

FROM GRACE TO GLORY

by Octavius Winslow

Winslow's devotional exploration of the believer's journey from the first experience of God's grace through the progressive stages of spiritual growth to the final glory that awaits in heaven.

10 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. WHAT IS NOT THE NEW BIRTH
2. WHAT IS THE NEW BIRTH?
3. The EVIDENCES of the New Birth
4. The Fruits of the New Birth
5. The Assurance of Conversion
6. ANXIETY FOR CONVERSION
7. THE TRIAL OF THE NEW BIRTH
8. THE RELAPSE AND RECOVERY OF THE
9. EARLY CONVERSION
10. FROM GRACE TO GLORY

WHAT IS NOT THE NEW BIRTH

WHAT IS NOT THE NEW BIRTH

"You have a name that you live, and are dead."-- Revelation 3:1

The reader, possessing a taste and an eye for the fine arts, must often have stood entranced before a picture of natural still-life, in which, with masterly genius, the artist had portrayed the subject with such vivid effect as to invest it with all the charm and power of reality. So successful is the illusion, and so intense the feeling produced, it would seem, while gazing upon the painting, that the fawn must bound from the canvas, the purple flow from the grape, and the perfume breathe from the rose. And yet, with all this appearance and glow of animation, it is but--a picture of still-life.

In the passage which suggests the leading thought of this chapter we find a striking analogy to this. It is the picture of spiritual still-life, or false conversion, sketched by the hand of a Divine Artist--"you have a name that you live, and are dead." This delineation of spiritual still-life--in other words, this description of the New Birth in profession and appearance only--is perfect. Here is conversion in all but its reality! Here is spiritual life--but it is the appearance of life only. Here is spiritual death--and it is a solemn fact. The one is an illusion, a fiction, a counterfeit; the other a grim, stern, cold reality. The very life itself is--death! Such is the spiritual state we are about to delineate in the present chapter--such the portrait for which thousands might stand as the original. And can the sanctified imagination conceive a state more sad or appalling? To believe that we are born again, to assume the exterior, and claim the privileges of the truly converted, while yet dwelling in the region and shadow of spiritual death, is of all spiritual conditions the most dangerous and fatal.

In a treatise devoted to an exposition of the nature and evidences of the New Birth, it is proper that we take first the NEGATIVE bearings of the subject, showing what is not real conversion. We need scarcely bespeak the reader's solemn and prayerful consideration of this subject, for it bears upon its surface the impress of infinite importance. Surely, if apart from the New Birth there is no state of grace here, and no state of glory hereafter, the question must come home to every thoughtful bosom with irresistible impressiveness and power. "Is mine a real or a false conversion? Am I truly born again?" Instructed by the Divine Spirit, we propose to assist you in this momentous inquiry, by showing how far you may advance in a profession of Christianity, in the appearance of the New Birth, and not be born again--having a name to live, and yet dead!

1. And, first, let us remark that a spiritually-enlightened understanding, or a mere intellectual acquaintance with Divine truth, is not of itself the New Birth. Light is not life. We may admit through the window the morning's roseate beams in all their brilliancy and power into the chamber of death, but the corpse around which they play remains, pulseless and lifeless, a corpse still. The body is bathed with the light, the pallid countenance is illumined with its radiance, and the shroud is fringed with its hues, but all still is death. The sun has not quickened into life a solitary throb!

And thus there may exist in the religion of an individual an enlightened understanding, much intellectual acquaintance with Divine things, a sound judgment, and an intelligent mind, yet entirely dis severed from spiritual life. We may accept the Bible as wholly true--a great concession this!--may believe in it historically, understand it intellectually, and expound it ably, and not be born again--substituting speculative knowledge, or a theoretical acquaintance with Divine truth, for the kingdom of God in the heart--religious light in the understanding, for spiritual life in the soul.

But the truth as it is in Jesus demands more than the mere assent of the understanding. It does not, indeed, bypass the province of reason, nor set aside the aid of the intellectual powers of man; but, while it appeals to this tribunal, and exacts its homage and its belief--carrying triumphant the noblest and loftiest powers of the soul--it enters the HEART, and there puts forth its mightiest power, achieves its greatest triumph, receives its profoundest love and conviction, claiming and securing the affections for Christ.

Believe me, my reader, your theology may be biblical, your creed orthodox, your mind well-furnished and fortified with Christian evidence, and yet all this may be accompanied with no more spiritual life than is produced by the moonbeams falling in cold, silvery luster upon an alpine peak.

2. Religious emotion is not the New Birth. You may be the subject of deep, intense, religious feeling; the conscience, brought into close contact with solemn truth, may be aroused; the sensibilities, appealed to, may be excited; the mind, reasoned with, may assent--and yet death in the soul maintain its gloomy scepter. A description of Christ's sufferings may dissolve you to tears, a picture of heaven's glory may entrance you with hope, a delineation of hell's woe may paralyze you with fear, and spiritual death still reign within your soul. No subject moves our natural feelings like religion. To nothing does our emotional nature so quickly and deeply respond as this. Hence how easy and how soon are those sensibilities of our being wrought upon which may assume all the resemblance and actings of life, and yet be spiritually dead. It is life, but, alas! it is still-life.

Real conversion does not petrify the natural or the moral feelings. Far from it. There is no real conversion apart from feeling, often the most profound and intense. A true spiritual conviction of sin will sometimes stir the soul to its lowest depths. It was so with the tax-collector, and thus was it with the Philippian jailer. There is nothing so startling, so appalling, so overwhelming, as a spiritual sight of the heart's depravity. Who can have an insight into this dark, mysterious chamber of imagery, this seat of all iniquity, as unfolded by the Holy Spirit, and not shudder, and tremble, and weep, exclaiming, "What must I do to be saved? Lord, save! or I perish."

But, in all faithfulness we must add that, intense sensibility, deep religious feeling, and great alarm may co-exist with spiritual death in the soul--it may be found apart from real conversion. The stony-ground hearer received the word with joy. Herod heard John preach the gospel with gladness. The devils believe and tremble. Thus the opposite emotions of joy and fear may exist apart from a spiritual change of heart. Beware, then, of this deception!

3. Mere religious conviction is not real conversion. There may be in the subject some intelligent knowledge and insight of sin, some vivid apprehension of its existence and guilt, attended with pungent conviction and mental distress, springing from its present and remote consequences, without any spiritual sense of sin, as sin, against the holy Lord God. While there is no real

conversion without the conviction of sin, mere natural conviction alone, unaccompanied with a spiritual renewal of the heart, cannot be denominated real conversion. An individual may for months and years be what is termed "under conviction of sin," and his soul yet remain without very decided evidence of spiritual life.

But, if these convictions which you have are of the Holy Spirit's producing, if they arise from the effectual work of Divine grace in your soul, they will, they must, before long, eventuate in your real conversion to God. If the result of animal excitement only, the mere emotional part of your nature stirred--if but a transient flash of thought, a sigh, a tear, a passing feeling--it will all evaporate, subside, and vanish as the foam upon the billow, as the morning cloud and as the early dew. There is, indeed, the appearance of life; but, alas! it is spiritual still-life. "You have a name that you live, but are dead."

4. Nor does real conversion resolve itself into the mere possession and exercise of spiritual gifts. The history of the Church of God affords lamentable proof of the existence of the most splendid and powerful spiritual gifts not in alliance with one atom of converting grace. The Corinthian Church supplies a sad chapter to this history. If God endows an individual with great and brilliant parts, and that endowment is in connection with a religious profession--it may be the holy office of the Christian ministry--the inference is not necessarily logical and true that the individual so furnished and installed is spiritually and thoroughly and truly converted.

Our adorable Lord--that great Prober of the human heart--He who only knew what was in man--forewarned us of this. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? and in Your name have cast out devils? and in Your name have done many wonderful works?" And what is the solemn, the inevitable result? "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you--depart from me, you that work iniquity." Oh you who are endowed with popular gifts, who plume yourselves with your brilliant attainments, who walk amid the golden candlesticks, distinguished lights and brilliant orbs, tremble, lest in the deep treachery of the heart you should be found substituting these meretricious ornaments, these tinsel garnishings of the Christian profession, for that spiritual renewal of the heart which leads its possessor to walk holily and humbly with God. How easy the deception! how woeful the result! We may speak with the entrancing eloquence of men, or with the soft music of angels, without one spark of real love to God glowing upon the lifeless, flameless altar of the heart.

We shudder to think how far human intellectualism and eloquence may pass current in the office of the Christian ministry, with those who fill and with those who worship it, totally dissevered from all spiritual life. These are grand weapons of Satan and of Error. Availing themselves of human learning, an acute intellect, and brilliant attainments, the eloquence of speech, and the fascination of address, those united foes of Christ and the Church--Satan and Error--seek to upheave the foundations of truth and righteousness, and to sow the seeds of "damnable heresies," consigning men's souls to everlasting perdition.

Great giftedness, disunited from great grace, has ever been the bane of the professing Church. The Lord lead us into solemn self-examination, and give us to prize one grain of real grace above all the most splendid gifts of nature, the most polished attractions of art, the noblest attainments of the schools that ever endowed and adorned the human intellect. To walk holily and humbly with God, to lie as a sinner at the feet of Jesus, to be living day by day upon the blood and

righteousness of Christ, and to do the Lord's work in the spirit of self-abnegation, lowliness, and love, has more of holiness and heaven in it, and brings more honor and glory to God, than the most costly gifts and the most brilliant achievements ever possessed--apart from the grace that empties us of self, sanctifies our hearts, and fills us with the mind and temper of Christ.

5. A high standard of morality may exist apart from true conversion. The ungodly and unconverted world furnishes many and marvelous examples illustrating this thought. Men of integrity and uprightness in all the relations of domestic, social, and commercial life; who can walk among their peers with dignity and honor, who yet are living in the region of spiritual unregeneracy and death. True, most true, there is no vital religion without morality, but there may be morality of a high and commanding order without vital religion. The minor morals of life may bud and blossom upon human character and conduct separate from the root of grace in the soul, and the soul's vital engrafting into Christ. It is fruit, but not the fruit of righteousness, nor the result of faith and love. It is life, but not the life that is hid with Christ in God.

It is at best but a negative righteousness, such as the proud, vaunting Pharisee wrapped around him when, with supercilious disdain, he looked down from the height of his self-sufficiency upon his humble fellow-worshiper in the temple, who, meekly standing afar off, smote upon his breast, and exclaimed, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

You may be able to dignify and adorn all the relations of life, be a man of virtue and honesty, benevolence and integrity, and yet not be born again of the Spirit. Your morality may have much of the appearance, attraction, and fascination of real holiness, but it is mere morality still; and mere morality is no passport, signed and sealed by the Great King, to a heaven of glory. It may look like the engrafting and the fruit of spiritual life, but it is life in alliance with death, cold, inanimate death, death in all but the name. "You have a name that you LIVE and are DEAD." Yet more pointed and solemn the testimony of Him who spoke these solemn words, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

6. Nor can religious activity and usefulness be regarded as either a substitute for, or a valid evidence of, real conversion to God. And yet we know not of a more specious and fatal danger than this. In a Christian age like the present, distinguished for its religious spirit and enterprise--an age in which the romance of pious zeal seems to have reached its highest culture, there exists a great and fatal temptation of substituting spiritual still-life for spiritual quickened-life, Christian activity for Christianity, and Christianity for Christ; the spasmodic throes and convulsions of religious zeal and excitement, for real, vital religion, the name to live while nothing really lives but--death!

Christian energy and success are, at best, but negative and dubious data upon which to predicate the actual existence of spiritual life in the soul. That an individual perfunctorily engaged in religious work may be useful in guiding the steps of others, as the sign-post planted midway between two diverging roads may direct correctly the doubtful footsteps of the traveler, itself remaining stationary, numberless cases testify. We may point the pious pilgrim the right way to heaven, we may lead the anxious inquirer to Jesus--we may, in various ways, be employed in the cause of truth and in the kingdom of Christ--in praying and exhorting and preaching; in instructing the ignorant, in reforming the vicious, in reclaiming the wanderer--and the vineyard of our own soul

remain untilled by one solitary act of spiritual culture--not a seed, or bud, or flower, or fruit of grace and holiness, relieving its barrenness, or evidencing its spiritual life.

Doubtless, the antediluvians were useful in aiding righteous Noah to construct the Ark for the saving of his house, while they themselves perished in the flood, clinging, perhaps, to the sides or clutching the keel of the vessel as it floated serenely on its way. The scaffolding is useful in the erection of the building, but, constituting no essential part of the structure, is removed when the edifice is complete. How delusive and unsafe, then, the evidence we glean from Christian activity and usefulness that we are personally born again, are truly converted to Christ. Such is the danger of becoming ourselves insensible to what we recommend and enforce, or assume that we possess it when in reality we do not.

We are overwhelmed with the apprehension that in a day of unexampled religious activity and stir, of enterprise and excitement, when association after association starts up, each demanding and each receiving a new host of volunteers, offering not only their wealth and influence, but their talents and time to the work, numbers may be beguiled into the belief that all this is saving religion, that all this is real conversion! Never doubting that they must experimentally know what they theoretically teach, and must spiritually love what they earnestly commend, they pause not to examine their own hearts as to their personal acquaintance with these things. In proportion, also, as these associations multiply, and with their multiplication the rate of activity and excitement increases, does the necessity of pausing for self-examination exist.

The increased magnitude and consequent velocity and din of the machinery of Christian activity must necessarily lessen the opportunity and the desire for a quiet converse with our own soul. The necessity, therefore, of special self-examination increases precisely at the same rate with the energy employed in promoting the spiritual well-being of others. Let it not be supposed that no individual can be employed in advancing the kingdom of grace who himself lives without grace; that we cannot promote the holiness of others without the possession of holiness ourselves; that we cannot be spiritually useful to others while we yet ourselves remain in an unrenewed state. He has studied the history of the Christian Church but to little advantage who has not learned that God has often employed unholy agencies for the accomplishment of His will and purpose; and that, when in His sovereignty He has so employed, He can in His sovereignty destroy them. "For the scripture says unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth," (Romans 9:17.) How should this truth, then, lead us to dive into our own hearts, bring our souls to the unerring touchstone of God's Word, drive us out of every subterfuge, and allow nothing--the most fair and plausible and good--to come between our hearts and their true, thorough conversion to Christ.

7. With many the idea is not less false and fatal, that a diligent and externally-devout attendance upon the means of grace and ordinances of God's Church constitute the great spiritual change of which the Bible speaks as essential to salvation. As though God would or could accept, in lieu of the heart spiritually renewed, divinely loving and holy--the mere externals of the Christian faith, the empty signs and symbols of Christianity! But, my reader, we must endeavor to dislodge this fatal delusion from your mind. You may be punctual in your attendance at the house of God, be externally a serious and devout worshiper; you may go to and fro with gilded Bible and

Prayer-book in your hands, you may remain, when the great congregation is dispersed, and join the few who approach the solemn symbols of the Savior's dying love, and with all this still continue unregenerate, unborn again, living in the distant region and dark shadow of spiritual death.

"We ate and drank in Your presence," will be the plea, earnestly but vainly urged, in the great day when no plea for admittance within the pearl gate that expands to admit the Bride to the marriage banquet of the Lamb will avail but the new birth. The only response to that appeal will be, "Depart from me, I never knew you." Oh yes! you may descend to the shades of endless despair--from the house of God--where judgment must first begin--from the table of the Lord, your lips moist with the dreadful symbols of a Redeemer's dying love, with no more valid hope of salvation than the deluded felon who stands beneath the fatal drop clasping the adored crucifix to his breast--another victim to the long, gloomy procession of lost souls, who presumed to substitute the lifeless forms of religion-- "Devotion's every offering but the heart"-- for the great spiritual change of the new birth; having a name to live, and yet dead. Examine yourselves, prove your own selves in this matter.

8. Among the most plausible yet most fatal errors is, the substitution of denominational religion for the religion of the renewed heart. And yet how common is this delusion! To what an alarming extent does it denominationalism divide all classes of religionists! An individual may be a fiery partisan, a stern bigot, a martyr for his creed, a holocaust upon the altar of his Church, and vainly imagine that this is all that Jesus meant when He thundered with reiterated force those solemn words upon the ears of the Jewish ruler, "You must be BORN AGAIN."

But zeal for a denomination, love to a Church, a wedded attachment to an ecclesiastical system, may exist, and in numberless cases does exist, in alliance with a nature entirely unrenewed by the Holy Spirit, with a heart totally destitute of the love of God. We have known individuals who have sacrificed health, substance, and even life itself in the arena of ecclesiastical warfare, closing their deluded and melancholy history unrelieved with one solitary ray of true Christian hope. What is this religion better than that of the Mohammedan, the Hindoo, or the Papist? There is nothing in it of spiritual vitality, nothing of Jesus, nothing of God, nothing of eternity. It may enable its partisan to pass muster with his peers, it may give him high position and great renown in his denomination, it may enthrone him upon the highest pinnacle of the temple, the demigod of his party. But, when the hour, the solemn, the appalling hour comes, to meet, whose tremendous reality, denominationalism, and ecclesiasticism, and priestlyism--systems, creeds, and sacraments--must all retire from the scene and give place to a foundation more real, to a religion more vital, to hope more substantial, what, oh what will this 'baseless fabric' of a denominational religion do for us then!

Reader, with all your denominational love, your party zeal, your earnestness and devotion and sacrifice to promote the ecclesiastical branch to which you belong, you must be born again, or share the fate that awaits all mere sects and systems, forms and ceremonies, rituals, creeds, and Churches. "O Lord, save us from so subtle, so dangerous, so fatal a delusion! Allow us not, in a matter of such infinite importance, to substitute a dream for a reality, a system for Christ, a lying fiction for a good hope of eternal life. Give us the reality and the earnestness and the vigilance of Divine grace to make sure work for eternity. Create in us a clean heart, and renew in us a right spirit!"

9. By how many is the fatal delusion fostered that, afflictions, adversity, and sorrow are, of themselves, valid evidences of the new birth! Were this a reality and not a phantom, the truth and not a lie, it would follow that this world, all enshrouded with the winding-sheet of woe, groaning and travailing in the throes and convulsions of suffering, sorrow, and death, is thronged with new-born and regenerate beings, temples of the Spirit, and heirs of the kingdom! We hasten to dispel the delusion.

There are both judicial and the parental judgments of the Most High God with the children of men. His afflictive dispensations with the ungodly are those of a Judge; with the righteous, they are those of a parent. And, although the season of adversity, the hour of sorrow, is oftentimes, in the purpose and arrangement of God, the period of the new birth--the occasion of the translation of the soul from darkness to light, from death to life--the rod of affliction driving the man from his shattered idols, his blighted hopes, his false dependences, to the Savior; yet, there is not necessarily a solitary link between the darkest adversity, the most crushing affliction, the profoundest sorrow--and that spiritual new birth indispensable to a state of grace on earth, and a state of glory in heaven; nothing but a wide, dark chasm, which can only be spanned by Divine, sovereign, and regenerating grace.

Shall I suppose you, my reader, an illustrative case? God, perhaps, has afflicted you heavily. Wealth, hard earned and stored, has disappeared like Alpine frost beneath the burning rays of a meridian sun. Health, rosy and robust, has waned and drooped as a mid-summer day dissolving into the twilight shades of evening. Death has invaded the sanctuary of your home, sundering some fond tie, withering some beauteous flower, snapping some strong stem of domestic bliss, leaving its deep, dark shadow still lingering upon that spot of verdure, sunshine, and joy. And what is the effect? What the position of your smitten and bleeding spirit? Is it not that of sullen, gloomy, cold, involuntary resignation? You had no power to avert the catastrophe, no skill to ward off the blow, and now that it has fallen upon you, and fallen with an irresistible and crushing effect--you bow your head, but not your heart; you surrender your idol, but not your idolatry; you relinquish your treasure, but not your will; you are submissive, but not resigned to the dealings and government of God.

Perhaps the affliction has had, for the moment, a subduing and humbling effect. Your heart is softened, your pride is mortified, your lofty spirit is laid low, and the subject and the ordinances of religion, for a season, engage your thoughts, rouse your interest, and command your attention. While the heavy hand of God is upon you, you seem to lie in the dust at His feet. You read your Bible, repair to God's house, retire from the haunts of worldly gaiety and from the scenes of sensual pleasure, and even suspend, for the time, the cares and anxieties of business.

But is this conversion? is this true religion? is this the dawn of grace? is this the spiritual birth of the soul? The RESULT shall supply the answer. The stunning effects of the blow are subsiding, your sorrow is lessening, your tears are drying, the deep shadows of your night of woe are dissolving into the morning's dawn of sunshine, and you have returned to the engagements and the cares of life--the mart of business and the haunts of pleasure--as indifferent to religion and the claims of your soul and the solemnities of eternity as if the hand of God had not touched you, and His voice had not uttered the admonition in your ears, "Turn! turn! why will you die?" And thus you supply another solemn confirmation of the truth that an individual may pass through all the stages

of adversity and yet remain unregenerate, unsanctified, unsaved.

But has no precious visitation continue? no fearful responsibility incurred? does no solemn account remain? Yes! emphatically yes! God rode in that chariot-storm, spoke from that cloud of thunder, commissioned that crushing sorrow. He designed to humble you, to instruct you, to subdue you to repentance, and win you to faith and love. And while the cloud was upon your tabernacle, and the thunder of His power rolled above you, and the grief lay heavy upon your heart, you were awed and softened, thoughtful and mute. But, alas! the affliction passed away, the tempest subsided, health has taken the place of sickness, the dead are forgotten, and you are yet unborn again. Be not deceived! Do not think that because you have been chastened and afflicted of the Lord, that therefore you are a favorite of the Lord's. That, having drunk of the cup of sorrow at His hand, you have therefore tasted that He is gracious.

There is nothing essentially converting in the nature or power of affliction. Far from it. The furnace does not transmute base metal into gold, it burns and destroys it. And while the brass, the tin, and the lead, the wood, the hay, and the stubble, are consumed and perish, the gold, the silver, and the precious stones, by the same fire, are purified, refined, and saved.

But, blessed, thrice blessed, are they who by the storm are driven to Jesus, the Refuge and the Hiding-place; who, when God cuts up all earthly hopes by the roots, blasts the human gourd, dries the creature spring, are led by the Spirit in the dark hour of adversity to discover that they have nothing to take hold of but Christ; that, knowing their sinfulness and condemnation and emptiness, are led to see the Lord Jesus Christ to be just the all-sufficient, able, willing, precious Savior that they need--and so, as amid the fire, and as by the fire, are saved from the worm that never dies and the fire that is never quenched. Oh, what countless harpers tread the gold-paved streets of glory, chanting the praises of 'sanctified trial', and testifying that, but for the fire, the whirlwind, and the earthquake of affliction, suffering, and adversity, they would never have basked in heaven's sunshine, nor bathed them in its sea of bliss!

10. It is important, in presenting the negative aspect of our subject, that we should give emphatic utterance to the truth that, an external and avowed profession of Christ is not real conversion. This, among all we have specified, forms, perhaps, the most popular, as the most plausible and fatal error. There is something in an avowed profession of Christianity so religious and holy in appearance, so apparently genuine and true, so like the actual and the real; and, added to this, there is with it a feeling of self-complacency so strong and deceptive, it is no marvel that multitudes should be ensnared by the delusion, that a Christian in profession is a Christian in principle, that a believer in name is a believer in reality; that nominal religion is vital religion, and that the external clothing of the sheep is all that is necessary to authenticate love to, and union with, the Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the flock.

How few will be found in society who are not 'professors of religion'. The great mass wear the distinctive external clothing of heaven, the uniform of the Christian, the holy and sacred name of Christ. And yet it is one of the most appalling reflections how few will be found among these religious professors who are really savingly converted to God, being truly born again. The Word of God is solemn in its instances of this fearful and fatal delusion. Simon Magus was a religious professor, yet was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Demas was a religious professor, yet loved this present evil world. Judas Iscariot was a professor and an apostle, yet betrayed his

Lord and Master. These men were types of a class the most popular and numerous in this professing age of the world--those who have a name to live, and are dead.

11. It follows that the ordinances of God's house--the institution of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, of which all religious professors are partakers--possess of themselves no converting, sanctifying, saving efficacy. Those who maintain that Baptism is an essentially converting rite, or that the Lord's Supper is a saving ordinance, contravene the direct teaching of God's Word, argue against the existence of facts the most incontrovertible and solemn. The 'automatic grace' principle, as maintained by a certain school holding semi-Romanist views--with which, alas! so many professing Protestants secretly sympathize--is an unblushing denial and blasphemous ignoring of the official work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth, reducing conversion--the divinest, most essential, and momentous change that can possibly revolutionize the soul--to the mere observance of an external rite, as destitute of its significance as of vitality and power. If this sacramental notion of the Romanized school of theology be true, then the teaching of the Bible on the subject of the new birth is false--for the two views are diametrically opposed the one to the other--a conclusion at which we shudder to arrive.

But let God be true, and every man who would contravene His word a liar. But what says the Scripture? The following declarations, because they cut from beneath us all ordinances as coming into competition with, and as substitutes for, vital godliness, cover the entire question, and are as applicable to Christian institutions as to any Jewish rite whatever--"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a NEW CREATURE," (Galatians 6:15.) "The kingdom of God" (that is, the kingdom of grace in the soul) "is not food and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy Spirit," (Romans 14:17.)

The order here observed by the Spirit is most impressive. First, the righteousness of Christ forming the foundation of the believing sinner's acceptance; then, peace, the effect of righteousness; and then joy, a higher order of peace--peace in its bolder range. Righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit. And shall we reduce this great spiritual change, apart from which there is no salvation--no grace here, and no glory hereafter--to a mere submission to a rite, a symbol, a sign? This were to believe that thousands are regenerate, sanctified, and saved, and when they die will die the death of the righteous, who, once baptized, are now living in all the enmity of the carnal mind against God--the captives of Satan and the servants of sin! In view of this appalling conclusion, we hesitate not to pronounce the Romish dogma of sacramental grace--the Papistical doctrine of baptismal regeneration--to be the pre-eminent lie of Satan--the most subtle and fatal weapon which this arch-foe of our race ever forged for the destruction of men's souls in perdition.

With the deepest earnestness and solemnity of feeling we address you as holding this fatal error. We appeal to your sober judgment as to the truth of what we say. If baptism be the new birth in the Scripture sense, then whatever the Bible teaches concerning the expressions regeneration, born again, or created anew, will hold true of baptism. In this light read the following passage, substituting the word 'baptized' instead of the phrase 'born of God', and see how it sounds--"Every one that is BAPTIZED sins not; but he that is BAPTIZED keeps himself pure, and the evil one touches him not." Is this true? Who will dare affirm that it is? And yet, to be consistent with your notion of baptismal regeneration, you must believe it to be true. Does baptism produce such a spiritual change in its subject as that "old things have passed away, and all things have become

new?" This is true of all who are born again. But we drop the argument. We appeal to your conscience, to your condition as a sinner, to your feeling as a dying man, to your prospect for eternity.

Do not build your hope of glory upon your baptism. You are lost to all eternity if you do. You must be born again if ever you enter the kingdom of heaven. If you are not born again of the Spirit, you have not the least ground of hope. Not a solitary bright ray trembles upon the dark cloud that enshrouds your future. Plunge into eternity, clutching the airy fiction, the fatal notion, that you passed from death into life in your baptism--that in baptism you were regenerated, adopted, justified, made holy and saved--and you have staked your eternal happiness upon the most fatal lie!

But yet there is hope. Feeling your lost and ruined condition as a sinner, quickened into spiritual life by the Holy Spirit, and by that same Spirit secretly led to a believing acceptance of the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, you may, you must, you shall be saved. With a soul-loving, yearning heart, we entreat you to pause, examine, and reflect. You lose nothing by relinquishing your delusion of baptismal regeneration--you imperil everything by holding it. Abandon it, then, at once and forever. Seek a baptism more vital, a religion more saving, a foundation more sure, a hope more true. Implore the Holy Spirit to teach you the good and the right way; to breathe into your soul the breath of life; to reveal the Lord Jesus to you as He who died for us that we might live through Him; and from your spiritual ruin, corruption, and death you will emerge a beautiful, holy, living temple of God through the Spirit, filled with His love, reflecting His glory, and hymning His praise through eternity.

12. We recur again to the thought, that a mere profession of Christianity, a submission to rites, an observance of ordinances, constitutes not the New Birth. What! is this all that Jesus meant in His memorable conversation with Nicodemus? Is this all the Bible means when it declares that, "If any man be in Christ, he is a NEW CREATURE?" My reader, be warned, be instructed, be entreated. Stake not your eternal well-being upon a lie so false and fatal as this. Attempt to keep this base, this spurious coin--bearing neither the image of Christ nor the superscription of the Holy Spirit--and yours will be the just and the terrible doom of the most daring, the most guilty, and the most fearfully condemned of all counterfeiters--the counterfeiter of a lying and spurious conversion!

13. We must limit our negative view of the question to but one more illustration. A calm, tranquil, peaceful death cannot safely be regarded as affording a valid evidence of that great, spiritual change which our Lord taught as indispensable to admission into heaven. "He died so peacefully, so calmly, so lamb-like," is the exclamation of many who dismiss the departed to the realms of bliss with no more authentic passport, no more assured hope than this! But what is the language of God's Word? "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death--but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men."

How many pass out of this world wrapped in the profound stupor of spiritual insensibility, which, with those not enlightened of the Holy Spirit, passes for the tranquillity of 'divine peace', for the hope of real conversion, for the holy slumber of a sleep in Jesus! Alas! it is but the fatal security, the false repose, the spiritual insensibility of spiritual death. They pass out of spiritual death into natural death, and out of natural death into eternal death. But be not deceived! Because you have

no fear of death, experience a composure in view of its dreadful solemnities, unruffled by a fear, undisturbed by a shudder, deem not yourself therefore really converted! It is a distinctive mark of the truly regenerate that, "through fear of death they are all their lifetime subject to bondage." It is a distinctive mark of the unregenerate that, "they have no bands in their death."

How unsafe, then, to rest our evidence of the New Birth upon a foundation so dubious and slender. You may, indeed, die a lamb-like death, at peace with yourself and with all mankind, and yet, with the untamed heart of the lion, at enmity against God, His Christ, and His truth. The death of the regenerate is truly a peaceful death. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright--for the end of that man is peace." And again, "The righteous has hope in his death." But it is not the peace of spiritual insensibility, nor is it the hope of the self-righteous. It is the tranquil, peaceful, hopeful death of him who, while he lived, lived unto the Lord, and when he dies, dies unto the Lord, and going hence, he is ever with the Lord. No false peace is that, no spurious hope, which springs from faith, reposes on the blood and righteousness of Christ. Life's last hour may bring its momentary conflict and cloud, its rippled sea and shaded pathway; but this will only test the reality of the work of grace in the soul, and render all the more illustrious and precious the atonement of Jesus on the cross. But we must bring this chapter to a close.

