoln, Bismarck and Gladstone—how strong they were in their confidence that death is not the end!

The human mind has not only persisted for these thousands of years in that hope and expectation; when it rose to its highest level and was illumined by the purest aspiration, it has shown itself most ready to make positive reply to the question of living again. It would cast contempt upon the great process which has produced these convictions, preserved them,

clarified them, to call its fruitage an empty delusion. It would cast aspersion upon the validity of our mental life and impeach the integrity of the universal order which has wrought this result, should we undertake to deny the fact of immortality, for which these ages of aspiring men have yearned.

The second line of argument I call analogical. The two scientific doctrines known as the “indestructibility of matter” and “the conservation of energy” are widely accepted. The form of matter changes, but the substance of the universe is neither increased nor decreased. The form of energy may be altered from motion to heat and from heat to light, but the energy persists.

Do senseless atoms thus endure while conscious, thinking spirits, standing higher in the scale of existence, perish? Do these manifestations of energy, seen in combustion or in a falling body, continue in some form undiminished, but the forms of energy which make up conscious personality utterly decay? The attempt to establish such a theory in the face of the present mental attitude on these questions will prove a difficult task.

Matter is—let him who can, prove that it will cease to be! No one has proved it. The best belief of the day looks quite the other way. I am alive—let him who can prove that I shall ever cease to be! The burden of proof is upon him. The form may change so that I no longer manifest myself through this familiar body, but in some form, I, too, endure.

Hear the word of John Fiske, a distinguished interpreter of the doctrine of evolution, “The more thoroughly we comprehend that process of evolution by which things have come to be what they are, the more we are likely to feel that to deny the everlasting persistence of the spiritual element in man is to rob the whole process of its meaning. It would go far toward putting us to permanent intellectual confusion. For my own part, therefore, I believe in the immortality of the soul as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God’s work.”

Progress is the law of life. The story of the past is the record of the ascent to higher and ever higher levels of finite existence. Investigation reveals nothing higher than man. It seems incredible that, having come so far, we should not go farther. To urge that God is perpetually destroying this sensitive bond between the created world and himself, by the perpetual extinction of souls who have learned to rejoice in their cooperation with him, makes a staggering demand upon our credulity. The anticipation awakened within our hearts by the creative purpose points the way of faith toward belief in a race of immortal men, to crown and complete the work begun.

The third line of argument springs from moral considerations as they rise to their higher levels. The voices which echo against the walls of our hearts bid us attain that for which this present life offers no adequate opportunity. The Master of moral values said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect!" Human aspiration at its best takes up his word and utters the same call, "Be perfect!" Poetry and song utter the same summons, "Be perfect!" The logic of growth says, "Go on, and on, and on—be perfect!" Are these high commands which fall upon our ears not meant to be obeyed? Are they but sent to mock our incompleteness? Such high demands can only be met where further life affords the adequate opportunity.

Faith in a future life is demanded for the utmost development of the moral nature here. Study the results of the affirmation of the truth of immortality upon broad fields of human experience, and compare them with the chilling, numbing effect of the denial of that truth! Men become steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, when they feel that their labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Would any one say that this faith in a hereafter thus necessary to the broad development of moral steadfastness, heroism, self-sacrifice, is a faith founded on an eternal mistake, while the denial of this claim with its chilling effect upon spiritual enthusiasm is the sober truth? In such event, it would seem that the things that are not mightier than the things that are. Saints and seers, heroes and martyrs, bravely bearing the heat and burden of many a hard day, unite in their testimony to the helpfulness of the hope of immortality. They could not have wrought thus valiantly had they not lived by "the power of an endless life." And until the world can believe that grapes grow from thorns and figs from thistles, it will hesitate to attribute such moral fruitage to an ill-founded delusion.

Raphael would not have used the utmost of his artistic ability in painting the Sistine Madonna had he believed some vandal would cut it to shreds the day it was finished. Beethoven would not have taxed his musical ability to the utmost in composition, had he not hoped that his melodies and harmonies might go singing their way down the ages. The great masters of literary expression would not have spent their vitality in speech and verse had they believed their manuscripts would be committed to the flames unread.

Plain men and women, bearing the heat and burden of many a hard day, cannot be relied upon to lift their ideals "up to the style and manner of the sky" unless they, too, are firmly persuaded that for them and for those they

serve there is a future life. Immortality is a demand of our moral nature. To deny it is to say that the deepest intimations of conscience are false and that the highest moral success in history has been made possible by the cherishing of delusion.

The fourth line of argument is theological. Here and there shadows, forbidding and inexplicable, lie heavy upon the fair fields of human experience. But in spite of them we discern the presence of a moral order lying beneath. The laws of life are good, for if these laws were perfectly understood and rightly obeyed, life would be noble, beautiful, joyous. Then the Author of these laws must be good, since he has thus established them in the world we know. In view of everything, we feel a profound assurance that when the returns are all in, it will be seen that the Judge of all the earth has done right.

But can he do right with individual men and women, unless there be a future life? Look upon the blotches of unreason and injustice, unexplained and unexplainable, unless there be scrolls of human experience yet to be unrolled! Sin and meanness unpunished as yet! Fidelity and unselfishness unrewarded! Puzzling and blinding situations issuing apparently in nothing of worth! Disciplinary experiences bravely borne by heroic souls, reasonable enough if they serve as preparation for higher states of being, but meaningless and useless if the moral results are wiped from the slate by the extinction of those who bore them! "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Shall not the moral order, which we dimly discern, vindicate itself at last to every soul?

Our faith in immortality springs from our faith in the moral integrity of God. If behind these phenomena there is neither intelligence nor moral purpose, then might we come at last to feel that death ends all. But the moment we rise to faith in the moral character of God, immortality seems sure.

Could you take your own child, brought into the world by your own act, trained by experiences pleasant and severe, allowed and encouraged to believe that he would live to man's estate, and then at some point in his development thrust him away into eternal nothingness? If ye then, being evil, know the moral rights of your children, and feel your obligations toward them, what shall we say of the moral obligation of him who created us, allowed and encouraged us to hope for further life? How could he deny himself by thrusting away his own!

“Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
Thou madest man, we know not why:
He thinks he was not made to die.
And thou hast made him? Thou art just!”

