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Matt:

This Religion and his World.

MAN:
HIS RELIGION
AND
HIS WORLD.

*"These are wells without water,
Clouds that are carried with a tempest."*

2 Peter 2. 17.

BY THE
REV. HORATIO BONAR,
KANS.

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PREFACE.

'It is not in the spirit of "judging," or with the wish to bring up an evil report against any class of men, that this book is written.

A temper of this kind is not only unmeek and unseemly, but it wholly hinders the good aimed at, and neutralises the truth spoken. It neither wins nor penetrates. The heart closes against it, the intellect defies it, and the conscience flings it off with irritation. It may be called faithfulness or blunt honesty; but a plain reader or hearer can detect little else in it than the sourness of natural temper, or the overflow of inordinate self-esteem, or the display of spiritual pride, or an eruption of "the wrath of man."

Yet, without maligning or misreporting any man or any class of men, one may calmly point to certain forms of evil which have, once and again, it may be, thrown themselves under his notice. It is this that I have sought to do ; not with the purpose of judging others, but simply of calling attention to some sad symptoms of prevailing evil, in order to induce men to sit in judgment on themselves. " If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor. xi. 31).

No minister of Christ can have had many dealings with his people, or much intercourse with the " religious world," without being constrained to suspect that the shapes and phases of formalism or nominalism are far more varied and subtle than could at first have been believed. The false has a thousand gradations, each rising nearer and nearer to the true ; the unreal takes on many guises so like the real ; the forged so resembles the authentic ; the stolen is so like that honestly obtained ; the imitated is so like the original ; the human so like the divine ; that whilst he soon begins to suspect the hollowness and spuriousness of much that he sees, it is with

exceeding difficulty that he can lay his finger on the exact line or point of difference, and say, “Here is the root of bitterness—thus and thus it has sprung up.”*

* The awfully solemnising anecdote given by Krummacher may help to illustrate some of our statements here, as well as in the second chapter of the first part. It shews how very far a man may go in religion, while all is hollow; and this without any direct hypocrisy or wish to deceive.

“ Several years ago there lived not far from us a very gifted preacher, who had, at the period of which we speak, for a considerable time, announced with great energy and success the word from the cross, and who, as we may suppose, had his share of enemies. One of his opponents, a man of information, from a distaste for the truth, had long ceased to frequent the church. One Sabbath morning he thought he would once more hear the stern man preach. He went to church. The preacher treated of the narrow way, which he made neither smaller nor wider than it is made in the Word of God. During the sermon, the visitor thinks within himself—‘ How is this? if what the man is saying be the truth, O my God, what will be the consequence ! ’ This thought cleaved to him. Wherever he went he heard the whisper in his heart—Is it truth or falsehood? At last he thought of going to the preacher to ask him, upon his conscience, if he was convinced of the truth of what he had asserted. ‘ Sir,’ he accosts the preacher, ‘ I was one of your hearers a short

The number of instances of what has been well called "incomplete conversion" will be

time since, when you preached of the only way of salvation. You have disturbed my inward peace, and I cannot refrain from asking you solemnly, before God, and upon your conscience, whether you can prove your assertions.' The minister replies with decisive assurance, that he had spoken God's word, and consequently infallible truth. 'O my God!' exclaimed his visitor, 'is it thus? Dear sir, what will become of us?' Of *us*, thinks the minister, rather startled; and, repulsing the strange '*us*' from his heart, he commences expounding to the querist the doctrine of redemption, and exhorts him to repentance and faith. But the latter, as if he had not heard a single syllable the preacher was saying, interrupts him, and with increasing warmth repeats the anxious exclamation, 'If it is the truth, dear sir, I pray you, what shall we do?' Terrified, the preacher staggers back. *We*, he thinks; what means this *we*? and striving to conceal the uneasiness and confusion of his heart, he begins anew to explain and exhort. Tears start to the eyes of his visitor, and, clasping his hands like one in despair, he exclaims, with a voice that might have moved the very stones, 'Dear sir, if it is the truth, then we are lost!' The preacher stands pale and trembling, and his speech fails him. He casts his eyes to the ground, and then embracing his visitor, amid sobs, he says, 'My friend, down into the dust, and let us pray and wrestle.' They bend their knees, they pray, they embrace each other, and the

found to be very large;* whether on the increase or not, I do not say; but out of this class most of those have gone who have found their way to Rome, or stumbled into scepticism, or sunk into Laodicean lukewarmness. The awful announcement of the Lord, "Few there be that find it," is not less of a realised and exhibited certainty now than eighteen centuries ago. Few saved, many lost! If this be true, then, what room for self-questioning and self-sifting! The righteous "scarcely saved!" What cause for alarm and inquiry!

The danger is great; for the by-paths are many, and the snares laid with skill. Satan's object seems to be to pervade the world's atmosphere, and stranger departs. The preacher locks himself up in his chamber, and on the Sabbath following he is indisposed, and unable to appear in the pulpit. The next Sabbath is the same. On the third, he appears before the congregation grief-worn and pale, yet with looks of joy, and commences his sermon with the affecting declaration that it was only now that he also had made his way through the narrow gate."

* See an excellent little book called *Incomplete Conversions*, translated from the French, and published by Messrs Nisbet & Co.

sphere with one universal mist of bright delusion, blending together the varied tints of natural truth and virtue, and calling up, as by a spell, the noble forms of creature-power and the graceful forms of creature-beauty, that man may be led captive by the gorgeous enchantment, and so, like the victims of the fabled island-sorceress, forget his truer kindred and his better home.* It seems almost as if man's might had already well-nigh mastered sin, and his skill baffled the curse! It is as if the world's gross darkness

* Take, as an illustration, the following sentence from a well-known journal, some years ago :—“ With peculiar pleasure, every cultivated mind must repose on the *fair*, the *happy*, the *glorious* Florence; on the halls which rung with the mirth of Pulci, the cell where twinkled the midnight lamp of Politian, the statues on which the young eye of Michael Angelo glared with the frenzy of a kindred enthusiasm, the gardens in which Lorenzo meditated some sparkling song for the May-day dance of the Etrurian virgins. Alas, for the beautiful city! Alas, for the wit and the learning, the genius and the love!”—How delusive the glow of such a picture as this! How sure to fascinate! With such gay dreams as these, Satan is ensnaring his myriads, specially of the young and fervid, making the whole earth to seem, what the Etrurian city is described to be, “ *fair, happy, and glorious!* ”

were yielding to his efforts, and passing off into a strange dreamy light, dazzling the wanderer, and wrapping him in such gay bewilderment, that he mistakes the unreal for the real, and, in spite of the sharp winds that pierce him, persuades himself that this is his place of rest and sure possession. Instead of the "ruler of the darkness of this world," Satan shews himself as an "angel of light," and his legions are going forth in the same radiant guise.

There is a system and uniformity about the plans of the Evil One that should be studied. The errors of an age or sect or individual are not isolated, each springing up unconnected with the other. Even the past and the present are closely linked, and the soil out of which the errors of one generation spring is formed of the decayed foliage of the preceding. Errors, like truths, always exist in groups or families, and can easily be classified. The same *type* of error may be traced under a hundred forms, running through the philosophy, the religion, the politics of the age; the same error that pervades the one of these three pervading all of them. It is gene-

rally in some one of the dominant philosophies that we find the full and expanded type. The philosophical error is the error in its nakedness and ruggedness. It is at this extremity that it shoots up into a perilous sea-chafed rock ; but the sunken ledge, of which it forms the extremity, extends for miles, sending up destruction to the unwary vessel that but touches the perilous ridge.

Satan has his “great ideas,” which he scatters abroad. With these he seeks to impregnate the age, usually through one or two master-spirits. Some of these ideas are cognate, some antagonistic ; for he cares little for consistency, provided, by means of them, he can supplant truth, and cheat man out of his birthright. According as they are sown in the theological or philosophical or political soil, they assume diverse forms, yet a great common type can be detected in each.

Thus, for instance, we have, in philosophy, scepticism ; in theology, rationalism ; in religion, latitudinarianism ; in politics, liberalism : doubt being the type. Again, in philosophy, we have

Idealism ; in theology, doctrinalism ; in religion, mysticism ; in politics, optimism : the abstract being the type. Again, we have in philosophy, pantheism ; in theology, ritualism ; in religion, sentimentalism : the oneness of matter and spirit being the type. Again, in philosophy, we have free-thinking ; in theology, Pelagianism ; in religion, antinomianism ; in politics, democracy or despotism, for both of these latter are one in genus : self-will being the common type. These are a few specimens of what I refer to. They are enough to shew the subtle bond which binds together the errors that arise in the different circles of practical doctrine. They tell us, also, how systematically the schemes of the great enemy of man.

To obliterate the distinctions between human error and divine truth, Satan has of late resorted to a scheme wholly new. Formerly he taught his followers to hate and shun the nomenclature of the Bible. Now, while scorning as "Biblio-latry" all reverence for the Divine Word, and teaching his followers to mock at verbal inspiration, he adopts the very odious of the words

which once he spurned. Such terms as "holy," "spiritual," "priest," "prophet," are taken into the service of philosophy, no doubt for the end of having their sacredness destroyed and their loftiness degraded. There is a subtle but most solemn peril in all this. It is a device of no common craft and malignity. By it, doubtless, he hopes to confound the divine and the human,—to give to the latter all the excellence of the former, and thus, "if it were possible, to deceive the very elect." He has stolen the priestly raiment of the sanctuary, in order that, by clothing his mighty men with it, he may turn aside the steps of the unwary, and lead them to do homage to his priesthood, kneeling in his temple before the "image" he has set up as a substitute for the one Jehovah and His Incarnate Son.

It seems strange, after all, that man should be thus easily misled, and that, among thousands who profess to seek for truth, so few should reach it. But man's bias is on the side of error, just as it is on the side of sin; for all error is sin. Darkness is loved rather than light, and the bondage of the Evil One preferred to the liberty

of God. Hence it is so easy to seduce men from the path of truth. God and truth are so closely linked together, that they cannot have the latter without the former. A false religion without God they may have, but a true religion without Him they cannot have. And thus they who have no relish for Divine companionship here, and an eternity in the presence of God hereafter, will be certain to turn away from a religion whose essence is communion with God ; nay, will only the more deeply hate it because it is heavenly and Divine.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, there is much that is not hopeless. The dull apathy of other days is gone. Satan has taken the field actively, and it is best to meet him front to front. Besides, men's consciences are really on edge. God seems extensively striving with them, as before the flood. A breath of the Divine Spirit has passed over earth, and hence the momentous character of the time, as well as the necessity for improving it so long as it lasts. The "earnestness" which marks the age is not of man but of God. It is the fruit of God's last dealing with

man, in love, ere He smites in wrath. To give the right direction to this earnestness is the great business of every one that would be a fellow-worker with God. It is taking so many wrong directions, such as scepticism, ritualism, Romanism, &c., that we must make haste to put forth every effort to lead it aright. The one true goal or resting-place, where doubt and weariness, and the stings of a pricking conscience, and the longings of an unsatisfied soul, would all be quieted, is *Christ himself*. Not the Church, but Christ. Not doctrine, but Christ. Not forms, but Christ. Not ceremonies, but Christ!—Christ the God-man, giving His life for ours—sealing the everlasting covenant and making peace for us through the blood of His cross!—Christ the Divine storehouse of all light and truth, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”—Christ the infinite vessel, filled with the Holy Spirit, the enlightener, the teacher, the quickener, the comforter—so that “out of his fulness we may receive, and grace for grace.” This, this alone, is the vexed soul’s refuge—its rock to build on, its home to abide in, till the

great Tempter be bound, and every conflict ended in victory.

It is to give this direction to the varied currents of earnestness that we must strive. How these may multiply, what strange directions they may yet take, with what turbid torrents they may pour along the valleys of earth, what ruin they may carry before them, and with what a hideous deluge they may yet overflow the world, dissolving and levelling everything divine and good, everything true and noble, who shall adventure to foretell ?

Let us then meet this “earnestness,” which is now the boast, but may ere long be the bane, of the age, with that which alone can bring down its feverish pulse, and soothe it into blessed calm —“the gospel of the grace of God.” All other things are but opiates, drugs, quackeries ; this is the Divine medicine—this is the sole, the speedy, the eternal cure. It is not by “opinion” that we are to meet “opinion;” it is the TRUTH OF God that we are to wield ; and, applying the edge of the “sword of the Spirit” to the theories of man (which he proudly calls his “opinions”),

to make him feel what a web of sophistry and folly he has been weaving for his own entanglement and ruin.

It is not opinions that man needs, it is TRUTH. It is not theology, it is God. It is not religion, it is CHRIST. It is not literature and science, but the knowledge of the free love of God in the gift of His only-begotten Son.

Kelso, August 20, 1851.

PART I.

Man—His Religion.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONTRASTS.

I do not write for Atheists, nor for deniers of Divine Revelation. Much that this work touches on may reach to them; but the classes I have in view lie considerably *within* these outer circles of the race—for surely they are the *outer circles*, the farthest removed from the great centre of our being's orbit.

I write for those who, in words at least, confess God, and own the Bible as His Word.

Yet I would not overlook the former



classes, as lying too far on the outskirts of creation, flung off, hopelessly, beyond the attraction of the central force—

“ Waifs in the universe, the last
Lorn links of kindred chains for ever sunder'd.”

They are men like myself, walking on the same green earth, breathing the same fresh air, shone upon by the same warm sunlight, dwelling under the stretch of the same blue sky, and preparing to lie down in the same chill grave. They are co-heirs of the same mortality, sharers of the same grief and joy, girt about with like infirmities, subject to like ills, partakers of like sympathies. I may, therefore, speak to them, and expostulate with them as to their perilous and strange *credulity*; for of all men they are the most recklessly and stupidly *credulous*, so that all the fables believed in by Pagans, or by Romanists, are not half so incredible as the fables of Atheism. The Brahminical fable of earth upborne by an elephant, and

that again by a tortoise, is not half so stupid and unreasonable as the fable of an effect without a cause—a book without an author—a city thrown up by chance—a sunbeam weaving its own radiant texture with a skill far beyond that of man—a lily arraying itself with a glory more resplendent than Solomon's—a world creating itself—a universe without a God!

I may say this to these men, “You of all men may be expected to be sincere and single-eyed. You have cast off God and His Revelation. You have done so, you say, after full and calm inquiry. Well, you must have come to this conclusion with sore reluctance, and you, of all beings, must be truly and profoundly sad. For you have made the awful discovery that there is no such thing as an infinitely perfect and blessed Being—a Being who is the bright well-spring of all that is fair and glorious. You have found out the terrific secret that the universe has no father—that creature-

hood has neither basis nor centre—that beauty has no birthplace—that truth, and goodness, and love, have no true, and good, and loving One out of whose bosom they come—that the deep springs of human feeling have no fountain-head deeper or higher than themselves—that the world's wide arch is without a keystone—that the throne of the universe is, and has always been, without an occupant!

“Granting that this is a *true* discovery, is it not a *sad* one?

“It quenches so many hopes; it mocks so many longings; it depresses the whole buoyancy of our being, and hems us in within such a narrow, finite horizon, so that not even fancy may travel beyond what we see, and touch, and hear. It bids us look round upon the poor earth, and says, That is all the perfection that exists: look not for something higher; cherish not the thought of a glorious Being, of whose passing splendour all that is fair in the earth,

or sea, or hills, or sky, or flowers, or the face of man, is but a slender ray, or a dim reflection—there is none such! The *imperfect* exists, but not the *perfect*—the unholy, but not the holy—the earthly, but not the heavenly—the finite, but not the infinite!

“Ah! my fellow-man, have you really made this sad discovery, and proved *non-entity* to be in the region which we had thought to be the dwelling of the Being of Beings, the great I AM? Have you really ascertained that there is no God, and that there *can* be none? that there is no Bible, and that there *can* be none? that there is nothing infinitely great, or good, or holy, and that there *can* be none? What struggles it must have cost you ere you could bring yourself to believe this! And what still more desperate struggles it must have cost you ere you could bring yourself to announce to your fellow-men a discovery so appalling—a discovery so unlooked for,

and so repugnant to our nature—a discovery which kills so many joys, which uproots so many hopes, which cuts asunder so many ties! And now that you have ascertained this, you must feel as if a cold shadow had been flung over life and all its outgoings; as if an infinite burden had come down upon you, a burden proportioned in weight to the greatness of that Being whose existence you have disproved, a burden which will press more and more wearily upon you each day you live. If you are honest and sincere, you must be overwhelmingly sorrowful! And then, how open to conviction will you be! How willing to have your arguments confuted! How desirous of every ray of light! How incapable of evasion or unfairness, of levity or scoffing, in a matter so lofty, and involving so many hopes and joys, so many griefs and fears!"

Thus much I have to say to the man who denies God and His Revelation. He

cannot but admit that it is an unspeakably desirable thing that there should be a God and a Bible; and if he be honest in his rejection of them, he will feel as I have said; nor will he be slow to listen to aught that may lead him aright.

But I do not write for such; though in tender pity I say these things, that they may be led into a better mind, if that God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. I am writing for those who profess to own a God, and to receive the Bible as His Revelation. My question now is, not as to God Himself or His Word, but as to that which men call RELIGION—What is it?

Men feel that they must do some homage to God. They confess this to be a becoming thing, and that to withhold it would not be proper in them as creatures. They have the idea that they ought to stand on a good footing with the Being that made them; and for this end they employ *reli-*

gion. In most cases, they try to have as little of this as seems safe; and their object is, to soothe the irritation of a vexed conscience, and yet to keep God at a distance, that they may be disturbed by Him as little as possible, yet without incurring His anger. Each one, accordingly, has a religion, either devised by himself or borrowed from his neighbour or received by tradition from his fathers.