This state of spiritual still-life which we have endeavored to portray is eminently perilous in many points of view. It is so, because it tends deeply to foster the fatal spirit of self-deception. So long as we have a name to live, while yet we are dead, we cherish the delusion that all is right with our soul. The very deception feeds and strengthens itself. And of all deceptions self-deception is the most fearful! To pass current for a true Christian, deceiving those who have recognized us as such, is most solemn; but to go down to the grave dreaming that we are truly converted, while yet the heart has known nothing of a sense of sin, faith in Jesus, and love to God, is more solemn still!

Such a state is perilous, also, because once it becomes fixed and permanent it is the most difficult of all states to remove. The Gospel proclaimed to the heathen mass completely ignorant of the existence and the very name of conversion would be a more hopeful task. The long-cherished delusion at length comes to be regarded as a reality; the fiction a fact; the profession of spiritual life for life itself. And so, all arguments and persuasions to the contrary, the unhappy victim of the delusion passes away, in many instances, undeceived until the deception is too late to rectify. Awake, then, to the conviction of your real state as having only a name to live while yet dead. Compare the state of your soul with that revealed and unerring Word which is to confront and judge you at the last day, and in its divine and searching light see and know it as it really is, concerning the great, the solemn, the essential change--the change of the New Birth.

In conclusion, we must remark that the New Birth doubtless involves each and all these negatives in its nature and actings. While false conversion may exist with them, real conversion does not exist without them. In false conversion they are but counterfeit resemblances of the real, in true conversion they appear in all their genuineness and harmony. Thus far may we travel in a religious life, and yet stop short of real and vital religion. Having a name to live, we yet may be dead. Carrying the oil-less vessel with the untrimmed, unlit lamp of an outward Christian profession, we dream that all is safe until the startling summons to meet the Bridegroom awakes us to consciousness, to conviction, to despair!

But let no trembling soul close this chapter in hopeless despondency. If the Lord has given you a holy fear of self-deception, a deep, earnest, solemn dread of false conversion, and has set you upon the task of examining your foundation for eternity, and looking well to the state of your soul, we think you may safely accept your experience as an evidence that the work within you is true and genuine--even the work of God's Spirit in your heart. Look afresh from off yourself to Jesus. Lay your doubt, and fear, and trembling down at His cross, and then look up, and rest your believing eye upon the sin-atoning Savior; and that close, believing look at Jesus will resolve doubt into certainty, melt cloud into sunshine, and calm fear into perfect peace and repose.

Did He from that cross ever dismiss a soul unblest? Look at that empaled body! gaze upon that purple stream! peer into those gaping wounds! Do they seem as though Christ could reject one true, penitent sinner who came to Him? Settle it, then, in your mind that no poor sinner ever descended from that cross into the shades of outer darkness in whose breast dwelt the holy fear that perhaps now trembles in your own. The spiritual impartation of the New Birth is not without its throes and pangs. The period may be protracted and painful. Many doubts and fears, many conflicts and despondencies may attend it, but the issue is certain, the advent glorious; and angelic strains, chiming sweetly with those which broke upon the plains of Bethlehem at the birth of the infant Savior, will ring the glad tidings through the bowers of heaven, "An heir of glory born!"

WHAT IS THE NEW BIRTH?

WHAT IS THE NEW BIRTH?

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3

We pass from the negative to the POSITIVE aspect of this great subject--the New Birth--purposing in the present chapter to consider its nature, author, and necessity.

1. The NATURE of the New Birth.

It is one of the most momentous questions we have to consider--pregnant with vital, precious, and deathless interests--What is the New Birth? All questions of human legislation, science, and learning dwindle into insignificance in comparison with this. The only inquiry worthy the study of a rational and immortal being is, "Am I converted, or am I not?" In conducting our study, we shall keep close to the teaching of God's Word; for the subject of our research is too vital and precious to be jeopardized by any other than a Supreme authority. In this matter we sit only at the feet of that Divine and Heavenly Teacher at whose bar we are to stand in judgment. In His memorable conversation with Nicodemus, our Lord, pressing home upon his attention that great spiritual change indispensable to salvation, compares it to a birth; and because it is essentially alien from the first or natural birth, He denominates it the SECOND or NEW birth. "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."--born over again. Guided by the analogy, we shall in this point of light, mainly, present the positive bearings of the subject.

The emblem is most expressive. The first, or natural birth, introduces us into a new world of being, of thought, and feeling. It ushers us into a new state of existence, in which all things are new. Now, between this and the New Birth there exists a strong and significant resemblance. In conversion the soul is ushered into a new, spiritual world--emphatically born again. The first birth introduces us into the natural world, the second introduces us into a spiritual world. The first birth ushers us into a world of sin, and woe, and death; the second birth, into a world of holiness, and happiness, and life. It is the birth of the soul into grace.

In keeping with our analogy, the New Birth is also represented as a quickening. "You has He QUICKENED, who were dead in trespasses and in sins." "And has QUICKENED us together with Him." It is described as "passing from death unto life." And by an appropriate and graceful image it is represented as a resurrection. "As the Father raises up the dead, and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom He will."

The New Birth, then, takes us out of a state of spiritual death into a state of spiritual life--reverses entirely our moral being. The truly-converted soul is a living soul, quickened from a death of sin into a life of righteousness. The life, the new-born life, which now animates him, is the life of God, communicated in virtue of his union with Christ, who is our life, and by the agency of the Holy Spirit, the Divine Quickener. All now is life--new, spiritual, holy, deathless life. The bitterness of

spiritual death is past, its sovereign dethroned, its dominion destroyed--and the glory, the reign, and the power of a divine and new-born life triumphantly enter the soul; and from henceforth exists an empire as lasting as the being of Him who created it.

And now the soul begins really to live. It swims in an infinite sea of life--the life of God. As from and in Him, so to and for Him that life is now lived. Christ is his life, and to Christ that life is consecrated. Spiritual death--dead faith, dead obedience, dead hope--is abolished, and the spiritually-quickened soul bathes itself in a divine ocean of vitality and bliss. Henceforth, for him to live is Christ; henceforth, whether he lives or dies, it is to the Lord. The tree, no longer exhibiting the fruitless bough, the seared and withered leaf, bursts forth into all the bloom, beauty, and fertility of life, laden with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ.

How precious are its actings! Prayer, is life breathing; faith, is life trusting; love, is life adoring; service, is life laboring; submission, is life patiently suffering. Life of God in the soul of man! how do you manifest your origin, prove your existence, and foreshadow your destiny, O divine and glorious thing!

My reader, here let us press the personal inquiry, Have you passed from death unto life? Do you feel the life of God pulsating within your soul? Are you expatiating in a new-born world of thought, and feeling, and action? In holy meditations on God, in spiritual breathings after holiness, in loving desires for Christ, and in ardent aspirations for glory? Does this living water--the indwelling of the Spirit of life--spring up, and ascend heavenwards? In a word, are you living for God? If so, then we confidently address you in the language of Paul, "You has He QUICKENED, who were dead," for you are born again!

The New Birth likewise consists in the restoration of the Divine image to the soul. The moral image of God was effaced in the fall of the first Adam. Sin obliterated the divine holiness, and we became more human and less divine. The righteousness and holiness in which God originally created us gave place to the empire and reign of sin; and the image and superscription of a usurped sovereign became enstamped upon the coin of the soul. But the New Birth is a restoration of the lost image of God to man. By Christ, the Second Man, it is effectually and indelibly recovered. In regeneration, the soul is formed in the likeness of Christ. The New Birth, then, is the restoration of the image of God to the soul of man.

But the apostle puts it yet more distinctly, "The new man, which is after God [or, the image of God] is created in righteousness and true holiness," (Ephesians 4:24.) We know not a more correct, and at the same time a more precious, view of the New Birth than this. It is nothing less, it cannot possibly be more than, the repencilling of the obliterated moral image of God--the image of holiness--upon the fallen but now regenerate soul. "Partakers of the divine nature"--"Partakers of His holiness,"--for these are the expressions of the Holy Spirit--we become, in regeneration, GOD-LIKE.

A higher, holier, diviner image than that which angels wear is ours. Theirs is the image of nature, ours the image of grace. Theirs is angelic, ours divine. They stand, by reason of their first creation, remote from the Sun--we, by reason of our second creation, stand in the inner circle, close to Christ the Center, the human assimilated to the Divine, mortal swallowed up in Immortality, the creature absorbed in the Creator, man in God! Again we press the inquiry, Whose moral image do

you bear? Is your soul reinstated in the likeness of God? Does the Divine holiness attach to your being? Are you living in the cultivation of that holiness without which no man can see the Lord? If so, you then are born again!

A new or changed heart--a heart renewed and sanctified--enters essentially into the New Birth. "A new heart will I give you," is the Divine promise pointing to this great change. What multitudes rest satisfied that they are converted who know nothing of the renewed heart involved in this great spiritual change. Vainly imagining that the natural instincts of love and benevolence, of amiability and kindness, of virtue and truth, are the "beauties of holiness" which adorn and evidence the New Birth, they recognize not the necessity of being renewed in the spirit of their mind, and of seeking that purity of heart which only exists in the new-born soul, and without which none can see God. By nature, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. But by grace it becomes penitent and believing, loving and holy, the temple of the Spirit, the home of the Savior, the shrine of God. Marvelous is the change! divine the conquest! The converting grace of God has achieved the wondrous revolution. The rebellious heart has become penitent; the proud heart, humble; the unclean heart, pure; the selfish heart, loving; the heart that despised Christ now embraces Him; that which was at enmity against God, now loves Him; that which strove with the Spirit, is now His willing sanctuary.

My reader, it is here the New Birth begins, it is here it carries on and terminates its mighty transformation. Its commencement, so gentle and veiled; its advance, so gradual and progressive; its victories, so unseen and noiseless; a mightier revolution than ever upheaved a dynasty, or overthrew an empire, has transpired, and none but God and the soul may know it!

Oh, it is a great thing to have a new heart--a heart reconciled to God in its affections, entwined with Jesus in its faith, pure and heavenly in its breathings, the temple of God by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Allow no sight and discovery of your heart's deep-rooted sinfulness to persuade you that you are not a subject of the New Birth. Hail this discovery rather as an evidence that you are born again of the Spirit. You would be ignorant of the depravity of your nature, would feel nothing of the vileness of your heart, would weep and lament not over the deep and desperate evil within, were you not quickened to life by the Spirit. Here is holy sensibility, here is spiritual life. A Divine hand has withdrawn the veil from your heart, revealing the plague, the darkness, and the sin of this chamber of abominations; and that same hand of love will perfect the work thus so divinely and so effectually begun.

There is not a solitary exercise of your soul at this moment that is not an evidence of your spiritual quickening. Your thirst for more grace proves your heart gracious. Your cry for stronger faith in God proves your heart believing. Your desire for intenser love to Christ proves your heart loving. Your panting for a deeper inspiration of spiritual life proves you a living soul. These evidence the work of grace within you, as the perfume wafted from a bank of violets upon the soft south wind divulges the flower whose fragrance it breathes. These holy aspirations--heaven-descending, heaven-returning--are the crystal-jets of the living water welled within you, "springing up into everlasting life." Take courage, then, dear heart! Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, for you have Christ in you the hope of glory.

In unfolding the nature of the New Birth, we must not omit a very important and impressive illustration. It is represented, and most appositely, as a translation out of darkness into light. Thus

it is expressed, "Who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light," (1 Peter 2:9.) And again, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The analogy between the natural and the spiritual creation in this particular will suggest itself to the reflective mind. Darkness covered as with a pall the whole earth when, "God said, Let there be light, and light was." In a moment the mist rolled from off the face of creation, and a world clad in loveliness, resplendent in glory, and bathed in perfume, burst into view. By that same voice the moral chaos of man's soul gives place to the existence, symmetry, and splendor of a new-born spiritual creation. The spiritual darkness of the unrenewed mind, of the alienated heart, of the rebellious will, is such as might be felt. So deep, so impenetrable its gloom, no light can pierce it, no voice can change it, no power can uplift it but God's. He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness speaks--"Let there be light!" and in a moment spiritual light bursts upon the soul--light is--and a divine creation starts into being, and all the sons of God shout together for joy.

"Marvelous light" it truly is! Marvelous its power--marvelous its revelations--marvelous its glories--marvelous the grace and love from whence it flows. And now, the newborn soul sees its sin, beholds its Savior, and looks upon its reconciled God. Floating upon the wings of light, it soars towards its native skies, and loses itself in the "Fountain of light." Henceforth, that new-born soul stands, where stood the apocalyptic angel, in the sun, itself a center of light in the orbit in which it moves, living and walking and acting as a child of the light, scattering the rays of holiness and truth on a darksome world, his path of righteousness shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Again we press an individual application of our great subject, and inquire, Has this divine light shone in upon your soul? Revealing the blackness, the emptiness, the depravity within, has it led you to Jesus the true light; in His light to see light on the pardon of your sins and the acceptance of your person in Him the Beloved?

We will not protract our description of the new birth longer than briefly to remark that it is a transfer of the soul into the kingdom of Christ--"Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son." This illustration is remarkably relevant. Our nature in its unregenerate condition is under the dominion of the prince of darkness--the god of this world. Dreadful picture! But not less appalling than true. Each individual of the human race is either a subject of Satan or of Christ, is under the power of darkness or a subject of the kingdom of God's dear Son. But conversion reverses this state. The new birth is a translation--a divine translation--from the galling, degrading power of darkness into the light and rule, the privileges and liberty of the kingdom of Jesus.

There are two words employed by the apostle in this remarkable passage very significant--delivered and translated. The former--implying a spiritual state neither desired nor deserved by its subject--has reference to the uplifting of a dead weight from a pit. By God's Spirit we are taken up out of the horrible pit and miry clay of corruption, and are brought into a state of grace. In the passage under consideration, it is represented as a deliverance from the power of darkness, or the dominion and will of Satan, the prince of darkness, who rules in the children of disobedience, and maintains his ascendancy by ignorance in the mind, rebellion in the will, and hardness in the heart. Therefore sinners are called "children of the night," and sins are denominated "the works of darkness."

Thus, there must first be in the new birth this emancipation from the bondage of Satan--the Pharaoh of this world--before there is the translation of the soul into the kingdom of Jesus. The two dominions cannot co-exist in the soul. We must first be drawn out of the pit of corruption, delivered from the power of darkness, before we are placed in a state of grace, or translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Nor can the two images coexist in the same individual--the image of God and the image of Satan. The one must be erased and destroyed before the divine lineaments of the other can be drawn by the Spirit upon the soul. This deliverance from the power of Satan and the corruption of sin in the new birth is not such a deliverance as totally frees us from the indwelling of sin, or entirely emancipates us from the temptations and harassings of Satan. With these the regenerate have to contend until life's last hour. That which is born of the flesh remains flesh until this corruption shall put on incorruption. And Satan, the accuser, will hover around the hour of the saint's departure intent upon winging his fiery darts to the very last. But, notwithstanding this, it is a blessed and glorious deliverance and disenthralment which grace achieves. It is a deliverance from sin's guilt, condemnation, and reign. It is a disenthralment from Satan's dominion, rule, and power. And so God, in the exercise of His sovereign grace, has delivered us who believe from the power of darkness, and for this deliverance heaven's high arches shall ever more ring with our shouts of praise!

But God not only delivers us from the power of sin, but He puts us in a state of grace. Hence the expression, "Has TRANSLATED us into the kingdom of His dear Son." Translated, that is, transferred from one kingdom into another. It follows that, all who are born again are the subjects of Christ's rule and government and law. They have been translated into the mediatorial kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, and henceforth are governed by His special grace, restraining and mortifying their corruptions, daily renewing them in the spirit of their minds, will, and affections, bringing every thought, aim, and desire into obedience to Christ.

Again, we pause, and press the inquiry, Have you been thus delivered and thus translated? Do you know what it is to have those galling fetters broken which bound you to the corruption of sin? Do you know what it is to have the yoke removed which bowed you under the service of Satan? This it is to be born again, and by this deliverance and translation you may know your condition as either regenerate or still unregenerate. And if by a careful examination of your real state as before God, and by bringing yourself to the unerring touchstone of the gospel, you are enabled to come to a scriptural and satisfactory conclusion that you are born again, hold fast the liberty with which Christ has made you free, and be not again entangled with the yoke.

Ever remember that you have liberty indeed in Christ Jesus, but that it is a spiritual and not a carnal, a holy and not a lawless, liberty. You have become freed from the curse of the law, Christ having been made a curse for you; from the rigor of the law, Christ having given it an exact and full obedience; and from the guilt, tyranny, and condemnation of sin, Christ having washed you in His own most precious blood. But you have no liberty TO sin, to use your liberty as an occasion for the flesh, but are bound by the most sacred, solemn, and eternal obligations to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly in this present evil world."

If the description which we have thus given of the nature of the new birth be true--and scripturally true we verily and solemnly believe it to be--no lengthened argument will be needed to establish

the proposition that it is a DIVINE and SUPERNATURAL work. Holy ancestry does not insure it, pious parentage does not convey it, human eloquence does not inspire it, moral persuasion does not produce it. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high is the accomplishment of this work above created power. How clear does the Holy Spirit put this--"As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in his name. Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," (John 1:12-13.) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." "Born again"--marg., "born from above."

But we wish in this necessarily brief statement to concentrate the reader's attention upon a single truth--the divine agency of the Holy Spirit in the accomplishment of the new birth. One passage from God's Word will suffice to establish this point--"IT IS THE SPIRIT THAT QUICKENS, THE FLESH PROFITS NOTHING." Clearly and indisputably, then, to be born again is, to be "born of the Spirit." Now, HOW does He produce this great change? By what steps does He conduct the soul to this divine and heavenly birth?

There is first, the Holy Spirit's work in the convincing of sin. He uplifts the veil that enshrouds the heart, and shows its plague and sin and defilement. He makes the sinner to know himself--the first step in real conversion. He breaks up the fountain of feeling, produces godly sorrow, inspires holy contrition, awakens true and saving repentance. It was by His power that Job exclaimed, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." It was by His power that David cried out, "Against you and you only have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight." It was by His power that the tax-collector prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Has He wrought this repentance for sin, beloved, in you? Uplifting the veil, has He given you an insight into the chamber of imagery within your breast; in other words, has He so uncovered and revealed and dissected your heart to your own eye as to force from you the exclamation, "I am vile! I am undone! Lord, save me, or I perish!" O blessed discovery! O glorious revelation! O life-breathing cry! You are born again! Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. Unregenerate nature never sent to heaven such an appeal. Spiritual death never breathed to Jesus such a living cry. It is the Spirit who has shown you your blackness, your vileness, your ignorance, your death, and having thus begun the good work in you, He will conduct you from grace to grace, and from glory to glory.

The next step of the Holy Spirit is to lead the soul to Christ. He deals not cruelly with the poor sinner--revealing the plague, and not the remedy; wounding, and withholding the balm; showing the sinner himself, and veiling Christ from the eye. Having wrought repentance towards God, His next step in the process is to work in the heart faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Making the soul to feel the sickness of sin, He leads it to the balm that is in Gilead, and to the Physician who is there. He takes of the precious things of a precious Christ, and shows them to the soul. He leads to the atoning blood, and applies it. He takes the robe of righteousness, and imputes it. He conducts the trembling soul to Jesus, and unveiling His love, and grace, and merits, brings it to a believing recumbence upon Christ; resting, not only in the blood and righteousness of Jesus, but resting in Jesus Himself.

And what a life-giving, hope-inspiring discovery is JESUS! Penitent, heart-broken, humble sinner, Jesus is just the Savior you need, just the Friend you seek. You have come to the end of your own righteousness, and strength, and striving--you have besought in vain every physician, and have

tried every remedy with no avail, and now you have lain you down to die--helpless, hopeless, despairing! Behold the Lamb of God, wounded, bleeding, slain for you! He took your sins, endured your curse, bore your condemnation, paid your debt, and now invites you to the cleansing of His blood, to the investiture of His righteousness, to the pavilion of His love, to the free acceptance of all the precious things of His grace. "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and none else." "Come unto me and I will give you rest." Doubt not either His ability or His willingness to accept and save you to the uttermost extent of your sinful, unworthy, and hopeless condition.

But we must advert to the INSTRUMENT which God has ordained in accomplishing in the soul the new birth. The Spirit of God being the Divine and efficient Agent, the Word of God is the Divine and passive instrument of regeneration. A few quotations from this Divinely-inspired Word will establish this. "Being BORN AGAIN, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, BY THE WORD OF GOD, which lives and abides forever," (1 Peter 1:23.) "Of His own will He BEGAT us WITH THE WORD OF TRUTH," (James 1:18.) The apostle gloried in the gospel of Christ, because it was "the power of God unto salvation." The psalmist testified to this truth--"The law of the Lord is perfect, CONVERTING the soul." But the testimony of the Lord Himself sets the question at rest--"The WORDS THAT I SPEAK UNTO YOU, they are spirit and they are life."

Thus then, the revealed word of God is, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, the appointed and Divine instrument of our being born again. As God never works apart from instrumentality, when instruments are made ready for His use, so the Holy Spirit never accomplishes this great and marvelous change in the soul apart from the truth of God. In His hands the gospel is a rod that works the miracle, a sword that pierces the soul, a fire that burns the dross, a hammer that breaks the rock, a light that dispels the darkness, a balsam that heals the wound, a seed that germinates, a voice that awakes the dead. And all this it does because it is the Word of the living God.

Shall we impugn its Divine authority--tracing thus its miraculous and marvelous effects? There are those who dare to do so! But, we ask the bold skeptic, can that be other than a mirror of Divine construction which, faithfully upheld to the soul, brings to view every thought and feeling, purpose and aim, deep-veiled within its secret cloisters? Would the God of truth invest a lie with the mission and power which clothes the gospel of His grace? Would He from whom comes down every good and perfect gift bless a fiction, a falsehood, a myth, as He has blest the gospel in the conversion of countless myriads of souls, of all nations, and tongues, and peoples, who, in the great day of His coming, shall crowd the throne of Christ the Lamb, all attesting its divinity, and witnessing to its effects?

What has wrought such moral revolutions in the world, achieved such spiritual changes, conferred such intellectual freedom, battered down such strongholds of error, as the Gospel of God? If the devotee of superstition has been converted by it, the slave of sin disenthralled by it, the captive of Satan delivered by it, the soul raised from death by it--if it has made the spiritual blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, has tamed the lion, transformed the wolf into the lamb, and the vulture into the dove--if it soothes the deepest anguish of the heart, calms the fiercest tempest of the soul, sweetens the bitterest calamity of life, and in life's last hour unfurls the banner of victory over death, and sheds upon the Christian's tomb the radiance of a glorious immortality--then, achieving such marvels, attended by such signs and attested by such evidences, we accept the

Gospel as of God, believe in its Divine authority, bow to its ultimate decisions, and stake our eternal all upon its doctrines, promises, and hopes. "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

"Should all the forms that men devise,
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I'd call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart."

What mighty power, then, has the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit! What heavenly dew distills from its promises; what spiritual life breathes from its doctrines; what sanctifying power flows from its precepts; what a heaven of glory is unveiled in its hopes! "One word of the gospel, a single sentence, has erected a heavenly trophy in a soul, which all the volumes of the choicest mere reason could never erect. One plain scripture has turned a face to heaven that never looked that way before, and has made a man fix his eye there against his carnal interest. One plain scripture has killed a man's sins, and quickened his heart into eternal life. One word of Christ remembered by Peter made him weep bitterly; and two or three scriptures pressed by the same Peter upon his hearers pierced their hearts to the quick. How has hell flashed in the face of the sinner out of the small cloud of a threatening, and heaven shot into the soul from one little diamond-spark of a promise. A little seed of the word, like a grain of mustard-seed, changed the soul from a dwarfish to a tall stature." (Charnock.)

This, and this only, is the preaching which will beget souls again, people the world with new creations, and erect, from the ruins of the fall, living temples of the Holy Spirit. Before it the wisdom of man dwindles into foolishness, and the power of man dissolves into weakness, and the glory of man pales into insignificance. To supplement it with human teaching is to blunt the edge of the sword, and to veil the luster of the diamond, and to render the Word of God of no effect. God has made His Word the tabernacle for the Sun of Righteousness to move in, and he who preaches it not fully and faithfully, without reserve and without deceit, throws the pall of hell's darkness around that divine Orb, and leaves the endangered and deathless soul to plunge, unilluminated by one ray, into the darkness that is outer and eternal.

We reiterate the important truth that, the Word of God--than which the Church on earth possesses not a treasure so divine, costly, and precious--is the instrument employed by the Spirit in commencing, carrying on, and completing that work of grace on earth which is the soul's preparation for the enjoyment of glory in heaven.

For one moment we venture to detain the reader with a glance at some of the OPERATIONS of the truth of God in the soul. As God's word of wisdom, it makes wise unto salvation. As the word of life, it quickens. As a divine word, it converts the soul. As the truth which is after godliness, it sanctifies. As a nourishing word, it promotes growth in grace. As a word of consolation, it comforts. As a storehouse of supply, it thoroughly furnishes us unto all good works. As the divine light, it is our guide. As a spiritual sword, it is a mighty weapon in the hands of the Spirit. And when the books are opened, it will judge us at the last day. Such is the word of God, which lives and abides forever.

Our Lord, in announcing the momentous doctrine of the new birth to the inquiring ruler, emphatically and solemnly insisted upon its necessity. "Marvel not that I said unto you, You MUST be born again." Were this great spiritual change a matter of no moment in its relation to our future; were it placed upon the same footing in the Bible with baptism, or the Lord's Supper--institutions, the observance of which is not essential to salvation--we could afford to view it with comparative indifference. But, seeing that it is an indispensable condition of salvation, and seeing that without it we cannot enter into the kingdom of grace on earth, and must be forever exiled from the kingdom of glory in heaven, it is a change, the absolute necessity of which we must press with all the arguments which the Scriptures supply, and with all the solemnity which eternity inspires.

What are some of the grounds of the ABSOLUTE NECESSITY of the new birth? Briefly these. It is necessary, in order to fulfill the eternal purpose of God with regard to His people. All His saints are born again. In the mystery of the Spirit's operations--viewless, noiseless as the wind; in the sovereignty of His grace--that wind blowing where it wills--all His elect people pass through the process of the heavenly birth. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

It logically follows that the new birth is necessary in order to authenticate our spiritual union with the Lord's people. We possess no scriptural, valid evidence that we are the true disciples of the Lord Jesus, or that the privileges of God's Church, and the immunities of the heavenly citizenship are ours, until we are born again. The true Church of God is composed alone of living stones; the Family, of reconciled and adopted children, the Kingdom of Jesus, of living subjects made willing in the day of His power. All other materials now outwardly mixed up with this--the wood, the hay, the stubble--will be consumed in the fire of the last day, for that day shall try every man's religion and hope of what sort it is.

Solemn thought! Reader, is your conversion of such a nature as to stand this fiery test? Are you spiritually, truly born again? Away with your rites and rituals, your forms and ceremonies, your morals and splendid virtues, your ecclesiastical relations, lifeless creeds, and costly doings. It is written, yes, it is written, "You MUST be BORN AGAIN!"

The New Birth is necessary, also, to the bringing forth of real holiness. There is not one grain of holiness in our unrenewed, unsanctified nature. There dwells in the flesh no good thing. In vain we garnish and adorn this sinful and corrupt humanity with the external beauties of holiness--it is but an embalmed corpse. We admit that the moral virtues are necessary to the adornment and well-being of human society. For what would this fallen world be apart from this restraint? And yet, spiritually viewed, what are they, in their highest cultivation, but 'refined flesh'? A picture is not a living being, a glow-worm is not a star, the sun reflected from a lake is not a sun; so, nature 'improved' is not nature 'renewed'; and the soul beautified with virtues is not the soul sanctified by grace; and the life regulated by the recognized laws and conventional manners of society is not a life quickened, ennobled, consecrated by the indwelling Spirit of God. Apart, then, from the New Birth, there is no true holiness, and "without holiness no man can see the Lord."

The last plea for the New Birth is a solemn one--without it there is no admission within the kingdom of heaven. Eternity begins with time--heaven commences on earth--glory has its first fruits in grace. The soul must be educated and disciplined for heaven, brought into holy sympathy and moral assimilation with its nature, character, and employments. An unholy being could not exist for one moment in glory. Its atmosphere would be too pure, its society too holy, its worship too

spiritual, its enjoyments too refined. If the pilot, soaring to a lofty altitude above the earth, finds the air too thin to exist; surely an unholy being, in a moment translated to heaven, would discover that in its perfectly pure and holy atmosphere he could not for a moment breathe.

To be fitted for glory, we must be gracious; to dwell in heaven, we must be heavenly; to see God, we must be pure and holy in heart; to be forever with the Lord, we must partake His nature, cultivate His image here, and, constrained by love, confess His name, and bear His cross until we pass from grace to glory.

"Marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again."

The EVIDENCES of the New Birth

The EVIDENCES of the New Birth

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature--old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."-- 2 Corinthians 5:17

It demands great skill in the holy art of dealing with Christian evidence--the evidence of the life of God in the soul of man. The fact we seek to confirm is so momentous, the evidences of that fact so varied, and the counterfeits of those evidences so many, that the work of sifting the true from the false, the genuine from the spurious, is more difficult and delicate than appears upon the surface. He who undertakes faithfully to delineate the new creation of the soul has need to adopt as his sole guide the landmarks of God's Word, watchful of the false lights which gleam along the narrow channel through which he courses his intricate way, which seek to decoy the unwary voyager upon the shoals and quicksands of error which line the shores.

It is thus we must deal with the subject of which the present chapter treats--the EVIDENCES of the New Birth in the soul. That these evidences vary, and that they are counterfeited, we have already intimated. It is of the utmost significance, then, that no reader of these pages should in matters of such infinite importance be misled. Born again or not born again, spiritually dead or spiritually alive, are the two spiritual conditions of our present being. And, seeing that between these two conditions there is no neutral position, and that either one or the other decides and foreshadows our future state of being, how great the responsibility resting upon him who deals with these evidences! Solemnly conscious of this, we shall adhere as closely as possible to the description which the apostle gives us of the New Birth, in the words placed at the head of this chapter, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature--old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new;" and, presenting what Bacon terms, "a gentle crush of Scripture," shall give a running exposition of the passage in its order.