Weigh these four lines of argument as affording warrant for cherishing the positive rather than the negative belief touching immortality! Hold the four of them together—the universal desire of men at their best to live on after death in a world where universal and persistent desires find over against them the means of satisfaction; the analogy between the persistence of matter and energy and the persistence of that higher form of existence known as consciousness, as the necessary outcome of the evolutionary process; the moral necessity for adequate opportunity to render complete obedience to the high commands which are laid upon us and the moral fruitage of the positive as against the negative attitude toward the future life; the plain implications of a moral order which stands as the abiding expression of a wise and just God! Hold the four of them together and clasp them with the serene faith of Jesus Christ in immortality, and somehow these five considerations become a mighty hand, clasping the inner life with reassuring grip!

The desire for immortality is so strong that if the intellectual objections are disarmed, the fortunes of such a faith may safely be left to the human heart. Two main impediments seem to stand in the way of such a hope. We cannot readily understand how life continues after the body has perished in the swift consumption of the crematory, or in the slower processes of the cemetery. Life seems to come to an end. The heart stops, the breath ceases, the eyes no longer see, nor do the ears hear; there is no response to any kind of stimulus. How can life survive the change and dissolution wrought by death!

But if we could stand at any crucial point in the unfolding creation, we should witness changes as extraordinary. When the universe was an unorganized mass of swirling star dust, how impossible seemed the orderly system of stars, planets, and worlds! When this solid earth was a molten mass like that seen in the crater of Kilauea, on the Island of Hawaii, how impossible seemed the verdure, the trees, the flowers, and the countless forms of sentient life! Life abundant on a globe once lifeless is a problem which baffles the scientist.

When the highest modes of life on earth were those huge forms of the Jurassic or of the Pliocene, gross and brutish, how impossible it seemed that

there should be found here a Milton and a Shakespeare! Advances have been made which we would have deemed incredible could we have stood as wondering witnesses of preceding conditions. In the face of what has occurred, it is not hard to believe that the Creator has in store that farther advance in the scale of life, pictured in the Scriptures as a race of immortal beings fulfilling his purpose in the completion of these lives possessed of moral aspiration.

We have thus far known conscious personality only in connection with physical organism. How consciousness survives the shock of the physical changes and destruction which death involves, proves a burden serious to be borne by many who would believe, but ask some wiser man to help their unbelief. It brings us face to face with the whole mystery of personal consciousness.

But a human being is more than a physical organism. There was a time in the history of every man when the germ of life from which he developed could not have been distinguished under the microscope from the germ of an ape or of a dog. What made the difference? Something apparently that the microscope, adjusted to hunt down particles of matter the most minute, cannot discover. This being came to have intellectual stature, moral sense, humanity, by reason of some mysterious endowment not discoverable in the material organism in its early stages. It is this something, transcending the material structure and differentiating man from the lower animals, which is destined to survive the shock of death.

To affirm the truth of immortality imposes upon us the hard task of picturing the continuance of personality after the dissolution of a physical organism now uniformly associated with it. But to deny it, when we are surrounded with other problems mysterious and unsolvable to present insight, involves us in so much greater intellectual and moral difficulty that reason bids us follow our deepest instinct in cherishing the hope of future life.

This point is well argued by William James in his Ingersoll lecture on immortality. He discusses the difference between productive and transmissive function. "Thought is a function of the brain," men have said. No brain, no thought; no thought, no consciousness—and therefore, they urge, no life after death has destroyed the brain. But may it not be that thought is a function of the brain as speech is a function of the vocal organs? These organs do not produce the tones of song or speech; they receive air from the lungs; and back of that is the invisible spirit of the man which

determines whether the tones shall be those of love or hate. The function of the vocal organ is only a transmissive function.

In like manner music is a function of the pipe-organ. The organ does not originate the music. It receives air under pressure from outside itself, and it is manipulated by a player altogether independent of it. Even though the organ might be destroyed by fire, the organist would remain to play upon another organ which would replace it. So the distinguished psychologist argues that the function of the brain is transmissive—upon “its delicate gray keys” the unseen organist, the spirit of the man, plays life’s noblest music. And though the organ perish in the swift processes of the retort or in the slow processes of the grave, the organist remains. “The sphere of being which furnished a conscious, self-directing player for this subtle organ, which we call the brain, is still intact and able to supply for it another organ in ways unknown to us.”

It is also suggested that the burden of believing in immortality for the countless hordes that live now and have lived becomes a bar to faith. “The incredible and intolerable number of beings which, with our modern imagination, we must believe to be immortal, if immortality be true, is a stumbling-block to many.” The ignorant, the base, the half-savage among our remote ancestors, the Hottentots and Eskimos, why should they live?

The adherents of that doctrine known as “conditional immortality,” or the annihilation of the unregenerate, are freed from this embarrassment by their aristocratic view of immortality. In line with the survival of the fittest, they hold that eternal life is for the best of us with quiet extinction for the rest. But this narrower hope has not won for itself any significant adherence.

“Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh are these half-brutish, prehistoric brothers. Girdled about with the immense darkness of this mysterious universe even as we are, they were born, and died, suffered, and struggled. Given over to fearful crime and passion, plunged in the blackest ignorance, preyed upon by hideous and grotesque delusions, yet steadfastly serving the profoundest of ideals in their fixed faith that existence in any form is better than non-existence, they ever rescued triumphantly from the jaws of imminent destruction the torch of life, which, thanks to them, now lights the world for us. How small indeed seem individual distinctions when we look back on these overwhelming numbers of human beings panting and straining under the pressure of that vital want! And how unessential in the eyes of God must be the small surplus of the individual’s merit, swamped as it is in the vast ocean of the common merit of mankind, humbly and undauntedly doing the fundamental duty and living the heroic life! We grow

humble and reverent as we contemplate the prodigious spectacle. An immense compassion and kinship fill the heart. An immortality from which these inconceivable billions of fellow strivers should be excluded becomes an irrational idea for us. That our superiority in personal refinement or in religious creed should constitute a difference between ourselves and our messmates at life's banquet fit to entail such a consequential difference of destiny as eternal life for us, and for them torment hereafter or death with the beasts that perish, is a notion too absurd to be considered serious.”^[16]

[16] James, “Human Immortality,” page 33.

And besides all this instinct of brotherliness, we may believe that God “has so inexhaustible a capacity for love that his call and need is for a literally endless accumulation of created lives. He can never faint nor grow weary as we should under the increasing supply. His scale is infinite in all things. His sympathy can never know satiety or glut. . . . The tiresomeness of an overpeopled heaven is a purely subjective and illusory notion, a sign of human incapacity, a remnant of the old, narrow-hearted, aristocratic creed. The inner significance of other lives exceeds all our powers of sympathy and insight. If we feel a significance in our own life which would lead us spontaneously to claim its perpetuity, let us be at least tolerant of like claims made by other lives, however numerous, however unideal they may seem to us.”