In truth, the formation of a religion has been generally looked upon as a sort of art; and a body of men, accordingly, have been always set apart for the purpose of constructing one. Man's desire has always been to have a hand in the construction of his religion, to prescribe to himself how he ought to worship God, and to dictate to God how He ought to be worshipped. What religion is, and how it ought to be carried on, are points which man has undertaken to settle by his own wisdom, and to regulate by his own devices.

But it is very evident that, both as to what God is, and how He is to be approached, or whether He will permit Himself to be approached at all, man can know nothing, and determine nothing. God only can make known these things. Man's opinions upon them are mere vanity, and the offspring of pride. They are certain to be wrong; for the points are so far above man's vision, and so inaccessible, that he must miserably misconceive them. He knows little of himself, and nothing of God; so that it is not even within the limits of possibility that he can be right.

Yet there is nothing almost of which man is so tenacious, as his right of thinking for himself (as he calls it) in matters of religion. In so far as this means merely that his fellow-men have no right to think for him, or to prescribe a religion for him, he is right. But in so far as he is claiming for himself a right of forming opinions independent of God, he is wrong—awfully

wrong. Man has no right to think for himself apart from God, or independent of the Revelation of God. God's declarations are to be received in unquestioning simplicity. What we are to believe, what we are to do, how we are to worship, are not matters of opinion or speculation: they are *truths*—truths not reasoned out or demonstrated by man, but dictated by God, and coming to us, therefore, with a certainty which man cannot add to or improve, and which no strength of mathematical demonstration can surpass.

This thinking for one's-self independently of God and His Revelation, is not merely an evil, but a *sin*. Nay, it is a sin of more than common darkness—it is so audacious, so contemptuous towards God. It places man on a level with God, or at least sets Divine truth and human opinion on the same footing. It strips the former of all innate authority, while it gives to the latter an authority to which it has no claim.

It makes man the teacher, not the listener or the learner. If it does not call good evil, and evil good; if it does not put light for darkness, and darkness for light, it at least claims the right of saying what is evil and what is good—what is light and what is darkness. It is another development of the old temptation, “Ye shall be as gods, *knowing* good and evil.”*

Nor is it of any consequence *who* it is that claims the right of settling religious truth or worship. It may be one man, or it may be many men. It may be a church, or a priest, or a council. It matters not. In such things there can be no *authority* save that which is infallible and Divine, that is, God speaking to us directly in His Word. Nor is it, surely, any great privation to be denied the honour of being *authorities* in

* *Knowing*, that is, knowing so as to pronounce upon. The Hebrew word is often used in this sense, as in Eccles. viii. 5, “A wise man’s heart discerneth (literally *knoweth*) both time and judgment.”

such a case; nor is it a hardship to be obliged to have recourse directly to God Himself, without the intervention of man—to have our understandings brought into direct contact with His revealed mind. The more direct the intercourse, the less liability or likelihood of error on our part. And as to the opinion that God's Revelation requires human interpreters before it can be understood, it is one of the most arrogant that can be conceived. For what does it amount to, but that man can express himself more intelligibly than God? nay, that God has expressed Himself so poorly and imperfectly in His Word, that men cannot be trusted with that Word alone, without a priest, or a Church, or a council, or a commentator, to unravel the Divine ideas, to simplify the Divine language, and to make intelligible what God has failed to do?

The same remarks apply to a *dead* as to a *living* interpreter. I mean Tradition. God does not stand in need of tradition to

make either His thoughts or His words intelligible. Even had tradition been as clear, as articulate, and as harmonious in its announcements of comment and of doctrine as it is thoroughly the reverse, it is wholly *superfluous*. We really do not need it, and hence its interference is quite officious and obtrusive. God has expressed Himself so plainly that nothing has been left for tradition to do. To attempt adding to or taking from what is entirely complete, is surely as unnecessary a thing as can be imagined. And it would have been well for the Church had tradition never interfered; for it has mystified what was simple, it has distorted what was straight, it has rendered vague what was precise, it has coloured and darkened what was transparent as the summer air; it has flung itself, like an armed host, between man and God, to hinder reconciliation and fellowship; it has risen up like a fog between the sinner and the sunlight, affirming that

the sun can only give light when its rays are transmitted through the vapours of tradition; nay, claiming to itself the power of purifying the sunbeams, and making them fit to illuminate a soul, or dispel the darkness of a world!

Man takes for granted that, in this respect at least, God is like himself, unable to express His thoughts in language level to all; nay, that He is worse than himself, for man can, sometimes at least, write and speak intelligibly, but God requires a human interpreter in order to be understood by His creatures, when writing expressly for their benefit, and suiting Himself to their capacity! Man also assumes as a necessary truth that where there are great things to be expressed, God's words must be unintelligible. Now, what is truly great is never complex. The solution of great questions is always simple. Great thoughts are, by necessity of nature, simple, and all God's thoughts are pre-eminently so. His mighti-

est are His plainest. There is no mystery about them, nor is any air of mystery thrown around the words that convey them. God needs no interpreter; and man, in asserting that He does, is a blasphemer, a slanderer of God and of His Word. He bears false witness against the God of the Bible as well as against the Bible itself; and when, under the name of Church, or priest, or any other name of authority, he claims the prerogative of being the authorised interpreter of God's Word, we set him aside without ceremony as a poor fanatic, or a self-honouring pretender, or a dark imposter, or a profane usurper of an office from which angels would shrink.

In two opposite ways has man sought to frame a religion of his own. He has proudly said, "I will think for myself;" and he has done so without due recognition of Divine authority. With the Word of God *professedly* as his guide, he has thought independently of God, and then laboured to

prove that the Divine Word bears him out in his conclusions. Or he has said with mock humility, "I will let the Church think for me;" and he has done so, placing a human medium between him and God, so that he may not hear God speaking to him directly, but only through the organs of a man. In such circumstances his religion *cannot* be true. Possibly his *creed* may be true, but his *religion* cannot; for a creed and a religion are very different things, though so often confounded. A creed is a form of words which I believe, or to which at least I give my assent, as if I believed it; religion is my position and actings in reference to God. This position and these actings never can be true or right so long as my creed (from which all true religion flows) stands on any authority short of Divine. It is not enough that I believe what God says; I must believe it *just because He has said it*—not because the Church has said it. To believe God's Word

upon God's direct authority is to build my religion on a rock; to believe God's Word upon the Church's authority, is to build it on the sand. It must be false. It may be plausible, but it must be delusive. It may sound well, but it is as thoroughly fabulous as any system of pagan mythology. It cannot be the expression of fellowship between God and my soul. A link is wanting, and the want of that link is fatal—God and the soul are not brought together; and whether the distance be great or small, whether the barrier be high or low, still *intercourse* is impossible; and without intercourse, though there may be a creed, there can be no *religion*.

In devising a religion, man thinks only, or at least chiefly, of himself, not of God—of his own rights, not of God's—of his own honour and gratification, not of the Divine glory. What will suit himself is what he concerns himself about. He must have something that will gratify his natural

feeling, or will give scope to his natural propensities. He must have something that will not crucify his lusts; or if his lusts must not be spared, he must have as much of the world as possible; or, if the world is to be renounced, he must have some compensation for this in securing a name for self-denial. SELF in some form must be gratified. This is indispensable to him. A religion without this would be intolerable. Self enthroned, nay deified, hell avoided, the world enjoyed, are the necessary ingredients in man's religion. His religious systems are a compound of such elements as these. To lose self in one direction, provided he gain it in another, he will consent; but to sink self entirely and in all directions, he refuses. In name he will perhaps "take up his cross," provided in so doing he can indulge his pride or love of fame; but to take it up so as to "deny himself" is what he abhors

Strange to say, he does not seem to ima-

gine that God can refuse to accept his religion, of whatever kind it be—"If I be sincere," he argues, "God must accept me;" and, making himself the judge of his sincerity as well as of his religion, he casts his offering on God's altar with the proud thought that it must be acceptable. He hates the thought that, after all, God may reject himself, and declare his religion vain. *That*, he conceives, would be unfair, for he has done his best—he has been sincere! Thus he would fain *force* his religion upon God; and all his worship proceeds upon the idea, that God cannot without injustice be displeased with the worship, or frown upon the worshipper. Two things, then, are very obvious. The *first* is, that there can be only one *true* religion in the world. There may be many creeds, but only one religion; there may be a thousand systems called religions, but only one of them is true. To say this is not to utter bigotry—it is simply to state a fact. The *second* thing is, that

the difference between the true and the false is no trivial one. The gulf that divides is broad and deep; the line that marks the boundary is not easily effaced. At certain points they may seem to resemble each other, but in all vital ones they are as far asunder as the east is from the west.

Nor is this to be wondered at. The plan and the workmanship of an idiot must be very unlike those of a wise and well-taught man. As is the person, so will be his work. Thus that which is "of God" must be different from that which is "of man." A Divine thing and a human thing cannot be the same. Frailty, poverty, insufficiency, littleness (not to speak of sin), must mark the latter; while greatness, excellency, fulness, and incorruption, must be in every part the very essence of the former.

Specially is this true in the things directly pertaining to God. Man's efforts to shape or copy these must be a failure. They are

too high for him ; he cannot attain unto them (Ps. cxxxix. 6).

Hence man's religion must be quite a different thing from God's religion. In some outward aspects they may be alike ; but, in essence, they are wholly diverse. They have hardly one thing in common, from the centre to the outermost point. They have different beginnings and endings. They have different aims and different ways of working out their aims. They rest on different foundations, and are constructed on different principles, and out of different materials altogether.

Man's religion makes man its centre. It is constructed so as to revolve around *himself*. He is its Alpha and Omega—its first and its last. It makes him live for himself, think of himself, magnify himself. It teaches him to lessen the distance between himself and God, for the purpose of enabling him to remove that distance by his own endeavours ; so that God is not the infinitely

glorious Being, nor man the helpless and unworthy thing which Revelation declares him to be. Man's religion is like the old astronomy, with the *vast* earth in the centre, and the puny sun revolving round it!

Man's religion trifles with sin. Having lessened the greatness of Jehovah's character, and obscured His glory, it is not wonderful that he treats sin lightly. If God be not the infinitely holy and exalted One, then, opposition to Him, and contempt of His law are not very serious evils. They may be acknowledged as not wholly *right*; but they will not be felt as unutterably *wrong*. God is not seen to be so deeply, so awfully wronged; nay, it is difficult to make men believe that they can really wrong God at all. The evil of sin, as a wrong done to man's self or to his fellows will be allowed; but its evil, as a wrong done to God, is never thought of. As that which may offend man, or break in upon *his rights*, sin will be dealt with as a real

grievance; but as that which offends God or assails His rights, it is treated as a thing of nought.

And as man trifles with sin, so he conceives that God will trifle with it, and overlook it. That which is such a small thing in his own eyes, he reasons, cannot be a great thing in God's. Hence the common idea of Divine mercy is simply that of indifference to sin. Man heeds it not save when personally affected by it, and God, he supposes, must heed it as little. God's hatred of sin, His purpose of taking vengeance upon the sinner, His profound displeasure against even *one* transgression, and His oft-written determination to punish sin eternally, is explained away, or supposed to be a transient feeling, easily altered, and quickly passing off. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," is not realised, but is either diluted into a mere temporary infliction, or made void as an uncertainty. It is not denied to be a Divine declaration; but it is not recognised as an absolute sen-

tence, carrying with it an infinite certainty of execution. It is not looked at as the expressed mind and feeling of an unchangeably holy Being; it is not heard as the utterance of the eternally righteous Law-giver; it is not seen as the very foundation of all government, the pillar of the universe, the keystone of creation; it is not felt nor understood that one hair-breadth's departure from that which is not the mere preamble to the statute-book of heaven, but *the essence of all law*, would involve the ruin of creation—the destruction of all happiness, as well as of all righteousness; and that any deviation could only be effected at the expense, on the one hand, of the blessedness of the creature, and, on the other, of the character of the Creator.

While man's religion trifles with sin, God's religion bases itself on the utterly odious and intolerable nature of sin. **THE SOUL THAT SINNETH IT SHALL DIE**, lies at the very foundation of God's religion, and of all His

dealings with the creature, specially of His transactions with the sinner. It was the foundation of His dealings *in righteousness* with Adam before he fell, and with angels when they fell. It has been the foundation of His dealings *in grace* with man when he had sinned. In all these cases, the great principle is equally acknowledged and comes into play, so that, as there could not be righteousness where this was departed from, so there could not be grace where this is set aside. Grace is not grace, which does not rest on this. Grace is not grace which mutilates or modifies, or tampers with this law of laws.

Man's religion contains no recognition of pure and unmixed grace. It does not deny grace, nay, it has a place for it among its forms ; but it will not allow grace the entire credit of saving man. It mixes together grace and merit, as if afraid to trust the former alone, nay, repudiating it, except in so far as it is restricted and modi-

fied by the latter. It dilutes grace, and lowers righteousness, and mitigates the law, and thus obtains a foundation for itself. Grace alone is the foundation of God's religion;—righteous grace, no doubt,—that is, grace coming in a righteous way, but still not '*mingled up*' with righteousness. Grace alone, not grace in connexion with doings or deservings in man,—but grace alone is the foundation of all religion that is true and Divine. It comes to us directly from God, not through the intervention of a priest ; it brings us directly into communication with God; it provides perfect and immediate reconciliation with God. Partial grace will not do ; mingled grace will not do ; uncertain grace will not do ; conditional grace will not do. It must be complete, unmixed, certain, and unconditional, else it cannot suit our case, nor provide a religion for the sinner.

Man's religion deals in uncertainties—God's religion in none. The former really

requires uncertainties to make it sufficiently effective and influential. It operates by keeping man in a state of uncertainty in all things pertaining to his own connexion with God. It suspends these uncertainties over man as the most powerful and trusty stimulants by which it can work upon him. It trusts to threats, and fear, and doubt, and perplexity. Its hope of operating upon man lies in these ; and it rejects all the opposites of these as mere opiates, fitted to enervate, not to brace, to lull asleep, not to arouse, to ungird, not to gird the loins. From God's religion all such uncertainties are swept away. He deals with man by calling up every feeling of love, and gratitude, and honour, and devotedness. He comes at once with certainties in His hand —the certainties of pardon, and life, and an endless kingdom. He presents to man a gospel, which at once, when believed, puts him in possession of all these certainties. This is the great motive power in the reli-

gion of God. It takes for granted that love is stronger and more effective than fear. It assumes, also, that there can be no genuine religion where fear is not cast out by perfect love.

Man's religion keeps God at a distance—God's brings him nigh. Homage to God, but not communion with Him, is the object of the former; nearness of fellowship and companionship, coupled with lowliest reverence is the aim of the latter. Man says, “God is my enemy, and must be appeased; or He is at the best a doubtful friend, and must be kept at a distance; he is incomprehensible and unapproachable, and therefore can have no common sympathies with me: I will lay my gift upon his altar, and retire out of his presence.” God says, “Man is my creature, and though he is a sinner, dreading, but not loving me, I will not leave him to his misery; I will come nigh, I will speak with him in love; I will win back his confidence, and teach him to love

me; I will make him feel that I am not his enemy, but his friend; I will shew him that in my favour is life, and that companionship with me is the joy and health of his being."

Man's religion is a thing separate from all his other doings, or employments, or feelings, nay, I may say, separate from himself. It throws up a wall between the religious part of life and the common part of it. It says, so much of life should be filled up with religion; but the rest of it religion must not touch nor approach. God's religion is made to pervade every lawful thing, so that nothing in its estimation is common or unclean. It is not a sacred lamp kept for the closet, or the crypt, or the cell. It is a universal sun, whose shining gladdens and consecrates everything in life, private or public, shedding its blessed radiance as truly upon the exchange, or the market-place, or the counting-room, or the family circle, as on the courts of the

temple. To separate religion from the common things and scenes of life has always been man's object, because he thus prevents himself being incommoded by it; he gets it cast into a corner; he can make it serve as a whet to give keener zest to his worldly joys. To bind religion and all common things together—nay, to pervade the latter with the former, so that every act of man's life shall be a religious act—a service done to God, has invariably been God's aim, because He shews that thus alone can man be truly blest, and because he would fain lift the common acts of man's life into an elevation and a dignity of which man himself does not seem to reckon them susceptible. God wishes not only to be the God, but the bosom-friend, of the creatures He has made. He wishes to be their companion everywhere; to dwell with them where they dwell, to go out with them, and to come in with them, to lie down and to rise up with them, to labour and to rest.

with them, to sorrow and to rejoice with them ; and all this, not as a spy upon their doings, but as a chosen friend, to whom they can intrust every secret, and on whose counsel they can safely rely—a dear relation, whose presence is the light of their dwelling, whose friendship is the cement of all other friendships, whose sympathy is their truest solace, and whose fellowship is the perfection of their joy.

Man's religion leaves the question of relationship to God unsettled and untouched. Adoption, sonship, heirship, are not words that have place in it, save in the vaguest sense. A *conscious* link between himself and God, man looks on as an impossibility; a *certain* sense of the filial bond, calling forth Abba, Father, he regards as presumption and pride. Paternity, indeed, he does make mention of. The great Father of all is professedly the God whom he worships. But paternity in the sense of an ascertained and personal relationship between himself

and God he refuses to recognise. The idea of unquestioned and unquestioning sonship in his own individual case is set aside by him, as being not religion, but profanity. In God's religion, this personal and paternal relationship is everything. "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty," is God's declaration of the nature of His religion. The commencement of it is the fastening of this great filial bond. Till this is done, God owns nothing as true religion which man may engage in, however laborious or costly it may be.