1. The doctrine of the indwelling of the renewed soul in Christ is the first truth that arrests our attention. "If any man be IN CHRIST." To be in Christ is to be in union with essential life. Life can only communicate life. The soul quickened with spiritual life is a reproduction of the life of Jesus. It is not that the soul lives, as that Christ lives in the soul. In Christ our death is quickened into His life, our demerit is merged into His merit, our unrighteousness merges into His righteousness, our blackness is lost in His loveliness. And thus Christ is the Divine principle, the root, the substance, the alpha and the omega of all that is godly in us.

"Christ, who is our life." From the commencement to the completion of grace in the soul--from the first tear of godly sorrow wept on earth, to the first note of holy joy sounded in heaven--Christ is essentially and indivisibly one with His people. The spiritual life of the soul springs from the cross, is entwined with the cross, is fed by the cross of Jesus; and, when that life springs into heaven, it will be from the foot of the cross that shaded and sheltered it in all the vicissitudes through which it passed in its journey from grace to glory.

The New Birth, then, is the spiritual reinstating of the soul into Christ. Sin broke the stem of Eden's beautiful flower--the sinless creature man--and flung it, a poisoned weed, upon the dark, seething waters of the curse, henceforth to drift away upon the treacherous current toward the yawning gulf of endless woe. But the New Birth recovers this broken stem, reinstates it into Christ, henceforth to bear the precious fruits of grace here, and, in full bloom, to be laden with the golden fruits of glory hereafter.

With every step in this divine and marvelous recovery of man it is instructive to trace the union of the Lord Jesus--how all flows from Christ, leads to Christ, and through Christ conducts us up to the Father, from whose ineffable love it first springs, and to whose divine glory it shall eternally redound. The Church was loved in Christ, chosen in Christ, blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, is called in Christ, preserved in Christ, and with Christ will be ultimately glorified. How clearly and impressively does His inimitable figure illustrate this truth, "I am the vine, you are the branches."

Sweet to trace all 'streamlets of grace' to JESUS--eternal election, preservation in unregeneracy, effectual grace, full pardon, free justification, divine adoption, full salvation, endless glory. Not a link can we strike in this golden chain of covenant blessing but it echoes the name of Jesus! Touch the lowest on earth, and it sends its vibration of faith and love up to the central throne of heaven, where sits and reigns and intercedes the Lamb that was slain. O believer, how ennobling your union, how exalted your position, how secure your standing! You are in Christ--vitaly, inseparably one with Him, your life is with His life, your heart is enshrined within His heart, your interests are entwined with His interests, your hand is locked in His hand, and His eye, beaming with love, bends ever over you. The Lord, having espoused your person, has become surety for all your interests, temporal, spiritual, and eternal.

So entirely are you spiritually incorporated with Christ, your sins are drowned in His blood, your demerit is lost in His righteousness, your hell-deservings are annihilated in His heaven-winning merits, your entire self is absorbed in Him, and you stand before God without one law-condemning charge, or one guilt-effacing spot. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

What! am I now and forever acquitted at the bar of infinite justice--all my accusers silenced, all my charges met, the indictment quashed, and the sentence of full and free justification pronounced? Yes! Jesus has done it all, leaving me nothing to do but believingly to accept the free gift of His love. His obedience honored the precepts of the law, His death satisfied the claims of justice, His resurrection ratified and sealed the engagements He undertook, and I go forth to breathe the free air and to bask in the warm sunshine of a present and a full salvation. The debt is cancelled, the prison is thrown open, the lawful captive is delivered, and heaven shall ring with hallelujahs, and God shall be eternally glorified. "Be astonished, O heavens, at this!"

Reader, endeavor to get into Christ. Rest not short of it. Be not satisfied without the assurance that it is your true position. Christ is an open door to all poor comers--enter and be saved. Wait not to mend one filthy rag, to obliterate one dark spot, to heal one festering wound; approach and enter, all sinful and unworthy as you are, and once in Him, your filthy garments are exchanged for beautiful attire, your soul is made whiter than snow, the bruise is healed, the scar is effaced, and you are COMPLETE in Him.

What a consolatory truth is this, also, in deep trial! Christ's interest in His people is not a divided interest. He does not separate their persons from their circumstances. One with you, He is one with all that appertains and attaches to you. He moulds and pencils all the events of your life--giving to each its form and complexion; is pledged to the supply of every need, to guide each step, sustain in every sorrow, and to keep you by His power unto the end. Oh, the blessedness of being in Christ! Here alone is liberty, security, and peace. The foe cannot assail you, the arrow cannot wound you, the storms cannot reach you, encompassed by His divine perfections, and pavilioned within His living, loving heart.

Living in Christ, it is the privilege of the believer to depart hence in Christ. "Those who sleep in Him." It is not death to die in the Lord. It is life in all but the name. We call it death, but He "has abolished death," and the believer in Jesus shall not see death. And when the last enemy approaches, all armed for the dread battle, he finds the soul he had thought to claim as his victim has become his victor, and he retires vanquished from the field amid the shout of the departing conqueror, "O death! where is your sting?" And when the Lord shall descend from heaven, all those who died in the Lord shall swell His train. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." "And the dead in Christ shall rise first."

2. A new creation. But the second truth brings us still nearer to our present subject, "If any man be in Christ, HE IS A NEW CREATURE," or, a new creation. The Word of God scarcely supplies a simile more expressive of the New Birth than this. Was not that a new creation when God, from the disorder and darkness of chaos, educed this magnificent world, teeming with life and radiant with beauty? It is true, matter existed, but the earth was without form and void, and darkness flung its sable mantle over all. But the Spirit of God moved upon the face of creation, and a new world floated into view.

The spiritual analogy is perfect. The New Birth of the soul is emphatically a new spiritual creation. The same Divine power that formed the original elements of creation, that woke it from its deep sleep, quickened it with life, and clothed it with light, recreates the soul of man, and forms it a new creature. Behold all things are new! The regenerate soul has found a new life, for the Second Adam, who is a quickening Spirit, has breathed into him the breath of life. He never before felt the power, or tasted the sweetness of life until now. He surveys the past of his existence, and it seems as if he had been dwelling in a tomb, wrapped within the winding-sheet of death. But now born again from above, quickened by the Spirit, he emerges from his "grave of sin" into newness of life, and henceforth he lives for God. A new principle of life animates him, a new atmosphere of life encircles him, a new object of life engages him, and he finds himself bathing his soul in a new element of existence, worthy of his dignity and destiny as a rational, accountable, and immortal being.

Even the world of NATURE seems to him as a new-born creation now that he has passed from death unto life. The sun shines brighter, the air breathes softer, the flowers smell sweeter, the landscape is clad with deeper verdure and richer loveliness; in a word, the whole creation appears in new-born beauty and sublimity, since seen by an eye that traces in all a Father's hand.

It may be truly said, that the spiritual creation of the soul in the New Birth presents the being and character of GOD in a new light. It is like a new revelation of Jehovah to the mind. The

unregenerate man does not worship the God of the Bible. The God therein revealed and made known to us, only in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. Worshiping a god of his own imagination, he rears his altar to "THE UNKNOWN GOD." Divesting the God of Scripture of His divine perfections--His holiness, His justice, His truth, His power--he completely undeifies Him, robbing Him of His glory, and annihilating His very being.

But, now born again, a new creature, lo! the God of the Bible bursts upon his new-found vision and his wondering gaze, as a newly-revealed God. Clothed with new attributes, arrayed with new perfections, bathed with new glory, standing in a new relation, the new creature falls down at His feet in adoring admiration and love, exclaiming, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear--but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Never did the being of God appear so true, the perfections of God so glorious, the character of God so great, the government of God so holy, the relation of God so endearing as now. Born into a new world, the GOD Sun of that world--the GOD of the new creation--unveils to the eye as infinitely, ineffably lovely.

Like a being born and grown up in a dark mine, and brought to the earth's surface to gaze upon the sun in its noontide effulgence, the new created soul is astonished, bewildered, overpowered by the splendor, glory, and greatness of the being, character, and perfections of Jehovah.

Reader, test your conversion by the experience of this truth. What is God, the God of the Bible, the God who gave us Christ, the God whose glory shines in the face of Jesus, the God who has revealed Himself as reconciled--what is this God to you? What is He as a God of holiness, of spotless purity, who cannot look upon sin but with abhorrence? What is He as a God of righteousness, just and upright in all His ways? What is He as a God of truth, keeping covenant, fulfilling His word, in which it is impossible for Him to lie? What is He as a God of love, sending His dear Son into the world that we might live through Him--a God pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin? What is He as a God pacified in Christ Jesus, all His perfections harmonized, bending upon you a Father's eye, and sending His good Spirit into your heart, awakening the response, "Abba, Father?"

Oh, see if the God you love, the God you adore, the God you worship, the God you hope to dwell with through eternity, is the God who sent the Bible, who gave His beloved Son to die for sinners, who was in Christ reconciling us to Himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us. This is the God who dwells amid the new creation of the soul, pronouncing it very good, taking infinitely more delight in it than when He spoke the universe out of nothing, irradiating every faculty of the soul with His glory, and tuning every power with His praise.

And in what a new-born light does the SAVIOR appear to the new creature! Until that moment of quickened life, when the veil is withdrawn from the heart, and the scale falls from the eye, Christ was never truly, experimentally, savingly known. He may have acknowledged Him with the lip, have bent the knee at the mention of His name, and called Him, 'our Savior,' and this was all he knew of Jesus. But, born again, he has found a new Savior, has discovered who Jesus is, and what He is, and he marvels that he never until now saw His glory, discovered His beauty, realized His presence, or felt His love.

Now he sees Jesus to be the Sin-bearer, the Atoning Sacrifice of His people, the physician, not of the whole, but of the sick; the Savior, not of saints, but of sinners; receiving and saving, not the righteous and the worthy, but the vile, the ruined, the lost. Probably there is nothing which more truly and distinctly evidences the new birth than the revolution it creates in all our apprehensions of the Lord Jesus Christ. It transposes every view, changes every conception, transforms every thought, and revolutionizes every feeling relating to the glorious and precious Savior of sinners.

The soul quickened with spiritual life is brought to its grand center, Christ. Finding that center, it has found God; it stands in the focus of His love, in the sun of His glory. The Lord Jesus Christ is both the Revealer and the Revelation of God. The fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelt in Him, and, "no man knows the Father but he to whom the Son shall reveal Him." How glorious and excellent does Christ, then, appear to the soul born again of the Spirit! How the eye admires Him, how the heart loves Him, how the spirit adores Him, how closely, inseparably, and supremely does every faculty, power, and desire of the whole being center in, and entwine around, this matchless, peerless, altogether lovely One--the Lord Jesus Christ!

How precious, also, to the believing heart, does He now become. His Person, as the God-man--precious. His blood, cleansing from all sin--precious. His righteousness, justifying from all things--precious. His grace, subduing all iniquity--precious. His sympathy, soothing every sorrower--precious. His intercession, presenting us to God in heaven--precious. His name, as ointment poured forth--precious. Truly, "unto those who believe He is PRECIOUS."

My reader, what do you think of this Christ? Is He lovely to your eye and precious to your heart? Is He the Teacher at whose feet you sit, the Pattern whose example you imitate, the Savior in whom you trust, the All in All of your soul? Then you are born again! Flesh and blood revealed not to you this wondrous Christ; nature taught you not to admire and accept, to love and serve Him whom the world hates, despises, and rejects. The love that glows in your heart to Him, though it appears but as a spark; the discovery of His excellence which you have made, though but partial; the sight of His cross which you have caught, though but dim; and the desire to depart and to be with Him which you cherish, though but feeble--all evidence the great, the spiritual, the blessed change through which, in the sovereignty of Divine grace, your whole being has passed.

You are a new creation. Jesus is its Sun, the Spirit its Author, and God its glory. On earth there are none to be compared with Jesus; in heaven there are none to surpass Him. Whom have you in heaven but Christ, and who is there on earth that you desire before Him?

"Jesus! the very thought is sweet!

In that dear Name all heart-joys meet;

But sweeter than the honey far

The glimpses of His presence are.

"No word is sung more sweet than this,

No Name is heard more full of bliss;

No thought brings sweeter comfort nigh,

Than Jesus, Son of God, Most High.

"Jesus! the hope of souls forlorn,

How good to them for sin who mourn,

To those that seek You, oh, how kind!

But what are You to those that find?

"No tongue of mortal can express,

No pen can write the blessedness;

He only who has found it knows

What bliss from love of Jesus flows.

"O Jesus! King of wondrous might,

O Victor glorious from the fight,

Sweetness that may not be expressed,

And altogether loveliest!"

The reader will infer from the preceding statement, touching the nature and evidence of the New Birth that, as a spiritual and divine work its Author must be supernatural. The Scriptures of truth leave us in no doubt as to this essential point. We are told by our Lord emphatically that, "it is the Spirit who quickens, the flesh profits nothing." Again--"Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." To the Holy Spirit, then, the third person of the ever blessed Trinity, the breathing of the divine life in the soul, the new spiritual creation of man, is ascribed. Having already adverted to this truth in the preceding pages, a brief reference to it in this connection is all that will be required. And yet, how momentous it is that we keep perpetually and distinctly in view the divine and sole agency of the Holy Spirit in conversion! Ignore or lose sight of this doctrine, and Baptismal Regeneration is in the ascendant. And from this soul-destroying heresy the Lord deliver His Church!

The Spirit of God commencing this work of the new creation of the soul, carries it on to final and eternal completion. He who unsealed the first tear of godly sorrow for sin, and created the first trembling touch of faith, and inspired the first thrill of holy joy, carries forward the work from step to step, from stage to stage. It is the Spirit who teaches us more of Jesus, increases our knowledge of God, deepens our sanctification, seals to us the pledge of our inheritance, witnesses to our sonship, speaks the promise, and conveys the consolation of the Lord of all comfort to our soul. Oh, the debt, the deep, the eternal debt, we owe to the Spirit--what arithmetic can compute it? Shall we not give Him divine honor, acknowledge His personal glory, listen to His still small voice, obey His holy injunctions, and in all things seek to please and magnify Him?

My reader, is your professed conversion the work of the Spirit? Is He the author of your hope for eternity? Has He discovered to you your guilt, danger, and universal corruption of your nature? Has He roused you from a state of carnal security, of spiritual stupidity and indifference, to an

affecting view of the holiness of God, of the purity and strictness of His law, of the terrors of its penalty, of the great evil of sin, and of your exposure to the Divine displeasure because of it?

Has He, thus giving you to pass through these pangs and throes of the New Birth, unveiled to you the cross of Calvary, revealing to your faith the Redeemer of men, the Savior of sinners, hanging upon that tree, wounded and bruised, bleeding and dying for our transgressions?

Has He enabled you to let go everything else--baptism, and sacraments, and church, self-righteousness, and unrighteousness--and look to the cross, and touch the Savior, and grasp Him as the limpet the rock, and stake your eternal salvation upon the blood, the righteousness, the merit, the finished work of the Lord Jesus? Have you got, as Rutherford expresses it, "a grip of Christ?" These are vital questions, which must be met and answered and disposed of graciously and savingly now, or to our eternal confusion and condemnation in the great day of judgment.

But there is one view of this new creation which we must earnestly vindicate and scripturally and distinctly place before the reader, seeing that there exists so many ideas that are vague and erroneous concerning it. Let it be clearly understood that the new creation of which we speak is not an integral, component part of the old creation, or a mending and improvement and development of the fallen and corrupt nature which we possess in the first Adam. Far from this. It is entirely, totally, essentially different.

It is a new, a divine, a holy nature imparted to the soul; so that the believer becomes the possessor of two natures--the one, the old nature, essentially and totally sinful; the other, the new nature, essentially and totally holy. The new creation of the believer is not a superadded, supplementary thing grafted upon the old; it is a substitution, a thing wholly and entirely distinct in itself, essentially, incorruptibly holy. The Scripture statements of this truth are clear and unmistakable. "That you put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be RENEWED in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the NEW MAN, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," (Ephesians 4:22-24.)

It is in the light of this truth we get some insight into the meaning of the apostle John, when, personifying the renewed nature, he employs this remarkable language, "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for His seed remains in him--and he cannot sin because he is born of God." This, and similar declarations in the epistles of the same evangelist, have received various interpretations from different writers. Some, by an unwarranted accommodation of the passage, have pressed it into the service of teaching, and countenancing the doctrine of sinless perfection. But nothing can be clearer than that the apostle, neither here or elsewhere, nor any of the apostles, taught a doctrine so opposed to the whole teaching of divine truth, and so contradictory to the uniform experience of the entire Church of God. "If we say that we have NO SIN, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Others have interpreted the text as teaching the inability of the Christian to sin wilfully, or habitually, or, "in such a sense as to lose all true religion, and be numbered with transgressors." But neither can we accept this as the mind of the Holy Spirit by the apostle. What, then, is the meaning?

The evangelist is now speaking of the new nature, which is the divine nature in the soul of the regenerate. He personifies this new nature thus--"And that you put on the NEW MAN, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," (Ephesians 4:24.) "And have put on the NEW MAN, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him," (Colossians 3:10.) Now, it is of this new, this divine nature in the soul of the regenerate of which the apostle speaks that IT cannot sin. "He"--the new man--"cannot sin, because he is born of God."

The new nature of the believer is so essentially holy, it cannot be tempted to sin, for it is incorruptible; it is so essentially divine it cannot of itself sin, for it is of God. "We know that whoever is born of God sins not." Such we believe to be the true and only logically correct interpretation of this remarkable text. That the best of God's saints have fallen into the worst of sins, is a fact patent in the history of the Church of God. That the most holy and matured Christian is perpetually battling with the existence of sin and the propensities to evil within, is equally true. To what conclusion, then, can we arrive but this, that, while in the flesh of the regenerate dwells no good thing--flesh remaining flesh until corruption returns to corruption--there exists in the renewed soul "the NEW MAN, created according to God in righteousness and true holiness;" and this "new man," essentially, perfectly, and unchangeably holy, is not, as we have previously shown, an engrafting of grace upon the old and fallen nature by which its evil is either exterminated or else changed into good; but is a separate and distinct nature in the believer, intrinsically divine and holy, the result of the creative operation of the Holy Spirit, and forms the germ of his future, higher, and nobler state of spiritual being, before long to be unfolded in its perfection and glory in heaven, dissevered from all that would taint its purity, mar its beauty, or shade its luster.

3. The evidence of the new birth.

But from this unfolding of the nature of the new creation in the soul of the regenerate, we pass to consider its evidence as laid down by the apostle. "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." This is the Spirit's comment upon His own previous declaration. "He is a new creature," says the Spirit. The evidence?--"Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." The first idea suggested by these words is, the VISIBILITY of the New Birth. We are invited to look upon it. "Behold!" The change produced by the internal regeneration of the Spirit is often thus described as open and seen. It is the visible expression of an invisible work; an alteration of life consequent upon a change of heart. If conversion revolutionizes our entire being, molding our principles, sanctifying our minds, purifying our hearts, shaping and tinting our spiritual feelings, our words and actions, then the passing away of old things and the taking their place by new must be discerned by ourselves and be discernible to others. The great spiritual change is so real that it cannot be concealed--the effect on the life is so palpable it cannot be mistaken.

The WORLD takes knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus and have learned of Him. They behold our light--for it shines. They mark our faith--for it works. They trace our love--for it constrains. They behold our religion--for it influences. How writes the apostle Peter? "Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will SEE your honorable behavior, and they will believe and give honor to God when he comes to judge the world." 1 Peter 2:12.

The best of men, as were Christ and His apostles, are exposed to the shafts of an ungodly world. The man of God may not always be able to avoid false accusation, misinterpretation, and

malicious calumny--even the doctrines he holds and the good he does shall be evil spoken of. But, by the grace of God, he may so live as to refute the calumny and even to convert the calumniator. We thus see that the New Birth is a visible thing in its effects. It should be so. Our Lord and Master justly expects that those who assume His name should honor it; that those who profess His religion should exhibit it; that, confessing Him and His words before men, they should everywhere be known and recognized as truly His disciples. That, children of the day, they should let their heavenly light shine, as lighthouses shine, illumining the dark ocean of life, and guiding, it may be, the perilous pathway of some benighted and bewildered voyager, so bringing glory to God.

The religion of a child of God should be visible and unmistakable. An epistle of Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God--a living epistle--the writing should be manifest, legible, and readable. He should not so live as that those who see him are surprised when they are informed that he is avowedly a professor of religion, a disciple of Christ, a guest at the table of the Lord. "What! he a Christian, a follower of the Savior, a partaker of the Spirit of Christ? I would not have thought it possible!" But, if old things are passed away and all things are become new, it will be said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed!" Be this our highest aim to reflect the image of Christ.

If Christ in truth is in us, our Christianity will be as the light, pure and visible, transparent and illuminating. It will not be that we are seen so much, as that Christ is seen in us. The New Birth will be manifest in our Christlike temper and mind and spirit. The old things of our unrenewed nature will give place to the new things of our regenerate nature--and this will be manifest and visible. The moroseness and churlishness, the pride and selfishness, the worldliness and frivolity, the levity and man-pleasing which cropped up so luxuriantly from the soil of our unsanctified heart, will now, in a great measure be supplanted by the fruits of righteousness springing from a heart changed, sanctified, occupied by the Spirit of God. The walk and conversation of a renewed man will be the outward and visible reflection of an inward and invisible grace.

As the stream cannot ascend higher than its level, neither can fall below it, so the holiness of the Christian's life will be in proportion to the sanctification of his heart. As the hands of a clock moving upon the face of the dial indicate the condition and working of the hidden mechanism of the timepiece, so the holy living and conversation of the regenerate point to the divine power from which they originate, and evidence the renewed and sanctified heart from whence they flow.

Let, then, beloved, your conversion be manifest, your religion be molding and visible. Let it impress its divine shape and impart its hallowed tint to all your actions, pursuits, and recreations. Let it influence and sanctify all the domestic, professional, and social relations and doings of life. Let its home power be visible and influential. Move amid the domestic circle as a new creature, a being of holiness and love, living for eternity; a beam flowing from the infinite sun, irradiating, softening, cheering in its hallowed influence on all around. As a parent, and as a child, as a brother, a sister, a domestic, so let your light shine, so let your life evidence its reality, so let your religion be visible in its lowliness and gentleness, its loveable and loving spirit, as to command from all who see it the admiring exclamation, "Behold! old things are passed away, and all things are become new!"

O Lord, let the new nature within me be an open vision, a luminous and faithful copy of Your own. It is Your nature, united though it be with frail, and sinful, suffering flesh; Your own divine workmanship, destined hereafter and forever to reflect Your glory and hymn Your praise--and

upon Your head, O Christ, shall the crown flourish!

The effect produced by the new creation of the soul is radical and thorough. "ALL things are become new." The work of God, like Himself, is perfect. The conversion which man would effect has respect to a partial reformation only, leaving the heart untouched and unchanged. But God's work of grace is radical and thorough. It begins at the center and works its way to the farthest circumference of the whole man.

The heart--once so hateful and hating--has now become a fountain of sweet waters, transmitting its pure and holy streams throughout the whole soul, changing the entire conduct of the individual, and working out, in its degree, a universal holiness of his whole being. "Old things have passed away." The world he once loved is now as a crucified thing. The pleasures he once indulged have lost their charm. The sins he once committed are now loathed and forsaken. The society he once enjoyed no longer attracts or pleases. In a word, old things have passed away with the old nature, and with the advent of a new nature behold all things are become new! How comprehensive the words, how vast the change!

Trace it in some of its radical results--

IMPENITENCE is replaced by a broken and a contrite heart. The old hardness and insensibility of the unrenewed nature have passed away, and God has made the heart soft by grace, and the Holy Spirit has wrought that godly sorrow for sin which lays the mouth in the dust, and dissolves the soul into holy contrition at Jesus' feet. Sweet contrition! Sweeter far the bitterest tears for sin at Christ's cross, than the sweetest pleasures of sin in tents of worldly enchantment.

Reader, has the old impenitence and hardness of your heart passed away, succeeded by a heart spiritually softened and divinely sealed? Has the Spirit emptied, humbled, and laid you low? You know nothing experimentally and savingly of Christ until He has. He is the Great Healer, but He heals with His blood and binds up none but sin-wounded consciences and guilt-broken hearts. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit--a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." What, my reader, is yours?

The old principle of UNBELIEF is passed away, and the new and divine principle of faith in Christ has succeeded. And with this new-born principle in the soul, behold, all things are become new. Faith changes the character and the aspect of everything in the experience of the believer. It revolutionizes the entire range of his vision. It diminishes things that are present, and enlarges things that are future. The visible things fade upon the sight, the invisible things unveil their grandeur. It is microscopic in its view of things that are seen and temporal, it is magnifying in its view of things that are unseen and eternal. It looks alone to Christ, and in Him it sees the Father revealed, and beholds the glory of God in that face once marred more than the face of any man. It deals only with the blood and righteousness of Christ, rests alone and confidently in His merits, obedience, and sufferings, and commits the keeping of the soul to His hand, and exclaims, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Thus the old unbelief which rejected Christ, and excluded the soul from salvation, has passed away, and behold the new principle of faith which receives Christ, and rests in Christ, has succeeded it; and with the advent of this divine and new-born principle are the first fruits of glory in the soul.

My reader, do you believe in the Son of God? Have you the faith that travels--sinful, poor, and empty-handed, to Christ, and accepts with child-like, unquestioning trust, the full and complete salvation which Jesus purchased at a price so costly, and gives with a love so free?

Not less conspicuous among the evidences afforded of the reality of the New Birth is, the essential change which takes place in the views and feelings of the regenerate with regard to SIN. Originally shaped in iniquity, and conceived in sin, the love of sin, and the hatred of holiness, are born with us. But when by the Holy Spirit we are born over again, and are made partakers of the Divine nature, this original and natural love of sin, and hatred of holiness, are reversed. A new and heavenly principle is implanted which leads the regenerate to hate sin and love holiness. In nothing are the reality and divinity of this momentous change more apparent than in this.

We have shown that the new nature in the regenerate is essentially and inalienably holy. It not only is of itself uncorrupted, but it is incorruptible by any power whatever--it CANNOT sin. Now, it is in this divine principle that the love of holiness in the believer is implanted, and a power in antagonism to sin is implanted in his heart. What a reverse now transpires! The regenerate now love what they once hated, and hate what they once loved. We loved sin, lived in sin, in some of its many forms--intellectual sin, gross sin, refined sin, open sin, secret sin. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life," the power of Mammon, the fascination of the world, the idolatry of the creature, the love of self, some or all these forms of sin maintained the supremacy, held their unbroken, undisputed rule.

Oh, how changed a man is he now! The sins which he before committed, the objects which he loved, the tastes which he cultivated, the sensualities in which he indulged, have lost their power to fascinate, to please, and to enthrall. The principle of sin may still exist embedded in the renewed heart; but the new man, day by day increasing in strength, advancing in holiness, and, growing in grace, gradually obtains the ascendancy; and so the believer puts off the old man with his deeds, and puts on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

O Lord, give to me this evidence, that I am born again! Implant in my heart the principle of holiness, deepen in my heart the love of holiness, strengthen in my heart the power of holiness, adorn my heart with the beauties of holiness, and enrich my heart with the fruits of holiness. Whatever brilliant gifts You withhold, whatever active service You forbid, whatever great achievements You restrain, whatever sacred honor You shade, oh, grant that I may be a true and humble partaker of that divine HOLINESS--deepening, ripening, perfecting--arrayed in which I shall behold Your face in righteousness, satisfied when I awake with Your likeness. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

The spirit and carriage of the renewed soul under ADVERSITY is no slight evidence of the reality and blessedness of the New Birth. Adversity before conversion, and adversity after conversion, seem not the same discipline. Affliction BEFORE the New Birth transpires in the soul, unsanctified by the grace of God, stirs up the enmity of the natural heart, increases the rebellion of the carnal mind, and arms the hostility of the will against Jehovah. The natural man kicks against God, flies in the face of His providence, and is as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.

But when the new nature, descending from heaven, makes its triumphant and glorious entrance into the soul, oh, how changed is everything! The rebellion of the will transformed into submission,

the enmity of the mind changed into love, the hostility of the soul subdued into harmony, the afflictive and corrective dealings of God are now interpreted and received as the righteous, wise, and loving discipline of a Father, who because He loves chastises us, who because we are sons scourges us.

Mark the spirit of the chastened believer--"And Aaron held his peace." Listen to the language of the afflicted child--"The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" Contemplate the picture of the sorrowful saint--"I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother--my soul is even as a weaned child." Truly have old things passed away, and all things have become new! Afflicted and chastised one! be your spirit and demeanor under God's present dealings a bright reflection of this. The hand of God may be heavy upon you. Dark may be the cloud shading your tabernacle, mingled the draught brimming your cup, and painful the sword which enters into your soul--nevertheless, in all this God is love--paternal love, unchanging love; and His present discipline of sorrow is but to bring your soul more deeply into the experience of His love, and to increase and burnish the evidences of your new and heavenly birth.

You are traveling the family-road to heaven--the King's highway to glory, trodden by the King Himself. Through much tribulation we are to enter the kingdom. Your present affliction, your present trial is in the covenant, appointed and ordained by everlasting love, infinite wisdom and righteousness. God, your own covenant God and Father, has appointed all, has shaped all, is overruling all, and is with you in all. Dark and mysterious as is this event, it involves a wise and loving needs be. God deals intelligently as well as righteously, wisely as well as lovingly, with His children. Every trial has its mission, every cross its lesson, every sorrow its blessing.

We little comprehend how much wise love is contained in what at first sight seems directly adverse to our best interests, to militate against our true happiness. A trial that seems a severe correction is often a wise prevention; a cross that wears a threatening aspect often proves a timely and wholesome check. The path of worldly sunshine, and often that of spiritual prosperity, may be as a sea of ice; and so God strews it with the sand of affliction, that our feet may not slide. He roughens the smooth way, that we may be safe.

When the Holy Spirit restores to the renewed soul the lost image of God, repencilling it with the lineaments of His holiness, the Lord sees fit that the newly-created vessel should pass through the fire, in order to deepen, consolidate, and perpetuate the sacred imprint. The Divine likeness is burned indelibly in the soul. This led the holy but afflicted Job to exclaim, "When He has tried me I shall come forth as gold." And so shall every furnace-tried believer issue forth a vessel purified and fit for the Master's service.