These clear, strong words quite dispose of the objection to the belief in immortality on the ground of the magnitude of the claim it involves. The difficulty was never anything more than an intellectual bugaboo conjured up to frighten the finite mind in quest of a hope to feed its courage.

There may be times when this question, “If a man die, shall he live again?” holds but a speculative interest. Youth, health, work, and dear companionship make this life seem adequate for all our needs. But when age and disease, enforced idleness and loneliness of heart become our lot, those deeper yearnings have the fuller chance to be heard.

What shall we be when all the years of earthly life have gone? And what of the dear dead who have gone before? Has the Author of our existence found nothing better for the strength and beauty of their precious lives than to blot them out? Are fidelity and purity so lightly esteemed that, as generation after generation brings up its share of moral worth, wrought out perchance in blood and tears, He instantly dooms them to extinction? We cannot believe it. So long as reason and conscience testify to the presence of a Moral Order, august, cosmic, eternal; so long as we see the divine glory

shining in the face of Jesus Christ, so long we find it impossible to cherish the negative belief. Mind and heart recoil; they leap in joyous assurance to the glad alternative—"Because he lives, we shall live also," and always.

Faith in immortality is a spiritual achievement rather than the result of logic. Reason may clear the way, but the more abundant life furnishes the power which carries us ahead in noble assurance. As you come to know God through trust and obedience, you will say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." As you enter profoundly into fellowship with Jesus Christ through faith and service, you will say, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God." As you come to feel the essential worth of your own life, and the significance it has for a world ruled by moral purpose, you will say inevitably, "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

Jesus did not persuade men of immortality by explaining away difficulties, nor by giving them details as to the future state. He maintained a noble reserve, which those who talk glibly of what is in store for us, would do well to imitate. He filled men with love and trust in the heavenly Father; he indicated that the whole natural order was ruled by moral purpose; he revealed the abiding worth and significance of the human soul. He abolished the fear of death by bringing life to light. And in that joyous sense of life abundant we think of death as a mark in the road over which the full tide of life eternal will bear us in glad and unending progress.

CHAPTER X

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

THE question as to how the just and the unjust will fare in the world to come, is an inquiry serious and inevitable. There are three main views embodying the conclusions to which reflecting men have come, touching the final result of the moral processes which we see at work.

It is held that at death all men are at once divided into two classes, the one destined for unspeakable and unending bliss, the other for terrible and endless punishment. This view rests mainly for its scriptural support upon the passage in Matthew where men are separated as are the sheep from the goats, the righteous entering into the rewards of life eternal, the unrighteous suffering the rejection and penalty prepared for the devil and his angels. The sharp division and fixity of condition pictured in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and certain passages in the Book of Revelation, are also cited in support of this claim.

The scriptural warrants for such a view are meager and inconclusive in the face of the many other passages which make against it. Yet this doctrine has been preached with a confidence and an offensiveness of detail far removed from the dignified reserve of the Scriptures themselves.

The practical difficulties in the way of holding such a belief, when we attempt to fill it in with real people, are so great that it may be doubted if any considerable number of the more thoughtful members of our evangelical churches really hold it. They may give formal assent to creeds where it stands by implication or perhaps by direct statement; they may not utter any formal repudiation of it as an abstract theory; but as an actual program for humanity, as a conviction to be carried into the home and applied with unsparing honesty to such of their own loved ones as may have died, not in outrageous wickedness but, it may be, in an unregenerate state according to the most charitable construction of evangelical standards, how many of them are ready to affirm it as an article of faith?

It would be passing strange if it were true. It would mean that while variety well-nigh endless obtains here, monotony obtains hereafter! A million different conditions for men here and as many different degrees of moral fidelity or infidelity, but only two conditions there! If reply is made that heaven may be one of degrees and hell also a state of degrees, the conditions graded according to gradations of character, then the lowest stages of heaven and the milder conditions of hell appropriate as awards for modes of life of almost equal worth may not be more than a step removed. A more rational conception of the future state would be saved by this shift, but the old doctrine of heaven and hell, with a great gulf between, would be gone.

The righteous went into "life," the wicked into "punishment." How endlessly varied are "life" and "punishment," as we know them here! The use of these plain terms might indicate as many heavens and as many hells as there are varying states of character.

The moral difficulty of separating men into just two classes with an infinite gulf forever yawning between them makes such a belief well-nigh impossible. The discrimination could not be made according to the degree of modern development. We may test ships by fixed standards, and if they fail to make so many knots an hour reject them. Men cannot be accepted or rejected in such rough-and-ready fashion. The degree of moral attainment depends on environment, heredity, and education, for which men are not always responsible, as well as upon worthy or unworthy choices. The poor, superstitious, ignorant Chinese, living with a high degree of fidelity to the light he has, may be in actual moral attainment far below an intelligent Christian; but the Christian in his fortunate surroundings, if measured by the degree of his fidelity to his nobler and more difficult ideals, might be outclassed by the Chinese.

In order to meet this difficulty it has been suggested that men will be judged according to their faithfulness to the light they had. This has a show of justice, but such a sliding scale would produce singular results. Men who had evinced a considerable degree of fidelity to the glimmer of moral truth they had, would be in heaven; and men whose lives conformed more nearly in every way to the precepts of Jesus, but who perhaps had not been quite so zealous in bringing all their conduct into harmony with those high and searching requirements, might be in hell. In that event hell would contain people who were morally better than some of those in heaven.

The confusion which arises when we try to state our belief regarding these two fixed states comes not alone from the incompleteness of our

knowledge of men's hearts. It would seem impossible for absolute knowledge to draw a line of demarcation separating all men into two companies, between whom forever after an infinite difference of allotment should stand. Men cannot be pronounced "guilty" or "not guilty" in the ultimate finding, as they might be on some specific charge. They are guilty of some things, innocent of others. And Paul says that we are to be judged "according to the deeds done in the body"—the decision is founded upon an estimate of character as illustrated and proved by conduct.