Man's religion begins by enjoining worship—God's by preparing the worshipper. And here the difference is as wide as it is striking. Man thinks that the worship makes the worshipper, and that therefore we must set diligently about worship, in order to get ourselves accepted. The main idea that man has in connexion with worship (such as prayer, and praise, and ser-

vice) is, that it is the means of securing acceptance, and effecting reconciliation with God. He brings his gifts as the bribes or payments of the criminal, not as the thank-offerings of the forgiven. He worships in order to pacify God, and persuade Him to extend His favour towards him. In God's religion, this order is reversed. The worshipper is accepted first, and then his worship. The person is first taken into favour, and then all his services are acknowledged as well-pleasing. God's design is to provide an accepted man in order to secure accepted worship; and His whole Word proceeds upon this great truth. This is the Divine order of things; and the reversal of this order not merely *injures* worship—it wholly invalidates it. God's order is absolutely essential to that which *He* recognises as religion. He will receive no offering save from the hand of an accepted worshipper. He can only frown upon service that is intended to propitiate Him, and to win favour

for him who professes to serve. He will not admit the power or virtue of any service on the part of man to secure propitiation or pardon; He will not suffer this to be held as the meaning or object of worship. He cannot own a religion whose aim is to buy His love, to persuade Him to be gracious, and to accept the person of the worshipper on account of the multitude or the excellence of his services.

Man's religion always leaves a sinner somewhere short of God and peace with Him. It may produce earnestness and seriousness and zeal, but it does not bring a sinner close to God. It leaves still a certain space to be gone over by the sinner ere he can reach God. It inculcates prayer, but mere prayer is not religion; nor is it always the sign of a nearness to, and peace with God. It stirs up to praise; but praise is not necessarily religion, or the utterance of a soul standing consciously in the presence of Jehovah. Man's religion

says much, and does much ; but it knows nothing of the Apostle's conclusion, " Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." Only God's religion can speak of that. And how fully it does this ! It leads us not up to the gate merely, nor simply places us on the threshold ; but it calls us into the inner chamber, and brings us nigh to the living God. It sweeps away all distance, all suspicion, all estrangement. It places us in the very shrine of the sanctuary ; and that not merely as strangers admitted to behold the glory, but as children brought into the paternal dwelling, and settled there, as in their natural and undisputed home.

Man's religion does not deal honestly, either with God or with himself. He is obliged to give a much better representation of himself than the case warrants. He is obliged to profess to be what he thinks he ought to be, and what he supposes God wishes him to be. He practises deceit

upon his own conscience; and he tries to practise the same deceit upon God. The whole of man's religion may be said to be founded upon this dishonest dealing. In his transactions with God, there is a want of straightforwardness and simplicity. He is disingenuous and crooked. He is always endeavouring to make out as good a case as he can for himself before God. Not that he is always conscious of this double dealing; but his religion makes it necessary to resort to some such subterfuges and disguises. It is not a religion that is based upon man's being totally and helplessly evil—it always leaves room for the thought, that a man may really be *too evil* for having anything to do with God, save in the way of condemnation. A religion that does this must lead to dishonest dealing with God and his own conscience. Trembling, it may be, at the thought, that he perhaps is one of those who are beyond the circle of Divine favour, he

shrinks from knowing the worst, and this leads him to tamper with his own conscience. Contemplating the possibility of a certain amount of sin being beyond the power, or at least the purpose, of God to pardon, he tries to shew himself before God as one who is not chargeable with such an amount, nay, as one who falls considerably short of it. God's religion lays no such snare for the conscience. It sets out with declaring the utter evil and ungodliness of man. It does so in a way that shews the man, that as, on the one hand, it is vain to seek palliation or excuse for himself, so on the other, that there is no need to attempt such a course, for that, as the difference between one sinner and another is but trifling, so there is no case of any one on this side of hell too bad for cure, or too vile for pardon. Thus, all temptation to deceitfulness is completely swept away. There is no room for it. He who understands this religion cannot but feel, not only

that there is no necessity for any such efforts to extenuate his evil, but that it is his interest to come to God just as he is, seeing it is only when coming in this way that God will consent to deal with him at all. Thus, while man's religion invariably offers a premium upon dishonesty, God's religion not only forbids it, but places us in such a position, and on such a footing before Him, that honesty becomes in truth our best policy, in this as in all other matters; and we are made to feel that, in presenting ourselves to God just as we are, we are not only more likely to succeed than if we had taken the less simple plan, but we are as sure as the Word of God can make us, of acceptance, and favour, and everlasting blessing

Man's religion has in it no struggles, no dangers, and but few difficulties. The path it prescribes is easy, not hard for flesh and blood. It leaves out the pangs of the new birth—the struggle with unbelief, with the

flesh, with Satan. These have no place in it at all. It acknowledges no enemies, no hardships, no conflicts. It broadens the narrow way, smoothing its ruggedness, and plucking up the thorns and briars that beset it. God's religion assumes all these things as not only certain, but necessary. It commences with a strife which seems to rend the heart in twain. The lightning of Sinai smites the sinner to the dust. The voice of the terrible law thunders against him, and shuts him up in his helplessness and guilt. Thus one who had passed through it describes it—"I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; and the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death; for sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me" (Rom. vii. 8-11). And as is the commencement, so is the progress. It is a continual fighting with enemies, seen and unseen, without and

within. There are tears and sighs, and "groanings that cannot be uttered." There is a "wrestling with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places." And thus the same man of deep experience describes it—"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.... To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Man's religion does not ascribe salvation wholly to God. It tries to share the credit of it with man. Admitting that man is a lost being, and therefore needing salvation, it includes salvation in its objects; it does not refuse to give to God some considerable share in planning and effecting it; but it seeks to *divide* the credit, so that,

at least, man shall have some of it, and be in some degree, however little, his own Saviour. Salvation wholly of the Lord is too humbling to be owned. Yet this is the very centre of God's religion. "Salvation is of the Lord." God planned it all, and performs it all. Man gets the benefit, but God gets the honour. The first thought of it was from Him. The *gift* on which it rests was of Him. The propitiation was of Him. The choice is His, the giving is His, the eternal life is His. He is the great, sole Giver—we, the mere receivers. He is the beginning and the ending of it all; the planner, the provider, the accomplisher; and to Him must belong the endless praise.

Man's religion does not trace up salvation directly to the eternal purpose of Jehovah. It passes this by; it shrinks from this; nay, sometimes it abjures this as fatalism. It substitutes man's election of God for God's election of man, and rejects

the truth that not one soul would arise from the dead, or believe, or seek God's favour, were it not for the Divine purpose from eternity. It says, "I can believe the truth of myself as easily as I can believe a lie; I can love God of myself as easily as I can hate Him; I can repent of myself, I can choose the good and shun the evil of myself." It boasts of self-power to think, feel, choose, do everything that is right and holy. To be dependent for salvation upon a direct purpose of God seems to it intolerable bondage, an encroachment on liberty, an interference with responsibility. God's religion takes the eternal purpose of Jehovah for its basis, as that without which there could be no gospel, no salvation, no hope for the sinner. It says to man, "You are a totally depraved being, unable to think, feel, act aright; your heart is so thoroughly 'enmity to God,' that the more you hear of Him, the more you hate Him; if left to

your own will or power, you would perish; not one would be saved." But God has interposed; He has said, "They shall not all be lost—I will save some, I will pluck them as brands from the burning." Thus the two religions are opposed to each other. They have hardly one common principle, either in regard to God's character or man's. God has no right to decree who are to be saved, and man is not so far gone in sin but that he can believe of himself, and turn to God—are the two principles on which man's religion rests. God has an entire, inalienable, and sovereign right to decree who are to be saved, and man is a totally depraved and helpless creature—are the two principles on which God's religion bases itself. Man's election of God is the main idea of the former; God's election of man is the essence of the latter. God presents himself to us in the attitude of a *sovereign* God, doing according to His will in the armies of heaven, and among

the inhabitants of the earth. It is His eternal purpose that is the fountain-head of all that we call salvation; and not only is the scheme of deliverance in general traceable to this, but the rescue of each one who is saved is directly ascribed to the same eternal source. All is of God, and God is all. The redeemed are as truly and specially comprised in the eternal plan as is the Redeemer. They and He have been viewed as *one* from all eternity. The Father selected the bride just as personally as He chose the Bridegroom. Each living stone in the great living temple is as distinctly fixed upon and appointed to its place in the building from eternity as is the corner-stone itself.

Man's religion is intended only for time, not for eternity. Its views of the eternal future are vague and strange. There is in them nothing definite, nothing positive, nothing certain. A region of carnal splendour, or, at the best, of intellectual illumina-

nation, arrived at through a gloomy subterranean passage called death, is its best idea of the heaven of God. It proposes to convey man as safely and as pleasantly as possible over a rugged earth, and to land him somewhere about the gate of the kingdom. But as to anything definite beyond that, it can say nothing—it has no information, and it seeks none. To the heaven of heavens which Jehovah fills with His infinite presence and all-pervading gladness it cannot point, nor tell of the open way to that home of homes. Of the city where they need neither sun nor temple, of the land where sin is not, and death is not, and the curse is not, and night is not, it brings no tidings; nor does it say to the needy sons of men, Go in and share the glory, for all is *free*. Its region is a narrow one, whose horizon is that of earth. Its movements here do not seem as if linked to any kindred condition of being hereafter. Its prayers are not in anticipation of the eternal

fellowship. Its praises do not sound as if they formed the prelude to the everlasting chant before the throne. All is narrow, indefinite, limited to time and earth.

God's religion is for eternity. Its essence is *communion with Himself*, begun in personal and conscious reconciliation, through the blood of the everlasting covenant—carried on through life by means of the same peace-bringing blood—not broken by death, but only more fully realised, and then for ever perfected at the resurrection of the just. It links the soul to God once and for ever. It crucifies the world to us, and us unto the world, by the cross of Christ. Severing us from earth, it fastens us to heaven. Identifying us with a risen Saviour, it sets our affection on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Leading us within the veil, it places us under “the shadow of the Almighty,” and in the immediate vision of the glory, that we may pitch our tents in the

sanctuary of our God, and, with the ark and the mercy-seat full in view, be kept in perfect peace. Making us "partakers of the Divine nature," it begins the assimilation to the lost likeness of God, and teaches us to long for the complete assimilation when we shall be "presented holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight." Kindling within us "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," it turns our eye eastward, and bids us watch in hope for the rising of the morning star. Forewarning us of tribulation here, it tells us to reckon the sufferings of this present time as not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Imparting to us "the earnest of the Spirit," it seals us unto the day of redemption. Making us to feel the burden of this vile body, it sends our hopes forward to the day of immortality and incorruption. Putting into our hands the pilgrim's staff, and saying to us, "Arise and depart, for this is

not your rest," it bids us hasten forward to the abiding rest. Giving us a draught of the living water, it points us to the "pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." Numbering us with the "royal priesthood," it awakens within us the hope of an unfading crown, and of a glorious priesthood, in that land whose temple is "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb." Making us "citizens of no mean city," even of "the joyous city," the "celestial city," the "holy city," the "New Jerusalem," it bids us "pass the time of our sojourning here in fear," and hasten swiftly onward to the many mansions in which our dwelling is prepared.

Such are the two religions, in their chief points of contrast.. How worthless the one —how blessed and glorious the other! Let the reader ponder the brief sketch now given.

We have seen the poverty of man's reli-

gion, and how far short it falls of man's true wants. It leaves him still empty and craving. At every point it comes short of what it professes to give, and fails in the very things which man most deeply feels his need of.

Some religions may be said to bring man further than others, but all of them leave him somewhere short of God. They bring him within sight of the temple, but they lead him not in. They keep him trembling on the outside.

God, on the other hand, has provided such a religion as leads us at once into His temple, and brings us not only across the threshold, but up to Himself. He completes the reconciliation at once, and, placing us on the footing of entire acceptance, He bids us lay aside our dread, and begin at the same moment our worship and our love. Gradual approximation to God and to His fellowship is all that man's religion can promise us; immediate entrance upon



a secure and happy friendship is what God's religion accomplishes in every soul that receives it.

But we must inquire as to the method by which this wondrous result is secured. An instantaneous reception into favour such as this can be brought about by no common means. The end is marvellous, so may we expect the process to be by which it is effected. Man tries gradually to lessen the distance between himself and God, by his own doings; God annihilates it at once, by the doings of another, which accomplished in a moment that which a whole eternity of doings could not have enabled man to effect. Man plies every effort to crumble into pieces, and carry away the mountain barrier which rose between God and him; God steps in and sweeps away the barrier, and levels the mountain into a plain. Man tries, by endless instalments, to pay the eternal debt which has cast him into prison, and made him an alien from his Creator;

God comes forth, and in one sum pays the infinite debt, and the prisoner goes free.

To do by means of another—one far greater than man—what man could only do by eternal working and eternal suffering, is God's way. To *exhaust* the penalty at once, so as to replace man in the position whence sin had cast him, is God's purpose.

The exhaustion of the penalty is indispensable. Any other way would be connivance at sin, for you cannot annihilate sin. Once committed, it must remain. You may perhaps obliterate some of its effects, but the sin itself is indelible. It cannot be put out of being. So is its guilt, and so is its penalty. Once incurred, they are irrevocable. They must stand. Physical evils pass away, and cease to be. The lightning cleaves the sky and shakes the earth, and is no more. The storm convulses the ocean, and then disappears in the level calm, leaving behind no trace of its power. Not so moral evils. One

single transgression of a soul is ineffaceable. It can neither be recalled nor cast out of being. Once done, it stands ; and with it stands its penalty.

In such a case, finite help is vain. To efface the ineffaceable ! To eradicate the ineradicable ! How vain and hopeless !

Only one way of help appears. But the helper must be infinite. For what must he do ? He must stretch forward into the coming eternity, and gather up into one the whole of that awful penalty which made sin so indelible—which floated it upon the waters, and prevented its sinking, and being lost for ever. When he has done this—when he has thus exhausted the penalty—sin passes off, and is seen no more ; it sinks beneath the mighty waters of the oblivious flood.

The exhaustion of the penalty, then, by the Infinite One in person, is the only way whereby the indelible may be erased, and sin annihilated. This exhaustion of the penalty on the behalf of His Church is the

work of the Son of God. It was He who passed on into the eternity to come, and gathering together the punishment spread out over the endless ages, took it all upon himself, and bore it, till, by exhausting it, he had blotted it out of being. "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."

This is redemption. Its essence is *substitution*. "The just for the unjust" is God's principle in His dealings with the sinful. In no other way could He be both gracious and righteous.

But the work has been done. God has reconciled His love and His holiness. And it is this wondrous reconciliation that is made known by the gospel to the children of men. "A just God, yet a Saviour;" "just, yet the justifier of the ungodly"—

this is the heavenly message. It was on the cross that the reconciliation took place. It was there that the curse was exhausted. And it is to that cross that God is pointing man's eye, that, seeing the great deed done there, he may understand the forgiveness that there is with God, and feel assured that the greatness of his guilt can no longer be a reason why righteousness should refuse him a welcome.

The finished work, the paid and cancelled debt, the exhausted penalty, are no unmeaning sounds. They are not exaggerated forms or figures of speech. They are no doubt the language of men; but, as made use of to denote the completeness of Christ's sin-bearing work upon the cross, they convey the glorious tidings that mercy and truth are met together, that righteousness and peace have kissed each other (Ps. lxxxv. 10).

This, then, is the foundation-stone of God's religion. He Himself has laid it, and

who shall try to shake, or slight, or supersede it? Religion is true only in proportion as it bases itself on this. The more entirely it does so, the truer it is. The less that it does so, the falser and more human it becomes. This is the sure test. Man tests religion by its morality, or its earnestness, or its seemly forms. But the Divine criterion is the recognition of this great foundation. The religion that rests most entirely upon this is the truest. No other can be true.

CHAPTER II.

THE COUNTERFEITS.

I HAVE endeavoured to contrast the two religions—man's and God's. We have seen how directly they are opposed to each other. They form two great trees, which in soil, root, branch, leaf, flower, and fruit, are altogether different. They have little else in common save the name—religion.

But what I have hitherto spoken of have been the visible and tangible points of contrast. In these we see at once the antagonism of the two great systems. They cannot mix or amalgamate—they are like the iron and the clay.

But there is something more subtle which I have not yet touched upon—something

in which the difference is far more difficult to discover. Man has set himself to *copy* the religion of God, so as to produce something which, while it is still human, has almost every feature of the Divine. Man's object has been so exactly and fully to imitate that which is of God, that no eye of a fellow-creature could detect the imposture. It is not a contrast—it is a counterfeit; and it is one of the most successful of all the ways by which the disguised “angel of light” has led men in the ways of his own darkness.