Do not think, then, O afflicted one, that God is dealing with you strangely! It is by the discipline of sorrow--it may be sickness, bereavement, loss of earthly substance, or the calamity befalling one we love--that our Lord is assimilating us to Himself. And is there not a holy congruity that the disciple should be as his Lord? Who would not be like Christ? Shall the Head be thorn-crowned and tried, and the Body be exempt from sorrow and suffering? Shall the Bridegroom be a man of sorrows, and the Bride a wife of pleasures? Oh, no! forbid it, love! forbid it, faith! forbid it, hope of glory! Jesus left us an example of suffering, that we should follow His steps.

The Lord tries the righteous, in order to deepen, mature, and bring forth their righteousness in noontide light. Sanctified trial develops and advances the new nature in the soul. The effects of trial in the godly are in striking contrast with the effects of a similar discipline of the ungodly. While affliction stirs up the corruption of the unregenerate heart, it stirs up the grace of the renewed heart. The one emits a noxious and loathsome exhalation; the other breathes its sweet and fragrant aspirations, bounding heavenward as the springing of a fountain of perfume. Oh, marvelous grace, that can extract purity and sweetness from hearts so vile as ours!

Lord, of Your own we give You; Your grace shall wear the diadem of praise, of all that is divine, and holy, and lovely within us! In the light, beloved, of these truths read the present discipline of God. He may now seem to be taking you down, but it is only to build you up and put you together again--a fairer, lovelier, and more symmetrical temple. He is teaching you, also, by trial as you could learn in no other school. Now you interpret the dark symbol which before was so difficult to decipher--that the saints' afflictions stand for God's blessings--blessings, indeed, when He is blessed for sending them. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, BLESSED be the name of the Lord."

What if He has imposed a daily cross, heavy, and chafing? You have not long nor far to carry it. "This light affliction is but for a moment." The "little while" of cross-bearing, of furnace-trial will soon be past and gone--gone like the foam that crests the ocean billow--and you will stand triumphant upon that shore, washed by no waves but bliss, and will awake the golden strings of your harp to the sweetest praise of Immanuel for every cross, tribulation, and trial.

Oh, could we even now but see the reason God has for appointing each sorrow--the wisdom that ordained it, the goodness that sends it, the power that controls it, the grace that sanctifies it, the sympathy that soothes it, and the mission of love on which it bends its dark wing to our abode--we would not feel a moment's anxiety or trouble in our mind; but, like David, behave and quiet ourselves as a weaned child, calmly, confidently waiting the blessed outcome--our more perfect fitness by grace for a perfect heaven of glory.

Let, then, your spirit and deportment under trial evidence, beloved, that with you old things are passed away and that all things are become new. Glorify God in the fires. Be meek, mute, resigned. Nothing but love is in this deep, dark calamity. Then shall grace triumph over nature, and your heavy affliction shall but unveil the love, illustrate the power, and increase the glory of Jesus. He, once the sorrowing and the suffering One, but now the loving and the sympathizing One, has not left you alone in this adversity. In all your afflictions He is afflicted; and His grace will heal the sorrow, and His love will control the grief, and His power subdue the rebellious will, and His sympathy soothe the suffering; and so the name of the Lord Jesus shall be glorified in you.

We ought to refer for one moment to the INDESTRUCTIBILITY of the new nature in the regenerate. Old things have passed away, never more to reassert or regain their ascendancy. The new nature may pass through varied and trying vicissitudes, for the Christian life has its lights and shadows; but it continues the same nature still, uncorrupted by the sin in which it dwells, unmixed with the alloy of earth through which it travels, unshaded and unextinguished by the clouds and waves through which it courses its way to glory; its path is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.

"He that has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Nothing shall arrest its progress or imperil its safety. It is a good work, and what is good is imperishable; it is God's work, and God's work is perfect. And since He annihilates nothing that He has made, not an atom of matter, do you think that He will destroy, or allow to be destroyed, the work of His new creation in the soul? Will He permit one grain of precious faith to perish, one spark of holy love to expire, one life-look at Jesus to be death-glazed? Will He allow a soul redeemed with the heart's-blood and the death agonies of His Son, quickened by His Spirit, called by His grace, kept by His power, to perish? Never, no never!

The new nature of the believer is as holy, as indestructible, as immortal as the God who created it. The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. He will never revoke a pardon He has given, call back a grace He has bestowed, efface a divine lineament He has pencilled upon the soul. Angels shall never be summoned to hush their harps to silence because of the apostasy, the final ruin, of one over whose repentance and conversion those harps once woke their jubilant melody.

Cheer up, then, dear heart! You weak and trembling saint, your touch of faith has saved you; your look of love has won the heart of Jesus, and no poor sinner that once crowned Him with the weakest faith, or clung to Him with the faintest love, shall ever hear Him say, "Depart!" Listen to His own assurance, and with this we close the argument of the final perseverance of all the regenerate--"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man (any one) pluck them out of my hand." And thus the new creature which could not sin because it was born of God, and which could not perish because God was in it, shall advance towards its destined completion, from grace to grace, until it is changed from glory to glory.

Before we close, let us solemnly and personally ask the reader, Have you these evidences of the New Birth? Are you a real Christian, a visible Christian, a thorough Christian, a growing Christian? Do not think that we exaggerate the importance of the great change, or that we demand evidences of its reality so high that you cannot attain unto them. If you question the correctness of our view of the subject, examine the Scriptures for yourself. Suppose that, after all, we should be right. Then what is your hope for eternity? And that we are right, it is spoken--spoken by Him who is the Truth, and who cannot lie--"you MUST be born again." What could be more explicit or more solemn? It is unequivocally appointed of God that you pass through this spiritual change. It is absolutely necessary in order to your entrance into heaven. Your eternal and changeless destiny turns upon the balance. Heaven or hell--the undying worm or the unfading crown--the quenchless fire or the eternal song--with demons and lost souls, or with Christ and glorified spirits forever are the solemn, momentous issues suspended upon your decision. Search the Scriptures, examine your heart, look into your life, and ascertain if of a truth you are BORN AGAIN.

But there yet remains one test of the reality of the new creation of the soul--the last and most solemn, the all-important hour when DEATH, the foe of nature but the friend of grace, approaches, loosens the silver cord, and translates the believer from earth to heaven. That all death-beds of God's people are precisely alike, that all exhibit the same jubilant joy, and exultant hope, and triumphant entrance into glory, we do not affirm. But whatever may be the dying experience of the departing saint--whether God puts His child to sleep in the dark or in the light--whether he departs hence with the lowly prayer of the tax-collector, or with the triumphant song of the martyred apostle

breathing from his lips, the renewed nature will evidence its reality and exhibit its power; and no holy watcher of the solemn scene shall retire from that chamber but with the conviction that it was not the Christian, but death that died.

You may go down to the bank of the river in fear, in gloom, and in tears, but you shall pass through it in confidence, in light, and in song. Oh, how will the new creature prove its heavenly birth, unveil its divine wonders, and evidence its deathless existence then! Emerging from its long and deep veiling--the sin that enwrapped it, the infirmities that impaired it, the sorrows that shaded it, the body of sinful, suffering flesh that imprisoned it--it will burst forth into a reality and a grandeur that will awe while it delights, astonish while it entrances the spirits of saints and angels gazing down intent upon the spectacle.

In all this, how glorious and precious will Christ appear! Living or dying, Christ is all in all to the believer. IN Christ has been his heaven below; WITH Christ will be his heaven above. To Him we owe all the grace that saves us now, and will ascribe all the glory that glorifies us hereafter. Blessed Lord Jesus! You who stooped to my fallen, sinful, sorrowful nature to raise it into union with Your own divine, pure, and happy nature--You who carried my cross in weariness, in shame, and woe, that I might sit with You upon Your throne--oh, claim my heart for Yourself, and rule and reign without a rival!

"My heart is fixed, Eternal God,

Fixed on Thee;

And my immortal choice is made--

Christ for me.

He is my Prophet, Priest, and King,

Who did for me salvation bring;

And while I live I mean to sing,

Christ for me.

"In Him I see the Godhead shine,

Christ for me.

He is the Majesty Divine,

Christ for me;

The Father's well-beloved Son,

Co-partner of His royal throne,

Who died for human guilt alone,

Christ for me.

"Let others boast of heaps of gold,

Christ for me;

His riches never can be told,

Christ for me.

Your gold will waste and wear away;

Your honors perish in a day;

My Portion never can decay,

Christ for me.

"In pining sickness or in health,

Christ for me;

In deepest poverty or wealth,

Christ for me.

And in that all-important day,

When I the summons shall obey,

And wing my heavenly flight away,

Christ for me!"

The Fruits of the New Birth

The FRUITS of the New Birth

"Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the praise and glory of God."-- Php_1:11

From tracing some of the more distinctive marks of the New Birth, we pass to a consideration of its FRUITS--a more advanced view of the same subject. There may be certain marks or features in a tree which, to a skillful eye, indicate its genus, while it is the fruit the tree bears which alone clearly proves the species to which it belongs. We have thus far in these pages reviewed but the elementary principles of conversion, sufficiently distinctive, however, to enable the general reader to arrive at a correct conclusion as to the real state of his own soul for eternity. The present chapter will present the New Birth in its more developed or advanced stage--tracing some of the more appropriate and matured fruits of the great change from death unto life.

If we infer, and correctly so, that the individual is born again by his hating the things he once loved, and loving the things he once hated, we have more than inferential proof, we have positive and unmistakable evidence of the fact in the ripened fruits of holiness which adorn and sanctify his life. We trace not the gentle bud, or the opening blossom of grace merely, but the mellowed and golden fruit of righteousness, yielding yet loftier praise and richer glory to God. "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the praise and glory of God."

The figurative language of the passage will be familiar to the reader of his Bible. It is a favorite mode of address with the Holy Spirit. Believers are called, "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified." In landscape scenery, God has constituted the tree the principal object of beauty. In the spiritual world it is the Church. The Church of God is the beauty of the world--its only adornment and sanctity. Take the saints out of the world, and the salt is removed--its real conservative element is gone, and nothing is left but spiritual putrefaction--fuel for the flame.

Now, the leading thought we wish to place prominently before the reader is, that of APPROPRIATENESS. The tree is a "tree of righteousness"--the fruit it bears is the "fruit of righteousness." This idea must not be superficially passed over. It supplies all infallible test of Christian character, a sure criterion of real conversion. Believers are known to be trees of righteousness, or righteous trees, by their righteousness of life. The tree is known by its fruit. The deadly upas tree is distinguished by its shadow of death. The sandal tree is known by the fragrance which it breathes. In the spiritual world it is precisely the same, with this difference--that the test is yet stronger, and the result more certain.

An UNCONVERTED state will bear fruit corresponding with its own nature. It must, in the nature of things, be so. It would be a miracle, a miracle of grace, were it not. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" So is it in the spiritual world. The enmity against God of the carnal mind, the rejection of the Lord Jesus, the governing principle of SELF, the supreme ascendancy of the

world, the slavery of sin, indicate, unmistakably, the unrenewed, unregenerate nature from which they spring. Old things have not passed away. We do not expect you to yield the fruits of holiness from an unholy nature. The life you live is in keeping with the unrenewed heart you possess. You are of the earth, earthly. It is consistent with your unregenerate nature that you should be of the world, should love the world, and that the world should love you and claim you as its own--that the things of the world--its pursuits, and pleasures, and sins--should harmonize with your nature, charm your taste, delight your senses, and bind your affections in their spell. It is only the thistle and the thorn yielding the fruit proper to their nature.

You walk, as others, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, and so you clearly evidence that you are not born again. In the absence of the fruits of righteousness, your present religious condition, and your future and eternal destiny, are melancholy and perilous in the extreme. Lose not a moment in examining your true position for eternity! With death all around you, its sentence upon you, eternity before you, the judgment-seat of Christ soon to confront you, postpone not the consideration of the great matter of conversion, lest you should be compelled to take up the lamentation, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved!"

But we turn to the RENEWED nature. We enter the Church of God where the trees of righteousness His own hand has planted grow. What a sacred and solemn enclosure is this!--a spot reclaimed from the world's wilderness by sovereign grace, and walled around with the ineffably glorious attributes of Jehovah. And now we stand amid the wonders and the glories of the new creation of the soul! Truly it is the garden of the Lord, the spiritual Eden of this fallen universe. A new and Divine sun quickens into deathless life every tree and flower and fruit. A new and heavenly atmosphere encircles it; new and exhaustless springs water it, a new and eternal heaven shines above it--lo! Christ has in His Church made all things new. It is a field which the Lord has blessed, does bless, and will through eternity bless. Such is the one, elect, redeemed Church of God, composed of all the trees of righteousness--trees of various sizes and forms and degrees of beauty and fruit, yet all trees of righteousness--of His own right hand planting, that He might be glorified.

But it is the fruit of the new nature of which we are now more especially to speak--the fruits of holiness which at once indicate its divinity and evidence its vitality. One word expresses emphatically the idea--"RIGHTEOUSNESS." "The fruits of righteousness." The bitter, poisonous fruits of unrighteousness meet us at every turn. They confront us in every species and shape and tint. Oh, what an ungodly world is this! Who would not sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done beneath the sun of heaven? The impurity, the insanity, the frivolity, the fraud, the oppression, the wrong, the cruelty, the injustice, the selfishness, the baseness, the torture, the profanity, the hypocrisy, the utter, total defiance of God, disbelief of His Word and rejection of His Son, all, all unite to confirm the truth of the inspired declaration, "The whole world lies in wickedness"--in the Wicked One. Such are some of the fruits borne by the unrighteous tree.

But the plants of God's setting, the trees of His own planting, are righteous, and the fruit they bear corresponds with their nature--divine, fragrant, precious fruit of righteousness by which His great and holy name is glorified. The regenerate are emphatically the righteous. The language is strong which sets this forth. Speaking of the Church of God, the prophet says, "This is the name with

which she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." The very name applied to the Lord Jesus is here given to His Church! It is fit that the Lamb's Wife should bear the name of her Divine and Royal Husband--"The Lord Our Righteousness." Standing in His imputed righteousness, the believer is counted as righteousness in Christ. "Their righteousness is of me, says the Lord." "He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

In addition to this external imputation of righteousness--constituting the full and free justification of the Lord's people--is the internal righteousness of the Spirit--the germ of holiness implanted in regeneration, which, as remarked, is the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul. Such, then, is the nature of the fruit the believer bears. While all other trees--at the root of which the axe is laid prepared to fell them to the earth at the bidding of God--bring forth not good fruit, these, through electing love and sovereign grace, in the springtide of youth and in mellow old age bring forth good fruit, even the fruits of righteousness, and God is glorified.

What are you, O reader? A tree of righteousness, or of unrighteousness? What is the fruit you bear? What is the life you are living? Think of your responsibility, remember your accountability, meditate upon your immortality! Are you sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit, for time or eternity, for a harvest of woe or a harvest of bliss, for heaven or hell? Rest not short of real conversion. Until you pass into the experience of the new birth, all the moral fruit you bear--though like the apples of Sodom, lovely and pleasant to look upon--is but the bitter fruit of a sinful, unregenerate nature, supplying fuel for the last, the terrible, the eternal fire. "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the tree--therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

But there is fruit that endures unto eternal life. Let us examine it. Having stated its nature, let us attempt a brief classification. The apostle speaks in the plural--"fruits of righteousness." The Lord's trees of righteousness bear all manner of holy fruit. For, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Let us consider some.

In the foreground of our picture we place the fruit of FAITH. The contrast in this particular with the unregenerate is very striking. Unbelief is the great characteristic--the master sin--of the world. Referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit, our Lord intimates this. "When He has come, He will convince (or convict) the world of sin, because they BELIEVE NOT on me." We live in a world unbelieving as to all that relates to the world to come. It will believe everything as to the world that now is, though it be the most ridiculous illusion that ever floated before the wildest fancy; it will believe nothing as to the world to come, though God, who spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.

But faith is the grand characteristic of the trees of righteousness. Basing his belief upon the BIBLE as a divine revelation, receiving it as the Book of God without demur or qualification, the Christian believes all that the Holy Scriptures of truth make known. The faith that accepts and spiritually understands the Bible, possesses and understands the Library of the universe. Marvelous volume! Without it what a blank would the annals of the present world be, and how bewildered would be our historians and sociologists, philosophers and moralists, to account for a large proportion of the phenomena which meet them at every step! How inexplicable the creation of the world, the introduction of natural and moral evil, the history of the primogeniture of the race, the manners and customs of the early ages, the multiplicity of races and of languages existing on the earth, the

history of that most astonishing of all people the Jews, the remarkable phenomena in the internal structure of the earth, as well as the existence of 'marine remains' found upon the summits of some of the loftiest mountains far remote from the sea! And yet, there are those in this enlightened age who, with the solemn vows of God upon them to believe and defend the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, are endeavoring to shake our faith in their integrity.

But the most prominent characteristic of the faith of the Christian is its repose in the Lord Jesus Christ as its great Object of reliance. There is no true faith in God, or in His Word, where there exists unbelief in Christ--the Christ whom God's Word reveals as the Sent of God. We may have just that faith in the existence of God which saves us from absolute atheism, but not that faith in God which brings us into actual theism. An ocean plant exquisitely formed, a coral reef curiously constructed, a simple flower shedding its fragrance amid alpine snows, may, in their silent, convincing eloquence, testify to you of 'a God'--that He formed that marine plant so exquisitely; created the insect that piled up that coral reef so curiously; pencilled the flower that blooms amid those frosts so sweetly; but, believing only in God as the God of nature and not in Him as the God of grace--the God who sent His beloved Son into the world to save it--your faith still leaves you in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity--the servant of sin and the slave of Satan.

The carnal mind is at enmity against God; and faith in His 'natural attributes' will not dissolve into love one atom of its malignity. And what regard has God for the faith which brings to Him but the Cain-offering of fruit and flower, while it disbelieves in His beloved Son, rejects His unspeakable gift, and brings no Abel-offering of faith in atoning sacrifice for sin? It is the utterance of Jesus Himself--"He that honors not the Son, honors not the Father who sent Him."

But the faith of the true believer embraces Christ, and believing in the Son, it embraces also the Father--"Then Jesus cried out, When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me." Such is the fruit clustering in all its beauty and fragrance upon the trees of righteousness! And no language can adequately describe the worth and preciousness of that faith that accepts without hesitation or qualification, on God's terms, the Lord Jesus Christ. The honor which this act of faith brings to JEHOVAH--the diadem of glory which it places upon His head--can but find its expression in the words of Jesus--"This is life eternal, that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

The confused and vague conceptions which many cherish of faith tend very much to render the fruit of this grace slender and sickly. It is impossible to entertain views too simple of the nature and operation of faith. Departing from the teaching of God's Word, and submitting themselves to human reasoning--the definitions and teachings of man, which tend to obscure rather than to elucidate Divine truth--they are lost in endless and fruitless speculations touching this most Divine, most fruitful and precious grace of the Spirit. And yet, taking the Bible as our manual, nothing is more simple and clear than its teachings concerning faith. What is faith? It is simply to believe what God says. The words are--"Have faith in God." "BELIEVE that I am able to do this?" "BELIEVE in the Lord Jesus Christ." "Lord, I BELIEVE." "Be it unto you according to your FAITH." "Your FAITH has made you whole." "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have BELIEVED." "It is of FAITH, that it might be by grace."

Now, the faith that receives Christ is the most direct, simple, and saving exercise of this marvelous grace, and the most lovely and precious exhibition of this fruit. To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,

is everything to the soul. An eternity of bliss is involved in it. Believe in Christ, and the treasures of heaven are swept into your bosom. Believe in Christ, and a present salvation is yours. Believe in Christ, and the hope of glory dawns upon your soul. Believe in Christ, and you are linked with the bliss of eternity.

You have nothing to do, only to BELIEVE. Away with conditions--away with reasonings--away with questionings--and immediately, simply, only BELIEVE that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and you are SAVED! It is when faith in Christ is simple that it is strong; when its hand is empty that it is full; when it comes in its deepest poverty that it is rich; and when it is the most weak in created dependencies that it is the strongest in God. See, then, that you bear this fruit of righteousness, and so evidence your new creation. Have faith in God--in His word of promise, in His infinite power, in His immutable faithfulness.

Take Him at His word, and though He slays you, yet trust in Him. Be your faith that before whose far-seeing eye the present pales, the future brightens; which diminishes the present things of trial, and suffering, and need, and magnifies the future things of happiness, fruition, and glory. Be your faith that which purifies the heart, which works by love, which walks humbly with God, which lies securely and peacefully at anchor upon the promise in the storm, which reposes quietly in the very bosom of Him whose chastening hand has smitten you. O glorious fruit of righteousness! Lord, let Your sun warm, let Your springs water, let Your hand prune my soul, that I may be filled with this precious fruit of faith, to the greater honor and glory of Your holy name!

In close proximity to the fruit of faith is that of LOVE. Love is that Divine principle which more than all others, perhaps, assimilates us to the Divine nature. "God is love." And when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, sanctifying our character, molding, influencing, and constraining us, we are like God. The religion of Jesus is the religion of LOVE. It is the revelation of love--the sacrifice of love--the story of love--the love of the Savior to sinners; and, as the subjects of His religion, the fruit of love will be seen in the life we live. Love, then, is the fruit of the new birth--"Love is of God, and every one that LOVES is BORN OF GOD, and knows God."

The absence of this fruit of righteousness--love to God supreme influencing and assimilating; love to Christ constraining us to obedience and conformity; love to the saints because they are saints, tiding over all differences of judgment, prejudices, and infirmities, manifesting our love to the Lord in the disciple; love to the Word of God, delighting in it more than in our necessary food, sweeter to our taste than the honeycomb, and more precious in our estimate than pure gold--negates our claim to the possession of the new birth; for, if we are begotten of God we shall partake the nature and reflect the image of God, and shall love, not only Him that begat, but them also who are begotten of Him.

How truly lovely and precious is this grace of love! The obedience that springs from it is sweeter far and more honoring to the Lord than the obedience which is the result of fear only. As fruit forced in a conservatory has not the flavor of fruit of spontaneous growth, fruit brought to perfection by the sun, so the obedience that is coerced by the law lacks the sweetness and fragrance of the obedience that is constrained by the gospel. Love makes all the difference!

Now, in proportion to the growth of the Divine nature within us, and the fidelity of our likeness to God, will be our love--love to Jesus Christ and to all His saints--the poorest, the lowest, the

weakest. And we ought to love the saints wherever we meet them, unlovely though their natural properties may be. Does not the Lord Jesus, the great High Priest, bear engraven upon His heart the names of all His people? Then, surely we, as a royal priesthood, ought to bear upon our hearts, in affection, sympathy, and charity, all who thus are borne upon the heart of Christ. No, more, we are called upon, as partaking of the Divine nature, to love our enemies--"I say unto you, Love your enemies."

An unregenerate man will love his friend, but hate his enemy; a regenerate man, under a proper and holy influence, will love both--his friend and his foe. Such is the fruit borne by the renewed nature. But, oh, how lamentably deficient are we of this fruit of love! How little of it exists in the professing Church of God! Here and there a cluster is seen--its very rarity increasing its preciousness--but the easily offended demeanor of ecclesiastical and doctrinal systems too thickly veils it from view, even where it exists; and so the Church of God is robbed of much of her loveliness and power, and God and Christ of much of their praise and glory.

But, oh, cultivate this fruit of righteousness! Look well to this, the badge of your Christian discipleship, the evidence of your new birth. Lacking it, what though you speak with the tongues of men and of angels; what though you have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; what though you have all faith, so that you could remove mountains; what though you bestowed your goods to feed the poor, and give your body to be burned--yet, lacking the grace of charity, or LOVE, you lack the most genuine and authenticating evidence that you are born of God; and all else is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, (1 Corinthians 13:1-3.)

And what precious fruit of righteousness is that which appears in the breathing of the renewed and devout soul after GOD and HOLINESS! One of the finest pages in David's recorded experience is that traced with these holy breathings--"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You--my soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Here is the divine nature ascending to its Divine Savior, rising to its level; and where it exists, to that Savior it will ever ascend. That which is divine reaches after the divine. That which is holy breathes after holiness. That which is of and from God is, in its nature and actings, godly.

The moral gravitation of the unregenerate is earthward--that of the regenerate heavenward. Having borne the image of the earthly, the believer now bears the image of the heavenly. Oh, it is a holy and impressive spectacle that of the soul breathing after God! When none but God will satisfy your longings; when your spirit pants for Him as the deer pants for the water-brooks, and more intensely; when, amid the din and turmoil of the world, like Isaac, you go forth to meditate in the field at eventide, your heart ascends to God in holy breathings, devout desires, and spiritual prayers, it is as though earth were kissing heaven, the human rising to the Divine, the finite losing itself in the Infinite. Such is prayer! a worm basking in the sun; a beggar at the beautiful gate; a child in communion with its parent; a sinner in audience with the Savior; a saint in fellowship with God. Drawing near to God in either of these relations, the nature and the actings of the renewed heart are exhibited in one of their holiest and most impressive forms.

Beloved, seek earnestly more of this religion--the religion of vital communion with God. Earth has no sweets, the creature no delights, sense no joys like this. It is the only religion that proves its divine source and its heavenly nature. It is the only religion that meets the yearnings of the soul, that satisfies its desires, quenches its thirst, and sustains it amid afflictions and trials--the religion

that deals closely, filially, humbly with God. Whatever heaviness, leanness, or sadness you may feel--when you have not a word to express, nor a heart to pray--never be tempted to give up prayer, to forsake the throne of grace. Go with your dullest, lowest frame--go with your shaded spirit, your sealed lips--and if you but lie in the presence of the Lord, detained, sad and mute, before the Ark, you will yet be conscious of a presence and a power which, soft and silent as the light, will diffuse life, joy, and radiance through your soul. Oh, give yourself to prayer!

God knows your sorrows, Christ interprets the language of your tears, the Holy Spirit understands the meaning of your groans. May this fruit of righteousness abound in us, who through grace believe, more and more! May our Christianity be more marked by poverty of spirit and mourning for sin; more faithful dealing with conscience and with our own hearts; more intense thirsting after holiness and more close communion with God; in a word, more of that divine vitality that ascends to, and loses itself in, God, the infinite Fountain of uncreated bliss! "As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after You, O God."

But by whose grace and vitality does the believer bring forth these fruits of righteousness? The apostle tells us--"Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, WHICH ARE BY JESUS CHRIST." Here is the true source of our fruitfulness. We bear no holiness but in union with Him--"From Me is your fruit found." Engrafted into Christ, we necessarily become one with Christ; and in virtue of this vital and spiritual union we bear the fruits of righteousness. One with Christ, we are one with Deity, are one with mediatorial life, and so one with all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Surely, if ever there existed a true, vital graft, it is this. Blessed union! one with the Lord Jesus! One with Him, as the branch is one with the vine. Thus united to Christ, by Christ dwelling in us through the Spirit, we partake of His life, and His life germinates in us; and so we yield the fruits of righteousness by Him.

Not only in virtue of our union with Christ, but in consequence of our receiving from Christ, we become fruitful. Once more we quote that most remarkable and significant declaration in Hosea--"From Me is your fruit found." The New Testament echo of these Old Testament words is in John 15:4 --"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in Me." Now, this abiding in Christ is the believer's own act, and involves the life of faith he lives on the fullness, sufficiency, and person of the Lord Jesus. As the branch extracts its life and nourishment from the vine, and thus becomes fruitful, so the believer receives out of Christ's fullness grace following upon grace, strength succeeding strength, life quickening life; and thus he is filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ.

Oh, it is by the life of Jesus, the supplies from Jesus, the intercession of Jesus--drawing constantly and largely from His overflowing fullness--taking to Him every corruption, confessing every sin, unveiling to Him every sorrow--that we become fruitful in faith, and love, and prayer. From Christ, and not from ourselves, we derive the skill by which we foil our foe; the grace by which we accomplish our service; the strength by which we sustain affliction; the life, the energy, the self-denying spirit by which, in whatever position we are placed, we glorify God. Leaning thus upon Christ--abiding thus in Christ--traveling thus to Christ--associating Christ with every duty, and cross, and trial, and service--doing nothing, undertaking nothing, enduring nothing without Jesus--we shall be filled with holy fruit.

How sweet it is thus to have Jesus blended with every thought, and feeling, and act! Conscious of His presence, to enter upon every self-denying service, to bear every painful cross, to lay down every precious idol, to drink every bitter cup to which He calls us--this it is to bear fruit by Jesus Christ. It is our fruit, indeed, but it is from Him we derive and by Him we bear it. Oh, how kind and gracious of the Lord to call it our fruit, as if it were all our own, and not all from Him! But this is so like Jesus. He takes the crown, as from His own head, and places it upon that of His saints. "YOUR FAITH has saved you." And yet, that faith was all the work of His own Spirit and the free gift of His own grace. And still He commends and crowns the lowly recipient, as though the merit and the achievement of the faith were all our own! Oh, what a gracious, condescending Savior is ours!

Lord, we give You back the crown You would place upon the head of our graces; for, from You alone is our fruit found, and to You belong, without a rival, the garland of our praises and the diadem of Your own glory. Without You, severed from You, we can do nothing. Shade Your sun, suspend Your showers, withdraw Your life, and we droop, wither, and die. Every grace perishes. Faith falters and fails; hope droops and is crushed; love wanes and expires; and we become barren and unfruitful, cast forth as a branch that is withered.

Look, then, O believer, to Christ the living vine to make you fruitful of holiness. No spiritual fertility of soul will be promoted by looking either within yourself or to your duties. You must ABIDE in Christ. Realizing your union with Him, your acceptance and completeness in Him, your supplies of grace as from Him; looking to Christ, living upon Christ, associating everything with Christ--you will become filled with the fruits of righteousness. "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples."

The great END of all our fruitfulness is, the praise and glory of God. And what an appropriate and sublime conclusion is this! It is a solemn, and yet a glorious truth, that everything God has created shall terminate in Him as its great and final end. All shall result in His glory. "I have created him for my glory." "The Lord has made all things for Himself." The salvation of the righteous, and the everlasting destruction of the wicked, shall alike show forth His praise and illustrate His glory. Yes, those fruits of righteousness--that lowly faith, that humble love, that feeble grace, that imperfect service, that weak endeavor to please Him, that victory over the tempter, that conquest of sin, that heavy cross carried, that bitter cup drunk, that long, lingering illness, that suffering of death--all, all shall redound to the praise and glory of JEHOVAH'S grace when the Lord shall come to be admired by His saints, and to be adored in all those who believe. If only the preparation of the soil, the sowing of the seed, the culture of the plant, the maturing of the fruit, brought such praise and glory to the Lord God here, oh, how great will be the revenue of praise and glory He will receive when all the golden sheaves are sickled, and the fruit is garnered, and heaven resounds with the song of the HARVEST HOME!