The claim is sometimes made—apparently in defiance of the basis of judgment just quoted, and in rejection of that of Jesus, who in the classical passage on the final judgment pictured the awards as resting upon men's faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the demands made upon them for humane service—that we are not judged upon our conduct, but upon our personal acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ as the Saviour. But what is meant by "accepting" him? The sincerity of a man's acceptance of Christ is to be judged by his effort to reproduce the spirit of Christ in his own life—that is to say, by his conduct. "By their fruits ye shall know them." "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."

The whole trend of the New Testament teaching is to the effect that men are to be judged by their deeds. The sheep and the goats stood respectively for the people who were humane and for those who were selfish and inhuman. "Those who had done the works of love out of a free, uncalculating heart" were accepted, and those who had shown no disposition to render such service were rejected.

The wise virgins were accepted because they had done their duty, and the foolish ones were excluded because they had carelessly failed to discharge their social obligations. The five-talent man was rewarded because he used his powers as he was bidden, and the one-talent man was cast into the outer darkness because he had failed to make righteous use of his modest ability. The rich man's beliefs or unbeliefs are not referred to in the parable of Dives and Lazarus—theological belief, except as we see the fruits of it in conduct, is never brought into any scene of judgment portrayed by our Lord—his destiny is made to turn upon his conduct. It was wrong for the rich man to allow a poor sick fellow to starve at his gate; and for that inhumanity he was punished. The deeds done in the body determine the issue in the great assize.

The attempt to make final allotment and establish this radical difference of condition makes an unsatisfactory showing in the region of abstract

theology. When we attempt to fill it in with concrete lives, the embarrassment is increased. A popular lecturer was accustomed, a generation ago, to use this illustration with telling effect. A robber enters a bank and shoots the cashier, the teller, and the bookkeeper before they have time to resist. He robs the bank, but later is caught, tried for his crime, and sentenced to be hanged. The men in the bank whom he killed were honest, worthy men, guarding the interests of their customers with fidelity. They were good men in their homes and useful citizens, but none of them had ever made a profession of religion; none of them could be called regenerate according to evangelical standards. Each one had a vague purpose of coming some time into more vital relations with Jesus Christ; yet he had postponed it until without a moment's warning he was killed at his post and went to his eternal account.

The murderer had time, after he was sentenced and before his execution, to repent, to believe on the Saviour, and to accept the offices of the chaplain who gave him in due form the absolution and blessing of the Church. He received the sacrament and died in all that odor of sanctity which such experiences can confer.

And then the lecturer would say, "You tell me that this murderer swung off the gallows into everlasting glory and looked over the safe battlements of heaven and saw in the place of lament and pain the three men he had suddenly shot down in their unregenerate state?" The fallacy is apparent, but it held enough of truth to set many uninstructed people in opposition to what they supposed was the religion of Jesus Christ. It indicates some of the difficulties involved in the notion of a separation at death of all men into the two states, with an impassable and infinite gulf forever yawning between them.

The second traditional view of the judgment is that of universalism. The crude form of this belief current a century ago, which declared that men are sufficiently punished for their sins in this life and that when they die they all enter heaven alike, has been abandoned. The modern Universalist holds that all men reap what they sow according to a justice which allows no slips. All wrong-doing will be punished here and hereafter, but always with reference to the correction of the wrong-doer. Retribution works in the interests of divine grace, and the hard experiences it brings serve to accomplish what gentler treatment did not achieve. Hell is not a place of endless, hopeless doom, but a reform-school. The worm "which dieth not" gnaws in the interests of moral recovery and the flames which are not quenched burn out the dross, leaving the life pure as a result of fiery discipline. As men are led

by the chastisement of God to repent, to accept his mercy, and to form new purposes, they are pardoned. At last, because God is greater than sinful men, because where sin abounds grace does much more abound, and because his persuasions to righteousness are inexhaustible and therefore destined to be finally successful, all men will be saved.

This view derives its scriptural warrant from such passages as the parable of the sheep, where the Good Shepherd is represented as going out after the lost sheep “*until* he finds it.” Jesus said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* unto me.” He expressed confident hope as to the complete success of his undertaking.

The expression “everlasting” or rather “age-long” punishment is understood to mean a process of chastisement which as a process endures throughout the whole age or dispensation of judgment; but it is not, for any individual soul, endless. This contention is strengthened by the fact that the word there translated “punishment” means literally “pruning”—the removing of the crooked or fruitless branches that the tree may gain its best estate. The fact that Jesus is described as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” is urged as indicating complete success—it is said to be inapplicable to one who should fail with half the race.

The Epistles furnish many passages which are quoted by the adherents of this larger hope. “As in Adam *all* die, so in Christ shall *all* be made alive”—the effects of redemption to be as universal as the effects of transgression. “Christ is the Saviour of *all men*, especially of them that believe.” There will come a time when “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth”: and inasmuch as “no man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,” this indicates a redeemed universe, with no outlying portion in rebellion. “It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile *all things* unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” Thus a universe is pictured where the work of restoration is complete.

The author of Revelation predicts a time when “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, shall worship, saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” The whole creation of sentient beings shall worship God and pay homage to the completed process of redemption.

It is a courageous and a winsome attitude. It has enlisted the sympathy of a host of noble hearts. The man who can believe that this Gospel of “the larger hope” is well-founded finds unspeakable satisfaction in proclaiming it. It has been set to music in the lines of great poets.

“Oh yet we trust, that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill.
That nothing walks with aimless feet,
That not one life will be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.”

If I were a root-and-branch Calvinist, I should certainly be a Universalist. If I held that God elects, chooses, and wills certain men to be saved, and does save whomsoever he will, I should certainly believe that he would finally save them all.

But salvation depends on human choice. Salvation means the attainment of holy character which can result only where men dedicate themselves to the pursuit of holiness. If salvation were accomplished by simply putting all men into a place called heaven, then the sheer Almightyness of God would suffice.

Salvation is godly character, developed by human volition, and we cannot affirm confidently that all men in this world, or in any world, will choose it. The facts around us do not seem to warrant the high claim. In the face of the full measure of divine entreaty, men wilfully choose unholiness. We stand amazed at the awful power a man has to say to the Almighty, “I will not.” With this vast and persistent refusal of the divine purpose before their eyes, most men find no valid warrant for affirming that all men will finally choose holiness.

The Universalist view is in open opposition to certain teachings of the Master. His tenderness was infinite and his confidence in the ultimate success of his own redemptive efforts as great as ours dare be, yet he uttered the most solemn words to be found in Scripture touching the final outcome of evil choices. He spoke of moral failure which was beyond remedy. He pictured the results of it in his references to fruitless trees cut down and cast into the fire; to chaff, separated from the wheat, swept up, and burned. The day of opportunity for the fruitless tree and for the chaff was over.