In illustrating this, let me ask the reader's attention to the following words of the prophet Jeremiah—“Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, THAT STEAL MY WORDS every one from his neighbour” (xxiii. 30). There is a certain class of prophets here described by no means like the common run of false teachers. The class is a peculiar one: I do not say a small one, but still a peculiar one; and while the description suits *teachers*, it

equally suits hearers and learners. God does not accuse them of setting up a false religion in opposition to His. He does not charge them with uttering lies, or misleading the people by perverting and distorting the truth. It is not “corruption of his word” (2 Cor. ii. 17) that He is speaking of, nor of a religion founded upon such a corruption, but a far more subtle and specious thing. Nor does He condemn them for uttering words of their own—words that were not His, whether true or false. This is not the evil complained of, and the sin denounced. He allows that the words spoken are really His, for He calls them “my words;” but His accusation is, that they were *not honestly come by*; that, instead of being obtained from the one lawful source—that is, Himself—they were surreptitiously seized upon from others—they were *stolen*. His charge is, that, instead of coming directly to Him, as the fountain-head, to be taught from His own lips, and

by His own Spirit, these men got all their religious knowledge, all their acquaintance with His words, at second-hand, thus preferring man's teaching to God's, eschewing everything like personal contact and communication with God, and thus foregoing the freshness and power which words coming straight from His mouth could not fail to possess, as well as forfeiting the blessing with which God accompanies all that He conveys to the soul.

But how, or in what circumstances, may we be said to steal God's words from our neighbour? This is a question of vast moment, inasmuch as it leads to an inquiry regarding *counterfeit* religion; that is, religion which, while admitting nothing false into the creed on which it bases itself, is yet, after all, a mere *fac-simile*, and not the authentic reality—religion which is thoroughly and essentially *human*, while, in all its visible lineaments and confessed articles of faith, it is *divine*; for man's per-

versity is seen just as much in his counterfeiting or mimicking the true, as in his upholding the false.

1. We “steal God’s words” from our neighbour when we imbibe our religious opinions or theology from education, or hearsay, or companionship. We have been taught certain articles of belief, and we have never either questioned their truth, or gone about them to establish them so as to set them beyond question. In such a case we have stolen God’s words from our fellow-men. They may all be strictly true and Divine, yet they have not been honestly and lawfully obtained; we have not gotten them from Him who alone can give us true possession of them—such possession of them as will make them entirely our own, by His gift and impartation.

2. We do so when we adopt opinions, however sound, upon human *authority*. In that case our faith stands in “the wisdom of men;” and the fear of God is taught

us by man's precept. If we receive truth because our fathers received it, ours is a hereditary creed; if we receive it because the Church has transmitted it to us, it is a traditional creed; if we receive it because of its venerable age, it is an antiquarian creed; if we receive it because great or even good names are affixed to it, it is a man-taught creed; if we receive it because reason has wrought it out and recommended it, it is an intellectual creed. In all these cases it is a human creed, resting upon human authority. It can be traced no higher than a human source, however true in itself. In other words, it has not been honestly come by—it has been "stolen." God Himself is the only authority we can recognise; and "God has said it" is the only resting-place for our faith. If it contents itself with any other foundation, it is either credulity or unbelief, or both together. "God hath spoken" is the one foundation of our faith; not

our fathers held it, or our church received it, or our authorised creed embodies it, or our best divines have maintained it, or reason has demonstrated it; for to believe what God has said is one thing, and to believe it simply because He has said it, is another. It is quite possible to receive God's words, yet not to receive them solely because He has spoken them.

3. We do so, when, in our inquiries, we consult man before consulting God—when we study first and pray afterwards, or when we study without prayer at all. In such study much apparent progress may be made in apprehending “God's word;” much truth may be reached, so that our orthodoxy will be unchallengeable even in its minutest *formulæ*, but it will not be *honestly attained*—it will be “stolen;” not gotten from its true Owner, but derived from man or from self, God not being consulted in the matter. Ah! it is not, first the study and then the closet—but, first the

closet and then the study ; it is not, first the commentary and then the Bible—but, first the Bible and then the commentary ; it is not, first theology and then Scripture—but, first Scripture and then theology ; else we are but purloiners of Divine truth, not honest purchasers of Him who has said, “Buy the truth, and sell it not.” It is in fellowship with Father, Son, and Spirit, that we must acquire our orthodoxy, and arrange our systems, and get hold of the form of sound words, and stablish ourselves in the faith. If this connexion be dislocated, if this order be reversed, then are we pursuing an unlawful and unblest course ; we are stealing God’s words from our neighbour instead of getting them where He would have us get them, in a far truer and more blessed way—directly from Himself.

4. We do so when we borrow the religious or spiritual experience of others, and use it as if it were our own, plying our-

selves with it, and endeavouring to make our souls to undergo it, as necessary to our religious character. A stolen or borrowed experience is just as unprofitable and hateful as stolen or borrowed truth. It is just another form of the same evil, another development of the same dishonest propensity; and it is, if possible, more sad and pernicious than the other. Yet it is no less common. Perhaps a certain standard of experience is set up, and it is given out that all must conform to this. Conversion must consist of a certain number of items arranged in certain theological order; it must embrace and embody certain classified elements; it must originate in a specified way; it must proceed according to fixed and unalterable rules; it must count up a certain number of definite stages!

In setting up a definite standard of experience, be it that of Luther, or Bunyan, or Edwards, or Brainerd, there is too plainly indicated a desire to cast ourselves

into such human moulds, rather than to allow the Holy Spirit to mould us at His will. There is a trying to feel as others feel, and *because* others feel in a certain way, or as we think that we ought to feel. There is an endeavour to force a certain set of feelings into ourselves, that with them we may come to God properly recommended, instead of putting ourselves unreservedly into the hands of the Spirit, that He may awaken them in us, and draw them out of us. There is a determination to make ourselves pass through certain processes of emotion, because we read that others have done so, not perhaps in rivalry by any means, but from a sense of necessity or duty. We set about being religious by laying down some great model-experience, and then trying to act, and feel, and think accordingly, as if every sapling ought to be a cedar, because the cedars of Lebanon are so goodly, or as if every root and seedling ought to be a lily, because

Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

It is this self-wrought, self-sustained experience, that God condemns. It cramps our moral nature, and it represents God as so poor in purpose and plan, that He requires to repeat Himself continually. It is as truly an injury to ourselves as an insult to God. It is as unhealthy as it is untrue and unreal. It is a stolen experience, an artificial conversion, a self-produced spirituality, a man-made religion, which, however like the true, is not genuine; nay, is not honestly come by, being copied from others, received at second-hand, not learned in the school of God, under the teaching and discipline of the Holy Ghost.

Such are some of the ways in which many get possession of the truth of God, and acquire their religious experience. I do not deny that what they have gotten is truth; all that I affirm is, that they have

not gotten it in the lawful way, and from the accredited source. It may not be "from beneath;" but then it is assuredly not from above: it is from around and from within.

In opposition to these discreditable ways of obtaining truth and experience, we must learn the only lawful one. We must draw them fresh from God. He is ever willing to impart them. There is no reluctance on His part to teach and to enlighten. He does not stand upon ceremony with us, nor compel us to stand on ceremony with Him. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Ps. xxxii. 8). "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John vi. 45).

This, then, is the process to which we must submit ourselves, if we would shake off this counterfeit religion; we must un-

learn the unlawful, and learn the lawful way of coming into the possession of the words of God. "Let him that stole steal no more." We must subordinate all teaching to that of God, or, as we may say, of Christ. "Who teacheth like him?" (Job xxxvi. 22.) "The Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh wisdom and understanding: He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous" (Prov. ii. 6). Let us receive knowledge from His lips. Let us lay ourselves fully open to the heavenly teaching, assured that God will "reveal all truth to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. ii. 10). Let us go straight to Him, that He may give us "the unction from the Holy One, whereby we may know all things" (1 John ii. 20).

Not that He gives us new truths or new revelations; but he gives us the old *in His own way*—the only way in which they will avail us or profit others. In all other

ways they are “stolen from our neighbour,” not obtained from God; and, when thus unlawfully gotten, however good in themselves, they not only bring with them no blessing, but “they eat as doth a canker.”

But this calls for further consideration, and I proceed to ask, “What are the *effects* of this stealing God’s words from our neighbour?”

In this inquiry, I assume that it is really the words of God that are thus obtained, and that the truth of God is fully preserved. Yet it might be easy to shew, that in such a case there will always be some flaw or some imperfection, some defect or some redundancy, some dislocation and disorder. It cannot be otherwise in reality; for however near truth we may come, yet *the very truth* itself in all its exactness we can never reach, save through the “enlightening of the eyes of our understanding” by the Spirit of truth Himself. Some correctness in scriptural lan-

guage, some precision in theological formulæ, we may attain to; but the nice yet simple correctness in thought and in expression that marks the man whom God has taught, we must always be deficient in.

But, assuming that it is really God's truth that is obtained, let us ask, What are the consequences of such a way of getting hold of it as we have been pointing out? It produces—

1. *An imitative religion.* In one sense, and up to a certain point, we may be *copyists*. We may study the developed graces of a fellow-saint, and be thus enabled to correct much in ourselves that is faulty. We may note the characteristics of others, and seek to have them transferred to ourselves, in so far as they are suitable for us; for what is befitting one, may not in all its extent be befitting another. But He who transfers them must be the Holy Spirit, otherwise they will appear but awkward appendages, not natural

branches growing out of the parent stem. He who corrects the faultiness must be the Spirit, else it will be a mere disguising, not an uprooting of the evil. He who enables us to copy must be the Spirit, else it will be a stiff lifeless imitation, an inanimate and unmeaning assemblage of features, thrown together by a hand that understood neither beauty, nor proportion, nor order.

When men assume the position of copyists, either in imbibing truth or in taking on character, the result must be a mere religion of imitation—not indeed necessarily a religion of hypocrisy, but still a religion of imitation.

This tendency to religious imitativeness is extensively ruinous. It is destructive of reality and freshness. It is totally incompatible with what is simple, and natural, and graceful in religion. Hence the inferiority of the Puritanic age to that of the Reformation. In the former there

was (amid much that was noble and holy) something of the imitative; and hence in the latter the superior gracefulness and ease—the higher, bolder style of character. Latimer and Baxter were both holy men; but there is a freedom and elasticity about the former—a stiffness and want of graceful buoyancy about the latter, which we may trace to the same source as the above. And if such be the danger even in those who are truly men of God, what must it be in those who have but the name?

The likeness may be exact, but it is the exactness of painting, or the correctness of the cold statue—not the resemblance of the child to the father, or of the sapling to the parent tree.

Yet much of what is called religion is of this kind—mere imitation, no more. Men profess to have been converted, to have undergone the authentic change which makes them sons of God, to be wrought in

by the Holy Spirit, yet we discover, upon closer scrutiny, that, after all, they are but copying a character that they admire. Men pray, and sigh, and weep, and confess sin, not because they have been thus moved by the Spirit, but because they have read the diary of a saint who thus prayed, and sighed, and wept, and mourned for sin. Let us give heed lest we be deceived by this imitativeness, and let us remember that it can produce in us, at the best, only a well-sketched outline, a piece of tame and commonplace externalism, which, though sapless and lifeless, lulls to sleep the conscience, and leads to deeper self-deception; while, at the same time, it dishonours God, grieves the Spirit, and wraps us up, contented, in a form of godliness, as a substitute for the living power.

2. *It produces a second-rate religion.*—The *quality* of a religion thus obtained must be of an inferior kind. Being thus borrowed or “stolen,” it cannot be of the

same high and Divine stamp as when received in the true and lawful way—for the stream can rise no higher than the fountain; if the latter be human, so will the former be.

An imitation must be in many points defective; and it is impossible for a religion acquired in the way above described to be otherwise than imperfect and subordinate, even should it descend no lower in the scale. So many things in religion are quite incapable of being borrowed; so many things are unseemly and grotesque when borrowed; so many things, when borrowed, hang loose about the borrower, not suiting him at all, and contributing nothing to strength, or symmetry, or ornament—that it would be folly to expect anything very much above the insipidity of commonplace.

Besides, *life* cannot be imitated. The lifeless and the material may be correctly copied, but life and immateriality are be-

yond the power of man's skill to imitate. He can paint a flower, but he cannot make one. He can chisel the marble into the likeness of man's material frame, but life and its movements he cannot copy. Its hidden pulses are beyond his reach. Much more true must this be of spiritual life, which is so much more impalpable, and whose sources are so much more inaccessible. The vanity of such an attempt will soon declare itself in the inferiority of the thing produced. It will be a poor, meagre, cadaverous religion, not only unfit to bring glory to the Cross, or hold up the eternal lamp in a dark time, to a far-erring world, but unfit to undertake man's common duties, unfit to stand the tear and wear of life, and still more unfit to throw itself for a death-wrestle upon the principalities and powers of hell.

3. It produces an unhealthy religion.— Health, like life, cannot be imitated. Its hues may, in a measure, be copied; but the

natural and ever-varying tints of its complexion cannot be caught. In constructing, then, a religious experience, there must be failure here. The source of health is beyond our reach—its springs are not upon the earth; so that sickliness, or rather deathliness, of aspect must ever be the characteristic of man's religion. There can be no healthy play in any one of our spiritual organs. All is diseased. The pulse will either be at the fever-heat of excitement, or in the stagnation of collapse or death. In such a case, the whole religious life will be unhealthy and feeble. The calmness, the unwrinkled freshness, the joyous energy that mark true spiritual health will not be there. How *healthy* the state of those to whom it was said, “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience; . . . thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted!” Theirs was no borrowed, no second-hand religion.

How unhealthy those to whom it was said, “Thou art neither cold nor hot!” Their religion was of man, not of God.

4. *It produces an uncertain religion.*—All religion that is of God begins with “purging the conscience,” and reconciling the sinner. This is its starting-point. It provides cleansing through the blood, and clothing through the righteousness, of the Son of God. Thus cleansed and clothed, the worshipper stands before the mercy-seat.

But in a borrowed religion, there can be no pacifying of the conscience; and all is necessarily uncertain as to reconciliation with God. Where there are no direct and personal dealings with God in the matter of acceptance, there cannot be certainty. Hence every step taken must be taken in uncertainty. Every deed done must be done in uncertainty, as to its being acceptable in His sight. Where God’s words of peace and grace are received at second-hand—“from our neighbour,” and not at once

from Himself, this uncertain condition cannot be rectified—darkness must rest upon the question of our relationship to God. We cannot say, “I know whom I have believed,” for, as yet, we have believed only a fellow-mortal, not God Himself. The rock on which we are resting is a human one, not the Rock of Ages—the foundation laid in Zion.

5. It produces a timid religion.—Having no sure resting-place for our souls, fear takes possession of us. Filial trust in God has no place in us; perfect love has not yet cast out fear; and fear, producing “torment,” unnerves us. Having no confidence towards God, we become timid in all respects; we are easily made afraid. We will not venture much, nor brave much, nor sacrifice much. We have not tasted enough of spiritual joys to make us willing to part with much for them. We have not discovered enough of Christ to make us count all things but loss for the excellency of the

knowledge of Him. We have not realised enough of personal blessing, nor experienced the forgiveness and the liberty which He imparts, so that we can say, "I would not part with these for worlds; and I am ready to do or to dare anything for Him who has done such great things for me." With God for our God, ascertained and felt as such, we can confront opposing evils; we can endure hardness; we are untouched and unintimidated by the fear of man; we are hardy, resolute, and indomitable. Without God as ours, we are feeble and timorous—more disposed to yield than to fight—more ready to flee than to "stand in the evil day."

6. It produces a negative religion.—A borrowed or second-hand religion deals little in what is positive. They to whom it belongs are known rather by what they are *not*, than by what they are. They are not profane, they are not immoral, they are not scoffers, they are not prayerless, they

are not opposers of the gospel, they are not outwardly inconsistent or ungodly ; but then they are not forward in the cause of Christ ; they have not the single eye and the simple heart. They are lukewarm, not fervent in spirit. They follow perhaps, but never lead. Their zeal prompts them to nothing large or great. “ Spending, and being spent,” “ filling up what is behind of the afflictions of Christ,” “ wrestling with principalities and powers”—these are things to which they are strangers.

7. It produces an unhappy religion.— Containing in it none of the certainties of pardon and reconciliation, it must be unhappy. But, besides, a religion thus borrowed from others—“ stolen from our neighbour”—cannot be congenial. It does not suit our case. It does not supply our wants. It does not heal our wounds. It does not give us rest in our weariness. We are in bondage, and it brings no liberty. We are in darkness, and it brings no light.

It is not a thing springing up from within us, filling and satisfying our souls: it is a thing put on from without, which, not exactly fitting us, only frets and burdens us. We submit to it, because we must have a religion; but life is not in it, and joy is not in it, and happy childlike confidence is not in it. It is irksome, often beyond endurance; and we are tempted to shake it off, and seek relief anywhere—in any change of form, or church, or opinion, or observance, by which a temporary ease may be obtained for our weary souls. We feel as disappointed men, and often in our lonely hours are ready to give vent to our disappointment in tears of bitter grief. Its whole effect is to make us uncomfortable. It spoils the world's mirth, yet gives us nothing in exchange. It forbids our enjoying gaiety, yet it compensates for it with nothing joyous or satisfying. Its yoke is not easy, its burden is not light. There is no reality about it—all is shadowy and hollow. We,

do not feel as if we had got hold of a solid and enduring substance, but as if we were “beating the air.” It imparts no buoyancy, no elasticity of soul; nay, it acts like a drag—it bears down upon us with a dull, heavy pressure, stifling instead of stimulating energy, quenching instead of kindling love.