The Assurance of Conversion

The ASSURANCE of Conversion

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."-- 2 Timothy 1:12

If there is one question involving our personal well-being upon which, above all others, there should not linger the shade of a shadow of uncertainty and doubt, it is the momentous question of our conversion to God--our preparedness for death and eternity. Other questions relating to the present life may reasonably admit of distrust and postponement, even of indifference and neglect; but, the question of our New Birth--the issues of which are solemn as eternity--admits of no uncertainty or delay.

In the preceding pages we have represented the new nature of the believer as a thing visible in its transforming effects. The spiritual change of the heart is evidenced by the moral revolution of the life. The world beholding it, exclaims, "Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new!" Now, if this great moral change is thus so evident to those who only trace its external evidence, how much more so should it be to the regenerate themselves! Surely, if others recognize and acknowledge it, we ourselves ought to be quite sure that we have passed from death unto life--are born again of the Spirit. Such is the holy state which we purpose in the present chapter to present--such the truth we shall endeavor to unfold--the believer's spiritual certainty, or, Divine authenticity, of his conversion to God. "I know whom I have believed." The points we shall briefly illustrate are--real conversion a self-evidencing fact--the way this assurance may be attained, and then the blessedness of its attainment.

I. Real conversion is a self-evidencing fact.

By a self-evidencing thing we, of course, mean that which is of itself so convincing and demonstrative, as to require no process of reasoning to establish. We say of the Bible that its divinity is self evidencing; that, apart from collateral proof of its Divine inspiration, to an honest and intelligent mind it possesses in itself the proof and evidence of its divinity, cumulative and conclusive; so that, no ingenuous and devout inquirer can rise from its study without the overwhelming conviction that it demonstrates and authenticates its Divine authorship--as the book of God. Now, the new birth admits of a similar line of proof. The moral change it produces is so great and radical, so spiritual and divine, its happy subject knows that he is a new creature--that he is regenerated, adopted, pardoned, justified beyond the shadow of a doubt, and can say, "I KNOW whom I have believed."

That we are not placing too lofty a Christian attainment before the reader, the following few declarations of God's Word, which seem to inculcate the state of assurance as attainable by the believer, we think will show. "We KNOW that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "We KNOW that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness." "KNOWING, brethren beloved, your election of God." In Colossians 2:2, the apostle speaks of "the

full assurance of understanding." In another place he employs this language--"Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." Thus it will be seen that the doctrine of assurance is a truth of Divine revelation, that it rests upon the Bible as its basis. Corresponding with these divinely-inspired declarations is the experience of God's saints in all ages of the world. Job could say with assurance, "I KNOW that my Redeemer lives." David could exclaim with assurance, "When I pass through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me." How full of sweet and holy assurance was the exclamation of Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!" We need not multiply these quotations; they are sufficient to convince the mind that the feeblest believer in the Lord Jesus may arrive at a moral certainty that he is born again of the Spirit.

But the point of light in which we desire to place this subject is that of a present salvation--a truth as replete with comfort as it is with sanctification. Our object will be to confirm the believer in the assurance of the fact that he is saved--saved now--saved as certainly as he will be when the redemption of the body shall be as complete as the redemption of the soul. We predicate this fact upon the declaration of the Lord, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hears my word, and believes on Him that sent me, HAS everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but HAS PASSED from death unto life." The language of the apostle speaks as assuringly of the same fact--"By grace you ARE SAVED." Such is the truth we present. We earnestly desire to confirm you in the scriptural assurance of your present standing before God, knowing how much your comfort and holiness are involved in its experience.

Take, for example, the state of PARDON in which Divine grace places the believer. Is it a present or a future pardon of sin which he receives? Most assuredly a present one. If pardoned, it is a pardon now, a pardon full, and a pardon forever. It is not a blessing we have to hope for or expect. If we are truly converted, really born again, Divine and sovereign grace has put us in a present forgiveness, in the personal and holy enjoyment of which it is our privilege to walk. How consonant with this truth is the Word of God, which alone could reveal it. "You, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has He quickened together with Him, HAVING FORGIVEN you all trespasses," (Colossians 2:13.) And what the language of Jesus to the penitent woman bathing His feet with tears? Did He dismiss her still laden with guilt, still polluted with sin? No! Listen to His words--oh, words none more precious!--"And He said unto her, Your sins ARE FORGIVEN." Need we multiply, which we could to a great extent, these proofs?

Beloved, knowing your election of God, we write these things unto you. If your souls are really regenerate, the blotting out of your sins is not a thing to be realized and experienced at some future period of your life, but is a present blessing, and should be a present enjoyment. If washed in the atoning blood of Jesus, you are clean every whit. Not more fully pardoned are the glorified spirits in heaven than you are at this moment. For this you have the Divine asseveration--"I HAVE blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins." He has done it, and having done it, He will never undo it. Once pardoned, fully pardoned; pardoned freely, and pardoned forever. Oh, realize your present standing as a pardoned sinner! Do not keep going over the great debt as still existing against you.

Suppose that the original amount has been fearfully augmented by superadded debts--debts infinite in number and aggravated in character? Be it so. Still it is written--"Having forgiven you ALL trespasses." "Your sins ARE FORGIVEN you for His name's sake," (1 John 2:12.)

Do not think that God, whose work is perfect, works this His master-work partially and imperfectly. Is it like Him to exercise this the highest prerogative of His moral government and the greatest act of His grace in a way that would lower its dignity, impair its power, and neutralize its effects? No! His pardons are worthy of His infinite greatness and love. He pardons like a God. "Who is a God like unto You, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?"

Again, we press upon you the realization of your present state as standing in God's sight, washed in the blood of Christ from all past, present, and future sin. Never was there a more entire annihilation, a more perfect canceling of anything, than the forgiveness of sin which has passed upon all God's people. "In those days, and in that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be NONE; and the sins of Judah, and they shall NOT BE FOUND--for I will pardon them whom I reserve," (Jeremiah 50:20.) "You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea," (Micah 7:19.) Timid child of God! loving disciple of Christ! see your sins all cast into these unfathomable depths. Sought for by justice, by the law, by Satan, by yourself, you shall never find them--all, all entirely and eternally forgiven--annihilated by God Himself. Walking in the happy sense of a present forgiveness, you will walk carefully, circumspectly, holily, hating your sins, and the sin still dwelling within you, all the more that God, your sin-pardoning God, has entirely and forever forgiven you.

Take the state of ACCEPTANCE. Is it a present or a future blessing? Is it a state the believer first enters into when he enters into glory? or, does he enter into it now, as the condition and the earnest of that glory? Most assuredly, if we are not brought into a state of justification by grace here, we have no pledge of a state of justification in glory hereafter. The act of justification passes upon the believing soul in this life, and is his title-deed to the inheritance of the life which is to come. The language of the Holy Spirit is confirmatory of this truth--"To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He HAS MADE US ACCEPTED in the Beloved." "BEING JUSTIFIED by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And then we have the statement respecting the righteousness of Christ, which justifies. It is declared to be, "unto all and UPON all those who believe." Believe this to be your present state before God. Not more fully, though more openly and declaratively, justified will you be when the Lord shall extend the welcome, "Come, you blessed of my Father," than you are now if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to the salvation of your soul. "ACCEPTED"--present time--not may be, or shall be, but, "ACCEPTED in the Beloved."

Oh, what peace will follow from the Spirit's witness to this your present condition as in the sight of God! Realizing that you are clothed in white garments--that God looks upon you only in Christ, lovely through His loveliness put upon you--you will daily clasp the belt of prayer and faith round the robe of righteousness, and so walk with Jesus in all the growing holiness of a full, a free, a present justification of your soul by Jesus Christ our Lord.

A present salvation, also, involves a present act of ADOPTION. This cannot possibly be a future, remote exercise of God's love. If we are in a state of regeneracy, born again by the Spirit of adoption, then, beloved, "Now are we the sons of God." "And because you ARE Sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." It is on the basis of this our present adoption that we draw near unto God as our Father who are in heaven. We call Him "our Father"--we feel Him to be our Father--He responds to us as a Father, and when we depart out of

this life, in the words of Jesus, our Elder Brother, we "go to the Father."

Walk, then, with God, beloved, in the sweet, holy consciousness of your present adoption. Not more fully adopted, not more really will you be a child of God when you arrive in heaven and see your Father there, than at this present moment, if, born again, you have received in faith the Lord Jesus Christ. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power [or privilege] to BECOME THE SONS OF GOD, even to those who believe on His name." Such is your present filial standing before God. Oh, what a motive to walk worthy of so high a relationship!--what an encouragement to draw near to God as to a Father, acknowledging sin, unveiling sorrow, revealing need, and in all circumstances and places--in mental sadness, in heart-grief, in temporal need--pouring all into that Father's ear, embosoming all in that Father's heart!

Equally, also, is our SANCTIFICATION by the Spirit a present attainment of grace. It is of great importance to keep this prominently before us, since our holiness here is our fitness for our glory hereafter. "Sanctification, indeed, unlike the parts of the new creation we have referred to, is a gradual work, yet, seminally, it is a complete thing. In its growth progressive, yet in its nature perfect. Still, gradual and incomplete, as our personal holiness is, it is an actual and a present grace, and may be advanced to a high standard of culture. "This is the will of God, even your SANCTIFICATION." Again we read, "God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through SANCTIFICATION of the Spirit."

For this high attainment let us press onward. Possessing in the renewed nature the germ of perfect holiness--its perfection arrived at only in glory--let us seek its development and growth, that we may be more holy, more separate from the ungodly world, more decidedly on the Lord's side, fairer copies of the mind, the loveliness, and example of Christ, maturing in grace here, amid all its opposition and difficulty, for the glory that is to be revealed in us at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

II. The way this assurance may be attained

The question now arises, how may the believer arrive to this assurance of his personal and present salvation? That it is attainable, we have shown from the precepts and examples cited from the Word of God. The question is, how may I attain unto this grace?

1. We answer, first, by a direct and simple dealing with the Lord Jesus. An assurance of salvation must necessarily spring from the great Object of salvation. We only know that we are in the light by coming to the light. No one immured in a dungeon can speak of the warmth and radiance of the sun experimentally. He must emerge from his darkness and stand in the light. A sick man could hardly expect to derive healing but from the process of healing. He could not reasonably expect to be cured but by the remedy prescribed for the cure. Now, how may we arrive at a comfortable assurance that we are saved? By dealing with the Lord Jesus, by whom and in whom we are saved. We derive light only from the sun, vitality only from the air, sustenance only from the bread. It is by a personal, believing, simple apprehension of Christ, looking only to Him, resting only in Him, receiving only from Him, that we can possibly know that we are saved.

Assurance will never arise from looking at ourselves, or from mixing up anything with Christ. How can we possibly know that our guilt is cleansed, but as we wash in the blood? how that our people are justified, but as we put on the righteousness? how that God has accepted, and delights in us, but as we know that we stand in the Beloved? This is assurance of salvation--the full, unqualified

acceptance of Christ. Approaching as a poor, empty, miserable sinner, and standing in this Divine Sun, all bathed in His light, all invested with His beams, all covered with His glory, we shall no more question the fact of our being saved, saved now, and saved forever, than we should, in our right minds, doubt the fact that the sun shines at noon while gazing upon its meridian splendor. This is assurance of salvation, looking believingly at the Savior.

What ground have we for knowing that we are saved, but as we see our great debt paid by the offering and sacrifice of Jesus? our sins forgiven through His atoning merit? our persons justified, and we counted as righteous through the imputation of His obedience? We must in faith behold the Lord Jesus answering for all as our Surety, undertaking all as our Mediator, accomplishing all as our Divine Redeemer, before we can possess a firm persuasion that we are saved. The blood and righteousness of the Lord constitute the basis of assurance. Taking our stand upon this, we can exclaim with humble assurance, "'I KNOW whom I have believed.' I believe in Jesus, that He has merited all, suffered all, perfected all for me--paying all my debt, enduring all my punishment, endowing me with all His wealth, and investing me with all His glory."

You have, perhaps, dear reader, long been in want of the assurance that you are saved. But you have sought it in yourself, and not in Christ. You have been searching for evidences amid the shadows and the taint of your own heart, the imperfect traces of your own doings, the varied exercises of your mind, and have sought them in vain. But now try the experiment--an experiment that has never failed one poor soul--of finding the evidence of your present salvation in a believing looking to a present Savior. Rest in Jesus from the burden and the guilt of sin; rest in Jesus from the conflict with doubt and fear; rest in Jesus from the fear of death and the dread of condemnation; rest in Jesus from your entire self; rest in His finished work, in His accepted sacrifice, in His boundless grace, in His unchanging love, and present intercession, and your assurance will be built upon a rock, against which no force of Satan or unbelief shall ever prevail.

The chief instrument by which assurance is obtained is, FAITH. It flows through the channel of believing. Indeed, the best definition of assurance of present salvation is, a lively and continuously-acting faith on the Lord Jesus. Assurance is believing, and nothing more. Believing that Jesus died for sinners--believing the record God has given concerning His Son--believing that His death was a sufficient atonement, and that His resurrection was its acceptance of the Father--simply, unquestioningly believing this--faith laying hold of the great salvation with a believing and assured grasp--hope sweetly and firmly resting upon it, yes, as sweetly and as firmly as upon the everlasting hills--assurance of salvation will follow, as any effect follows its cause. Now, according to the degree and strength of your faith will be the degree and strength of your assurance of salvation. In proportion as you believe in the Lord Jesus, faith will bring into your soul the peace, joy, comfort, and hope which ever follow in its channel; and the deeper and the wider the channel, the deeper and the wider will be the blessings which it conveys to your soul. It shall be unto you according to your faith.

Oh, then, cease to do, and labor, and desire--all which exercise profits nothing. Cast overboard the oars with which you have impelled your bark against the tide, and spread your canvas to the heavenly gale. Trust to the irresistible power of believing prayer. Let your faith, dropping every other confidence, take hold of Christ--His person, His love, His word of promise. And the sun which shines, and, in its shining, warms into life, loveliness, and fertility the landscape of nature,

will not diffuse more vitality, gladness, and song, than will that simple faith which clasps its arms around the Savior, and so brings the ocean-fullness of a present salvation into your soul.

In proportion, then, to the simplicity of your faith in the Lord Jesus will be the personal conviction of your safety. Brood not over your sins, but confess them with a humble, lowly, and believing heart to Jesus, and the assurance of pardon will follow. Be not dismayed at your demerit, but take it to the infinite merits of Christ, and the assurance of acceptance will follow. Rescued by a lifeboat from drowning, I am saved; if, however, I have any doubt of the fact that I am actually within the rescuing vessel, my conviction and joy of safety must be seriously diminished by that doubt. But, firmly believing that I am in the vessel, floating securely and calmly upon the foaming billows, at which now I smile, the assurance that I am actually saved, and the transport springing from that assurance, will be unimpaired and unclouded by a doubt. In proportion to the hold which your believing heart has upon the Lord Jesus--the Divine Lifeboat of the soul--for He came into the world to save sinners--will be the strength and the joy of your personal salvation. Believe that you are actually in Christ--realize your union with Him--deal only with the infinite sufficiency of His person and the complete fullness of His work--receive Him as a sinner all guilty, as a bankrupt having nothing to pay, as sin-diseased, having resorted to every physician, having tried every remedy, and as being nothing bettered but rather grown worse--dealing simply, and fully, and only with Jesus the Savior--and, with the holy apostle, you, also, shall triumphantly exclaim, "I KNOW whom I have believed."

In addition to the assurance of salvation which a believing apprehension of the Lord Jesus imparts, we have the witness of the Holy Spirit testifying to our possession of the new nature. Having formed this new and divine nature within us, it is His office, as His delight, always to authenticate its existence and unveil its glories. In the new creation of the soul, the noblest achievement of His creative power, He has made His personal and permanent abode. "He [the Spirit] shall ABIDE with you forever." "The Spirit himself bears WITNESS with our spirit that we are the children of God." Thus we have the highest source of assurance--the testimony of God the Holy Spirit Himself. Earnestly seek it. His seal, His attestation, His endorsement will quell every fear, annihilate even doubt, and not the shadow of a shade shall veil the existence or becloud the luster of God's new creation in your soul.

Eternal and blessed Spirit! though I have slighted, grieved, and wounded You times without number, stifling the still small voice of Your love, and checking the gentle constraints of Your grace, yet shine upon Your new creation in my soul, awaken the joys of God's salvation in my heart, dispel my sadness, dissolve my darkness, and turn my night of weeping into a morning of joy!

Such are some of the channels through which the assurance of a present state of salvation flows to us.

The means of its attaining assurance.

Let us, in conclusion, glance at some of the means of its attainment. PRAYER shall be the first we quote. For this great, comforting, and sanctifying attainment in grace the Lord will be inquired of to give it. It comes not forth but by prayer. As communion with God is the chief characteristic of the new creature, the life of God in the soul, so it is by this means that that life is kept vigorous, health,

and progressive. The willful neglect of prayer--the soul withdrawing even from what is holy, that it might enter into the "Holy of Holies" for secret communion with the Invisible One--will seriously affect the assurance of our salvation. But closeness of walk with God, frequent communion with Jesus, will keep the heart in bloom, will nourish the germ of holiness, and so encompass the soul as with a shield as shall prevent the accumulation of these corroding doubts and fears around the heart which render its spiritual action sluggish and feeble. Then, give yourself to prayer! Draw near unto God, and He will draw near unto you. He inspires prayer, loves prayer, listens to prayer, answers prayer; and by prayer you shall live in the happy, holy experience of a present salvation, walking in the full assurance of your saving interest in Christ, of your adoption into the family of God.

Meditation on God's Word essentially aids our comfortable assurance. The truth as it is in Jesus is the manna of the renewed soul, the spiritual nourishment of the life of God within us. "Your words were found, and I did EAT them; and your word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by EVERY WORD that proceeds out of the MOUTH OF GOD." There is nothing so nourishing to the new nature--nourishment so appropriate to the new man--as the pure wheat of God's Word. Its glorious doctrines of grace strengthen it, its divine precepts mold it, its precious promises comfort it, its blessed hopes animate it. It is from this Divine granary that the true nutriment is drawn by which the new man lives. Hold fast God's Word in its integrity, contend earnestly for the faith, live upon every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, let your soul stand in awe of His Word, read it meditatively, study it prayerfully, treat it reverentially, believe it fully--so shall it feed and nourish and render fruitful the new nature of God within your soul. Thus shall you be a man of God, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Nor would we fail to remark that full assurance is only found in the way of holy obedience. Speaking of the relation of Christian evidence with evangelical holiness, our Lord says, "If any man will DO His will, he shall KNOW of the doctrine whether it be of God." By the same test--doing the Divine will--a man of God may know his heavenly calling. Ever remembering that, "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams," reverence for the lowliest command of Christ will be a deep and prevailing sentiment of the true believer. Obedience to one divine command will be, in his estimation, of more importance than the costliest sacrifice. Now, in this path of holy, unreserved obedience the Lord meets His disciples with tokens of His favor.

In seeking to carry out the Lord's will in the small as the great precepts of His Word, in the minor as the more important concerns of life, in all things and under all circumstances doing the will of God, the believer shall lack no evidence of his new birth. "You meet him that rejoices and works in righteousness, those that remember you in your ways." Oh, rich the comfort, deep the peace, unclouded the assurance which will flow into his heart who seeks to stand complete in all the will of God.

Christian assurance and unreserved obedience are inseparably linked in the experience of God's saints. This, perhaps, may suggest a defect in your walk, my reader. You have been seeking the assurance of your salvation, but not in the path that has been most honoring to the Divine commands as a child of God. Examine well your obedience! Is there any command of Christ wilfully dishonored, any divine precept knowingly slighted, any required cross daily neglected in your Christian walk? Then marvel not that the trembling fear, the anxious doubt, the darkling cloud

intercepts the comfortable possession of your interest in the Savior. Take up the cross, however self-denying, and follow the Lord fully, and you shall know from most happy experience that in keeping His commands there is great reward.

To sum up the whole matter--prayerfully and watchfully avoid whatever tends to impair and becloud your assurance. A distant following of Jesus, much contact with the world, too close communion with cold-hearted, half-hearted Christians and inconsistent religious professors, trifling with conscience, neglect of confession of sin, dealing slightly with atoning blood, looking into self instead of looking unto Jesus, needless exposure to temptation, reserves in obedience, a shrinking from the cross, undervaluing the means of grace--because of these things many of the Lord's people are weak and sickly, and many sleep, and walk not in the peaceful, joyous, holy experience of a present salvation.

But, beware of making a savior of assurance. This were to rob you of the blessing altogether. Whatever in the experience of the believer displaces Christ, casts a deep shadow upon his soul. Whatever is exalted above its proper place, or is exaggerated beyond its legitimate position in the plan of salvation, must materially affect the happiness of the Christian. Christ is all in our salvation. The alpha and the omega, the first and the last. Place assurance of salvation upon a level with salvation itself, and you have introduced a disturbing element. Exalt any part of Christian experience to a level with Christ, make it essential to salvation, and you dishonor the Lord Jesus, and veil the sun from your soul.

Assurance that you are saved is not an essential principle of your salvation. It may be necessary to your holy and happy walk to be fully persuaded that you are a believer in Christ, but it is not necessary to your standing with acceptance before God. Christ, and Christ alone. Christ, and nothing more. Christ, and nothing less. Therefore, in the absence of that full and comfortable persuasion of your eternal safety which you desire, still keep your eye intent upon Christ, who can save you, and is prepared to save you and bring you to His eternal glory, though in weeping and mourning, you follow Him to the grave. Mary weeping at the tomb had no assurance that her Lord was alive; and yet how she loved, and how He loved, and how near Jesus was to her! Look not, then, to your assurance, but--look simply, directly, and only to Christ.

But, make sure work of conversion! Let not this essential, all-important, all-momentous change be a dubious, uncertain, unauthenticated matter with you. So long as you remain unconverted, your condition is one of imminent peril. What, if leaving your home in the morning radiant with life, before nightfall you are borne back to it--a corpse? For what is life but a vapor? And among all uncertainties what more uncertain than it? "In the morning it flourishes and grows up, in the evening it is cut down and withers." What, if amid the still hours of midnight, the summons should be heard, "Your soul is required of you?" and, before morning light, your body lies a 'ruined tent' upon the ground? Are you in readiness to meet the solemn change? We beseech you, then, make sure work of the NEW BIRTH. Take nothing for granted in a matter involving interests so momentous and precious. Be satisfied only with LIFE in your soul. All things new, the divine image restored, Christ precious, the new nature blooming and fruitful, maturing beneath the Sun of Righteousness for its native paradise on high. But scorn it, trifle with it, postpone it if you will--

"This fearful truth will still remain,

The sinner must be BORN AGAIN,

Or sink to endless woe!"

Thus living upon a present Savior--present ever at your side, in all places and at all times--you will live upon a present salvation. It is with the present, fleeting though it be, rather than with the future, we have more immediately to do. The present is more solemn and momentous than the future, since the future is all that the present makes it. A present of grace involves a future of glory. The Lord has graciously provided for the present of the believer in the life of faith He has appointed him to live. The life he now lives in the flesh, with all its needs, sorrows, and trials, is by the faith of the Son of God. So live! Go and tell the Lord Jesus every present need, perplexity, and trial. "To whom COMING." Coming now--coming incessantly--ever coming--coming with the same trials and needs, the same backslidings and infirmities, the same sins and sorrows--never ceasing to come so long as the heart has a corruption to be subdued, earth a sorrow to be comforted, or life a service to be done.

What an evidence is afforded of the DIVINITY of the Savior in the assurance which the apostle expresses, and into which we desire to mold every Christian reader of this volume! What was the treasure which Paul committed to Jesus Christ? It is something personal, something valuable, something precious. What was it? What but his immortal soul--his redeemed body--his whole interests for eternity? Would he entrust this deposit--a deposit compared with which the wealth of the universe were as the dust in the balance--to a creature--a man--a mere man--an arm of flesh--a human savior? Oh, extreme of folly! Oh, dream of madness! He knew whom he believed. He knew Him to be GOD--absolute God--the "Almighty God"--the only-begotten Son of God--the "brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person"--"God manifest in the flesh." To no other hands but those of a DIVINE REDEEMER can we safely confide our undying soul.

Who that possesses a sense of the value of his soul--that has an enlightened view of its relation to eternity, its sinfulness, its accountability, its immortality, its exposure to an ever-living death--would confide its deathless interests to any than to Deity? My reader, Paul never dreamed of entrusting the keeping and salvation of his soul to a created Redeemer. Man, though Christ was, Paul knew that the light of Divinity gleamed from His eye, that the thunder of Divinity slumbered in His arm, and that the words and power of Divinity were upon His tongue. Well, also, did he know that, possessing all the essential attributes of God, Christ had attested His Divinity by the miracles which He wrought. He transformed water into wine, fed thousands with a few loaves, raised the dead, restored the paralyzed, healed the sick, ejected demons, controlled the elements, and trod the earth, as a province of His empire, with the keys of the invisible world pendent from His belt. And then dying, all nature testifying her sympathy with her expiring Creator, He burst from the imprisonment of the grave, and was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. We marvel not at the bold, triumphant language of Paul, "I know whom I have believed."

To that same Divine Redeemer, as unto a faithful Creator, you too, O believer, have entrusted the salvation of your soul; and with like precious faith, and with like full assurance, you may confide your interests for time and for eternity--your present of grace and your future of glory--confidently and safely in the hands of Jesus. Oh, do you think that He will not securely keep what you have

committed to His care against the great day of judgment? Do you think that he will not guard, as with unslumbering eye, the soul for which he sorrowed and sobbed in Gethsemane--suffered, bled, and died on the cross? Stagger not, then, at this Divine and precious truth through unbelief. Command your doubts to be gone. Give your fears to the winds. Jesus will keep to the end, and will conduct in safety and in triumph from grace to glory, the lowest, weakest of His saints. Not one shall perish. The hand that touched with trembling faith the border of His robe, shall sweep the golden harp of heaven to His praise. The eye that caught the dimmest view of His cross of humiliation, shall gaze with unclouded vision upon the throne of His ineffable glory. Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied, and both the Savior and the saved shall rejoice together through eternity. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

ANXIETY FOR CONVERSION

ANXIETY FOR CONVERSION

"What must I do to be saved?"-- Acts 16:30

Many readers of this work may have traveled through its pages to the present chapter with a sad conviction that hitherto their spiritual state touching the momentous subject of which it treats has been unmet. Feeling that they cannot lay claim to Christian experience so advanced, they are ready to close the book in despair of having any part or lot in the matter--as possessing no scriptural evidence of spiritual quickening in the soul. To meet the case of such, whose very anxiety is no small sign of life, we devote the present chapter of our work, designed to exhibit conversion in its incipient form--the sincere, earnest anxiety of a soul to be converted. We select, as the illustration of this stage, the often-quoted and familiar, but not less appropriate and instructive, case of the Philippian jailer. The inquiry which he proposes must, more or less intense, be the inquiry of every individual born again. All must commence their spiritual course from this starting-point--all with that momentous inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?"

It is an inquiry which only God can answer, as it is a state which only the Holy Spirit can produce. It is the most profound, the most weighty, the most solemn question that ever stirred human feeling or awakened human thought. Traverse the circle of human inquiry, and select the most learned, important, and thrilling subject that ever engaged the intellect or called into being the energy and enterprise of man, and place it in contrast with this single, simple question--"What must I do to be saved?"--and it pales into the profoundest insignificance. It is as the child gathering pebbles on the shore, compared with the diver searching for the pearl, or the miner excavating for the diamond. It will be seen, then, how much importance we attach to the first or incipient stage of the new birth. So far from despising the day of small things in grace, so far from regarding with indifference the anxious, trembling state of mind which the question betrays, it presents itself to our view as the most important, touching, and lovely stage of conversion.

Can there be any difficulty in tracing this anxiety for salvation to other than its proper and legitimate SOURCE? Man could not convey it, nature could not inspire it, flesh and blood could not reveal it. It is of God. We turn to the trembling jailer. Two great convulsions were transpiring at the same moment. The one was natural--the earth quaking; the other was supernatural--the soul morally convulsed from a sense of sin. God is at no loss for means to bring to Himself His chosen people. He can employ an earthquake, a flash of lightning, a thunder-clap, a sudden bereavement, to rouse the soul to the all-important concerns of eternity. Tell us not that, that conversion is not genuine, that, that spiritual change is not real, because produced by some stirring, alarming event of God's providence--a convulsion of nature, the prostration of health, the loss of property, the knell of a departed soul. "Lo, all these things works God oftentimes with men."

God grant that the solemn, startling events of His providence in your history, my reader, may not be without their spiritual impress upon your soul! Sad, yes, most dreadful, if, when your present

probation closes in a destiny changeless as the throne of Him who will appoint it, it should appear that you were deaf when God spoke, you trifled when God was serious, were impenitent when God called; and that all His startling providences, solemn warnings, earnest and touching appeals tended but to fit you all the more for condemnation, as the sun's heat seasons the fuel for the flame. But we address the soul anxious for salvation.

We approach the consideration of this state of mind with solemn and tender interest. If the angelic host contemplate the spectacle with wonder, and find in its study material for joy--beholding in it the fruit of Christ's death and the wondrous working of God's grace, the struggles and the pangs of a soul passing into the new birth--surely we are justified in regarding it as possessing vital and transcendent interest, worthy of our deepest, tenderest consideration.

Anxiety for salvation is, as we have remarked, conversion in its latent or incipient state. It may arise from various causes, but essentially it is the same. You feel yourself a lost sinner. You have made the startling, momentous discovery that you are not saved! Hitherto, living in ignorance of yourself as a sinner, and of your state as under condemnation; living for the world as your portion and for self as your god, you now awake as from the sleep of death, and find and feel yourself lost, guilty, self-destroyed. Your great anxiety now is--how you may be saved. Shall we attempt to analyze your anxiety? You feel yourself--a SINNER. This is the great concern of your soul. Sin is your distress, your burden, your alarm. Sin as sin against God, sin as polluting your entire being, sin as exposing you to condemnation, sin as the most oppressive weight that ever crushed you to the earth, sin as separating you from the holy on earth and from the glorified in heaven, is the cause of present conviction, anxiety, and alarm.