Unfaithful men were cast into outer darkness and the door was shut, with no mention made of future opening. Men who built their houses on the sands

of ungodliness saw those houses thrown down by the forces sent to test them. They saw the results of their efforts swept away without remedy. The selfish man living inhumanly found himself separated from the objects of his desire by a great gulf fixed. The Master of moral compassion said of one who committed grievous wrong, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." In the event of his final restoration to holiness and to a consequent eternity of happiness, this would not be true.

In the face of these declarations of Christ, attractive and winning as is the hope of moral success for every soul born into the world, it does not seem to me that it has sufficient warrant to enable men to proclaim it as the gospel of the Son of God. The vast measure of failure in the physical world finds a counterpart in the moral failure of which the Scriptures speak solemnly. Jesus, with all his optimism, urged men to strive as those who would enter in at a strait gate, which many would fail to find.

The third traditional view is that of conditional immortality, or the annihilation of the unregenerate. This is "the aristocratic view of immortality." It holds that men are naturally mortal. Immortality is held out as a price to be gained by spiritual effort. Those who become Christians in this world inherit eternal life. The moral failures are blotted out. This view is held by the Adventists, by a few other small sects, and by individual Christians here and there in many of the churches.

The adherents of this view cite those passages of Scripture which indicate that righteousness will at last be universal, with no outlying regions of sin and pain, thus excluding the idea of persistent wickedness and of unending punishment. They also emphasize those passages which indicate that death will be the penalty for evil-doing. "The wages of sin is *death*; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not *perish*, but have everlasting life." "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God *hath not life*." The "second death" is regarded as final extinction. The fact is cited that the "tares," the "chaff," the "fruitless branches," were "burned up," indicating extinction of being rather than eternal torment for the unregenerate whose fate was thus symbolized.

This view is further supported by certain scientific and philosophical considerations. It is indeed the doctrine of the survival of the fittest carried into the moral world and dressed in ecclesiastical phrase. The strong in faith and righteousness survive. Those who are weak in these moral elements go to the wall and perish.

The philosophical claim is to the effect that all evil-doing results in limitation of being. As men persist in wrong-doing, they grow small. They come to have less and less significance for a moral universe. This process of reduction continues until the nature becomes infinitesimal, without relations adequate to sustain it in being. It therefore perishes. "Loss of personal existence is the natural end of a life, in which sin runs its full course and brings forth its fruit; a man sins on and gradually reduces himself, by the disuse and extinguishment of power after power, to nonentity." This doctrine thus introduces something of the competitive principle as a spur to moral endeavor. It offers eternal life as a privilege to be gained by those who make the adequate effort.

This view is more humane than the first. In a world where moral failure is so common it is more probable than the second. It may be held as an interesting theory. It cannot be urged dogmatically as the one doctrine taught in Scripture touching the final judgment. It errs in using Scripture with a literalness which is misleading. "Eternal life", is not, according to the prevailing use of the phrase in the New Testament, "mere continuance of being: it is enriched and elevated being, as worthy and glorious as it is endless." The word "death" is by no means synonymous with extinction. The father spoke of the prodigal son as having been "lost and dead," though the young man had been in conscious existence during all that period. Men are "dead" when they are living "in trespasses and sins."

The rough-and-ready way in which great numbers of our fellow beings are by this view handed over to destruction, because they have not made such attainments in righteousness as others have made, shocks the moral nature. This belief relegates to extinction all the heathen who have not received eternal life in Christ, who indeed never had an opportunity to receive it. Thus from Scripture, from moral reason and from the claims of Christian humanity, opposing considerations arise to the doctrine of the annihilation of the unregenerate.

If no one of these three views then can be held dogmatically, what shall we say? If Scripture, honestly interpreted and justly compared part with part, does not teach any one view to the exclusion of all the rest; if the general indications of all the facts attainable and the considerations advanced by moral reason do not indicate one certain outcome of the moral processes at work, where shall a thoughtful Christian stand?

It would seem to me that the only tenable position is this: It has not pleased God to reveal anything like a precise program of the future world. Beyond the powerful sanctions for righteousness and the solemn warnings

against ungodliness afforded by our belief in a future state of rewards and punishments, where each shall receive its appropriate desert, he seems to have felt that for his immature children one world at a time was enough. The attempts to bring all the passages of Scripture bearing upon the final outcome into line with either of the three traditional views, fails. Any definite theory about the final issues of the future world is compelled to support itself by a partial use of Scripture. It draws its conclusions from certain selected passages, but fails to give due consideration to other passages which point to a contrary view. The entire silence of Paul, the greatest of the apostles, respecting the method or the results of punishment beyond the grave is worthy of careful consideration by all his fellow Christians.

The Bible was not intended to furnish exact information as to what God will finally do with evil men, or with those whose characters are so indeterminate that they have never been competent to decide the momentous question of eternal destiny. The Bible was intended to make known to us the offer of his grace and truth, as aids in holy living; to guide us in the way of righteous activity; to give the stimulus which comes from the sense of those over-brooding spiritual realities. With these aids in our possession we may go about our Christian activities leaving the future in God's great hands.

When we are asked as to what will finally be done with the heathen who have neither accepted nor rejected Christ, because they never heard of him, we need not hesitate to confess our ignorance. Why should we know? What will finally be done with those about us who are not totally or irreclaimably bad, and yet who live and die giving no sign of actual repentance and conversion? How should we know! The field of inquiry is wide and attractive, but we shall do well to be faithful to our own ignorance. The cause of religion is never advanced by pretending to know what we do not know. I have no map of the future to hang upon the wall. I need none. I prefer to hang there the portrait of Jesus Christ. It is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" with whom we have to do here and hereafter. We may be confident that He, as Judge of all the earth, will do right.

We are involved in difficulty when we undertake to go beyond a few simple principles. "Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God. . . . But it shall not be well with the wicked." "The way of the transgressor is hard." The kind hands of the Almighty make it hard for our warning. It grows harder the longer men travel it. If, at any time, anywhere, unrighteousness should succeed in being permanently prosperous, there God

would cease to be moral ruler. Retribution must continue as long as sin continues.

The final outcome lies beyond our ken. The “Judge of all the earth” will do right. What that right shall finally be we leave to him. When the returns are all in and moral judgment has grown sufficiently mature to see things as they are, we shall see that it is right. With confidence in the moral character of God, with certainty touching the present and unending benefits of righteousness, and with the awful consequences of wrong-doing made clear beyond a peradventure, we have an adequate source of motive.