8. It produces an uninfluential religion.

—It has nothing about it either winning or commanding, either to attract or to overawe. Even at its best it accomplishes but little. It sheds no light upon a dark world. It does no deeds of daring; it attempts nothing high, or great, or noble. It has neither breadth nor depth. It has no power of extending itself. It is not *infectious*. It is circumscribed as well as feeble; it is inoperative as well as empty. It is selfish in its very nature, and has no tendency to produce results in others. It is not idle, perhaps; but its labours do not tell. It carries no blessing, no power with

it. God cannot bless it, for it is not *His* religion; and, besides, it lacks the fresh glow and fiery edge which alone can give effect to it. It has not the heartiness, the animation, the simple-hearted eagerness, which operate so irresistibly, not only bearing down opposition and disarming prejudice, but making men to feel, "This is reality—this is not of earth—this is of God." A borrowed religion cannot be a successful one. It is not capable of impressing or attracting, of awakening or subduing. It has no edge upon it fitted to seize or penetrate the conscience. It carries no weight with it, no innate authority, no overawing solemnity—no such intense vitality as to make a careless world regard it as something strange and mysterious, if not to recognise it as Divine.

Such are some of the results of the great evil referred to by the prophet when condemning those "who stole God's words from their neighbour." What really good

or effective thing can a borrowed religion, a copied experience, a second-hand theology, accomplish? These results are deadly and disastrous beyond measure, both as regards the individual to whom such a religion belongs, and as regards those with whom he comes into contact. Having no real light from heaven, he wanders in darkness even while seeming to possess the light; and thus he can only lead others astray. Having no peace within himself, he cannot testify of peace to others, and is sure to err when attempting to lead them in the way. Not having "tasted the good word of God" for himself, nor known the keen relish which the Holy Spirit imparts, his words come with no power, but fall blunt and unimpressive upon the hearer. He has theology, but he has not Christ: and of what profit can he be either to himself or others? He has religion, but he has not God: and whence can come the blessing? He is a well without water—a tree

whose fruit withereth, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. With a borrowed religion, and a stolen experience, and a self-taught theology, he cannot reckon upon a useful or a successful life.

There may at times be some pleasure in all this, some self-satisfaction with his attainments, but so long as he is stealing God's words from others, and not receiving them from God, such feelings must be deceitful, and, in contenting himself with them, he is practising a ruinous delusion upon his soul. "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant; but he knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell" (Prov. ix. 17, 18).

Yet, on the other hand, let us remember the danger of seeking novelties in religion, or in doctrine, or experience. This, though apparently an opposite danger, is yet in reality one of the same kind as the preceding, inasmuch as it gets nothing from

God. For the sake of being original or singular, we may perhaps refuse to borrow or to imitate, but we may not the less be making God's words pass through the corrupting medium of human intellect, and we may be standing as far aloof from God.

There is no new revelation to be given us, but the old revelation which we have had from the beginning ; only taught us in God's way, by God's Spirit, and not simply acquired by the reason and research of man.

There is no inconsistency between this and our previous statements ; nay, there is the truest harmony. We can warn men against a borrowed religion, and yet beseech them to be upon their guard against *novelties*. We can say, " Beware of taking your creed or your experience from men or books;" and yet with equal honesty we can add, " Beware of seeking after new doctrines, and of cherishing a spirit of speculation and restless search after the

ingenuities of intellect or fancy." it is not against the reception of the old that the prophet warns us in the passage above referred to, nor is it to the adoption of what is new that he exhorts us. It is as to the *mode* of reception that he speaks. It is of the source from which new opinions are to be drawn that he speaks, and of the authority on which they are to rest. There is a *Divine* mode of receiving truth, and there is a *human* mode; and it is here that the warning comes in.

The question is not, What are God's words? but, How are these words to be received into the soul? Are we to go to man or to God for aid and enlightenment? Are we to go to man, that he may, in his own imperfect way, write Divine truth upon our intellect, and fill the outer region of our being with doctrines and abstractions? Or are we to go to God, that He may infuse His own truth into our soul, engrave His own law upon our conscience,

and fill the inner region of our being with the vitalities of His own everlasting Word, making them to become in us “a well of water springing up into everlasting life?”

It is needful that both of these forms of danger should be shunned. While the former, if not guarded against, would lead us into a sapless formality—a Laodicean religion, the latter will as surely land us in a total departure from the faith. There is a large class in the present day settling down in the former, but there is perhaps a yet larger class drifting away upon the wild current of the latter. We are to beware of stealing our words from our neighbour, and thereby taking on a borrowed and second-hand religion; but we are at the same time to ask for the old paths and the good ways, that we may walk therein, and find rest for our souls.

The age is setting out upon a new career of thought and action, and it seems to think that for this it requires a new outfit of

ideas, the old being worn-out and tame. It would fain make a complete disjunction between the past and the present, treating the former as obsolete, and endeavouring to make the latter the era of originalities, or at least of novelties. To "lag behind the age" is one of the most approved sarcasms of the day, and for a man to have this sentence passed upon him is equivalent to entire condemnation, and consequent dismissal from all further notice.

But to pass on from truth to truth is one thing, and to bury past truth out of sight, or treat it as antiquated, is another. There are some things which never grow obsolete or out of date. These it should be our endeavour not to supplant, but to reproduce; for, after all, the best things of earth are, in a certain sense, but reproductions or repetitions. The tree but reproduces itself from the seed, and has been doing so ever since God planted it by His hand upon this soil. Nor has this been

thought a fault to be amended, but rather a thing to be thankful for, inasmuch as we have still before our eye the beauty, the greenness, and the fruitfulness in which the men of other ages rejoiced. And the rainbow bends over us the same arch as in ages past—true to the primeval curve and colour. Nor do we despise its want of originality, nor wish for changes suited to the age—we are content with it as it is; nor do we blame its Maker for poverty of conception, nor are weary with seeing its fair fringe upon the dark cloud, however often it comes. And the sun repeats itself—yet we love the repetition. And the stars repeat themselves—yet we do not count the repetition stale. And night repeats itself with its solemn vastness; and day repeats itself with its freshening glow; and the flowers repeat themselves with ever-changing hue and fragrance; and the seasons repeat themselves in their glad succession; and the sea repeats itself alike in the un-

measured roll of its waves, and in the measured motion of its tides.

Yet do we blame Creation for its repetitions, as if an original age like ours could no longer bear them; or do we speak slightlyingly of its beauty as stereotyped and antiquated? Nay, do we not rejoice that it does so faithfully repeat itself, stereotyping all its eldest forms, and reproducing each one of its primeval glories?

Nor do they lose by repetition. They are as fresh and new in these last days as when God first pronounced them good. The stars are as keen in their sparkle, and the sky as fair in its blue stretch as at the first. The sea has not grown tame, nor the mountains commonplace, nor the forest wearisome, nor the streams monotonous. We are satisfied without originality in these: we would not have them otherwise. The old suits us well. Not only do we recognise repetition as the law of the universe, but we see in it that very law

which makes creation so goodly, so perfect, so suitable for us.

If so, is there not something unhealthy, something false and unnatural, in the tendency to set aside old truth as obsolete, in the restless craving after what is new? Nay, and is there not something suspicious in the dislike of the old forms of doctrine—the ancestral moulds of venerable truth? We claim no uninspired declaration of truth as perfect, and we are always glad to have it amended, and made more correct; but we tremble for the feeling unfolding itself in many quarters, that theology must keep pace with the age, and spurn the straitened limits and narrow *formulæ* of other times. What was true in Reformation theology is true *now*, even as *then*. Truth has not altered with the age or with the climate. What was scriptural in Puritanic doctrine, is still scriptural and Divine. We may add to it, or we may illustrate it, but we cannot supersede it. We may fol-

low it out, but we cannot supplant it. It is not Christianity that is to keep pace with the age, but it is the age that is to keep pace with Christianity. To say that the movements of theology are to follow the march of intellect—that Christian doctrine must shape and adapt itself to the progress of the age—that old channels of truth must be burst, and old moulds broken, in compliance with the spirit of the age—that the Divine must bend to the human, the infinite to the finite, is to give utterance to the mingled pride and infidelity which says, “Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us?” and to take at least the first step in doing homage to Satan, as an angel of light, the usurper of the glories of Him “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Both these classes of evil are to be marked and shunned—the evil of a borrowed experience and second-hand theo-

logy on the one side, and the evil of a lax and audacious speculativeness on the other. Both are destructive of true religion, and neither of them is fitted to meet the exigencies of the times, or to withstand the flood of evil which Satan is rolling in against us in these last days. Neither of them can make head against his power or craft ; neither of them can furnish armour for repelling his fiery darts. He has no reason to fear a religion so heartless as the former, so unstable and capricious as the latter.

It is not at tradition or philosophy that Satan trembles : he can afford to despise both ; and the man who goes to meet him with only such armour, or such weapons as they provide, may count the battle lost ere he has taken the field.

The man whom Satan fears—the man who is able not only to face the world, but to scatter the hosts of hell—is the man who can say, under the Spirit's teaching,

“I know whom I have believed”—I have “tasted that the Lord is gracious”—“I beheld his glory;” and who, in speaking to others, either friends or foes, can bear such testimony as this—“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” The “secret of the Lord” is with that man; and, possessed of that secret, he can confront the god of this world, and put to flight the armies of the aliens. He carries about with him in his very countenance something which, while it awakens opposition, yet overthrows the opposer. His connexion with God cannot be hidden. It betrays itself unconsciously; not visibly indeed, but just as surely as did the face of Moses when he came down from his forty days’ communion with the Lord.

But in what way are we to learn truth, so as to avoid these counterfeits? How

may we shun an evil so great, yet so easily besetting? Our answer to this must be brief.

The Lord's conference with Nicodemus, and again his conversation with the woman of Sychar, are specimens of the way in which Divine truth is to be learned. He must be our Teacher. Each lesson must come from Him; and, in order to receive it aright, we must be brought into living contact with Himself. No other kind of teaching is authentic, or fruitful, or sanctifying. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and *he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*"

In the first and great question between us and God—that of reconciliation, we have to deal with the Saviour *alone*; no one can come between us and Him; no one can stand beside us; no one can speak for us; no one can prompt us. It is a matter which can only be gone about at a private and

personal interview between us and the Lord. So is it also in the subsequent process of teaching. We must have recourse to Him *directly*; we must deal with Him in private; we must have personal communication with Him. Nothing else can be profitable, or true, or abiding. It was in complying with the "Come unto me," that we found rest for our souls; and it is in remembering the "Learn of me," that we go on unto perfection in the knowledge of the Father and of the Son.

In order, then, that we may learn Divine truth, God calls on us to open up a communication directly and personally with Himself. He warns us against self-teaching, and against man-teaching, as fitted only to mislead; and He presents us with Divine teaching—nay, He offers to become our Teacher! "I am thy God, which teacheth thee to profit," said He to Israel (Is. xlvi. 17); and what profitable teaching is there apart from Him? "If any man lack wis-



dom, let him ask of God" (James i. 5); and what will it avail us to ask it of any other? "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John ii. 20); and what is the knowledge of *anything*, obtained without this unction from the Holy One? "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John ii. 27); and to what source can any one turn for that which God calls knowledge, or would recognise as teaching, save to this Divine anointing?

Often has God respected the promise of His teaching—"All thy children shall be taught of God" (Is. liv. 13); "He will teach sinners in the way" (Ps. xxv. 8); "He will teach us of his ways" (Is. ii. 3)—and as often have they who heard it availed themselves of it, going to Him and

thus pleading: "Teach me thy paths"— "teach me thy statutes"—"teach me good judgment and knowledge"—"teach me to do thy will." Often did He accuse Israel of preferring other teachers—"Their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men." "They shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears."

All this, too, His people's experience has verified. Thus Elihu exclaimed, "Who teacheth like him!" Thus David found it—"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law;" "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant." And thus Daniel, in his perplexity, went straight to God, "desiring mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret." Thus wrote John Owen, in the preface to his *Exposition of the Hebrews*—"I must say, that after all my searching and reading, prayer and assiduous meditation on the text have been

my only reserve, and far the most useful means of light and assistance.' By these have my thoughts been freed from many and many an entanglement, into which the writings of others on the same subject had cast me, or could not deliver me from." And thus wrote Whitefield—" I followed my usual practice of reading and praying over the Word of God upon my knees: sweet was this retirement to my soul."

The only profitable, as well as the only lawful, way of obtaining truth, is getting it from God; otherwise, it will be sapless and lifeless. When setting aside His teaching, we are either exposed to have our souls shrivelled up by the mechanical reception of a traditional creed, or tortured with ceaseless doubts, or broken to pieces with the rude storms of scepticism.

God is most willing to teach us, and all the more willing when we cast ourselves unreservedly upon Himself, allowing no interposition of any kind between us and

Him. "If we lack wisdom, let us ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Let us go direct to Him; for what teaching is like His? or who is there that can really understand our case, or master our untractableness and folly? We must study the Bible on our knees; we must acquire theology in our closets; we must learn experience in communion with God, in cultivating intimacy with Christ, in submitting ourselves to the discipline of the Holy Spirit, in fighting with the flesh, in wrestling with the devil, in overcoming the world.

This is true philosophy, as well as true religion. He who can instruct us best in the Scriptures is He who wrote them. And as the Lord opened the understanding of His disciples to understand His word, and made their hearts to burn within them while He talked with them by the way, and opened to them the Scriptures, so does He

still to every soul that thus gives itself into His hands. It is the want of this Divine teaching that causes so many to be led astray, or to receive *unfelt and unconsidered* the truths of the circle in which each man may be moving.

The remedy for the world's many evils, and the correction of its many errors, lies here. But, alas! it does not understand this. In its eyes, it is folly or fanaticism.

The cure, also, for the professing church's many maladies lies also here. To have a creed, a true creed, and yet **A CREED NOT TAUGHT OF GOD**, is one of the deepest roots of bitterness in these last days. To restore health to the churches, to elevate thousands from a mechanical profession to the living power of godliness, to promote unity of faith as well as harmony of action, to present to the world the spectacle of a vigorous and unearthly spirituality, recourse must be had to this direct dealing with the great Fountain of Light. If this be neglected

or spurned, there must follow worse errors, looser principles, sadder formalism, and a more repulsive religion.

“ Acquaintanceship with God”—it is this that is the world’s *great want*. It does not indeed feel it, but not the less on that account does it suffer from the loss of this Divine companionship. He who would make a happy world and a noble church—he who would secure a true philosophy and a living religion, must not hesitate continually to urge this foundation-text, “Acquaint thyself with God.” All that comes short of this must end in foolishness and error. Whatever does not lead us to God Himself, and form the link of realised fellowship between our souls and Him, must set us down in formalism or fanaticism or self-delusion, if not in infidelity itself.

PART II.

Ann—His World.

CHAPTER I.

MAN'S THOUGHTS OF THE PRESENT.

HAVING seen man's views of what is *inward*, let us now look at his thoughts of the *outward*. The religion that he wants is sadly at variance with that which God has written for him ; let us now see if the world, either present or to come, which he would have, at all resembles that which the purpose of God embodies.

I have endeavoured to shew that his religion is as poor as it is false ; let us see if his world be any better.

That the age is, in many respects, a needy one, few will wholly question. Even the self-satisfied and vain-glorious enthusiasts of progress feel that there is much wanting.

They scoff at any symptom of what they call *retrogression*; they smile at those who are disposed to stand still; and they urge on *progress*, with all the buoyancy of young hope, fearing neither precipitancy nor impetuosity. Impatient of the past save as a repository of antique relics, hardly tolerant of the present except as a necessary round in the upward ladder, they press forward into the future—(*man's* future, alas!)—and dream or prophesy of infinite progression spreading wide before them; and all achieved by their own wisdom and strength!

It is strange to hear these men boasting of what is lying before them as the result of modern enlightenment. Each morning, as they look forth at their window upon the world and its prospects, the horizon seems to widen, the atmosphere to clear, and the sun to gather intenser and more healing radiance. “Glorious prospect!” they exclaim, in rapturous musing. *Mind* is now on the ascendant! *Intellect* has now

come of age; and having attained its long-deferred majority, it is going forth in the ripeness and freedom of its manhood, to do battle with evil and ignorance and misrule, assured of returning, ere long, laden with the spoils of victory—these spoils a regenerated world!

The thought of their heart is, that the world's true day has dawned at last; light has arisen; darkness *must* make way for it; the progress, once begun, must accelerate in speed; the wave, once set in motion, even far out in mid-ocean, must swell and rise, sending out on every side its bright circles, nor resting till its far-spread ripples have laid down their freight of blessing upon every shore of earth. These things they predict with ready confidence, becoming prophets themselves while hotly condemning others for venturing to pry into the prophetic Word of God. Visions of splendour float out before them, and they cannot away with those who suggest that



possibly these may be but man's visions—nay, perchance pictures conjured up by the god of this world, in order the more surely to mislead their hopes, and, by bewildering their fancy, to entangle their steps more cruelly in his snares.

Yet even with them there is at times a misgiving. Their confidence wavers, if it does not wholly give way. An uneasy feeling steals over them that there is perhaps more of show and less of solidity, more of surface and less of depth, more of hollowness and less of reality, more of galvanic impulse and less of natural vitality about the present state of things, than they are at other times willing to admit. Some untoward circumstance, some disastrous stroke of evil, crushing fond hopes and laying bare abysses of evil hitherto undreamt of, startle them into the unwelcome suspicion that their hopes were too high and full. Some strange occurrence, bringing out awfully to the light the deep and un-

changed selfishness of man, shakes their confidence in the rapid progress of the race. Some terrific discovery, in some corner of one of our vast cities, for instance, of masses of suffering and pollution, undissolved and undiminished by the enlightenment of the age, nay, augmenting and fermenting, alarms them. Some overwhelming personal calamity, making their heart to bleed at every pore, convinces them that sorrow is still the condition of our being here, that the curse is still unrepealed, and that there is an incubus lying upon our race, which sets limits to all progress, and must continue to weigh us down till lifted off by an Almighty hand.