But, startling and solemn as this discovery of your condition as a sinner is, be not more startled if we pronounce it as most blessed! It is the first dawn of light, the first pulse of life in your soul. Before you are healed, you must feel that you are diseased. Before you are cleansed, you must feel that you are unclean. Before you are saved, you must feel that you are lost. Before you repair to the Savior, you must feel that you are a sinner. Do you see the fitness of all this?

Administer medicine to a corpse, and supply it with nourishment. Is there a fitness, a harmony in the means you are employing to the end? Most assuredly not. But, let there be life--conviction of disease, sense of hunger--and your proceeding is rational and proper. Now, all this will apply to your spiritual condition. None come to Jesus but under the vital drawings of the Spirit. None come for healing but the sin-sick. None repair to Him for the bread of life but the soul hungering for salvation. I am now supposing this to be your case. You are inquiring the way of life. You are anxious to be converted. You long to be saved. This is just the process the Holy Spirit is taking to bring you to the Savior. The illumination of the understanding, the conviction of sin, the enkindling of godly sorrow, is a work supernatural and divine. To withdraw the mental veil, to remove the spiritual cataract from the spiritual eye, to unlock the chamber of the heart, to crush the rebellion of the will, and to subdue the whole soul before the cross, oh, this is the work of God the Spirit, and is the sure precursor of that New Birth, which, transpiring in grace here, shall be perfected and eternized in glory hereafter.

The soul-anxiety you now feel, being the fruit of the Holy Spirit, will terminate in your full conversion to God. Conversion does not depend upon the depth of sin-conviction, nor upon the clearness of faith's eye. In one night the Philippian jailer repented and believed, was converted,

saved, and baptized. That night that heard, amid the trembling of the earth, the earnest inquiry of the alarmed and anxious penitent, heard songs of gladness in heaven over one sinner that was saved.

And why not you? In one hour you may be awakened, converted, saved. Listen to the recorded conversion of an eminent saint of God in tracing the way the Lord brought him to Himself--"As I was alone in the field, all my past life was opened plainly before me, and I saw clearly that it had been filled up with sin. I went and sat down in the shade of a tree, where my prayers and tears, my longing and striving for a better heart with all my doings, were set before me in such a light that I perceived I could never make myself better, should I live ever so long. Divine justice appeared clear as condemnation, and I saw that God had a right to do with me as He would. My soul yielded all to His hands, fell at His feet, and was silent and calm before Him. And while I sat there I was enabled by Divine light to see the perfect righteousness of Christ, and the freeness and richness of His grace, with such clearness that my soul was drawn forth to trust in Him for salvation, and I wondered that others did not also come to Him who had enough for all. The Word of God and the promises of His grace appeared firmer than a rock, and I was astonished at my previous unbelief. My heavy burden was gone, tormenting fears were fled, and my joy was unspeakable. Yet this change was so different from my former ideas of conversion, that for above two days I had no thought of having experienced it. Then I heard a sermon read which gave the characters of the children of God, and I had an inward witness that those characters were wrought in me--such as a spirit of prayer, a hatred of sin, an overcoming of the world, love to the brethren, and love to enemies; and I conclude that I then had the sealing of the Spirit of God, that I was a child of His. New ideas and dispositions were given me; the worship and service of God and obedience to His will were the delight of my soul. I found such happiness therein as I never had in all the vanities of the world." (Memoir of Rev. Backus of America.)

Such may be the joyous termination of your present serious impressions, anxious feelings and desires. Your inquiry is--how you may be saved. If so, then your mind is brought into sympathy with the greatest work in which the God of heaven ever embarked--the work of saving sinners. Salvation! It is but one word, and yet, oh how pregnant with significance! How glorious its meaning! Salvation was the one thought of the Father from eternity, when He devised the scheme of its accomplishment. Salvation was the one thought of Jesus when he made His advent to our world, with the blood-sweat, the sighs, and sobs of Gethsemane, the cross, the agonies, and the passion of Calvary confronting Him. His one mission was to--save. He objected not at the price, hesitated not at the terms, shrank not from the sacrifice. Though it involved such humiliation, and such sorrow, and such suffering, and such a death, and such a sacrifice as convulsed the universe--struck terror into hell and awoke amazement in heaven--the Son of God dying for the chief of sinners!--yet he voluntarily undertook and faithfully finished the salvation of countless millions. One life sacrificed--and by that one life sacrificed innumerable lives saved. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." Such is God's salvation, worthy in all respects of Him who embarked His all of love, and power, and wealth in its accomplishment!

Contemplate it in some of its transcendent blessings. WHAT IS IT TO BE SAVED?

1. To be saved is to be delivered from the guilt and despotism of sin. And what a salvation is this! Who can estimate its greatness and its preciousness, but he who has felt the burden of sin uplifted

and removed, the corrodings of guilt cleansed and effaced entirely and forever? This the blood of Jesus effects. That blood was sacrificial and atoning, expiatory and cleansing. "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." "He bore the sin of many." "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." "His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

What truth can be more luminous or what declaration more precious than this? What could avail to efface so deep a stain, to blot out so dark a spot, to annihilate so heinous a thing as SIN, but the atoning blood of Immanuel, the incarnate God? And this BLOOD has done it!--has done it now, has done it fully, and has done it forever in the happy experience of all who believe in Jesus. Bring your sins, your crimes, your transgressions in believing contact with Christ! Let them touch the cross--and the cloud shall dissolve, the chains shall fall, the burden shall vanish, and no sounds shall linger upon your ear but the Words of Jesus--"Your sins are forgiven--go, and sin no more."

2. To be saved is to be delivered from the condemnation of the law. In an unconverted, non-saved state, we lie under the curse, and are shut up to the eternal condemnation of the law. "The law works wrath." "Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." But the salvation of the Lord Jesus is a deliverance from the law in its anathematizing and condemnatory power. It flashes no more curse, and rolls no more condemnation over the heads of those who are in Christ Jesus. "Christ has delivered us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." And oh, what a salvation is this! The curse annihilated, the sentence repealed, the condemnation removed, and yet the law fully repaid, perfectly obeyed, divinely honored and magnified in the eyes of all holy intelligences, in the life of Him "by whose obedience many are made righteous." Thus, our Lawgiver is our Law-Fulfiller; and His fulfillment of the law is imputed to us who believe; and so we become the righteousness of God in Him, which righteousness is unto all and upon all those who believe.

3. It follows from the preceding statement, strictly logical, that the salvation of Christ insures our deliverance from the wrath which is to come. If there is no present condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, then the future, with all its tremendous realities, its dreadful solemnities, unveils no dread, awakens no terror, to those who are saved. The Lord Jesus, offering Himself as our substitute, engaging as our surety, obeying for us, suffering for us, dying for us, has exhausted the curse of the law, drained the cup of wrath, and saved us from its future outpouring. Having by sovereign grace turned from idols to serve the living and true God, we now "wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come." Oh, what a salvation this! Saved from the quenchless flames, from the undying worm, from the companionship of the lost, from the pangs of the death which is eternal! Who would not utter the cry--never ceasing to utter it, until, piercing the heart of the Savior, it brought down the gracious response--"Lord, save, or I perish!"

And still the great question remains unanswered--"What must I do to be saved?" We wish the anxious inquirer particularly to mark how the apostles--those sons of consolation, those blessed heralds of the cross, to whom was given the tongue of the learned, that they might know how to speak a word in season to the weary--met the question. They did not commence, as, alas! too many human teachers unskilled in the Word do, by investigating the nature or gauging the depth of the jailer's conviction; nor did they set him upon the hopeless task of doing something of himself to

soothe the intense anguish of his soul; neither did they direct him to an external reformation of his habits--to go to the synagogue, to partake of baptism, or the communion of the Lord's supper--to fast, and pray, and read. Still less did they exhort him to throw off his serious thoughts, to drown his mental distress in scenes of worldly frivolity and excitement. Oh, no! Miserable comforters they would have been, physicians unskilled in the art of spiritual healing, to have employed means like these--means which must have proved a vain and cruel mockery of a case so peculiar and desperate.

But what did they? They at once preached to him JESUS--they uplifted the cross--directed his eye to the Crucified--brought him to the Savior. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." What a marvelous announcement! How suitable, how simple the remedy! This was all they prescribed. Not a word about election, or baptism, or church, or reformation. The one instrument of healing was faith; and the one Object of that faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And such is the gospel, the glorious gospel, of the blessed God. It proclaims with clarion notes of sweetest melody, everywhere and to all, "BELIEVE, and be SAVED!" All man's working, all human merit, all self-doing of the anxious soul is utterly ignored. What says the Scriptures? "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his FAITH is credited as righteousness." Anxious soul, listen to the joyful sound!--welcome the good news of the gospel of the grace of God! Sinner though you are--the vilest, the greatest, the very chief--receive in faith the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!

Do not hesitate because of the feebleness or the dimness of your faith. Faith is not your Savior, but JESUS. The mightiest faith ever possessed would not save you, apart from the sin-atonement Lamb. Therefore it is that the weakest, dimmest faith ever exercised in the Lord Jesus will save from going down to the pit the greatest criminal. Jesus is mighty to save, is willing to save, is pledged to save, is eternally glorified in saving. Without a work, without one particle of merit--as a poor bankrupt sinner, having nothing to pay--He has promised, and is pledged to save you to the uttermost. Did He ever repel a sincere penitent? Did He ever reject an humble suppliant? Did He ever refuse to save a poor sinner? Did He ever scorn and reject a trembling, sorrowing outcast? Oh, never! That case is yet to transpire of a soul convinced of sin by the Spirit, and falling down at the Savior's feet seeking His pardoning mercy, on whom He bends a frown of anger, exclaiming, "Begone! you are too vile, too unworthy, too great a sinner to be saved; the sins of your youth, of riper years, of old age, exclude you from my mercy--place you beyond the pale of my salvation. You have resisted light, have stifled conviction, have striven with the Spirit, and there remains to you no room for repentance, no sacrifice for sin, no hope of pardon." We say, this fact is yet to transpire. And when it does, there will be a profound and prolonged silence in heaven, and a loud laugh of fiendish triumph in hell!

What, then, hinders your coming to Christ, and coming to Him now, O anxious soul? Is it ELECTION? Election is among your greatest encouragements to come to Christ; since, were you not one of His elect, the Holy Spirit would not have convinced you of sin, and Christ would not have inclined you to come, by His grace. All that the Father gave to Him shall come to Him; and your coming to Christ under the drawing of the Spirit is just the evidence that you are one of those given to Him of God. Who will dare affirm that you are not one included in the eternal purpose of God, whom He has made to see, feel, and deplore your impotence, vileness, and nothingness in

His sight? "Whom He predestinated, them He also CALLED;" and the voice of His effectual grace is now calling you to Himself, and so you have irrefutable evidence that you are one of His. Making your calling sure, you will make your election sure; and so, taking hold by faith of the lowest link in the golden chain of God's salvation, you shall rise to the highest, and before long partake of the rapture of the saints, and find yourself in heaven--having passed from grace to glory!

What hinders you coming now to Christ? Is it your SINS? Why should this be a bar? Jesus made His advent into the world to save sinners; He shed His atoning blood to save sinners; He gave Himself a sacrifice to save sinners; He rose again from the dead to save sinners; and He is now exalted at the right hand of God to give repentance and remission of sins to poor sinners. In addition to all this, He has left on earth His great and glorious promise, that, "him that comes unto me, I will never cast out." Upon this magnificent, this precious promise you may venture, and hope, and rely.

This plank has saved many a drowning soul from going down into the yawning pit; and if you will with simplest faith grasp it, it will save you. Accumulate all the arguments, objections, and difficulties to your coming to Christ which it is possible for sin to allege, unbelief to suggest, or Satan invent, and hurl them in faith against this one Divine and gracious promise, and they will fall as powerless, broken, and scattered as the billows which launch their thunders against the ocean's rock. Bunyan, in his own quaint but forcible way, thus puts it--"But, I am a great sinner,' say you. 'I will never cast out,' says Christ. 'But, I am an old sinner,' say you. 'I will never cast out,' says Christ, 'But, I am a hard-hearted sinner,' say you. 'I will never cast out,' says Christ. 'But, I have served Satan all my days,' say you. 'I will never cast out,' says Christ. 'But, I have sinned against light,' say you. 'I will never cast out,' says Christ. 'But, I have sinned against mercy,' say you. 'I will never cast out,' says Christ. 'But, I have no good thing to bring with me,' say you. 'I will never cast out,' says Christ.

Thus might I go on, and show you that this promise was provided to answer all your objections, and to ease all your fears. Many, like you, have feared that the Savior would not receive them; but 'I will never cast out' is a promise of Christ upon which millions more will yet rely, and which, when the grass is withered and the flower faded of all creature strength and glory, shall endure forever. You blessed spirits in glory! tell us, is it not a faithful saying that Jesus Christ saves sinners?" You Saul of Tarsus, who once gloated in the dying agonies of Christ's first martyr, yourself a Pharisee and blasphemer, tell us, is it not a faithful saying that Jesus receives and saves sinners, even the very chief? And you Mary Magdalen, once demoniacally possessed, tell us, is it not a faithful saying that Jesus has might to cast out the Evil One, and save to the uttermost the poor victim of his power? And you expiring malefactor, appealing in penitence and faith to the crucified Savior, at whose side you did languish and die, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom," tell us, is it not a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners?

And what, my anxious reader, is the testimony which this great cloud of witnesses bears?--"Oh, yes, it is a most true and precious saying, worthy of all belief and acceptance. We came to Jesus as sinners, the vilest, the greatest, the very chief, and He welcomed and saved us; we washed in His blood, and we clothed us in His righteousness, and He saved us by His grace, and brought us home to glory, and now we sing, Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own

blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Anxious soul! humble penitent! come to Jesus, and come now! For, "we believe that, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they."

THE TRIAL OF THE NEW BIRTH

THE TRIAL OF THE NEW BIRTH

"The Lord tries the righteous."-- Psalms 11:5

It is the perfection of God that He does everything for Himself; this, while it is the greatest imperfection of the creature, is the highest perfection of the Creator. The works of creation exhibit the glory of God. Not an insect floats in the sunbeam, not a flower blooms in the valley, not a dewdrop sparkles upon the rose leaf, but has its end in God. It is equally so in the works of providence. All its events--the greatest, the most minute, the mysterious, and the lucid illustrate His wisdom and promote His glory, and terminate in Himself. If in the kingdoms of creation and of providence it is so, how much more in the kingdom of grace! The fall of man from his original righteousness, to his recovery from that condition by electing grace, and his final translation to glory, is that masterpiece of Divine workmanship which will fill heaven with God's glory and replenish eternity with His praise.

We have a striking illustration of this thought in the subject to which the present chapter is devoted--the process of trial through which God permits the renewed nature of the believer to pass. It might seem to a superficial eye, or to the mind of a young convert to Christ, at first sight strange and incongruous that the Lord, who loves the righteous, as He does, should often subject them to trials so severe and so prolonged. That He should impose sufferings so intense, and permit sorrows so many and deep, to come upon those whom He has pronounced the chosen objects of His love, in whom is all His delight, who are His peculiar and costly treasure, tender and precious to Him as the apple of His eye, seems mysterious, if not inequitable.

And yet, all is right! It is proper and befitting that the new nature of God in the souls of His people should evidence its genuineness, develop its power, and unveil its glory. And the mode which the God of love and wisdom has chosen for this is just that one the best adapted to promote and accomplish the great end--"The Lord tries the righteous." Such is the view we are about to present to the reader of this volume. But a brief description in the first place of the "righteous" is necessary, since in a preceding chapter we have dwelt at length upon the character.

Contemplate the "righteous" in their PRIVILEGE, as righteous in the righteousness of God. It is called "the righteousness of God," not because it is the essential or abstract righteousness of God, for this is incommunicable, and cannot, therefore, describe the righteousness in which the believer is justified. But it is called "the righteousness of God" because it is the righteousness of Christ, who is God. To quote a text more than once referred to in this volume, "He has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"--observe, made the righteousness of God in Christ. Thus, we stand by imputation, in the righteousness of Christ--God in our nature, Immanuel, God with us; "The Lord our Righteousness."

What a vital and precious truth is this to the believer! The more the mind revolves round this doctrine, the more glory we see in it, and the more we seem to clasp it, as the drowning mariner

the plank. And how some can talk of sin, and confess sin, and yet think of standing before God without this righteousness, is most puzzling! When we study the law of God--its spirituality and strictness; when we think that for one thought, one glance of the mind, it curses and condemns; that, it demands the body, the soul, the time, the talents, yes, our all for God--else it were a most wicked law--that, its terms are blood for blood, life for life--how suitable, how perfect, how glorious does the righteousness of an incarnate God appear which has met every demand, honored every precept, and which is unto all and upon all those who believe!

And when we consider that there bends not a believer over this page, however weak his faith or small the buddings of Divine grace in his soul--he may have been the vilest sinner, and now the weakest believer--yet looking to Jesus, notwithstanding all his imperfections and failures, he stands complete in the righteousness of God, how magnificent and precious does this doctrine appear! O blessed truth! how it abases, and yet how it exalts! To know that while our feelings fluctuate, and our frames vary, and our experience ebbs and flows as the tide, yet our righteousness varies not, changes not, and that we are not justified one moment more really, more freely, more completely than another, is a mercy unspeakably great.

And when we examine our principles and their fruits, our aims and their results--striving to reach the center--the mark of the prize of our high calling--yet ever falling short, had we not this righteousness to stand in before God, how could we dare look up? O you saints of the Most High, you who are traveling on through much failure, through much infirmity, it may be through much trial and tribulation, shout the hallelujahs of heaven! Christ is yours, His righteousness is yours, His work is yours, His glory is yours, for you are complete in Him. Such are the "righteous" in their great privilege.

Let us look at them in their CHARACTER. They are denominated "the righteous." It is here the existence and vitality of the new nature appear so evident and illustrious. All the holiness that vitalizes and adorns the life of the child of God, all the righteousness which renders his path so luminous, his influence so sanctifying, his character so glorifying to God, is the new and Divine nature in his soul exercising its power and putting forth its fruit. Born of God, believers advance in spiritual stature, from the babe in Christ to the young man, from the young man to the father, and from the father to the hoary head found in the way of righteousness. And, as they grow up into Christ, the new nature exhibits more and more of its vitality, unveils more and more of its loveliness, and accomplishes more and more of its achievement.

Growing up into Christ in all things, their religious progress is a gradual development of Christ's nature and image in them, and in the same ratio a gradual putting off the old man with his deceitful lusts and putting on the new. In other words, the believer growing up into Christ grows less like himself and more like Christ, less earthly and more heavenly. Thus does his newness of nature appear in the righteousness of life which he lives--"He that does righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous," (1 John 3:7.)

This will constitute the grand distinctive feature of the human race in the great day of judgment--righteousness. The distinction of races and of languages, of rank and wealth, of churches and creeds, will vanish in that solemn day, and nothing will mark the great separating distinction of man from man but the righteousness of God imputed, and the righteousness of the Holy Spirit imparted, to those who shall be saved. "They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in

that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him. Then shall you return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serves God and him that serves him not," (Mal. 3:17, 18.)

"Jesus, Your blood and righteousness,

Your beauty, are my glorious dress;

'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,

With joy shall I lift up my head.

"When from the dust of death I rise,

To take my mansion in the skies,

Even then shall this be all my plea--

Jesus has lived and died for me.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day,

For who aught to my charge shall lay?

While, through Your blood, absolved I am

From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

But, "the Lord TRIES the righteous." To this truth let us now direct our attention. Trial is an essential part of our advance in grace here, and of our fitness for glory hereafter. There never was a saint of God exempt from trial. As has been remarked, God had but one Son exempt from sin, but never one exempt from suffering. Thus it is said of Jesus, "Though he was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." Trial, as a part of earth's discipline for heaven's enjoyment, is nowhere a fact disguised or qualified in God's Word. It confronts us upon the very threshold of our conversion, that, if we become the true disciples of Christ, it must be by bearing His cross and following Him through much tribulation to the kingdom. God thus speaks of His Church, the remnant according to the election of grace--"And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried," (Zech. 13:9.)

The testimony of the New Testament is not less clear and emphatic. Thus taught the first apostles of the faith. They went forth preaching the gospel in every city, "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through MUCH TRIBULATION enter into the kingdom of God."

The very constitution of the renewed nature of the Christian implies its exposure to trial. Its existence in the living soul is where sin's empire is. It is a kingdom of light irradiating amid a kingdom of darkness--an empire of righteousness reigning amid an empire of sin--a spark of fire glowing amid the heaving ocean. What is the daily life of the believer from the moment he raises his head from his pillow in the morning until he replaces it at night, but a battle with inward corruption and with external temptation? Thus our very constitution, as those that are born again, is in direct and incessant antagonism with evil, and, consequently, is one of perpetual combat

upon the inspired declaration, "The Lord TRIES the righteous."

The discipline of trial to which the righteous are subjected is essentially different to what the world blindly supposes it to be. In the world's estimate the trial of the saints is a retributive judgment--a penal evil--a divine condemnation. But, as represented by God, what is the trial of the righteous? It is variously denominated. Thus, for example, trial is the believer's testimonial for heaven, (Matt. 5:10;) the gift of God, (Phil. 1:29;) the Spirit of glory resting upon him, (1 Pet. 4:14;) a baptismal consecration, (Mark 10:38, 39;) a filling up of the Lord's sufferings, without which Christ's sufferings in His Church are not complete, (Col. 1:24;) the evangelical perfection of the righteous, (James 1:3, 4) a refining of their faith, (1 Pet. 1:7;) their enhancement of glory, (2 Cor. 4:17;) their conformity to Christ their Head, (2 Tim. 2:11, 12.) Such are a few of the lights in which the Holy Spirit, in the Word, places the process of trial by which the Lord tries the righteous.

It were a truism to remark that the trials of the Lord's people are VARIOUS. No individual can carefully and thoughtfully read and study God's Word, or his own personal history, without arriving at this conclusion. As the Lord's garden is planted with trees of various sizes--as God's family is composed of children of different growth--as Christ's body, the Church, is composed of different members; so the spiritual discipline of God with the righteous varies. Some of the Lord's people are tried in body and some in soul; some in their circumstances, and others in their families; some by the world, and some by the Church. Like a wise and loving parent, like a skillful and attentive physician, like an experienced and judicious husbandman, the Lord adapts and moulds the discipline, the treatment, and the pruning in His trial of the righteous according to the nature and requirements of the case, so that every believer's cross and trial is just what the Lord makes it, and just what his case required.

But whatever the trial to which the Lord in His love and wisdom may see fit to subject the new nature, it will but result in its greater development and maturity. When we remember how much there is within us opposed to its progress, how much to veil its beauty, to weaken its power, to shade its luster, and almost to imperil its very existence, is it any marvel that He whose work, whose nature, and whose image it is--jealous of His own glory, as its Author--should subject the righteous to the discipline of trial, that their righteousness might appear as the light, and their judgment as the noonday?

The apostle Paul, in a passage already quoted, speaks of filling up that which is behind by the afflictions of Christ in his flesh. It was a noble sentiment worthy of his magnanimous spirit. But it expressed more than this. It sets forth a truth most consolatory to the believer-- that is, that the afflictions of Christ's people are the afflictions of Christ Himself, so perfect is the oneness of Christ and His Church. Now, if it were an essential part of the Divine economy--if it were necessary as perfecting Him as the mediator of His Church, that Christ, the sinless Son of God, should pass through the process of trial--should be tried from every quarter and in every part, shall we count it a strange thing if God subjects His own work in our soul to the searching process of the crucible?

It is written, "THE LORD tries the righteous." Sweet is this assurance, that it is the Lord Himself who tries them. Jesus is the Refiner. The work of our sanctification shall be His own. He will not allow His saints to fall into the hands of man for the perfecting of that which concerns them. The moment that the afflicted saint recognizes the Lord in the chastening, sees God in the calamity, he passes beyond the region of second causes--with which, alas! the latent infidelity and atheism of

our heart deal so much--and the chastened soul rests in the First Great Cause of all events--Jehovah. "I was silent; I opened not my mouth, because You did it," and so he behaves and quiets himself as a child that is weaned of his mother.

Receive this strong consolation, chastened and afflicted one! "God HIMSELF has done it," therefore it is well done. God can do nothing wrong. His work, like Himself, is perfect. And, if perfection traces His work of grace, shall we suspect imperfection in His work of providence? That be far from us! He who gave us His beloved Son, will He compromise our interests, imperil our happiness, rob us of one real blessing in the severest discipline of His hand? Oh no! infinite love prescribes, infinite wisdom shapes, infinite faithfulness and power execute all His purposes, thoughts, and doings concerning His people.

Again, we repeat the truth--He to whom you are more delightful and precious than myriads of planets like this; who laid all your sins and curse upon His beloved Son; who sustains to you the divine and the tender relation of a Father, has sent this present trial, this discipline of grief which bows your spirit to the dust. Look above the proximate causes of the event, and see the rod, the sword, the cup in your Father's hands, and hear Him say, "I will do you no hurt," (Jer. 25:6.)

But you have in this present trial with which the Lord is trying your grace more than a negative, you have a positive assurance of good. See how the faith of Jacob pleaded it with God--"You said, I will surely do you good." Imitate the patriarch. God is honored when His people remind Him of His word of promise. Our faith has nothing stronger, yes, has nothing else to rest upon than the word of the living God. And faith asks no more. "Your word is TRUTH," is the grateful acknowledgment of its deep, firm conviction. It deals with a God who cannot lie, whom it is impossible that He should deny himself, (Tit. 1:2.)

Change is written upon every being and object but God. All is passing away! The verdant grass withers, the beautiful flower fades, the tall cedar bows, the aged oak falls, and in one hour the light of the home is extinguished, its center and attraction gone! Time passes, and removes the friend around whom the heart's fibers fondly entwined, and, like the vine wrenched from its support, our hearts lie torn and bleeding in the dust. Events, unexpected and startling, transpire, and in one short day the whole scenery of life is changed!

And yet we go on in our creature idolatry, still loving, and clinging, and trusting; carving new idols, hewing out new cisterns, planting new gourds, so loath to hear the voice of love, which says, "Arise and depart, this is not your rest; it is polluted."

But the unchanged and unchangeable, the infinitely blessed and all-satisfying One is--GOD! And He will assert His own supremacy in His people. Everything outside of Him is unsubstantial, unsatisfying, and passing away. Nothing is real, no one true, but God. It is often trial alone, and that the most painful and humiliating, that will school us into the experience of this truth. Emptied from vessel to vessel, earthly hopes crushed, creature blessings torn up by the roots, human resources failing, we then are shut up alone to God, and never knew until then what a Fountain of bliss He was.

Oh, what a true, all-satisfying, all-sanctifying portion is God! An infinite being, He is a boundless, inexhaustible Good. Creating the soul with a capacity to enjoy Him, He never intended that man should be happy in any other than Himself. And since the creature committed the crime of

renouncing Him as its chief and only good--since man forsook Him, the Fountain of living waters--all His dealings in providence and in grace have been but to win and woo the soul back to Himself, its original, inalienable, and eternal Good. To accomplish this purpose, the Son of God--the same in divine essence with the Father, co-eternal and co-equal--assumed our nature, that the chain now broken, which once bound us in righteousness, and holiness, and love to God, might re-attach us to His being, that henceforth and ever He might be the--

"The sea of love,

Where all our pleasures roll;

The circle where our passions move,

The center of our soul."

O Lord, though it were a trial that brings us to You; though to reach You we wade through billowy seas, walk over broken cisterns, tread upon withered flowers of human good, yet will we praise and bless You for all, if it but draw us nearer to Yourself, that we might loose ourselves in Your infinite bliss!

"I thank You for sickness, for sorrow and care,

For the thorns I have gathered, the anguish I bear,

For nights of anxiety, watchings, and tears;

A present of pain, a perspective of fears.

I praise You, I bless You, my King and my God,

For the good and the evil Your hand has bestowed.

The flowers were sweet, but their fragrance is flown,

They yielded no fruits, they are withered and gone;

The thorn it was poignant, but precious to me,

'Twas the message of mercy--it led me to THEE!"

Before we conduct this chapter to a conclusion, it may be profitable to mention some of the spiritual BENEFITS accruing to believers from the trials to which the Lord subjects His own new nature in the soul of the regenerate.

1. The first we quote is, the closer acquaintance into which it brings them with their own hearts. There are corruptions deeply embedded in the heart of the most holy, which the discipline of sanctified trial alone removes. It was not intuitively that the Church in the wilderness came into the experience of this fact. Thus we read, "He led you through the wilderness these forty years, to humble you, and to prove you, TO KNOW WHAT WAS IN YOUR HEART," (Deut. 8:2.) Until the hour of trial, how little know we of this the seat and chamber of all evil! What pride, what selfishness, what infidelity, what carnality, what idolatry, what ingratitude, what murmuring, what rebellion against God are there! Trial is searching in its tendency. It is the furnace alone that

reveals the alloy, and separates it from the pure gold, and so brings to view the new nature in its reality, loveliness, and purity.

Speaking of His Church in Jer. 9:6-7, God says, "Through deceit they refuse to hear me. Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will melt them and try them." As though He had said, "I will cast them into my furnace of love, and then will I discover themselves to themselves, and they shall know what was in their hearts." Thus the Lord by the same process deals with us. And then, in astonishment, we exclaim, "Woe is me! what a heart is mine! Did I suspect the existence of such latent virulence, such deep-seated depravity? How ignorant of myself have I been! Where is my faith in God, my love to Christ, my strength in service, my patience in suffering, my rejoicing in tribulation, my power in prayer? Instead of this, what do I discover but self-love, creature-idolatry, distrust of God, earth-bound affections, rebellion of will, and discontent of spirit against my God, my Father, my Friend!

What sad memories, also, does my trial awaken! Since God has let in a little of His displeasure upon my soul, I am made, as it were, to recollect the sins of my youth, sins of riper years, sins of old age--so easily committed and so soon forgotten--and with the brethren of Joseph exclaim, 'We are certainly guilty concerning our brother.' Thus searching and humbling is trial.

But if, like the surgeon's lance, the Lord's trial of His people is sometimes painfully probing, it is equally salutary and healing in its result. All this sad discovery of our hearts drives us more entirely out of ourselves to the Lord Jesus. We value Him as we learn to undervalue our own selves. Our thoughts of Him rise as thoughts of ourselves sink. In proportion as we learn by experience--and there is no school like God's school of trial--our own emptiness and nothingness, we learn what a full, all-sufficient, all-powerful Christ we have. Trial, deepening our self-acquaintance, deepens our acquaintance with the Lord; and to know more experimentally the Lord is worth all the discipline of chastening and of suffering it involves. Then we seek to straighten what is crooked, to strengthen what is weak, to restore what is lame, that it may not be turned out of the way, but that it may be rather healed.