The definite programs for the future world have done harm. The credulous have been taught many things about the future of which we cannot be sure. The thoughtful have learned that it is so. And, as a result of this discovery, many have been led to distrust even that part of the message which is worthy of all confidence. We have thus suffered a loss of power in speaking with authority about the ascertained spiritual realities.

As I wrote these words, I turned to a volume of sermons. They were not preached by some obscure, untrained man on the frontier, without books or aids, or scholarship at his command. They were preached in the city of London to a large congregation of people, by one who stood among the great preachers of his generation, as judged by the hearing he secured and by the clear evidences of his usefulness.

Here are the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon! “Thou wilt sleep in dust a little while. When thou diest thy soul will be tormented alone—that will be a hell for it—but at the day of judgment thy body will join thy soul, and then thou wilt have twin hells; body and soul shall be together, each brimful of pain, thy soul sweating in its inmost pores drops of blood, and thy body from head to foot suffused with agony; conscience, judgment, memory, all tortured; but more, thy head tormented with racking pains, thine eyes starting from their sockets with sights of blood and woe, thine ears tormented with ‘sullen moans and hollow groans and shrieks of tortured ghosts’; thine heart beating high with fever; thy pulse rattling at an enormous rate in agony; thy limbs crackling like the martyrs in the fire, and yet unburnt; thyself put in a vessel of hot oil, pained, yet coming out undestroyed; all thy veins becoming a road for the hot feet of pain to travel on; every nerve a string on which the devil shall ever play his diabolical tune of hell’s unutterable lament; thy soul forever and ever aching, and thy body palpitating in unison with thy soul. . . . Many of you will go away and laugh and call me, as I remember once being called before, ‘a hell-fire parson.’ Well, go; but you will see the hell-fire preacher one day in heaven, perhaps,

and you yourselves will be cast out; and looking down thence with reproving glance, it may be that I shall remind you that you heard the Word and listened not to it. Ah, men, it is a light thing to hear it; it will be a hard thing to bear it. You listen to me now unmoved; it will be harder work when death gets hold of you and you lie roasting in the fire.”^[17]

[17] Spurgeon’s Sermons, Volume II, page 275.

This from one of the most celebrated preachers of our time in all the English-speaking world! It was not a hasty, hurried utterance which a man preaching without manuscript might make unguardedly. He wrote it out and published it for wide circulation as his deliberate conviction.

The gross materialism and cruelty of the conception offend, but the dogmatic assumption offends us even more. How did he know? Where did he learn that men will be “roasted in literal fire,” plunged now and then “into vessels of hot oil,” their nerves used by the devil as fiddle-strings upon which to play his fiendish music? Where did he discover that in heaven he would be permitted to stand, in a strange attitude for a man of Christian compassion, surely, on the battlements of heaven and look “with reproving glance,” shaking his finger at tormented souls, and saying, “I told you so?” This is not the atmosphere of the New Testament. He knew none of those things. The picture is a bit of crude mythology. The inhumanity of it makes men shudder, but the raw, dogmatic assumption touching the destinies of those men gathered before him, would drive the thoughtful into unbelief.

Without pretending to know the final destiny of those who persist in evil, we know enough to make us realize our full responsibility for our conduct. “We shall all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ.” The judgment day will be a revelation of what we have become by our own acts and choices. “The seed sown here will naturally determine the fruit to be gathered hereafter.”

The absoluteness of moral law; the fact that men must reap what they sow, here and hereafter; the necessity of personal righteousness for the attainment of peace and happiness; the awful consequences of persistent disobedience to the best we know; the base ingratitude of turning one’s back upon the divine mercy—these ascertainable realities in the moral order are sufficient to bring out the seriousness of living, and to awaken a deep sense of personal accountability to a Moral Judge.

It may be that the positive, hopeful side of Christianity has been over-emphasized and that the darker things of warning and judgment have been neglected. We may look too much on the bright side. My own sympathies

have been with the men whose message reads, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand,” rather than with those who go about saying, “The kingdom of hell is at hand.”

There are considerations innumerable which give us confidence. If wise generals never fight unless there is a reasonable prospect of victory, we may be sure God would never have undertaken this fight with evil unless there was a good prospect of success. He will subdue this world to himself. He will establish righteousness. He will enlist in his own service a vast army of faithful men and women who shall win a victory glorious enough to fill earth and sky with songs of praise. He will see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied—and we may rest assured that what satisfies him will satisfy us.

There will be cowards and deserters refusing to march under his banner or to wear the name of his Son—of these the Scriptures give nothing but a solemn account! Misery springs out of wrong-doing as the plant from the seed. Retribution follows upon disobedience naturally and therefore inevitably. We have no warrant for supposing that it can ever be otherwise in a universe controlled by a Moral Being. Therefore, punishment will last as long as sin lasts, and nothing but holiness can ever see the face and share the joy of the Father.

But without venturing where we do not know, we may, through our faith in the integrity of God, feel sure that every human being will have the fullest opportunity to attain the object of his creation which the Almighty, who desires that end above all things, can give him.

We may be assured that every human being will receive from the providential ordering of circumstances, from the revelation God has made and will make of himself, and from the direct persuasions of the Spirit, all the impelling influence to turn him to holiness that his nature can bear and still remain free to choose.

We may be sure that no human being will be given over to perish or to suffer endless loss so long as God can see any possibility of his salvation.

These three great confidences, not original with me, but urged by many teachers of religion as axioms of judgment taken from the character of the God and Father of him who came to seek and to save that which was lost, fill us with courage. They give us a gospel of good news for all the children of men.

CHAPTER XI

THE USE OF A CREED

THERE are light-hearted and light-headed people who count it all joy to pour contempt upon creeds. The moment any one of them sees the word “doctrine” or “creed,” he feels impelled to give it a kick. This is a stupid performance. It is the act of those who apparently do their religious thinking with their feet rather than with their heads. We all have our creeds, simple or elaborate, positive or negative. We must have creeds, unless we commit intellectual suicide and stop thinking.

The word “creed” comes from the Latin “*credo*,” “I believe.” It refers to convictions held touching matters where the truth or falsity of the claims advanced cannot be instantly submitted to the test of demonstration, as we demonstrate that two and two make four or that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. The convictions expressed in one’s creed lie in another realm. The man who holds them feels that they are warranted, yet he may not be able to demonstrate their truth and thus coerce the intelligence of another into accepting them. They therefore constitute his “creed.”