Of this class, some still remain confidently hopeful, in spite of disappointment and retardation. Light-hearted and buoyant, they refuse to look at anything but brightness, and easily laugh off all symptoms of rising gloom. They have cast their theory of the world in the mould of their own sanguine

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temperament, and to part with that gay theory would be parting with half their nature—would be cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye. They hold fast their self-flattery—their world-flattery, in spite of adverse events, however numerous and dark.

But there are others whom sore disappointment has sobered, if not solemnised. Hope deferred has made their heart sick ; and though still in a measure clinging to their theories of progress, they are more diffident and less boastful than heretofore. Sharp experience has schooled them into patience, and pulled down their high conceits. They are more willing to believe that the age's progress is less rapid and unbroken than once they imagined. The checks to this progress, the fallings back, the want of proportion between the parts, the counteractions—these have now a more prominent place in their thoughts than they used to have. The bud that swelled so fully and promised so fairly, some ten or

twenty years ago, has not expanded according to expectation. It has become sickly in hue, nay, seems to wither, as if blight were on it. Instead of opening, it seems to close, and give token of decay. A chill has nipped it, or a worm is at its root. They have anxiously watched its progress, and, with heavy hearts, they begin to suspect that they were premature in their rejoicings, and to despair of its ever ripening here.

In their case there is danger of misanthropy. They begin to despair of a world whose maladies will not yield to their skill. They are on the point of saying, "There is no hope." Progress in man's way, upon man's system, and by man's strength, they see no prospect of; and they have not yet learned God's system of the world, the Divine theory of progress. God's thoughts as to the future they have not received—His way and His time of healing the long-sick creation, they have hardly thought of inquiring into.

Something of this becomes visible in the great literary thinkers of the day. They once hoped, nay, were confident; now they begin almost to despair. Democracy and despotism, kings and people, learned and unlearned, are all brought under their satire and scorn. Let us listen to one of them.* His complaints and cries are, if not wholly inarticulate, at least sadly confused and contradictory. He looks abroad upon the world, but it is without a Bible in his hand. He speaks eloquently of the world's evils, but the "everlasting gospel," the good news of the death and resurrection of God's Incarnate Son, are not within the circle of his remedies. He points, though with trembling finger, to a "new era;" but he has not learnt that that era is to be introduced by no less an advent than that of the King of kings. Thus he writes of our day :—

"In the days that are now passing over

* *Latter-day Pamphlets.* Edited by Thomas Carlyle.
No. I.—"The Present Time."

us, even fools are arrested to ask the meaning of them ; few of the generations of men have seen more impressive days. Days of endless calamity, disruption, dislocation, confusion worse confounded : if they are not days of endless hope too, then they are days of utter despair. For it is not a small hope that will suffice, the ruin being clearly, either in action or in prospect, universal. There must be a new world, if there is to be any world at all ! That human things in our Europe can never return to the old sorry routine, and proceed with any steadiness or continuance there—this small hope is not now a tenable one. These days of universal death must be days of universal newborn, if the ruin is not to be total and final ! It is a Time to make the dullest man consider ; and ask himself, Whence *he* came ? Whither he is bound ?—A veritable ‘New Era,’ to the foolish as well as to the wise.”

This is a true picture, so far as it goes.

But the artist could not paint the real darkness of the present, nor the glad radiance of the future, not only because he does not seem to know, from the oracles of God, either the one or the other, but because both are alike beyond the intensity of any colours that earth can furnish.

What are his feelings in looking around him upon the present condition of the world? He gives utterance to thoughts which shew a mind ill at ease in reference to all that is now going on, either abroad or at home :—

“ This is the sorrow of sorrows! what on earth can become of us till this accursed enchantment, the general summary and consecration of delusions, be cast forth from the heart and life of one and all! Cast forth it will be ; it must, or we are tending, at all moments—whitherward I do not like to name. Alas ! and the casting of it out, to what heights and to what depths will it lead us, in the sad universe mostly of lies

and shams and hollow phantasms (grown very hastily now), in which, as in a safe home, we have lived this century or two! To heights and depths of social and individual *divorce* from delusions—of ‘reform’ in right sacred earnest, of indispensable amendment, and stern sorrowful abrogation and order to depart—such as cannot well be spoken at present; as dare scarcely be thought at present; which nevertheless are very inevitable, and perhaps rather imminent several of them! Truly we have a heavy task of work before us; and there is a pressing call that we should seriously begin upon it, before it tumble into an inextricable mass, in which there will be no working, but only suffering, and hopelessly perishing!”

Then there comes a *glimpse* of the truth. But it is only a glimpse—no more. With what vagueness he tries to point in the direction whence the only hope for the world can come!—

"To prosper in this world, to gain felicity, victory, and improvement, either for a man or a nation, there is but one thing requisite—that the man or nation can discern what the true regulations of the Universe are in regard to him and his pursuit, and can faithfully and steadfastly follow these. These will lead him to victory."

Another *glimpse* of the truth then comes, yet, like the last, only a glimpse—a mere faint glimmering—no more. England needs kings—the world needs kings—ay, kings and priests! But where are they to be found?—

"England, as I persuaded myself, still contains in it many *kings*; possesses, as Old Rome did, many men not needing 'election' to command, but eternally elected for it by the Maker Himself. England's one hope is in these, just now. They are among the silent, I believe; mostly far away from platforms and public palaverings; not speaking forth the image of their nobleness in

transitory words, but imprinting it, each on his own little section of the world, in silent facts, in modest valiant actions, that will endure for evermore. They must sit silent no longer. They are summoned to assert themselves—to act forth, and articulately vindicate, in the teeth of howling multitudes, of a world too justly *maddened* into all manner of delirious clamours, what of wisdom they derived from God. England, and the Eternal Voices, summon them! poor England never so needed them as now. Up, be doing everywhere: the hour of crisis has verily come! In all sections of English life, the god-made *king* is needed—is pressingly demanded in most; in some, cannot longer, without peril as of conflagration, be dispensed with."

Thus, with wild inarticulate moanings, does one of the best representatives of the age utter his misgivings, nay, despondency. One cannot understand what he points at. It seems almost certain that he does not

know it himself. A feeling, profound and pervading, coming up from the very depths of his being, that all is wrong, and that the world's endless convulsions are abortive efforts to shake off a curse that cleaves to it as part of its very nature, seems to labour to unburden itself in his pages. Strange, sad wailings, from a soul so gifted ! They are by far the strongest and the saddest of creation's groans.

Yet with all this vagueness of complaint, and this still greater vagueness in pointing to the remedy, we gather from him such conclusions as the following :—

1. This world is thoroughly disordered. All things are out of course. The true cause he sees not. The *moral* evil, “the ineradicable taint of *sin*,” he has no idea of ; nor does he understand how it is that *this* should poison all its fountains and blight all its verdure. This darkness, this sorrow, this toil, this pain, this weariness, this misrule—whence come they, save from *sin* ?

But this one root of bitterness is not in his philosophy.

2. All things in the world are *hollow*. They are but semblances, shows, falsehoods. Yes, most true, but in a deeper sense than he dreamt of. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Each man “walketh in a vain show.” “The fashion of this world passeth away.” Creation has truly “been made subject to vanity.” But of this deep, sad hollowness, he does not speak. It is not easy to understand what he means by reality, and what by unreality. In the Bible this hollowness is plainly enough declared. God Himself is wanting. *God Himself*, we say;—no mere system of truth—that fills no void; no mere heap of abstract attributes—that fills no void; no mere speculation about “wisdom,” or “nobleness,” or the “Divine message,” or the “eternal voices”—that fills no void; no burning invective against “shams,” and “*simulacra*,” and “semblances”—that fills no void; no

waving of banners over the downfall of cheats and the "bankruptcy of imposture;" this, alas ! is the mere shout of bemazed and bewildered men, who, dissatisfied with their present habitation, are exulting in the conflagration that is levelling it, while they have not the very slenderest idea of what is to come in its stead, or of what roof they may have to shelter them from shower or storm !

3. It is wisdom that this world needs. Men have been plunging into thicket after thicket, and the world has been a misruled and miserable outfield, because *wisdom* is wanting. The foolish have wielded the sword and the sceptre ; now the wise must seize them, and save the world from self-annihilation ! True—yes, most true. It is *wisdom* that earth so sorely is feeling the want of. But where is it to be had ? Science says, It is in me ; let me ripen, and I will right the world. But do we believe it ? Philosophy says, It is in me ; let me

dive a little deeper and bring up a few more profundities, and the world will find a sufficient ruler in me. But do we believe it? No. We believe not these, nor any of their fellow-boasters. They have been tried in the balances, and found wanting. Their wisdom will not do for such a world as ours. We need something deeper and broader—higher and holier than they can furnish. It is *Divine* wisdom that we need. Wisdom, it must be, that comes from God Himself; not speculation, but truth; not an opinion, but a certainty; not expediency, but eternal principle. Without this “wisdom that cometh from above,” what is “earnestness,” of which so much is spoken? It is a feeling without an *object*. And what will such feeling do for a world composed of such materials as ours? Without this wisdom, what is the detection of “shams” and “cheats” but the discovery that all is wrong—most thoroughly wrong? But will that set us right? Will the know-

ledge of my poverty bring riches in upon me like a flood?

4. We must ascertain the true law of the universe; and until this "new rock-basis" comes to light, all must be confusion worse confounded. What more true than this? Yet what this true law is, or where this rock-basis is to be found, the modern philosopher does not inform us. Evidently he knows not. Jehovah's purpose—that purpose which man is fighting against, but which is holding on its steadfast way in spite of man—this is the law of the universe, and it shall stand. In so far as our purposes are co-ordinate with this—in so far as we have been brought to be at one with God in reference to the movements and prospects of this world, to that extent we have discovered this true law—this law of laws to which this world shall yet conform; a law apparently turned aside for a season; nay, thwarted and defied, but which is moving on as steadily to its issues and developments.

as this system of ours, in the midst of apparent crossings and recrossings, is moving round its great central sun ! Jehovah's purpose ! The purpose of the God only wise ! His purpose to bring good out of evil, holiness out of sin, honour out of dis-honour ; His purpose to make this sad earth comely and blessed, more than Canaan under Solomon, or paradise under Adam ; His purpose to glorify His Incarnate Son on this earth, where His blood has been shed, His grace rejected, His name cast out as evil, and His authority set at nought. This is the purpose round which all present events are clustering, however rugged they seem, towards which all movements are tending, and in which the history of man and his earth shall yet be consummated !

5. We must have kings and priests to rule. But who are they ? According to Mr Carlyle, philosophers such as himself ; according to Scripture, the "redeemed from among men." According to Mr C,

the true kings are the men of intellect and genius; according to God, they are the men who have become fools for Christ's sake, who have identified themselves with His despised Son, and are content to wait for their thrones till the day of His return. According to Mr C., the true priesthood are the men who have entered the sacred groves and temples of science, and philosophy, and song—conversing with nature, uttering mysterious oracles, and so "fulfilling their mission;" according to God, they are men who have taken their stand beside the altar of the Divine burnt-offering, who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is worth our while to notice, that the philosophers of our day seem to have got some glimpse of the idea of a royal priesthood—a conjunction between the offices of priest and king. Of God's purpose in this respect they know nothing. Yet king and priest seem to be united in their minds as the true

conjunction by which the world is to be ruled. Somehow or other they have caught a passing gleam of this mighty truth, and some of the truest things they write are concerning this—vaguely enough, imperfectly enough, yet still as if groping their way darkly to this great idea yet to be developed in the world's coming history, when God brings in, not merely His royal priest, His Divine Melchisedec, but His royal priesthood, the glorious band of ransomed men, by means of whom He is to rule this world in righteousness, and shew the wondering universe what true kingship is, what true priesthood is; and how the holy union of these two sacred offices is the perfection of all rule, the eternal basis of a happy earth, the eternal link between the created and the uncreated, between the things above and the things beneath, the things celestial and the things terrestrial. *Now*, that union is impossible. It is fraught with unspeakable peril. Such offices cannot be trusted in the hands of

imperfect men. The attempt to unite them has been the root of the earth's heaviest and most intolerable woes. But then the union shall be effected, when the true Melchisedec arrives to ascend the priestly-royal throne, and, under Him, the perfection of all government shall be exhibited in the hands of holy men—of men who passed through humiliation like His own, knowing nothing here but obedience, patience, sorrow, weakness; and then it shall be truly seen how they only can rightly rule who have learned to suffer and obey.

The work I have been referring to is in very deed a cry of despair. It is one of the saddest and most affecting signals of distress hung out in these last days in behalf of a wrecked and sinking world. He who raises it has done and spoken the utmost that his philosophy can devise, for the last twenty years. But it is all in vain. The world lies broken and helpless. Its men of might cannot find their hands. The

crisis is approaching when, its utter ruin having been demonstrated, and its utter powerlessness made visible, God shall interpose to renew it, rebuilding it from the foundation, sweeping off the long curse, brightening its sad skies, binding its rebel prince, and introducing the glad age of righteousness under the sway of the Virgin's Son.

CHAPTER II.

MAN'S THEORY OF PROGRESS.

THE special boast of the age is its *progress*. Upon this its self-gratulations are numerous and fervent, as if it not only loved to advance, but to let all men know, as decidedly as possible, how much it thinks itself advancing.

Are these gratulations well-founded? Is this progress a reality? Is there not exaggeration in the boasting? Are there not many compensating and neutralising considerations, which go far to raise the question whether, upon the whole, having respect to the *minus* as well as the *plus* of the items, and looking well at the opposite

sides of the great balance-sheet, there has been solid and thorough progress—progress which will abide—progress which has placed the nation or the race upon a higher level—spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically?

Let it be allowed that, *in many things*, the age is one of advancement. Thus much is notable and beyond question. It would be unjust and unthankful, as well as untrue, not to allow this. I admit it ungrudgingly, not reluctantly or through constraint. Into much that is true the age has found its way, and in several provinces of knowledge, unreached by its predecessors, it has made good its footing. Circle after circle has widened round it; and, its discoveries are certainly neither shadows nor tinsel; they are real and solid. No Christian need fear to make this admission, nor think that by so doing he lowers the credit of the Scriptures as the true fountain-head of God-given truth, or casts dishonour upon

Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The *mental philosophy* of the age is, in some respects, of a truer kind than heretofore, though still cloudy and unsatisfying —nay, often stumbling into Scepticism, Pantheism, Atheism. The *science* of the age is prodigiously in advance of former ages. Its *literature* is wider in its range, and purer in its aim. Its *arts* are on a higher and more perfect scale. Its *astronomy* has searched the heavens far more extensively and profoundly. Its *geology* has pierced the earth more deeply and successfully. It—the age, we mean—has brought to light law after law in the system of the universe. It speeds over earth with a rapidity once unknown. It transmits intelligence not only more swiftly than sound, but more swiftly than the light. It is restoring fertility to the soil. It can shut out pain from the body, in circumstances which, but a few years ago, would

have racked or torn every nerve. These things, and such as these, the age has discovered and done ; and, because of these things, we may admit most freely that there has been, *in some things*, wondrous progress—progress which might be turned to the best account—progress for which praise is due to God.

All that is *true*, in any region of God's world, must, in its measure, be valuable. What is true is of God, and, therefore, not to be cast aside, because discovered by an unsanctified understanding, seeing God has often used His worst enemies as His servants, making them His hewers of wood and drawers of water. The value of a truth is not to be judged of by the character of the discoverer ; for why may not God use the finger of Balaam to point to the Star of Jacob ? The difficulty lies, not in discerning *what truth* is of value and what is not, but in regulating its *degree* of value, so as to give to each portion or fragment

the right place, the true level, the proper space, the due order, and to assign the exact amount of thought and study which it demands or will repay.

"All truth is precious, though not all Divine," said Cowper; but to this we must add, that though all truth is precious, yet all truth is not *equally* precious, nor *equally* worthy of our care; nay, and we must also add, that though all truth is precious, yet much of it must be left unstudied totally. Our life is brief, and we have no time for all things; we must select, for we are hurrying onwards; the King will soon be here, and it concerns us to dwell most on those things which will most help to fit us for His presence and kingdom.

There is the atom of dust under our feet; there is that flower-bud rising above it; there is yon forest stretching miles around; there is yon vast mountain-range that walls in the plain; there is the blue arch above us, with its clouds and rainbows; there is

day, with its sun and splendour; there is night, with its stars and stillness. All these things *exist*. Their simple being is a *truth*; and with that being there are connected ten thousand *truths*. Yet there is not the same kind of truth, nor the same amount of truth, belonging to each, for each is the centre of a circle, wider or narrower, less or more important, according to its nature. Yet what there is of *truth* in each is equally *real*, and therefore not to be slighted.

To say that the facts in each of these are equally precious because equally true, or to say that the same amount of study should be allotted to each, would be foolishness. To say that the same amount of time may be expended upon each is gross miscalculation, indicating a false estimate of the different parts of truth, as well as of the true value of time. The truth which affects the future, specially the eternal future, must be more momentous than that which influences the present only. The truth which

relates to the inner man must be more important than that which relates to the outer man. The truth that goes to make up the link between us and the God that made us, must be unspeakably more precious than that which forms the tie between us and earth, or even between us and our fellows. The truth which bears upon earthly citizenship and its rights, must be far inferior to that which bears upon heavenly citizenship and its more glorious privileges. These distinctions the age does not consider. Progress in one direction, or at least in one or two directions, it is apt to regard as progress in all directions. Blinded by the magnitude of its discoveries, and by their present bearing upon society, it overlooks counter-actions, it forgets how sadly it is losing ground in many things, it veils the evil, and exaggerates the good; and then reports progress, where real progress there is none.