2. By means of trial we are also brought into closer communion with God. In times of prosperity, there are many things which insinuate themselves between God and the soul. When the heart grows fat and is surfeited with creature-good, we are prone to forget and to forsake God, and even to kick against Him. Our communion with Him is invaded, and sometimes superseded. The compass is disturbed, and the needle of the soul swerves away from God.

But the Lord sends trial, and by it He restores the balance of the affections, attracting them again to their Divine and blessed Center. Responding to its touch, the truant heart flies back to God, under His most gracious restorings. Sensible of its backsliding, tasting the bitterness of its departure, it returns to its rest, and exclaims, "Lord, You have made my heart for Yourself, and it is restless and unquiet until it can rest in You." And, then, He who rebuked and chastened puts forth His hand, and receives back the weather-beaten dove, and the soul folds its weary wing upon the bosom of God.

To be stirred up to prayer is to be roused to our sweetest privilege and highest blessing. Therefore it is that God's tried ones are His most praying ones. The spirit of prayer is within them, but the lance of trial is often needed to draw it forth. "In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a

man of prayer." David's adversaries gave themselves to persecution and wickedness, but he gave himself to prayer. The more they persecuted, the more he prayed. As his troubles multiplied, so did his heaven-sent petitions multiply.

So long as God keeps us in the furnace of trial, so long does He keep us on our knees at the throne of grace. "Is any afflicted? let him pray." Prayer is the true sweetener and solace of affliction. Affliction rouses us to prayer, and prayer in return soothes and hallows the affliction. Not only do our prayers multiply in trial, but they intensify. We pray not only more frequently, but more fervently. Of our blessed Lord it is recorded that, "being in an agony, He prayed MORE EARNESTLY," until He sweat great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Prayers that satisfied us in prosperity will not meet our state in adversity. Petitions which answered well enough for the day of peace and prosperity will not serve our turn when the hour of temptation comes, and the cloud of sorrow darkens. The remembrance of the cold, dreary, formal devotions which congealed as they rose to our languid lips, covers us with shame and confusion when the Lord tries us. It would seem as though we never knew the reality, the power, and the intensity of real prayer until now. And never did God listen to our voice with so attentive ear. "O my dove, you who are in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs; let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice, for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is lovely," (Song of Solomon 2:14.) Beautiful in His eye as was His dove, her wings covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold, most sweet as was the cadence of her voice, yet more beautiful is she now, bedewed with tears, trembling with emotion, and peering out from beneath the rock and the stair, that veiled her from His view. Yes, the Lord tries the righteous, that He might behold the loveliness of their countenance, and listen to the sweetness of their voice.

3. Trial, also, imparts to the new nature a more quickened and intense desire for the nutriment and sweetness of God's Word. The Bible is the book of the afflicted. We fly to it in times of correction. Then it is we read it more attentively, counsel with it more closely, understand it more clearly, relish it more sweetly, and receive it as the engrafted Word into the heart more experimentally. But in times of worldly engagement or prosperity, the Word of God is apt to be slighted and unread. As we then pray to God carelessly, so we read God's Word carelessly. Prayer and the study of the Word go hand in hand. But God uses His rod, and by its discipline, like indolent or careless children, we are chastened to a closer and more diligent study.

This was David's testimony--"It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." Divine chastening and instruction are thus connected. Again--"Princes have persecuted me without a cause; but, my heart stands in awe of your word." While Saul and his princes were meditating his downfall, David was found meditating in God's statutes. While they were consulting with the oracles of hell how they might best sin, he was consulting with the Oracles of God how he might best not sin. While they were coming against him with the sword, the spear, and the shield of human might and prowess, he went forth in the name of the Lord of Hosts, armed only with the sling of God's Word, and the smooth stones of its exceeding great and precious promises.

Oh, how sweet and nourishing do we experience God's Word to be in times of soul-hunger and trial! "The full soul loaths the honeycomb;" but when God intensifies our spiritual hunger, even the bitterness of trial becomes sweet, because it endears Him to us who is the sweetness of the Word. He wisely and mercifully permits a famine, that He might show how He can keep our soul alive in

its midst by the pure wheat of His own truth. "I have made," says one, "many a meal's food upon the promises when I have lacked bread." Oh blessed trial, that increases our love to, deepens our experience of, and satisfies our soul with, God's Word!

4. Another hallowed fruit of the Lord's trial of the righteous is, the examination and test of their salvation. It is when His afflictive hand is upon us that we more especially feel the necessity of that sound evidence and assured conviction of our salvation, and of heaven, which, in its support and consolation, more than balances the heaviest trial. Before the hour that brings our religion to the test, with what superficial grounds, with what slight evidence, with what a dubious hope, are many religious professors satisfied! When the candle of the Almighty shines upon their tabernacle, when all is peace within and prosperity without, they can walk as upon high places, and float as upon the placid tide, and speak confidently of the haven of eternal rest. A little religious profession, and still less religion, goes a great way with them, just serving their present turn.

But, when the hour of adversity comes, when the storm breaks over them, when death knocks at the door, oh, then they discover that the 'fig-leaf covering' and the foundation of sand--the Christless, lifeless, prayerless religion--which sufficed for the sunny hour, fails now that the hand of God is heavily upon them. Oh, what a test of real religion, of vital godliness, of the new nature in the soul, is the hour of trial! Shadows and chimeras, dreams and phantoms, flee away then, and one scriptural, real, spiritual evidence of interest in Christ, of the love of God, is worth ten thousand worlds.

My reader, look well to your religion, look well to your hope of the future. Ask yourself, "Will this covering avail me when I appear in the presence of God? Will this faith sustain me when my heart and my flesh are failing? Will this love give me boldness in the day of judgment? Will this evidence answer the solemn purpose, when I lay me down to die?"

But the true believer finds evidence of real grace, of soundness of profession, of a fixed hope, in the time of trial. The crucible tests his religion, the furnace consumes the spurious, the sieve scatters the chaff; and when God has tried him, he comes forth as the fine gold, as the pure wheat, testifying to the sweets of adversity, and chanting the praises of correction, rejoicing that the Lord tries the righteous.

5. Not the least hallowed and happy result of the Lord's trial of the righteous, is, the mellowness which it imparts to the Christian character. There is much, in some believers, which, like iron in its native state, is hard and intractable. It will receive no impress, and yield to no mold. There is the absence of that refinement of feeling, and ripeness of Christian character, so marked and distinguished a characteristic of the believer disciplined by sorrow. But, like to the ore to which we have compared it, let it be subjected to the fiery trial of the furnace, and the grace that is in the believer can be molded to any shape, and will receive any impress God may please. "I will melt and try you," says the Lord. "God makes my heart soft," is the experience of Job.

No believer attains to anything like completeness of Christian grace, who has not been a tried believer. The file has smoothed the roughness, the fire has softened down the sharp angularities of his character, imparting a tone and air so gentle and courteous and winning, as to rank him among those who 'wear soft clothing, and dwell in king's houses.' "Each one resembled the children of a king."

Emerging from beneath the hand of God, the tried believer presents a more beautiful and perfect copy of the mind, spirit, and demeanor of the Lord Jesus--meek, lowly, and loving. Trial, while it has more vividly impressed the seal of genuineness upon his Christianity, has developed more of its intellectual robustness and moral beauty, imparting a new mold to the entire man. Oh, how needful is affliction to perfect us in grace and to fit us for glory! We shall read this truth, before long, in a serener, clearer light, and shall then fully see, what now we perceive so imperfectly, that our present trials were indispensable parts of our spiritual education for earth's service, and of our holy preparation for heaven's enjoyment. Then shall we learn that, with not a solitary trial could we have dispensed; that there was nothing arbitrary, unkind, or unwise in any of the dealings of our God; that, that event wrapped in such dreadful mystery--that calamity so fearfully crushing--that trial which, like a two-edged sword, pierced our hearts through and through, was the message of a Father's wisdom and love, and formed an essential part of our holy training for eternity. Oh, to what lofty music shall we then wake our golden harp in remembrance of all the way the Lord our God led us home to glory, and home to Himself!

6. We have reserved for the last of the hallowed results of trial, its crowning and most precious one, the closer intimacy into which it brings us with the Lord Jesus. Much of our knowledge of Christ, before the Lord tries us, is but theoretical. Experience of Christ and His truth is only derived in the school of self-knowledge, and in the discipline of adversity. The soldier and the mariner are but mere theorists in their respective sciences, until the one stands amid the thunder of the battle-field, and the other amid the fury of the storm. It is thus God trains His Church for heaven. He will have us know His beloved Son not from books, or sermons, or hearsay only, but from a personal and heartfelt experience of what He is.

But it is to the school of trial we more especially refer. When clouds of adversity are gathering--when death is invading, and ties are dissolving, and friends are leaving, and resources are failing, and health is drooping, and the long-drawn shadows of sorrow are falling many and darkly upon the future of life's landscape, we turn to Christ, and the closer transactions into which we then are brought with Him deepens our intimacy and increases our knowledge; and then we more fully experience what a Redeemer, what a Friend, and what a Brother Christ is.

And now we rejoice in tribulation, since it has made us better acquainted with Jesus. We have learned more of Christ in one sanctified trial than from all the books we ever read! Sorrow brought us to Him, and brought Him to us; and so correction has been our teacher. Jesus loves to be where His saints are in trial. Are you in search of Him? Go where adversity in one of its many forms has found a home; go where there is a couch of weakness to strengthen, a pillow of sickness to sustain, a bed of death to cheer, a house of mourning to comfort, a wounded, sad, and lonely heart to heal and solace, and there you will find Jesus. Imitate Christ, and, perhaps, in striving to help, strengthen, and comfort a suffering fellow-disciple, the sorrow concealed within the cloister of your own sad heart may be comforted with the comfort with which you have comforted another.

Here would we pause and inquire-- What, my reader, is the hallowed fruit of your affliction? The Lord has, perhaps, brought you through fiery trial, out of much tribulation. You have had sickness, bereavement, loss of property, or, some crushing woe. Sit down, examine and reflect. Turn in upon your heart, and ask, "What spiritual benefit have I derived from my affliction?--what lessons

have I learned from the catechism of trial?--what blessings have I received from the discipline of sorrow? Have I in suffering learned that there is no evil in the world like sin, and that there is no sin so great as that of my own heart? Have I found from experience that there is no good so great, no treasure so precious, and no Savior so suitable in the universe, as Christ? Do I come forth from beneath God's chastening hand a converted man--born again? Am I, as a Christian man, more deeply sanctified? Am I more like Christ? the world less in the ascendant in my thoughts? and the creature less the idol of my heart? Has the Word of God become more precious, and communion with God more sweet? Am I, in a word, as was the Captain of my salvation, perfected through suffering? God, my Father, has consecrated suffering to me; has suffering consecrated me to God?"

Such, my reader, be our self-examination. Oh, it is sad to taste the bitter root and not the sweet fruit of sorrow; to experience its curse and not its blessings--its fainting, but not its cordial. "I have smitten you, yet have you not returned unto me, says the Lord," (Amos 4:9.) May our testimony to the hallowed results of divine correction be that of David--"It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray--but now have I kept your word." Then shall we go down to the grave and up to glory, chanting the praises of sanctified correction, and in eternity shall adore God for all the discipline of trial that fitted us for its endless enjoyment, and treasure up within the sacred ark of our memory, the rod of affliction that budded with blessings so many and so great.

Thus have we endeavored to trace in the present chapter, which now must close, the process of trial to which the Lord subjects the new nature of His people. If this nature, as represented by the Son of God, passed through suffering--though He was without sin--shall we marvel that the same nature in us, dwelling as it does amid so much that is unholy, is made to pass through much tribulation to the kingdom? Meekly, submissively, no, cheerfully, let us drink the cup which Christ's own hand has mingled, rejoicing that we are counted as worthy to drink of the cup that he drank of, and to be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized.

Soon--its coming speeds fast!--we shall require this training and this discipline no longer. We shall arrive unto the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus, and our education and fitness by grace for glory will be complete. A few more 'winter days of suffering' and we shall be perfected. The last thorn of the crown will pierce us--the last cup of suffering will distress us--the last fiery dart will assail us--the last touch of sin will taint us--and we shall outshine the brightest angel, and sing more sweetly than the sweetest seraph, casting down our diadem of glory at the feet of Him whose atoning blood will have brought us there!

THE RELAPSE AND RECOVERY OF THE

THE RELAPSE AND RECOVERY OF THE NEW NATURE

"O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more."-- Psalms 39:13

Our blessed Lord, in those remarkable words addressed to His erring apostle, "When you are converted, strengthen your brethren," unfolded one of the most authentic and sad, yet difficult chapters in the history of the believer. Peter, to whom the exhortation was spoken, was already a converted and gracious man. He had fallen, and fallen deeply, but he had not fallen from the principle and possession of grace. This he could never fully or finally lose. And yet the Lord speaks of his conversion--"When you are CONVERTED." The real state of the disciple will at once explain the meaning of the Lord.

Peter had backslidden. He had fallen, not, as we have intimated, from the principle and possession, but from the profession and power of grace. In denying his Lord and Master he had fearfully sinned, had awfully relapsed; the locks of his spiritual strength were shorn, and he was powerless in the hands of his foe. Jesus came to his rescue. Bending upon him a look of forgiving love, which in a moment dissolved his heart into penitence, he addressed those memorable words, "when you are converted, strengthen your brethren."

In other words, "When you are restored from your backsliding, turned back from your wandering, rescued from your fall, as an evidence and fruit and acknowledgment of your recovery, strengthen your brethren--your brethren who, through weakness of faith, littleness of grace, and manifold infirmities, are liable to fall through the force of a like temptation." We are to understand, then, by the re-conversion of the believer, his restoration from those spiritual lapses to which, more or less, all the Lord's people are subject, to that healthy and robust state of grace from which his soul had declined.

The experience of the Psalmist--which suggests the subject of the present chapter--harmonizes in its essential features with that of all the people of God. David was now, as from a sick couch, taking a solemn and close survey of eternity. Anticipating his departure, he roused himself to the task of self-examination. The result of that scrutiny was the startling discovery of his soul's declension--the loss of spiritual vitality and strength. Hence his prayer--"O spare me, that I may RECOVER STRENGTH, before I go hence and be no more." How much is there in this spiritual lapse of grace with which the condition of many believers corresponds!

Nothing is so liable to fluctuation, nothing more sensible of change, as the renewed nature of the believer. The conviction of spiritual loss to which this giant in grace was roused in view of his departure, describes the state into which many imperceptibly decline, and suspect not its existence, and are not conscious of their loss, until the solemn charge is heard, "Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live." Let us briefly consider some of the spiritual lapses to which the new nature in the soul is exposed, and the means of recovery.

It is a melancholy state thus portrayed--to witness a man of God drooping, a standard-bearer fainting, a stalwart competitor for the great prize acknowledging, just as he was about to finish his career and reach the goal, the decay of spiritual vitality and power, is a spectacle startling and painful in the extreme. And yet how frequent its occurrence! There is nothing in the renewed nature to exempt it from spiritual fluctuation. It is a divine, but not a deified, nature; it is of God, but it is not God. It dwells in a body of sin and of death, and is exposed to all those hostile influences which spring from the fallen and corrupt nature in the midst of which it dwells. Just as the barometer is depressed or elevated by atmospheric influences, or just as the compass is disturbed by the proximity of objects naturally affecting its regularity, so the new man is constantly exposed to deterioration from the opposite and baneful influences springing from our fallen and corrupt nature. The depressions, therefore, of the new nature arise not from any essential defect in that nature--for it is incorruptible--but from the sin that dwells in us. Thus it is that the believer loses strength.

"That I may recover strength." The strongest may become weak, yes, weak as the weakest, when sin is allowed for a moment the ascendancy. But when conscious of the feebleness of our own native strength, of the fallibility of our own wisdom, of our soul's emptiness, poverty, and nothingness; when thus acquainted with, and so weaned from our own selves, then are we strong--strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might--strong and mighty in Jehovah. This was the testimony of Paul--"When I am weak, then am I strong."

But let us consider--In what is this loss of spiritual strength the most visible? Where is the child of God the most sensible, especially when he takes a close view of death and eternity, of soul-weakness?

With regard to the principle and action of FAITH, this decay of vigor may be visible. As faith is the 'parent grace' of all the Christian graces, the root of all the fruits of the Spirit, the mainspring of all the holy actings of the soul, it will be at once perceived that any decay, weakening, or slumber of this precious grace, must paralyze, in a measure, the entire Christianity of the soul. When faith droops, all the springs of the soul are down; when faith rises, the soul mounts as on eagle's wings. Peter trod the broken waves manfully so long as the eye of his faith rested upon Jesus, its Author and Object. But when the winds increased in might, and the sea grew more billowy, he looked from Jesus to his watery pathway, and his faith failing, he began to sink--"Lord, save; I perish!"

And how weakening to faith is the looking off from Jesus to our sins and infirmities--to our trials, difficulties, and dangers! The moment 'faith' forms an alliance with 'sense', it droops. A healthy body chained to a sick body would, before long, itself grow sickly. A living body fastened to a dead body would soon itself die.

Now, faith in itself, is a divine, healthy, vigorous principle. Left to its own actings, resting simply upon God's Word, looking only to the Lord Jesus, and dealing chiefly with the invisible, it will achieve wonders. It will overcome the world; it will foil the stratagems of Satan; it will deaden the power of sin; it will tread firmly the broken waters of trial; and will do and suffer all the will of God. What great things this divine principle wrought in the worthies of old! "By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight.

Women received their loved ones back again from death. But others trusted God and were tortured, preferring to die rather than turn from God and be free. They placed their hope in the resurrection to a better life."

With such a picture before us, how sad is the thought that our faith should ever suffer weakness or decay. And yet what a waning of the strength of faith may the believer discover in his soul just at the hour when he needs more than ever all the might and power of this wondrous grace!

My soul, is your faith weak, and does your heart tremble? Are you looking at the broken waves beneath you, at the dark clouds above you? Is it now the fourth watch of the night, and Jesus not come to you? Are resources narrowing, needs pressing, difficulties accumulating, and your heart dying within you? Fear not! He who trod the limpid waves with Peter, who gently said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" then stretched forth His hand and caught him, is at your side, and will not allow you to sink and perish beneath these waters. Hope in God; for you shall yet praise Him who is the health of your countenance, and your God.

There may likewise be a loss of strength in the LOVE of the renewed nature. The love of the changed heart to God is so pure, unearthly, and divine a sentiment--a feeling so spiritually sensitive--it is soon affected by any change in the moral atmosphere by which it is encircled. How soon and how easily may it be wounded, chilled, and impaired! The ever-pressing cares of this life, the undue ascendancy of the creature, the captivity of sensual objects, the insidious power of the world, will, any single one of them, seriously affect the purity, simplicity, and intensity of our love to the Lord.

"Do you love me more than these?" is a question which we need our Lord to put to us on every occasion. How condescending His grace to place Himself in competition with the objects of sense! "More than these? More than these creature claimants? More than these earthly honors? More than these worldly riches? More than these domestic comforts? More than parent or child, brother, sister, friend, or country? Do you love me singly, supremely, above all, and even amid ten thousand suitors for your heart?"

Oh, blessed they who from the depth of their sincerity can respond, "Lord, You know all things, You know that love You!"

And yet when life approaches its close--when human objects of love, and creature objects of interest, are losing their power and their hold, and the soul peers beyond the present into the solemn, mysterious future, how many a child of God has found reason to exclaim, "O spare me, that I may recover strength!" Love has lost its power; its strength is impaired, its luster is shaded, its hold upon Christ is weakened, and the soul begins to doubt all past, as all present experience of its existence. But, thank God, the principle of love to Christ can never utterly perish. It is a part of the new nature, is born in the soul when the soul is born again, and can only perish with the destruction of the ransomed, renewed, and saved soul itself--and this can never, never be! Watch, then, against the waning of your love, lest when about to fly to a world where all is love, you find how impaired is the vigor of this grace of the Spirit.

Reposing your head upon the lap of some too fond and too indulged creature-delight--be it the world, be it the creature, or be it SELF--you awake to the startling discovery, how sadly the locks of its strength have been severed, and with how little of this heavenly grace you are about to enter

heaven, and meet Him whose love to you had never, never faltered, chilled, or changed. "O spare me, that I may recover strength."

How frequently, too has it transpired in the experience of the child of God, that just at the hour that the HOPE of glory is about to enter upon its full fruition, its sun is setting amid darkling clouds! "Where now is my hope? My hope is perished from the Lord!" is the mournful exclamation of the departing Christian. Oh, sad and melancholy discovery! But is it really so that Christian hope--the good hope, through grace, enkindled in the renewed heart by the "God of hope"--hope reposing upon Christ, and entwined with His cross--hope which, like a brilliant star, poured its silver rays down upon many a tempestuous sea--hope which buoyed up the soul in many a season of sorrow and darkness, despondency and despair--hope which looked for the coming glory, and anticipated living forever with the Lord--can it be possible that that hope, however feeble its strength, or dim its luster, or obscure its vision, shall ever perish? Never! no, never!

There is hope in your end, O believer in Jesus; however weak and veiled that hope may be, it shall not make you ashamed; and when all other hopes--earth's fondest, brightest--languish and expire, the Spirit of God will fan this faint and feeble spark, and again shall its flame burn brightly, and pour its radiance upon the upward pathway of the departing spirit. And yet, at that solemn hour, when heart and flesh are failing, you may find it needful to breathe the prayer of David, "O spare me, that I may recover strength." Study to keep your hope lively--its lamp daily fed and brightly burning. "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may ABOUND IN HOPE through the power of the Holy Spirit."

And thus, also, with regard to EVIDENCES, these may grow dim when the strongest evidences alone will meet the necessities of the solemn case. Evidences of conversion and of safety, which amid the buoyancy of health, and the heyday of life, the excitement of religious activity, and the influence of religious ceremonial, pacified the conscience and tranquilized the feelings, are found to be unsatisfactory and insufficient when the soul is about to appear before God. Searching thus for evidences of salvation, many a child of God has for the first time discovered his loss of spiritual strength. One by one has failed him, and he is compelled to close his Christian course as he commenced it, in looking as a poor, empty, lost sinner to the Lord Jesus, clinging to that exceeding great and precious promise of the Savior, as the last and only plank that could sustain him--"Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

He has now learned what books and sermons failed to teach him before--that the great, the grand evidence of our salvation is in a direct and simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; that it is not in looking to ourselves, or in searching within ourselves for evidences that we are enabled to say in humble assurance, "I know whom I have believed;" but in looking out of and off from our own selves, upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners, even of the chief. Such has been the experience of some of the holiest saints, whose piety and labors have adorned the Church or blest the world. Searching in that solemn moment for evidences of salvation, how many a believer has taken up the language of the Psalmist--"O spare me, that I may recover strength."

The SPIRITUAL LIFE of the renewed soul is equally exposed to this loss of vitality and vigor. A long-existing and deep spirit of drowsiness may enwrap the believer, of which he is scarcely conscious. He knows that he has life in his soul, but he is not aware how depressed is its vitality, how low are its springs. Much has passed for life which was no real evidence of its existence.

Periodical awakenings, spasmodic action, religious activity and excitement have, for the time, supplied the absence of that holy retirement, devout meditation, self-examination, secret prayer, closeness, and watchfulness, and holiness of walk which formed the only safe and authentic evidences of the life of God in the soul.

But now that the spirit is about to enter the eternal world, the solemn discovery is made--"How low are the springs of life in my soul! How faint, how feeble, how imperceptible almost, is its pulse! 'O spare me, that I may recover strength.'"

But we need not multiply these varied lapses of grace in the soul of the believer. When there exists the element of spiritual declension and decay in any one part of the renewed nature, the whole is more or less sympathetically affected. The drooping of one grace will impart languor and feebleness to every other. Our true wisdom is to watch the first beginning of declension, and the moment it is discovered, to seek the remedy and apply the check.

One of the most solemn and affecting views of our subject is, that this decay of which we speak is always secret, unnoticed, and unsuspected. In the graphic language of the prophet, "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not," (Hosea 7:9.) Old age steals on, and we are insensible of its encroachment. The hair is silvered, the eye loses its luster, the limbs their elasticity, and memory its vigor, and yet we take no thought of time. In fact, we strive to banish from our mind the conviction that "old age" is actually advancing. Thus is it with the decay of grace. It goes on slowly, imperceptibly, and unsuspected, yet most sure. Spiritual strength becomes weakened, the eye of faith grows dim, its divine and precious Object becomes distant and obscure, the hand of faith upon Jesus loses its grasp, the spiritual action of the heart becomes languid, the pulse of life beats feebly, and the soul loses its zest and relish for divine things--for fellowship with God--for communion with saints--for the public means of grace, and for a spiritual, practical, Christ-exalting ministry. "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not."

Nor does he desire to know it. It is an unmistakable evidence of this state of decay of grace--the reluctance of the heart to know its real state before God. Just as some individuals would efface each new mark of growing years, and shrink from every sad memento of approaching senility--as if ignorance of the fact would arrest the march of time, and each evidence of its ravages obliterated would win back the spring-tide of youth! so the soul, losing its spiritual vitality and vigor, loves not to be reminded of its spiritual loss, declension, and decay, but is content to live on in its lukewarmness, making no effort to strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die, until, like David, the prayer is wrung from the trembling lip, "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more."

Alas! that the child of God should so lose his strength of soul as not only to frame excuses for his drowsiness, but even exclaim, "A little more sleep, and a little more slumber." Such was the case of the Church in the Song--"I sleep, but my heart wakes." What a contentedness was there here with her state of slumber! And, then, to Christ's approach--"Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled--for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night," she replies, "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" She was not only in a state of drowsiness, a state of heart-departure from her Lord, but she was satisfied to be so, and framed excuses in justification of her continuance in that state. Distinctly did she recognize the voice of her Beloved. Well did she know that it was He who so

gently was knocking at her door, while, as with irresistible tenderness, the heart-melting words were falling upon her still wakeful ear, "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night;" and yet she loved the bed of sloth too well to arise and admit her Beloved.

Oh, what a sin was this! It was sin added to sin--it was sin begetting sin. There was first the sin that led to her slothful condition; then there was the sin of her backsliding; then the sin of contentedness with her state; and then the crowning sin of all; the excuses with which she repelled the loving, tender appeal of Him who loved her, and whom yet she loved. In all this see we not ourselves? Behold, to what a low state of grace the renewed nature may decline! See how far the Christ-loving heart may wander from the Lord! See what excuses even a saint of God may frame for his sins!

But what a patient Jesus! Gaze upon the one picture and then upon the other, and mark the contrast! The backsliding saint--the still loving, clinging, wooing Savior! There is no slumbering of Christ's love towards His saints, no denial of them, no indifference to their circumstances. They may forget that they are His children, God never forgets that He is their Father. Listen to His touching, astounding language--"Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord; for I am married unto you," (Jeremiah 3:14.)

There may be besides, as we have just remarked, seasons of spiritual wandering or depression in the Christian's experience, when he may lose sight of his adoption, may sink the character of the son in that of the slave, the heir in the servant; but God never forgets that they are still children, and He still a Father. And how tender and irresistible the invitation, "Return unto me!" And again--"I said after she had done all these things, Turn unto me." Yet once more--"Return, O backsliding Israel, says the Lord; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you--for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity." Child of God! conscious of departure, bemoaning grievously your sad declension, shedding tears of bitter grief over your willful and aggravated backslidings, can you resist the gracious invitation of the God from whom you have wandered? "Return unto me; unto me from whom you have backslidden, against whose grace you have sinned, whose love you have slighted, whose Spirit you have grieved. Return to me, who will heal your backslidings, will love you freely, and will remember your transgressions no more forever. Look not at my holiness or my justice, but at my grace, my goodness, and my mercy; how can I put you away, for my compassion and my pardoning love are kindled within me! Though you have backslidden a thousand times over, yet, return again unto me."

It may be proper in this part of the chapter to group together a few of those CAUSES which have a tendency to produce that spiritual weakness, that soul-declension which so many Christians discover and deplore when on the eve of entering upon the eternal world. The life of God in the renewed soul is so holy, and divinely sensitive, there is scarcely a quarter from which it may not be seriously affected.

The WORLD is a great robber of spiritual strength. It is impossible to go much into it, even when lawful duty summons us, and not be conscious of its deteriorating influence. How much more is this the case when we voluntarily and needlessly expose ourselves to its snares! Oh, how this world eats as a canker-worm into the spirituality of so many! We cannot unite Christianity and the world--walking with Jesus and association with the world--the pleasures of religion and the pleasures of the world--the strength of the strong and sinful conformity to the spirit, the dress, the

enjoyments, and the gaities of the world. The ungodly world is the great Delilah of the Church of God. Alliance with her in any shape will beguile the spiritual life, liberty, and power of the Church into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, who will but mock the victim they have ensnared, and make merry with the weakness and disfigurement they have wrought.

Saint of God, you cannot be strong to labor, skillful to fight, powerful to testify for Christ and His truth, if you are indulging in worldly habits or recreations inconsistent with your heavenly calling. Marvel not that you are weak in faith, in prayer, in conflict, and are hastening to the solemn hour of your departure unassured of your salvation, and with but a dim prospect that that departure will be unclouded and serene.

There are other equally potent causes of spiritual decay, which we have only space to group together. Superficial views of sin--unmortified corruptions--unsanctified affections--the indulgence of unbelieving fears and of speculative doubts--a slighting of the means of grace--the habit of reasoning rather than of believing with regard to divine truth--an unsettled ministry--residing in a land where no living gospel springs are--acting as unto man and not wholly as unto the Lord--reserves in child-like obedience--a spirit of levity and humour unbefitting the saintly character--a profane and unhallowed dealing with God's Word--an uncharitable and unforgiving spirit--a tendency to look more at the difficulties than at the encouragements of the way, more at trials than at the promises, more at evidences than at the cross of Jesus, more at self than at Christ--all these, single or united, will sap and undermine the strength of the soul; and when the last enemy approaches, instead of the victorious shout of the mighty, will be heard the plaintive prayer of the feeble, "O spare me that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more!"