The fool said in his heart, “There is no God”—that was his creed. He did not know that there was no God, because any one to know that would have to know everything. If there remained any outlying section of the universe which his intelligence had not mastered, God might still be there. That statement of belief seems weak and foolish, but it is no less a creed.

Thomas H. Huxley used much time and breath and ink in fighting certain theological creeds, but personally he was one of the most dogmatic Englishmen of the nineteenth century. He had his creed and he fought for it as stoutly as did the Westminster divines for the statements of the famous “Confession.” The agnostic who insists that we cannot know anything about God or prayer or immortality is a man with a creed. If he is a thorough going agnostic he will fight to the last in defense of his disappointing creed. The moment the mind moves out beyond the things of sense or the exact demonstrations of mathematics or the inevitable conclusions of formal logic, it begins to cherish convictions of some sort, positive or negative, inspiring

or depressing. The convictions cherished make up its creeds. The whole habit therefore of pouring contempt upon creeds is intellectual folly.

The claim is made that “one creed is as good as another, if only it be sincerely held.” But one creed is as good as another only when it is as true as the other; only when it can show as much sound reason under it and as much moral spiritual fruitage growing out of it, where it has been tested by men and women in the actual business of living! The creed which makes the best showing for itself in moral reason and in spiritual experience is the only one acceptable to a serious, discriminating mind.

“We do not care what a man believes”—this is a foolish statement! We do care whether a man believes truth or falsehood, whether he stands on facts or on fancies! Every sane man cares! Intellectual freedom does not mean liberty to believe any or every vagary. It means the fullest opportunity to discover the truth. It is folly for a man to build his life on beliefs which are soon to be swept away like chaff by the wind of knowledge. It is folly for a man to refuse reasonable beliefs, which, if accepted, would put gunpowder behind his aspiration, his utterance, his action. In the long run the truth alone proves serviceable. For a season the vain imaginations of some flighty individual may work apparent results, but by the test of years it will be found that only those beliefs which are grounded in reason and match the system of things as we find them, produce strength and peace and joy. What people believe is of vital importance.

We find those who feel that when they undertake to accept any religious creed they must, in some measure, ignore the claims of reason. They think that religion is a matter of unreasoning sentiment, feeling, and imagination. They would agree with the statement of the schoolboy who wrote, “Faith is that faculty by which we believe what we know is not so.”

This was not the attitude of Jesus. The Master’s word was, “I am the truth.” His promise to his disciples was, “Ye shall know the truth.” He indicated the moral results of competent knowledge, “The truth shall make you free.”

When he uttered the two great commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets, his word was, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy *mind*, and with all thy strength.” Lest some near-sighted individual should fancy that any set of faculties was omitted from the sphere of religious influence, he repeated four times over that great word “all.” All thy heart, all thy soul, all thy mind, all thy strength! He had no sympathy with the notion that religious belief

would not bear the scrutiny of intelligence. He commanded men to use their brains in the discovery of that truth which was to set them free from all that might hurt or hinder their lives.

We find those who think that the less we believe, the better. They look into the minister's face in a dyspeptic mood and say, "How much must we believe in order to be Christians? Must we believe this? Must we believe that?" If they can reduce the affirmations of the gospel to the lowest terms, they seem to think they may be able to accept it.

It is a singular attitude. Men do not pursue that course in regard to other interests. We cannot imagine a man saying, "How much must I eat in order to live? I want to eat the very least amount possible which will keep me alive." Doctor Tanner managed to live for forty days on water. He did not recommend it, however, as a steady diet. The question is not, "What is the least amount that I can exist upon?" but rather, "How much may I eat for the highest degree of health, pleasure, effectiveness?" In religious belief there are souls keeping along on the thinnest kind of theological gruel. We are glad they are alive—we can but wish that they were better fed! They would not look so lean and sad when the subject of religion is mentioned, if they ate more.

The man born blind was conscious of a meager equipment when he began his Christian life. He did not know whether Jesus Christ was a sinner or not. He was strong and clear at a single point—"One thing I know: whereas I was blind, now I see." But he was open-minded. When the Pharisees cast him out of the synagogue, Jesus said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The man whose eyes had been opened did not know. He was not ready to commit himself until the import of such a belief was made plain to him; nor would he lightly refuse such a belief. "Who is he, Lord? . . . I might believe on him." Then Jesus revealed himself to the man whose eyes he had opened; and at the end of their conversation the man said, "Lord, I believe." This is the wholesome attitude. The man of open mind wishes to accept all the inspiring and helpful beliefs which a rational man may accept.

The vital question is not how much must we believe but how much may we reasonably believe. We do not wish to be absurd or superstitious or devotees of the impossible, but we do desire the fullest possible creed which may be reasonably accepted. Life is richer and sweeter for one who believes in "God the Father" than for one with the fool's creed, "There is no God." Life is more privileged and glorious for one who believes in the efficacy of prayer, in the Bible as containing a message from the Eternal, and in

immortality, than for one who limps along without these inspiring aids. Without in any wise taking leave of our senses or ignoring the claims of reason, we ask, "How much may be rationally believed by aspiring souls?"

Even though the logical faculties may not be coerced as they can be coerced to believe that the whole is greater than any part, or that water released will run down hill; even though the conclusions of the intellect touching some of the claims of religion may stop short of that degree of certitude common to mathematical demonstration, if those claims are manifestly for our health and vigor, our inner cheer and comfort, it is the part of common sense to accept them, provided always they offer nothing impossible or absurd.

The people who take this line are in a much better way than those who stand forever shivering on the brink of actual faith, fearing lest they might include in their confidence some possible item of error. This point is conclusively argued in Professor James' essay on "The Will to Believe." "Better go without faith forever," these timid and fumbling souls seem to say, "than to admit the least possibility of error into our hope." This attitude of mind is foolish and barren! There are many worse things than believing too much that is good about God or about ourselves or about our possible destiny. Believing too little or believing nothing at all is infinitely worse for the interests of the inner life! Inasmuch as we stop short of complete and exact certitude touching so many things in this world of mystery, the attitude of the man whose eyes had been opened, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" is in every way more healthful and promising.