To confound or misregulate the *degrees*

of value in truth is at once an error and a mischief. It deranges everything. It is in itself an error, and it leads on to innumerable errors. It is in itself a mischief, and it is the root of endless mischiefs. It is not merely equivalent to the non-discovery of truth ; it not merely neutralises the truth discovered, but it draws out of it all the evil of positive *untruth*, thus making truth the producer of error, good the fountain of evil, light the cause of darkness. So that there may be many steps of advancement, which, by the evil use made of them or the false level assigned to them, become in the end so many steps of retrogression. Has this been duly weighed by those who boast of progress ? Have they calculated the *loss* as well as the *gain*, the *minus* as well as the *plus*, and is it on the ascertained *difference* that they rest their congratulations ? If so, let them boast. It is well. If not, then their estimate is so wholly one-sided, that no credit can be given to it even by themselves.

It is a literary age—it is an age of science—it is an age of far-ranging inquiry—it is an age of discovery—it is an age of action; many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased. But still it may not be an age of *progress*. The amount of knowledge gained may be nothing to the amount lost; or that which is gained may be so perverted or ill-regulated, as to injure instead of profiting.

In these different parts of the world's progress, God is not recognised, or only by a few; or recognised solely out of compliment or custom, and in such a way as to place Him at an immeasurable distance from the works of His hands. What is there that is good, or true, or beautiful, of which God is not the centre? And is not the age in its progress fast severing God from His works, making man, or chance, or abstract laws, the centre of creation, instead of the living, personal Jehovah,—thus shifting the axis of the universe in order to be saved

the irksomeness of coming into contact with Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being! What, then, becomes of the advancement and the enlightenment of the age? Can we look upon them in their present stage without suspicion, or can we contemplate their issues without terror? For all science is a lie, or at least lodges a lie in its very core, if apart from God and His Christ. All wisdom is foolishness, if independent of Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." All inquiry must become a mere maze of scepticism, if separated from Him who has said, "Learn of me." All truth and goodness are but empty abstractions, if away from Him who is the true and good. All beauty is but a torn blossom or a broken gem, if sought for out of Him who is its birthplace. All enlightenment is but a dream, if not received from Him who is the light of the world, the light of life. All liberty is but a well-disguised bondage, if not found

in the service of Him whose love hath made us free. All rule and law are but the exhibitions of man's selfishness, and ambition, and pride, if dissociated from Him who is the Prince of the kings of the earth. Nay, and all religion is but hollowness and unreality, if severed from the fellowship of Jehovah and His incarnate Son.

We hear much of the knowledge of the age. Well; but has not one of its own poets said, "Knowledge comes, but *wisdom* lingers"?* Yes, knowledge comes, but *wisdom* lingers! Knowledge comes, but *goodness* lingers. Knowledge comes, but the world is as far as ever from peace and righteousness. Its wounds are not healed; its tears do not cease to flow. Its crimes are not fewer; its morals are not purer; its diseases are as many and as fatal. Its nations are not more prosperous; its kingdoms not more stable; its rulers are not more magnanimous; its homes are not

* Tennyson.

happier; its ties of kindred or affection are not more blessed or lasting. The thorn still springs, and the brier spreads; famine scorches its plains, and the pestilence envenoms the air; the curse still blights creation, and the wilderness has not yet rejoiced or blossomed. Yet man is doing his utmost to set right the world, and God is allowing him to put forth all his efforts more vigorously and more simultaneously than ever, in these last days.

Nor can any Christian mind fail to look with intensest though most painful interest upon these vain endeavours. We know that they must fail. Man cannot deliver himself, nor regenerate his world. Reforms, republics, constitutions, congresses, change of dynasties, will not accomplish it. Art in every form, science of every name, are bringing into play unheard-of energies for the improvement of this globe, and for giving man the complete empire of earth, and air, and sea. But the task is super-

human, and each new forthputting of human strength or intellect is only proving this the more. And hence it is with such interest, as well as with such pity, that we look upon the generation around us, with its overwrought muscles, its overtasked energies; toiling unrestingly, and yet failing in its mighty aim—the regeneration of a world.

There is a secret consciousness of the evil of the times, even among those who have not the fear of God before their eyes. They see but the surface, indeed, and yet that surface is not quite so calm and bright as they could desire ; nor are the effects of the supposed progress quite so satisfactory as they expected it would be. They have their misgivings, though they cheer themselves with the thought that the mind of man will ere long be able to master all difficulties, and rectify all the still remaining disorders of the world. Accordingly, they set themselves in their own way to help

forward the regeneration of the world and the correction of its evils.

Among these there are various classes or subdivisions. There is, for example, the *educational* class. It labours hard to raise the level of society by the mere impartation of intellectual knowledge—"useful knowledge," "scientific knowledge," "entertaining knowledge," "political knowledge;" in short, knowledge of any kind, save that of the Bible, and of the God of the Bible. There is the *novelistic* class;—a very large one it is, and possessed of far greater influence over the community than is generally credited. It has set itself to elevate the race by exciting what are conceived to be the purer feelings of our nature. Of one school, the standard of perfection is romantic tenderness; of another, worldly honour; of another, bare rectitude of character, without reference to such a Being as God, or such a thing as His law; of another, it is good-nature and Christmas festivity;

while others seem to have no real centre of elevation in view, only they hope, by stimulating some of our finer feelings into growth, to choke or weaken our grosser and more hateful. There is the *poetical* class. They think, by the inculcation of high thoughts and noble images, to lift up the world to its proper level. With one school, it is the worship of nature; with another, it is the love of the beautiful; with another, it is chivalry; with another, it is the re-enthronement of "the gods of Greece;" with another, sentimental musings. These, and such as these, are the devices by which they hope to put evil to flight, and bring back the age of gold! There is the *satirical* class. Their plan for meliorating the world is ridicule. Folly, vice, misrule, are to be caricatured in order to be eradicated! Ply men with enough of ridicule; just shew them how ridiculous they are or can be made; raise the laugh or the sneer against them; exhibit them in all the exaggerated

attitudes that the genius of grimace can invent, and all will be well! There is the *philosophic* class, large and powerful, composed of men who are no triflers certainly, but who are sadly without aim or anchorage. Give them but "earnestness," and on that fulcrum they will heave up a fallen world into its true height of excellence! Give them but earnestness, and then extravagance, mysticism, mythism, pantheism, so far from being condemned as ruinous, are welcomed as so many forces operating at different points for the anticipated elevation. Give them earnestness, and they will do without Revelation; or give them "universal intuition," and they, setting it up as the judge of inspiration, will make *man* his own regenerator by making him the fountain-head of truth. There is the *political* class. They have their many cures for the evils of society, and are quite sure that, by better government, a wider franchise, freer trade, the abolition of ranks,

the division of property, the extinction of laws of primogeniture, they will bring all into order and peace; as if these could touch the seat of the disease, or minister to the real wants of a helpless and heart-broken world.

To see the vanity of all these efforts of man to better himself, apart from God, one needs only to look into the extent of the evil to be remedied. It is vast, it is incalculable. We see but its outer circle; its innumerable inner circles of vileness and misery we see not, we cannot see. It is an evil so broad, so deep, so manifold, so malignant, that to attempt to cure it by such appliances seems like silencing the thunder by the tones of the harp, or arresting the havoc of pestilence by scattering roses on the breeze. Whoever would have some idea of the hideous mass of evil under which the earth is groaning, and with which the atmosphere of the age is filled, let him read the third chapter of

Second Timothy, or the twenty-fourth of Isaiah, or the descriptions of Israel's state and sin drawn by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Let him compare these inspired descriptions of Israel's condition with what he sees in the world around him, and he will, we doubt not, go forth to the world a wiser, more thoughtful, more solemn man; not disposed to hate, or to scorn, or to satirise, but to pity, and to mourn, and to pray.

Along with progress, the age boasts of its *liberality*; identifying liberality and liberalism. Let us see how far it can make its boasting good. True liberality is a blessed thing, for it is but another name for the love that "beareth all things," that "thinketh no evil," that "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." With this, however, the liberality of the age has nothing in common. Its essence is, indifference to sin and error. Its object is, to smooth down the distinctions between good and

evil; between holiness and sin; between the church and the world; between Protestantism and Popery; between the belief of God's Word and Infidelity or Atheism. All its sayings and doings in government, in the Legislature, in society, in corporations or private intercourse, are based upon the axiom that there is no real difference between these things, or, at least, that if there be, it is not discoverable by man; so that man is not only not responsible for acting upon it, but that it would be intolerance and presumption in him to do so. Kings are, therefore, to rule as if there were no such distinction, forgetting by whom they reign. Judges are to know no such distinction, forgetting that they are to judge "in the fear of the Lord." Society is to be constructed without reference to any such distinction; as if the Bible were not the basis of all society; as if the Book which God has written were unsuitable for the regulation of the world which He cre-

ated. But is not this calling good evil, and evil good—putting darkness for light, and light for darkness—putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter?

We see this liberality in the kind things spoken of Infidelity; in the praises of Popery; in the sneers against Protestantism, as being by its very name a system of illiberality. Education from which God is shut out, and in which the Bible has no place, is contended for, even by men who call themselves religious; and this is named liberality. To attend mass in a Popish cathedral; to listen to the blasphemies of Socinianism, for the sake of the eloquence of the preacher; to hold fellowship with the avowed Infidel, for the sake of his science; to sit at the table of the licentious, on the score of his artistic fame,—these are common things amongst us, and all are honoured by the name of liberality! Because our fathers condemned these things; because “they abhorred that which was

evil, and cleaved to that which was good," they are branded as intolerant and narrow-minded; and because our own age has thus filled up the gulf between the good and the evil, it is honoured with the name of enlightened!

Thus to blot out the difference between truth and error has been the feat of the age. For this it praises itself, pitying the littleness and contractedness of other days and other minds. In so doing, it forgets that no man is narrow-minded who expands to the full circle of *truth*, and that the first step beyond that is real contractedness of spirit. Latitudinarianism is not true liberality; indifference to error is not true liberality, unless it can be shewn that the Bible, the Book of Truth, is equally latitudinarian, and equally indifferent to error. It is an appalling fact, that men, with the Bible in their hands, should deny the distinction between truth and error, and then, as if ashamed of what they had done, call

it by the venerated name of liberality. But it is a more appalling fact, that men should give as the reason for this indifference, that truth is not discoverable, thereby throwing the blame upon God, for having given a Bible so vague, so ambiguous, so unmeaning, that no one reading it can certainly gather either what is truth or what is error.

This liberality, however, turns out to be a one-sided principle. Its toleration of error is unqualified and unconditional, almost as if the fact of its being error entitled it to toleration, and even encouragement. Its toleration of truth is grudging, meagre, restricted. Nay, it only consents to tolerate truth on condition that its supporters will not contend for it too decidedly, but will bring it considerably down to the level of error. Thus, though assuming a Protestant name, its deference to Popery is unlimited; while its hatred of all that is decided and essential in Protestantism

is deep and unconcealed. It finds many excuses for the Popish claim of infallibility, but none for the Protestant assertion of the full and thorough inspiration of the Word of God. It palliates the Popish system of monastic vows, but detests and denounces the scriptural doctrine of separation from the world. It praises and associates with a Papist that believes in the lying legends of saints, and in the virtues of dead men's bones, or in the immaculacy of the Virgin Mary; but it rejects, as silly and insipid, the acquaintanceship of the man who reads his Bible, and loves his Saviour, and walks humbly with his God. Its sympathies are all practically on the side of those very errors it professes to reject, and its hostilities are directed against those very truths which in words it owns.

The age also boasts of its *religion* as part of its progress. With many, religion is mere philosophic speculation upon truth connected with man's soul. With others,

it is the seemly discharge of all relative duties. With others, it consists in admiration for the Bible, as a book of literary excellencies. With others, it is the adoption of a creed or connexion with a church. With others, it consists in bustle and outward zeal. In all, it lacks LIFE,—that deep, intense, glowing life, which so marked it in earlier times. Its root is not in the *conscience*, but in some outer region of the soul, which does not bring us into close and living contact with Jehovah himself. It is a thing of the imagination, or of the intellect, or even of the affections, but not of the *conscience*. There can be no religion which has not its seat there. The hindrance to living religion is the want of a “purged conscience;” and till the conscience has been purged from dead works, there can be no real religion, no true service of God. How little is there of *conscience* in the religion of the day! Hence that lack of simplicity, of freshness, of serenity, which we

should expect. Hence its hollowness and noisy shallowness.

The religion of the day is (as we have seen) an *easy-minded* religion, without conflict and wrestling, without self-denial and sacrifice; a religion which knows nothing of the pangs of the new birth as its commencement, and nothing of the desperate struggle with the flesh and with the devil, day by day, making us long for resurrection-deliverance, for the binding of the adversary, and for the Lord's arrival. It is a *second-rate* religion,—a religion in which there is no largeness, no grandeur, no potency, no noble-mindedness, no elevation, no self-devotedness, no all-constraining love. It is a *hollow* religion, with a fair exterior, but an aching heart, a heart unsatisfied, a soul not at rest, a conscience not at peace with God; a religion marked, it may be, by activity and excitement, but betraying all the while the consciousness of a wound hidden and unhealed within, and hence un-

able to animate to lofty doings, or supply the strength needed for such doings. It is a *feeble* religion, lacking the sinews and bones of hardier times,—very different from the indomitable, much-enduring, storm, braving religion, not merely of apostolic days, but even of the Reformation. It is an *uncertain* religion, that is to say, it is not rooted on *certainty*; it is not the out-flowing of a soul assured of pardon, and rejoicing in the filial relationship between itself and God. Hence, there is no liberty of service, for the question of personal acceptance is still an unsettled thing: there is a working *for* pardon, but not *from* pardon. All is thus bondage, heaviness, irksomeness. There is a speaking for God, but it is with a faltering tongue; there is a labouring for God, but it is with fettered hands; there is a moving in the way of His commandments, but it is with a heavy drag upon our limbs. Hence the inefficient un-influential character of our religion. It

does not tell on others, for it has not yet fully told upon ourselves. It falls short of its mark, for the arm that drew the bow is paralysed.

These are some of the features of the age. Such is its PROGRESS. Such are its prospects of self-regeneration, or world-regeneration. Alas! how little in all this do we see of God! How little can we detect, in these movements, of the Spirit of God! There is a movement, doubtless,—nay, not one movement, but many. But how much of this is the work of the Holy Spirit, of Him who alone can reform an age or regenerate a world? How much from above, and how much from beneath? How much onward and upward, and how much backward and downward? Is not the age one which is especially grieving, nay, quenching, the Spirit? And in many of these things which are counted *progress*, are we not grieving Him most signally and

awfully? Instead of setting our face steadfastly to go after Christ, are we not following after Antichrist in his manifold delusions, in which, by mixing up truth and falsehood, he is seeking to deceive the very elect? Instead of putting ourselves under the teaching of the Spirit, are we not taking the false guidance of the evil one, now clothed in the fair disguise of radiant knowledge, and going before us as an angel of light to mislead and ruin?

Not as though some strange thing were happening to us. We look for no times of righteousness in these last days. We have been warned to expect evil and not good,—progressive evil, and not progressive good,—until the Lord come.*

* Perhaps our readers may find some pleasure in reading, in connexion with some of these remarks, the following striking old Latin hymn (see Daniel's *Thesaurus Hymnologus*, vol. ii. p. 380):—

“ Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt; vigilemus!
Ecce, minaciter imminet arbiter ille supremus!
Imminet, imminct, ut mala terminet, aqua coronet,



The age of *progress* is not the present; it is the age to come. In the *present* there is the development of evil,—in the *future* the development of good. Man is now

Recta remuneret, anxia liberet, aethera donet,
 Auferat aspera duraque pondera mentis onustæ,
 Sobria muniat, improba puniat, utraque justæ.
 Ille piissimus, ille gravissimus, ecce venit rex !
 Surgat homo reus ! Instat homo deus, a patre judex !"

The unlearned amongst them may take the following as a rough paraphrase :—

" 'Tis the last hour !
 The times they are evil !
 Let us be watching !

Lo, He is coming !
 Threateningly, frowningly !
 He the Great Judge !

He comes ! lo, He comes !
 The evil to end, the good to crown,
 The right to reward, the troubled to free,
 Heaven to bestow, the laden to lighten,
 The holy to strengthen, the unholy to doom,
 In righteousness all !

King, the most gracious,
 King, the most kingly,
 Lo, He is coming !

Rise, sinner, rise !
 The God-man is coming,
 Sent by the Father,
 Judge of all !"

putting forth his power to the utmost in efforts after *progress*. Poor progress at the best, yet much boasted of! It is but *man's* progress; it is but *finite* development. Man is now put to the proof. He is allowed to do his best, and he is given time to do it in. God will not hinder the attempt, nor hurry him in making it. Full time, ample scope, large opportunity will be granted. Man ruined a world; it is to be proved whether he can rebuild it. He ruined it in a day; he is given six thousand years to attempt its reconstruction. His *downward* progress was swift enough; it is to be tried whether his *upward* progress will be as rapid, or whether there can be such a thing as upward progress at all when he is left alone. God has been putting him to the proof. He says to him, "Try to govern the world;" man tries it, but fails. He says to him, "Try to regenerate a world;" he tries it, and fails. He says to him, "Try to remove the

curse ;” he tries it, and fails. He says to him, “ Fertilize the earth ;” he tries it, and fails. He says to him, “ Try to advance—make progress—increase in knowledge ;” man tries it, and fails. It will not do. Man’s day has been a long one ; but it has been a day during which, in all possible circumstances, and with all advantages, he has been proved helpless, ignorant, evil ; unfit to rule, and unfit to be left without a ruler ; unfit to teach, and unwilling to learn ; unfit to be intrusted with the care or management of ought within the world’s wide circle,—from the atom of crumbling dust beneath his feet up to his own imperishable soul.