Conscious of spiritual relapse, oh, seek instantly and earnestly a re-conversion of your soul! Let your prayer be--"Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation." Without ignoring your past experience, denying not the converting, renewing grace of God in your soul, yet, in your return to Christ, begin at the beginning. Come as first you came--a poor, empty sinner to the Savior. Your first love lost, you may win it back by a renewed baptism of the Holy Spirit, by a fresh taking hold of Jesus. And remember that, one end of your re-conversion is that you may strengthen your brethren who are weak, warn those who sin, uplift those who have fallen, and win back those who have erred from the way, ever walking yourself humbly with God. (Psalms 51:12-13.)

But it is often reserved for the solemn hour of death to discover to the believer the sad waning and loss of spiritual strength. It is at this appalling crisis that many of the saints for the first time awaken to a knowledge of their spiritual decay. Then they discover the "gray hairs" upon them in thick and startling array. About to battle with the last foe, they find the sword has rusted in its scabbard, and the "armor of God" has become loose and poorly fitting. Then they pray, "Lord, yet a little longer spare me, that I may renew my strength, examine my hope, recover my evidences, and experience once more a renewed manifestation of Your love to my soul!"

This clearly was the experience both of David and of Hezekiah, and this may be ours. The prayer--breathed though as with the departing breath--is heard and answered; and divine grace, and strength, and hope are given for the dying hour. And now the departing soul, renewing its spiritual strength like the eagle, uplifts its pinions for the flight. Oh, what a marvelous change have we witnessed at that hour! We have seen spiritual life that throbbed so faintly, divine grace that looked so sickly, holy love that beat so languidly, Christian hope that shone so dimly, now emerge

as from a long and dark entombment, clad with all the bloom and vigor of a new-born creation. The petition sent up from the quivering lip of death has been washed in the blood, perfumed with the merits, and presented through the intercession of the great High Priest, and accepted of God. Strength has been given, the foe has been conquered, and with the shout of the conqueror--"O death! where is your sting? O grave! where is your victory?"--waking the echoes of death's lonely valley, the renewed and ransomed soul has winged its flight to heaven.

"When death is near,
And your heart shrinks with fear
And your limbs fail,
Then lift your heart and pray
To Christ, who smooths the way
Through the dark valley.

"Death comes to set you free;
Oh, meet him cheerily,
As your best friend;
And all your fears shall cease,
And in eternal peace
Your sorrows end!"

EARLY CONVERSION

EARLY CONVERSION

"All Israel will mourn for Abijah and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord has found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." 1 Kings 14:13

God, who calls His people by His grace, calls them, for the most part, early in life. That there are countless exceptions to this we do not question; for the Lord God is a Sovereign, and He works all things after the council of His own will, and gives no account of any of His matters. Many, we admit, are called by grace in the meridian of life, others at the eleventh hour of its closing scene, and not a few even when the eleventh hour has passed, and the twelfth was about to strike its last solemn note. All that the Father has given to the Son shall come to Him sooner or later, whether it be the babe and the suckling--sanctified as from the womb--or the hoary-haired sinner being a hundred years old; not one shall perish.

But the majority of conversions are in favor of early life. Divine grace, in the sovereignty of its exercise, has ever delighted to engraft itself upon the spring-bud of youth bursting into beauty, or upon the tall and graceful sapling just shooting up into life, as if, while seeking emblems of its own loveliness and strength, it yet would illustrate the truth how infinitely the beauty of grace transcended and eclipsed the most surpassing loveliness and attractions of nature.

We have selected from God's Word a most touching and instructive confirmation of this fact. It places before us an example of early piety in its feeblest and most limited form. Abijah, to whom the case refers, was the young son of Jeroboam, and heir-apparent to the throne. Jeroboam was one of the worst of the kings of Israel. Scarcely had he reached the throne than he turned aside from the worship of the only true and living God, and established in its place a system of the vilest idolatry. After a while his son Abijah was smitten with sickness. Jeroboam, a wily diplomatist, as an unholy man, sent his wife in disguise to inquire of the prophets of the Lord whether the child should recover. Why of the prophets of Israel did he inquire? Why not seek the gods his own hands had set up, and which he and his court worshiped? The fact supplies the solution of a solemn problem.

When God sends affliction and adversity upon ungodly men, they then discover how little faith they had in, and how little support they derive from, the vain confidences in which they had been accustomed to repose. The world, the heart's idols, and theoretical and speculative notions of God's Word, utterly fail to administer light, consolation, and hope when God's hand is upon them, when adversity crushes them, when health and wealth, creatures and reputation, take wing and fly. How often the most ungodly and profane discover that there is but one Being who can help them!--that one Being is GOD. How true the language of the prophet--rather, how true the word of the living God--"Lord, in trouble have they visited You; they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them," (Isaiah 26:16.)

The wife of Jeroboam brought back to the king a sad and woeful message--that the entire family of the king, with a solitary exception, should die, dishonored, unmourned, and unwept. "Him that dies of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dies in the field shall the fowls of the air eat--for the Lord has spoken it." All this came to pass. Thus we read--"Baasha killed Nadab in the third year of King Asa's reign in Judah, and he became the next king of Israel. He immediately killed all the descendants of King Jeroboam, so that not one of the royal family was left, just as the Lord had promised concerning Jeroboam by the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh." (1 Kings 15:28-29.) To this terrible infliction of divine judgment there was, as we have intimated, one solitary exception. It was Abijah, the young son of Jeroboam. Of him said the Lord, "All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord, the God of Israel, has found anything good."

Let us now turn our attention to the SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTION which this remarkable instance of early piety inculcates.

1. The first important inference we draw is, GOD'S TENDER REGARD FOR THE YOUNG. It is a period of human life especially dear and interesting to the Lord. Christ in His own person passing through this stage of life, honored and sanctified it. He was "the holy child Jesus." It is the golden period of human life. It is to life what the bright morning is to the day, and what the spring-time is to the year. It gives to the future its character, mold, and complexion. It is the preface to the history of our being, present and future; and he who ponders thoughtfully this preface may, without the sagacity of a prophet, form a correct conception of the character of the volume. As a young person sows in early years, so shall he reap in later life. Approach the crowd of hoary heads bending to the grave beneath the snows of many winters, and ask of each what relation their youth sustained to that distant and solemn period of life, and each will testify that, the memories of early years, sad or joyous, clouded or sunny, clustered around that closing scene; imparting to it a character, a solemnity, and an impressiveness indescribable and ineffaceable. Memories of early consecration to God, or of the sins of youth against Him; memories of a father's counsels and of a mother's prayers, of first religious thoughts and impressions, of prayers and promises and vows--oh, how they link the past with the present, sunny youth with hoary age, life's first dawn with its last sunset!

Such is the importance of youth in its relation to conversion. This period of human life passed unawakened, unsanctified by the new birth, the probabilities of conversion lessen with each revolving year. We speak now after the manner of men. Well assured are we that all the Lord's hidden ones shall be brought in, were it when the twelfth hour of life were about to strike its last moment, or, were the working of a miracle necessary for its accomplishment. The eternal Word of the living God affirms it; the everlasting covenant of grace provides for it; the atoning blood of Jesus secures it; and the covenant engagement of the Spirit in conversion gives to it its fullest and most blessed realization.

Cheering, consolatory truth to those who, amid much discouragement and despondency, little or no fruit, and, perhaps, much difficulty and opposition, are laboring in the Christian ministry, or by other means, to win souls to Christ. What though you see no immediate result from your arduous, anxious, self denying labors, the promise yet remains sure--all Israel shall be gathered, and as many as are ordained to eternal life shall believe. You are only responsible to your Divine Master

for the fidelity and integrity, the singleness of eye and honesty of purpose, the prayer, the earnestness, the watching, and the faith with which you plough the soil and sow the seed. The blessing, the harvest--the golden and waving grain, the sickled and garnered fruit--are the Lord's.

And yet, tracing the Lord's work in the sovereignty of His grace in conversion--especially in this the last of the latter days--the great majority of those who are called by grace are taken from the ranks of the young, the very babes and sucklings perfecting His praise. Oh, spectacle of surpassing loveliness! Earth has none to compare with it, the Church not one to surpass it.

2. The loveliness of early piety can only be equaled by its ADVANTAGES. They who are born again early in life; who, while the sun is but just seen above the horizon, have set out in the Christian pilgrimage, are thoroughly armed and equipped for the temptations, duties, and trials of their course. The pleasures of religion--transcending all pleasures--are theirs, amid the toil, the battle, and the sufferings of life. They begin their race with the surrender of their hearts to Christ--continue it with His presence encompassing them--and close it with the crown of life, which His own hands will place upon their brow. And should their sun go down while it is yet day, it will but the sooner rise again in that land of glory where there are no more sunsets of life; for it is written, "There shall be no night there." Oh, seek the Lord early in life, for He has said for your encouragement, "I love those who love me, and those who seek me early shall find me."

But what made the youthful Abijah an exception to Jeroboam's family? "Because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." And what was that good thing? It was not rank, nor talent, nor influence. It was nothing of nature or of man. It was some good, some gracious, some spiritual, some holy thing, not born with Abijah, but implanted in his heart when, by the grace of God, he was born again. No interpretation but this fully meets the expression, "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." Observe, it had reference to God. It was "toward the Lord God of Israel." It came from God, and it returned to God. What could it be but the new, spiritual creation of the soul--the converting grace of God--filial fear and holy love--"the root of the matter" implanted in his young heart by the power of the Holy Spirit? It is said, "SOME good thing." The expression seems to imply the "incorruptible seed" sown, or the seed in the first stage of growth--just germinating, budding; perhaps, the first gentle blade bursting through the crustations of the heart.

How feeble and obscure may be the first appearance and growth of Divine grace in the soul. No one may discover it, know it, acknowledge it, but the Lord. Yes, he in whose heart the good thing is wrought may be the last one to recognize it. But the Lord knows His own work in the heart of a poor sinner--recognizes His own image in the renewed soul; and He who has begun the good work will perfect it. "As for God, His way is perfect." "Some good thing." What is it?

Is it a broken and a contrite heart? What a good thing is this! It is the beginning, the groundwork, the earnest of good things to come. Apart from true repentance for sin, there is no good thing. If the Lord the Spirit has given you, my reader, to see and know and feel yourself a sinner, a marvelous "good thing" has been wrought in your soul. The world thinks lightly of repentance; the formalist ignores it, the self-righteous despise it; but if there is a "good thing" in the heart of man in which God takes delight, over which saints and angels rejoice, and upon which all heaven looks down with ineffable wonder and praise, it is a penitential spirit, a broken and a contrite heart for sin; it is the spectacle of a soul prostrate in the dust--self-abased, self-abhorred,

sin-loathing--before the holy Lord God. If, beloved, you have nothing to offer to God except the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite heart, there is some good thing in you towards the Lord God of Israel; and a more costly and acceptable sacrifice you could not lay upon His altar, (Psalms 51:17.)

Is it a simple, childlike, believing acceptance of the Lord Jesus that marks us? Then, there is some "good thing" in our heart towards the Lord of priceless worth. Faith is a good and precious thing. There is more real good and worth in one infinitesimal grain of real faith wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit--the faith which gets the dimmest view of Jesus, which touches but His robe--than in all the good of which the world can ever boast. How small the degree of faith in the youthful Abijah! Yet God pronounced it "good."

As a young believer but just setting out in the Divine life, with but slight views of sin, little knowledge of self, still less of Christ, your faith may be weak and trembling; nevertheless, if it has led you to trample your own righteousness in the dust, and has brought you, as a sinner, to a simple, believing reliance upon the Savior, then you possess a "good thing" in reality, before whose beauty earth's highest type of loveliness fades, and the luster of its most dazzling gems pales into darkness. Is this good thing found in you? Do you believe in the Son of God? Has your faith led you to turn your back upon the world, and upon your sins, and upon a life of sense and sensuality--henceforth to be the decided follower of the Lord Jesus? Then, God sees some good thing in you in which He delights.

And is there any degree of real love in your heart towards the Lord God? God has set a high estimate upon love to Him! Marvelous grace! wondrous condescension! that He should say, "My son, give Me your heart." Standing, as it were, a lowly suitor at the door of your young affections, he says, "I love those who love Me. Do YOU love Me? Does my beauty charm you? does my love win you? does my grace draw you? does my cross attract you? have my sufferings and my death subdued you to penitence, faith, and love? Am I dearer to you than earth's dearest attractions, more precious than the heart's most precious treasure? Can you part with all, and every one for Me?"

Oh, if from that young heart, beating high with warm and noble impulse, there rises the gentlest response, "Lord, I love You! You who know my heart's most sacred cloister, who have Your finger upon its faintest pulse, read its most hidden thoughts, and know its most secret desire, You know that I love You!" then a "good thing" has been wrought in your heart which shall never perish.

"Do I not love You, O my Lord?

Behold my heart and see;

Gently dislodge each idol thence

That seeks to rival Thee.

"You know I love You, dearest Lord;

But, oh, I long to soar

Far from the sphere of mortal joys,

And learn to love You more!"

And who will say of the prayer of a young heart that there is not some "good thing" there towards the Lord God? It is a precious thing when a young person is led to pray. The spectacle in its spiritual beauty is unsurpassed. What would thrill the heart of a pious parent with deeper joy, next to his personal salvation? Would it not be the intelligence that the child of countless parental prayers had now become himself a praying child? Would it not be to witness the door closed for prayer, and to hear the gentle breathings, the fervent petitions of the young heart as they ascended in holy prayer to God? Truly, if the heart is incited by the Holy Spirit to pray--feeble, imperfect, stammering as its accents may be--there is "some good thing" in that heart towards the Lord God which marks that soul as born again of the Spirit, as a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Once more mark the expression, "some good thing." It is not EVERY good thing. Young believers are often perplexed and discouraged because they do not find in themselves all the grace and knowledge and Christian attainment they see in others. But this is not to be expected. It was not so with Abijah, the young son of Jeroboam. And yet there was some good thing in his heart towards the Lord God, and for that God marked him as His own. Thank God for the least degree of life, for the smallest measure of faith, for the faintest spark of love; and press on for more. Place no limit to your Christian attainments. Be not satisfied with your measured knowledge of the Lord Jesus. "That I might know Him," was the language and the desire of a saint of God far in the ascendant of the greatest saint among us. Imitate the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and, forgetting the things that are behind, press on to know Christ more--to love Him more--to serve Him more--to glorify Him more--that for you to live may be Christ, and that for you to die may be gain.

The young Abijah died, and God honored him in his death and burial. The Lord, my young reader, is perhaps taking you early home to glory. Disease, insidious and fatal, is slowly wasting your frame, and bringing you to an early tomb. The anticipations of youth, the hopes of life--once so ardent and bright--are now darkening with the shadow of death. Be it so! What a matter of rejoicing is this! Early ripe, early gathered. Think it not hard to die so soon, deem it not sad to relinquish life so early. Think of the sins and temptations, of the conflicts and the sorrows, you so soon and forever shall escape. Think of the heaven of glory into whose joy and bliss and society you so soon and forever will enter. And let not the reflection distress you that you cannot be fitted for heaven because your Christianity has not been matured and tested by many years of experience--that your spiritual knowledge of the Bible has been so deficient--your acquaintance with Christ so short--your service for the Lord so unfruitful--your battles so few and your laurels so scanty--your holiness for heaven so imperfect.

Remember that, if there is only "some good thing in your heart towards the Lord God," you have an unmistakable evidence of being born again; and, born again, though but a babe in Christ, with the smallest faith, the weakest love, the dimmest hope--that faith, that love, that hope, the "good thing" wrought in your soul by the Holy Spirit--when you die, though your sun go down while it is yet day, Jesus will take you to His bosom, and your happy spirit shall repose within its Divine pavilion forever.

"It matters little at what hour of day

The righteous fall asleep; death cannot come

To those untimely, who are fit to die;
The less of this cold world, the more of heaven;
The briefer life, the earlier immortality."

—Milman

FROM GRACE TO GLORY

FROM GRACE TO GLORY

"The Lord will give grace and glory."-- Psalms 84:11

We reach the last stage in this brief history of the new nature in the regenerate--its translation from a state of grace to a state of glory. God has not left His Church on earth without some pledges and visions of heaven. Now and then the pearly gate of the celestial city expands to faith's far-seeing eye--perhaps, when attending some beloved saint to the brink of the river, or when, in seasons of rapt communion, we ascend the summit of our spiritual Pisgah--and then we seem, for a while, to be encircled with the sunbeams, to breathe the odors, and to hear the music of the glorified; and, like the disciples amid the scene of the transfiguration, we would gladly build our tabernacle and abide there forever.

We have had occasion to remark, in the progress of our little treatise, that the grace of God in the soul was the pledge of its coming glory. It is indeed more than the pledge, it is essentially and undeniably a part of the glory itself. Present grace is to future glory what the outline is to the picture, the seed to the flower, the twilight to the day. He who has the smallest degree of grace in his soul has the first beginnings of glory. The question of our final entrance into heaven is not the first which should engage our earliest and most anxious thought. There is another, a more immediate and important one. "Have I the converting grace of God in my heart? Am I born again?" If this question is fairly met and satisfactorily answered--if the Holy Spirit authenticates His own work in the soul, then the ulterior question of our final entrance into glory is forever set at rest, and set at rest in a way which should annihilate every doubt and quell every fear. The believing soul grasping the first and lowest link in the chain--converting grace--gradually ascends from link to link in the process of knowledge, and strength, and holiness, until, touching the last and highest, it finds itself in glory.

The fitness of the two states to the circumstances of the believer is evident. Grace is the believer's portion here; glory is his reward of grace hereafter. The one is an essential element of his present condition; the other of his future condition. Glory in its fullness cannot be realized on earth, seeing that it appertains to a perfect state of being; and grace cannot be exercised in heaven, seeing that it has reference to sin and sorrow in their endless forms, both of which are there utterly and forever unknown. So long as we dwell in this imperfect state of being, we are sustained, sanctified, and comforted by grace; but when we are delivered from the burden of sin, and the soul is divested of its earthly vestments, the mission of grace is done, its work complete, and we are then received up into glory. The two things which will now briefly engage our attention, and thus close the volume, are--Grace and Glory. Both are the gift of God. "The Lord will give grace and glory."

GRACE is one of the most precious and significant terms of the Bible. It tells of God's free and unconditional choice of a people, everlastingly loved. It speaks of His mercy to the miserable, of His pardon to the guilty, of His favor to the lost, of His free and boundless love to poor sinners.

Seeing, then, that none are saved but those who are saved by grace--electing, sovereign, free grace--and seeing, also, that all the precious streams of sanctification, peace, joy, and hope flow from this Divine and marvelous Fountain, is it any wonder that from the lowest depths of the soul the believer should sing--

"Grace! 'tis a charming sound,

Harmonious to the ear!

Heaven with the echo shall resound,

And all the earth shall hear?"

"The Lord will give grace." This He does in the first place, by giving Himself, the Infinite and Eternal Fountain of grace. Who gives this grace? It is Jehovah, whose title is, "The God of Grace." He is so essentially. The light which flows from the sun, the water which gushes from the spring, are dependent elements upon a higher and creative power; and yet we may employ these figures to illustrate the spontaneity and freeness of this great blessing--the grace of God. The greatness of God is the greatness of grace. The infinitude of God is the infinitude of love. When Jehovah would portray Himself, is it not as the God of grace? Gaze upon the picture, wonder and admire! "And the Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and GRACIOUS, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," (Exodus 34:6-7.)

Who could reveal the Divine nature thus but God Himself? Who could tell that He was merciful and gracious to sinners, to the most guilty, to the most vile, to those who had forsaken Him the fountain of living waters, who had rebelled against His government, who had derided His authority, who had sought to annihilate His very being, had He not revealed it himself? And when God would win us to confidence, and encourage our trembling heart to draw near to Him, all guilty as we are, what is the argument which He Himself employs? Oh, so like Himself! "It shall come to pass, when he cries unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious!"

What a nature is our God's! What a heart is His! The Lord of all grace--all-pardoning, all-accepting, all-sanctifying, all-comforting grace to the ungracious, to the unworthy, to the poor, to the bankrupt, to the vile, the sinful.

See the spring-head of our ELECTION to eternal life! It was grace in eternity which chose us in Christ, and blest us in Him with all spiritual blessings, and, to the praise of the glory of that grace, made us accepted in Jesus Christ the Beloved. In this light I wish you, my reader, to study the character of God. Study Him not in the light of your sins--look not upon Him through the haze of your guilt; but behold Him in the Divine light of His boundless grace--look upon Him through the pure, gracious medium of the Son of His love. It is a delightful and consolatory reflection that no distortions of His character--no misrepresentations of His Word, or blind views of His conduct, consequent upon the guilt of our sin, or the working of our unbelief--can possibly affect His true character, or change the relation He sustains to His people. "Though we believe not, yet He abides faithful; He cannot deny Himself." Approach Him, then, as "the God of all grace." Confess your sins, make known your requests, unveil your sorrows. Cast upon Him all your care--acknowledge Him in all your ways--revere, honor, and glorify His great name, for, "God is

able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." Marvelous declaration! but not more marvelous than true!

The Lord Jesus, the unspeakable gift of God, is the DEPOSITORY of this grace. It is a treasure too divine and too precious to be placed in other hands--to be confided to the keeping or the administration of any other being than the beloved Son of God. As the God-man Mediator, the Lord Jesus is the Head and Fountain of all grace to His saints. "It pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell." "Full of grace." The first Adam became a bankrupt in grace, and impoverished and ruined his posterity. The Second Adam, the Lord from heaven, is He in whom "dwelt all the FULLNESS of the GODHEAD bodily." His resources, like His being, are infinite--His supplies, like His nature, are inexhaustible. He has been administering this grace from the time of the first transgression until now, and will administer it until there shall no longer exist a vessel to receive out of His fullness.

Will you hesitate, then, saint of God, to sink your emptiness in this fullness--to drink abundantly from this supply--to go to Jesus with every sin, the greatest; with every temptation, the strongest; with every need, the deepest; with every trial, the severest; with your mental despondency, your lowest spiritual frame--yes, exactly as you are--and receive from Christ's boundless grace--grace to help you in the time of need? Hesitate not! Every drop of Christ's fullness of grace is yours! And you have not a sin this grace cannot cancel, not a corruption it cannot subdue--not a trial of faith or patience it cannot sustain--not a cross or burden it cannot enable you to bear.

Yes, the Lord will give grace! He will give us grace for every position in which His providence places us. He will give sustaining grace under every trial He sends us. He will give preserving grace in every path of peril along which He leads us. He will give comforting grace in every afflictive dispensation by which He seeks to promote our holiness here, and so to advance our fitness for glory hereafter. Yes, He gives more grace. There is no stintiness, no limit in the Triune-God. He has given you grace for past exigencies, and He is prepared to give you more grace for present ones. The Lord keeps His people poor, that He might keep them dependent. They shall have no grace in hand, that they might live daily, hourly upon His bounty. It is under the pain and pressure of a present trial we learn the value and preciousness of this grace, and fly to its appropriate and boundless supply, and find in our personal experience the promise fulfilled, "My grace is sufficient for you."

We only add, the Lord will give dying grace. That day, that solemn day so long anticipated, so fearfully dreaded, comes, but with it comes the GRACE that cheers its solemnity, sustains its sinking, strengthens its languor, quells its fear, disarms its dread, and transforms it into a scene of life, of bliss, of glory. You who, all your lifetime in bondage through the fear of death, die a thousand deaths in the anticipation of one, give your gloomy, desponding apprehensions to the winds, and calmly, hopefully wait the appointed hour. With your sickness will come the grace that sanctifies it; with your parting will come the grace that soothes it; with your dying will come the grace that sustains it; with your death will come the grace that disarms its sting, and glorifies God in it. He, who from His infinite fullness gave you grace to live, from the same boundless, exhaustless source will give you grace to die!

And then follows THE GLORY! "The Lord will give grace and glory." If there is any one revealed truth more true than another, it is this, the final GLORIFICATION of all who believe in Jesus.

"Whom He justified, them He also GLORIFIED!" The translation of the Christian is out of grace into glory. In the first place, the Lord gives the first-fruits of glory in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the renewed soul. First-fruits are specimens and pledges of the harvest. The apostle speaks of the saints of God as having "the FIRST-FRUITS of the Spirit." And Christ our Lord is said, by the same apostle, to have "risen from the dead the FIRST-FRUITS of those who slept." He, then, who has the Spirit of God dwelling in him--and every soul born again has this--binds to his believing heart a sheaf of the first-fruits of heaven. Oh, realize this in your personal experience! Don't you know that if you are a temple of God, the Spirit of God dwells in you? And he in whom the Spirit dwells, by that very indwelling possesses the pledge, the seed, the dawn of future and eternal glory. Heaven opens to your believing eye. Often pause amid the weariness of your heavenward journey, and recline upon the sunny slopes of the Delectable Mountains, and gaze upon the glory so soon to burst in all its fullness and splendor upon your soul.

The Lord gives us FITNESS for glory. It is an impressive thought that each day's history in the life of the believer is a schooling, a training of his soul for heaven. The deeper discovery of indwelling sin, the more experimental teaching of the Holy Spirit, the increase of our intimacy with the Lord Jesus, the discipline of sickness, of sorrow, of trial, all, all is but to mature us for the inheritance reserved in heaven for those who, for that inheritance, are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Oh, accept every stroke of His rod, every lesson of His love, every dispensation of His providence, every gift of His grace, as sent to prepare you for the prepared glory! Let your interpretation be, "This affliction, this rebuke, this event is designed by my Father to promote my personal sanctity, to wean me from creatures, to disengage me from earth, and to set me to seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God, and to terminate in His own undivided and endless glory."

The Lord gives, also, the TITLE to glory. No individual can legally make good his claim to an earthly domain without a valid title. Look well to your title-deed to the inheritance of glory. There is but one--it is the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, received by faith, put upon us by the Holy Spirit, and authenticated by a holy and a godly life. This was the panting desire of the apostle, "That I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Christ's merit is our merit for heaven. Christ's worth is our worthiness for glory. Christ's cross is our ladder to the throne. The groundwork of our glory, then, is the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus--the finished work of Immanuel--the perfect obedience He gave to the law in His life, and the infinite satisfaction He offered to Divine Justice in His death. Invested with the righteousness of Christ--your own righteousness abjured and trampled in the dust--when you pass into eternity, and knock at the gate of glory, it will in a moment open to your touch, and usher you within its untold, its ever-telling, ever-deepening happiness and splendor; and so you shall ascend from grace to glory.

Then comes the GLORY ITSELF! Who can describe it? To stand in the presence of God--to behold Jesus in His glorified form--to be perfectly like Him--to mingle with the goodly fellowship of the apostles, with the noble army of martyrs, and with the spirits of just men made perfect--to be reunited with the saints from whom we parted on the confines of glory--to come again with Jesus

when He appears in the clouds of heaven--in a word, to be forever with the Lord in the new heavens and the new earth--oh, this, this is glory indeed! We know but little of heaven in its details. God has given us a grand outline in His Word, and this must suffice for our present limited range of knowledge, and satisfy our present ardent aspirations, until the blissful moment when our personal experience shall put us into possession of the fullness of joy that is in God's presence, and of the pleasures that are at His right hand for evermore. "As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness--I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness."

From these general statements let me, in conclusion, reiterate a few particulars of the coming glory of the saints. 1. It will be the glory of perfect HOLINESS. Transporting thought! All remains of sin will be annihilated; and, body and soul pure and sinless as Christ is pure, we shall be arrayed not only in the beauty, but resplendent with the glory of holiness. Oh, how the heart bounds in anticipation of that state!

2. It will be the glory of perfect LOVE. Dwelling in the home of love, standing in the Divine Center of love, and bathing in the crystal sea of love, our love to God and to the Church of God will be perfect. All that tainted and jarred and shaded it here below will be consumed in the conflagration of the last day, and we shall be complete in holy love.

3. It will be the glory of perfect KNOWLEDGE. That which is in part done away, we shall then know even as also we are known. The dark environment through which our intellectual powers now look will then be exchanged for the perfect expansion of all our faculties; and with the vast field of divine knowledge thrown open to our view, the unfettered, unclouded soul will expatiate in a world of study and thought, illimitable in its range, infinite in its resources, and eternal in its duration.

4. It will be the glory of perfect COMPANIONSHIP. The social instincts of our being, developed and sanctified in the highest and noblest degree, will then revel in the goodly fellowship of apostles and prophets, of the nobler army of martyrs, of the spirits of just men made perfect, of the whole assembly and church of the first-born, and an innumerable company of angels, with whom we shall sit down at the banquet of the Lamb. Oh, what a glory will encircle that august and blissful assembly!

5. There will be the glory of REUNION. Even the heathen philosophers cherished dim, vague conceptions of this. Socrates, before he drank his poison, cheered his last moments with the prospect of meeting and conversing with his beloved Orpheus and Homer. But Christianity not only reveals the fact, but unveils the glory of the future condition of the renewed soul. And not the least glory which it flashes upon the believing eye is, the certain, the intelligent, and holy reunion and communion in heaven of all who knew and loved each other in this life, and who died in the assured hope of meeting again forever in the life which is to come.

6. But, transcending all glory will be the glory of BEING FOREVER WITH CHRIST. Whom, not having here seen, we loved; but beholding Him now in beatific vision, how intense will be our affection, and how consummate will be our glory! I marvel if for ages we shall desire to gaze upon any other object than Jesus! It would seem as though He would fill the entire orbit of our admiration, love, and bliss--the all-glorious, all-absorbing, all-satisfying One. Bending upon each saint a smile of ineffable complacency and love, how will He welcome each to glory as the precious fruit of His soul-travail, introduce each one to the Father, and enfold all within His loving

and capacious bosom! Oh! is not this prospect worth living to gain, and worth dying to possess? Until then, let us seek to have more heavenliness, and to live more entirely for heaven. Looking and longing for the glorious appearing of the Lord, be it our aim to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly in this present world; that, at Christ's coming, we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield--the Lord will give grace and glory--no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly." Psalms 84:11

"Death comes to take me where I long to be;

One pang, and brighter blooms the immortal flower.

Death comes to lead me from mortality,

To lands which know not one unhappy hour;

I have a hope, a faith--from sorrow here

I'm led by death away--why should I start or fear?

"A change from woe to joy--from earth to heaven--

Death gives me this--it leads me calmly where

The smile that long ago from mine were riven

May meet again! Death answers many a prayer.

Bright day, shine on! be glad--days brighter far

Are stretched before my eyes than those of mortals are!

"Death comes, but with it comes the Lord of death,

The Christ who gave His life a sacrifice for me;

And I with joy will yield my parting breath,

Wrapped in the splendor of the home I then shall see--

And thus from GRACE to GLORY I shall go,

Have passed from earth, with all its scenes of weariness and woe."

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net