We find warrant for those main beliefs of Christian faith in the great fact that life is more successfully and happily lived in the atmosphere of reasonable faith than in any other atmosphere to be named. The atmosphere of Christian faith is the only atmosphere which sustains life at its best over broad areas and for long periods. A man can live after a fashion for years in a dark cellar, but the color and vigor, the effectiveness and joy of his life will not compare favorably with the quality of life possessed by the man who lives in a sunny upper room. The actual results justify the instinctive preference men feel for the sunny room. Men and women can live and many of them do live for years in apartments unlighted by the faith and hope and love of the gospel of the Son of God, but the color and tone, the effectiveness and happiness of their lives, as compared with that of people similarly constituted who have walked in the light of Christian faith, justify the preference felt for the way of Christ.

I have thus briefly indicated in this little book some of the grounds upon which "I am ready always to give to every man that asketh a reason for the hope that is in me." "Reasons," the apostle said, not compelling proofs or final demonstrations! He knew that all the greater beliefs of the race shade off into mysteries which human intelligence has not perfectly mastered. The hypotheses held in regard to the heat of the sun, the movements of the planets, the power of gravitation, the force which turns the magnetic needle always to the north, the inter-relations of mind and matter, and many other familiar phenomena where science finds itself unable to bring in a final report, offer us instead what seems to be a reasonable working theory. We are in the presence of unsolved mysteries at every one of these points, but having adjusted ourselves to the part we know and holding working hypotheses touching the part we do not know, we live along.

In the absence of proof and demonstration touching certain claims of religion where definite conclusions cannot be made compulsory, we choose sides. We choose the side which can show the largest amount of reason behind it and the largest spiritual fruitage resultant. We choose between believing in God and undertaking to explain things without him. We choose between believing in prayer and undertaking to explain this vast accumulation of spiritual experience, or the age-long, world-wide habit of prayer, without faith in its utility. We choose between believing in the future life and trying to make out for ourselves a just and rational world-order without the hope of immortality. And when we take that course with open minds and honest hearts, we find ourselves able to give a reason for the hope we cherish.

In seeking to indicate briefly what may well be the creed of a Christian, it may not be unfitting to quote the creed of the church which it was my honor and privilege to serve as pastor nearly fifteen years. This creed was adopted by the First Congregational Church in Oakland, California, after careful consideration and full discussion, without a single dissenting vote. It represents in brief compass that consensus of opinion to which a large congregation of Christian people came under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, who is the Holy Spirit. It is at once so simple and so comprehensive that it may be suggestive to print it here:

"We believe in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord and Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit."

"We believe in the Bible as the divine rule of faith and practice, and in prayer, and in the life of useful service."

“We believe in the Holy Church Universal, in salvation from sin, in the resurrection from the dead, and in life everlasting.”

“And in this faith we here and now declare our purpose to live the Christian life.”

It does not enter upon the necessary task of theological definition, but it suggests the truly vital elements in Christian faith. It does not represent all that the people of that church believe; it does not contain all that some of them would esteem vital; it does not state all the truths there named as some among them would prefer to have them stated, but it does affirm the agreement to which they all readily came touching what were esteemed “The Main Points.”

We believe in God. We believe that his character and disposition toward us, as well as his purpose for our future, are best indicated by the term “Father.” “To us, there is but one God, the Father,” and all our religious thinking is adjusted to that fundamental claim.

We believe in Jesus Christ his Son—a Sonship altogether unique in its perfection—our Lord and Saviour. He is our Lord in that he is the final standard by which all lives are to be judged. He is the eternal Lord of the race in that we owe to him our ultimate allegiance. And in the word “Saviour” we register our full confidence in his power of redemption, of moral recovery, of spiritual renewal. Theories might vary as to the method by which that redemption is accomplished, but all agree that he is the Saviour of every life committed unto him.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the personal presence of the Divine resident in every heart where he is not excluded by a sinful will, the informing and guiding Presence within every religious mind leading it into all the truth, the hope of the race through his “Continuous Leadership” finding expression in the truest and holiest aspirations of men. We believe in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ, his Son our Lord and Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit.

We believe in the Bible as the divine rule of faith and practice. We leave to literary scholarship the determination of all questions as to date, authorship, and the composition of these sacred writings. We do not affirm inerrancy or equal authority for all the statements contained in this literature of sixty-six books. We affirm that any man with pure heart and honest mind may find herein a rule of faith and a guide for conduct, which will be to him nothing less than divine.

We believe in prayer as the normal, constant and fruitful means of fellowship between the heavenly Father and his earthly children.

We believe in the life of useful service, for this life of fellowship with the Father finds its natural and inevitable expression in doing good.

We believe in the Holy Church Universal, a Church vaster and truer than the Congregational Church, or the Methodist Church, or the Roman Catholic Church, or any other similar body. It includes all that is genuine in each one of them. It is that Church to which all those who own and follow the sway of the spirit that was in Christ, belong. We believe in that Church, and in our attitude toward all Christian bodies we endeavor to express that faith.

We believe in salvation from sin. Through repentance and faith in divine grace, men are saved from all that hinders their growth into the likeness and image of the Son of God.

We believe in the resurrection from the dead, and in life everlasting. As to the final allotments of destiny in the world to come, we do not find that Scripture, or reason, or experience points inevitably to one theory to the exclusion of all others. We do not, therefore, dogmatize upon that point.

In the church referred to there are members who believe that after death all souls are assigned at once either to a state of unspeakable and unending bliss, or to a state of unending pain and torment; others believe that all unregenerate souls are annihilated, that only those who are "in Christ" attain immortality; others believe that, at last, every soul will be brought, by penalty it may be, severe but disciplinary, to holiness and thus to happiness. The liberty of interpretation is freely granted to each one in these matters where no one claim can show such evidence for its validity as to make the other claims impossible. But they all agree that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," and that when the accounts are finally made up, it will be seen that the Judge of all the earth has done right. In this common faith, here briefly outlined, they stand together declaring their common purpose to live as Christians.

Are there not hundreds of hesitating people who are not members of any church, who have not as yet made any public profession of their faith, who could, if they but consulted that which is deepest and best within their hearts, stand up and utter together these words of faith and hope and love? The intellect might not be coerced by proof and demonstration, but the yearning heart, the aspiring mind, and the undiscouraged will would stand ready to claim at least this much of Christian truth as food for the inner life!

A Christian faith grounded in reason, vitalized by spiritual experience and made practical by being related at every point to ordinary duty, is the choicest, dearest possession any one can have for the life that now is; and it furnishes the only satisfying preparation for the life which is to come.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Main Points* by Charles Reynolds Brown]