When God has made this proof to the universe of man’s utter incapacity ; when He has demonstrated man’s unworthiness of trust and inability for any progress, save a downward one ; He sets him aside as “ a despised and broken vessel,” in order to bring in the “ greater man,”—ay, the

greater than man, even His own eternal Son. The great experiment of 6000 years is now drawing to a close. The vast but awful demonstration is now nearly complete. The case is most manifestly going *against* man. King, prince, noble, peasant, beggar; statesman, diplomatist, master, parent, child, servant; poet, philosopher, artist, mechanic,—all have had their long age of trial, and all have failed. The verdict will soon be given, and the sentence pronounced.

At this crisis we now stand. At the close of a long series of experiments made to see what man could do, we find the world as wicked and lawless (to say no more) as at the first. Peace has not spread her reign among the nations, nor misrule departed. Righteousness does not sit on the thrones of the nations, nor does holiness beautify the homes of the children of men. Man's merchandise is not consecrated to God, nor his wealth laid at the feet of Jesus. The heart remains still deceitful

above all things, and desperately wicked. Oppression, murder, cruelty, selfishness, lust, sedition, strife, and hatred, are still uneradicated, unsubdued, unmitigated. Man has found no cure for these maladies. They rage on, but he is powerless. The curse still pervades the earth and poisons the air. Man cannot disinfect it. The thorn and thistle still shoot up their prickly memorials of the primal sin. Man cannot uproot them. Disease still haunts the body, and man says "depart," in vain. The "rooted sorrow" still keeps place in memory, scorching health's freshness, and tearing down life remorselessly, man vainly endeavouring to pluck it out. Death still smites down its daily myriads, and man tries in vain to bribe or disarm it. The grave still receives the loved, and preys upon the beautiful,—man pleading in vain that it should give back the joy of his heart and the desire of his eyes!

Such are the fruits of the first Adam's doings, and such the powerlessness of his children to remove so much as one of the ten thousand evils. It has been proved that man can ruin, but not restore, a world. His attempts at restoration have been sad and mischievous failings. His attempts at PROGRESS have been abortive; so that, progress in evil, progress in alienation from God, is the feature of greatest prominence in his history.

But this progress in evil has a limit. God has set bounds to it which it cannot overpass. He will not allow this earth of His to be totally a hell. He will make the sin of man to praise Him, and he will restrain the remainder thereof. A certain amount and a certain duration He will allow, but no more. Neither of these is indefinite; and we seem to be nearing their boundary.

It is well. For then shall the good displace the evil, and the blessing the curse.

The second Adam is at hand, and, with Him, the kingdom and the glory. He brings the cure. He knits the broken world. He rebukes disease and sorrow. He binds death. He rifles the grave. He delivers creation. He sets up a righteous peaceful throne. He draws aside the curtain that hid heaven from earth, making them as one,—the inner and the outer chamber of the one tabernacle of Jehovah,—and setting up the true Jacob's ladder, on which the angels shall be seen ascending and descending, still ministering in holy service to Him and to His saints in the day of the kingdom, as heretofore they have done in the day of tribulation and shame.

That is the age of PROGRESS! What progress, when God shall set His hand to it! In the light of that ever-widening knowledge, in the blaze of that ever-brightening glory, how poor, how vile shall seem the progress of the dishonoured past! Not merely like age's recollection of childhood's

trivialities and wasted time, but like morning's remembrance to the drunkard of last night's revelry and lust; like the king of Babylon's remembrance of his seven years' sojourn with the beasts of the field.

CHAPTER III.

MAN'S HOPE OF THE FUTURE.

IT is to a REIGN OF PEACE AND JUSTICE that man looks forward as if by instinct; and it is for the hastening of this that the cries and groans of the race are going up continually. That the present condition of things in the earth is not what ought to be, and that it cannot last, are two principles rooted deeply in the human soul.

Not that this feeling of dissatisfaction with the present and anticipation of a more healthful and genial future has had its origin in some noble enlargement of spirit, some generous growth of principle, by which men's sympathies have spread themselves

over this sorrowful earth, and embraced its broken-hearted millions in brotherhood and love. Not that man has become unselfish, and that his aspirations have taken hue from this unselfishness of nature. Not that he has at length consented to receive God's estimate of the world as it is, or acquiesce in God's purpose concerning the world as it is yet to be. It is not to such sources that man's anticipations of a bright future are to be traced.

There is much of what is deeply and truly *selfish* in these anticipations.

Man feels uneasy in his present position. The pain experienced tells him that there is dislocation somewhere. Turn which way he will, he cannot relieve himself. Momentary cessation of anguish he may obtain by these efforts at change; but the pain returns, only to be transiently abated by some new change of posture. It is this uneasiness that makes man dissatisfied with the present. It is not the sin that pervades

it; it is not the wrong that is perpetrated; it is not the general injustice that overshadows it;—these are not the real causes of dissatisfaction. There is a *personal* quarrel in the case. It is some personal evil that is experienced. This quickens his indignant philanthropy in its schemes for redress and reformation, and gives direction to his philosophy in its magnificent ordering of the future. He is dissatisfied with the world because it has not made *him* happy or great, and he would fain conjure up a world in which *he* would be both.

It is this uneasiness, this feeling of dislocation in the body politic, that has given rise to the various reforms, or endeavours after reform, which our day has witnessed. These have, within the last twenty or thirty years, become much more frequent, both because the inward malady is nearing its crisis, and because men have become more impatient under the pain of it. All the rocking to and fro of thrones, the revolu-

tions of government, the savage shouts of despotism, or the wild howl of democracy; —all the recent European changes, are but indications of this deep-seated pain endeavouring to alleviate itself by alteration of posture or by clutching at each object within reach.

Sad and hopeless effort! Poor alleviation! As transient as it is vain! Like him in the olden time who said,—

“ Such cure as sick men find in changing beds
I found in change of air. The fancy flattered
My hopes with ease, as theirs do, but the grief
Is still the same.”

The seat of the disease is not so much as guessed at. The true remedy is not so much as named!

Looked at in this aspect, these political convulsions have something in them to call forth our most solemn commiseration. Considered by themselves, they exhibit much that is likely to call forth anger and reprobation, at the selfishness, the ferocity, the wild revenge which bursts forth through-

out. But, viewed as the efforts of a pained body to find relief from suffering by change of posture, they cannot fail to excite our pity, even when we feel most disposed to condemn them. There is too much of deep anguish at the root, to allow us to visit them with unmixed indignation. We refer not to political wrongs and grievances as the causes of this anguish; with these we have nought to do; but we refer to the moral sores, the spiritual maladies, which have made the whole head sick and the whole heart faint, yet of which the pining victims are totally unconscious. These, though unfelt and unrecognised, are the true causes of this sad restlessness and these wild paroxysms; and, knowing that such is the case, knowing also how vain must be the endeavours to cast off suffering, or find lasting ease, so long as the true disease remains undiscovered and unhealed, we cannot help giving utterance to the true sorrow that we feel for the condition of the

men—a sorrow increased, not diminished, by the blind random efforts to shake off the pain that is clinging to them like the poisoned garments of Hercules.

It is, then, we fear, this consciousness of pain or disorder that is the origin of many of the elaborate theories of modern times. It is argued, that, as things are wrong, so, some time or other, they must be set right; that, as there is suffering now, so there must, sooner or later, be relief from suffering; that, as there is unrighteousness now, so, ere long, there must be righteousness brought in to remedy the thickening evils of the earth. It seems to be concluded that our race deserves better treatment than it has hitherto received, and that right possesses such an inherent buoyancy as is certain to bear it up above the long dominion of wrong. It is assumed that it would be unjust to abandon this earth to misrule and disorder; and it is argued that there are many indications, in the present state

of the world, of an inherent energy (*a vis medicatrix*) quite sufficient to throw off the disease, and to bring about, according to certain natural laws, a perfect state of things.

Now, as to this self-rectifying energy, we may admit that there are many phenomena, both physical and moral, which indicate a tendency upwards. But this is the utmost we can admit. The natural *vitality* of things has not yet been quenched; but its range is now so limited, and its energy so checked and neutralised, that no high, no abiding result is perceptible. Sin, with its accompanying curse of death, has so borne down and overpowered the springs of health and life, that their elasticity is gone. They have no power left to bear up against the pressure which has so long crushed them. And then that pressure is accumulating. Whilst they have been enfeebled, the weight upon them has been increasing; so that, though at intervals they may occa-

sionally give token of something like elasticity, yet these intervals are becoming rarer, and the elastic power is diminishing.

But even granting that this self-regenerating energy were as vigorous as formerly, and that it has not more to do battle with now than heretofore, there is another and more serious question behind. Sin, as a moral disease or poison, may not have so fearfully deteriorated the race, but how shall we dispose of its *guilt*? How is the righteous reckoning for this to be disposed of? If God looked upon sin as a trifle, or if he regarded it simply in the character of a disease, to be gradually expelled from the tainted constitution, and so pass away without further mark or notice, the above difficulty might be surmounted. But if sin be an infinite evil, the difficulty is one which philosophy cannot surmount with all her wisdom. And if there be more than the eradication of a certain amount of moral *virus*,—if there be *guilt* upon which a judge

must solemnly adjudicate,—if there have been an accumulation of guilt for ages, on which a judicial sentence must pass, and on which judicial vengeance must be executed, . . —this boasted process of self-rectification becomes a mockery.

Why? For it has been arrested by something far stronger than itself. A stern law of righteousness—the law of the universe, a law of which “one jot and tittle” shall not pass away—steps in and says, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die!” And what can the utmost amount or intensity of vital self-regenerating power do in opposition to this.

Philosophy is at fault. It cannot extricate itself. All its plans of the bright future, its magnificent sketches of a reign of justice, are nothing better than fancy or fable. This mountain barrier of six thousand years’ guilt stands unremoved. Dissolve this, and then talk of progression; but not till then. Provide even for the gradual

extinction of this, and the theory of a self-regenerating world will not halt so grievously. But, with this rising before us, such a theory cannot for an hour be maintained. Before there can be a reign of righteousness upon earth, there must be a vindication of God's righteous government; there must be a public judicial demonstration of God's unchanged purpose to carry out to the uttermost that law which has all along proclaimed—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them."

Hence the absolute necessity for a judgment before the millennium. A reign of peace upon earth, without a previous judgment in one form or other, would be a nullification of all God's principles of holy government—an overleaping of the righteous barrier—a making light of the infinite *guilt* of sin. So that a public, solemn, visible, judicial process, at the commencement of the millennial reign, instead of

being an incongruity, is just what we might have expected, reasoning from the great principles of Scripture. And just at the very place where, arguing generally from the Word of God, we expected to find a judgment, we do actually find it set down in the special predictions regarding it. Into these I do not now enter. But I cannot help here adverting to the fact that, when the judgment and the reign are spoken of together, the former is uniformly made to precede the latter. The Book of Psalms is full of instances of this kind. There are comparatively few psalms in which both of these are not introduced, and the priority is always assigned to the judgment as a matter so absolutely fixed, and at the same time so reasonable and natural, that to reverse this order would be to subvert every principle of righteous rule. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness," and therefore He must first, as Judge, pronounce open sentence against the

ungodly, and execute upon them the fierceness of His wrath, before He can introduce the reign of righteousness and peace.

Such is God's order of things in this world, and such the principles on which that order is founded. Let us beware of a philosophy that would reverse that order; or set aside the principles on which it rests. This world stands before God as a *guilty* world—a world that has been “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”—and no theory which does not take that guilt into account, which does not face the question of its judicial removal before peace can be restored to earth, ought to be listened to for a moment, far less lauded as noble, or imbibed as true.

If that reign of peace be not preceded by this process of judgment on the world's past guilt, it has no security for its continuance. Its foundations must be laid in righteousness. It must take for granted

the full amount of the world's previous guilt. It must have witnessed the removal of that guilt by a judicial sentence, else what are the prospects of peace being continued for a day? If it be reared upon smouldering ashes, the flame may burst up in a moment, and lay it waste. It is not to be viewed merely as a reign of peace or righteousness, without reference to the previous history of the region where it is set up, and the race of which its subjects are composed. These must be taken into consideration. It cannot be overlooked that there has been a previous reign of unrighteousness, the long-accumulating guilt of which must be fully met and removed.

Besides, let it never be forgotten that for such a reign at all we have no assurance save from God himself. The race does not deserve it at His hands. And it may be questioned whether, without revelation, such a thought or theory would ever have been conceived by man. The speculations

of philosophy, either ancient or modern, are no proof of the contrary; for these are, after all, but the echo of Revelation, however unacknowledged. Man, in anticipating the future, could picture to himself no such kindly hopes for his race or his earth. It was a dark future that hung over him, even as over the angels that sinned. Nor could even the assurance of personal forgiveness, through the blood of the Sin-bearer, give him hope as to this; for, while this pacified his conscience, and introduced him into personal reconciliation with God, it said nothing respecting his race. For aught that he knew, this earth might be a wilderness, or a fiery hell for ever, where devil and damned spirit, flung upon each other like the vulture and the wolf, might rage against his fellow, or gnash their teeth in anguish. How could man speak of hope to the earth that he had ruined? Or how could he predict the cancelling of the curse, or the sheathing of

the thunder, or the recall of death, or the eradication of sin, or the banishment of Satan, or a reign of peace, a new Paradise, instead of that which he had blighted? He could not. Only God could do this. And in doing it, He must shew man distinctly the way in which it was to be done, so as to prevent the speculations of his vain philosophy.

God has done all this. He has spoken out concerning this reign of peace; but He has spoken as fully out respecting the way in which it is to be introduced. It is to be introduced by "terrible things in righteousness." God must first exhaust His whole quiver in overwhelming judgment upon the earth and its inhabitants. The coming kingdom is to be no lame reconstruction of previous kingdoms, no patchwork of ancient empires. This was Satan's way, when he built up imperial Rome; gathering together the fragments of a hundred empires, and constructing with them an

empire mightier and more imposing than all.

But God's way is like himself. He is first to turn everything upside down; to subvert and crumble down all that earth contains of grand and stable, and make its kingdoms like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor; and then, in His own way, and with His own materials, to build up His own kingdom—a kingdom that cannot be moved—a kingdom of abiding justice and unending peace.

It is worse than vain to philosophise upon this subject, without direct and minute reference to the prophetic Word. Men seem to think that, having assured themselves from Scripture that there is to be a reign of peace, they are at liberty to speculate in their own way as to its nature, and as to its mode of introduction. But God has settled all these just as explicitly as He has settled the fact of there being such a kingdom at all. Are we then to depart



from His plan, and prefer our own chart to His? Is any theory, however apparently philosophical, to be adopted, which overlooks either the leading features of God's plan, or any of its minuter details? Let God be true, and every man a liar. Let us rest satisfied with God's order, and God's details,—unscrupulously weighing every theory in God's balances, and casting it aside wherever it is found wanting; for “vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt.”

There is another barrier in the way of such philosophical speculations, viz., the existence and power of Satan. What is to be done with him? How is he to be cast out? And how can there be a reign of peace till this be done? This is a point respecting which philosophy says nothing —a point which it dislikes to enter on; for not only is this a region into which it cannot extend its speculations, but it finds itself at once arrested and silenced by

being brought directly into contact with God and His purposes. Philosophy may provide for the gradual extinction of evil, the gradual regeneration of the world, by the hypothesis of an innate vitality, but how is it to get rid of Satan, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air? In the Divine plan, this hindrance is recognised and provided for. At the commencement of the reign of peace, Satan is to be bound and cast into the bottomless pit. Just as truly as now he personally roams the earth with his hosts of darkness, working evil, so truly is he to be restrained and fettered, that his power for evil may no longer be exercised, and thus one main element in the reign of unrighteousness be removed.

To those who own the revelation of God, the question of Satanic agency is one of far greater moment, in its bearings on the future age of peace, than is generally sup-

posed. If Satan be the bold, mighty, successful antagonist of good that he is represented to be—if he be really the great and potent adversary of God and of His Church which Scripture declares him to be—there must be some very decided place given to the way and time of his removal, in any theory of the future which can pretend to be harmonious with God's. The system that overlooks this, or that provides inadequately for the removal of this evil, can have no pretensions to be scripturally correct, whatever may be its supposed philosophical beauty and symmetry.

Then there comes in the present condition of the material earth as another element for consideration. What is to be done with the curse? Is it a mere figure? Are man's own efforts sufficient to overcome it? Or are *moral* means adequate to extinguish this physical evil? Or will it be maintained that a reign of peace and justice can go on excellently in the midst

of a groaning creation, and upon the surface of an untamed barren earth?

Lastly, where is the king who is to administer the government of this righteous kingdom? Is he to be invisible when all else is visible? Or is there no need for a monarch? Is it to be so entirely a reign of *principles*, that the presence of a king would only be a disfigurement and encumbrance? Admitting that this may not be so urgent a question as some of the preceding, still it is one requiring solution, were it only to complete the theory, and leave none of its details unadjusted, as well as none of its difficulties unsolved.

In entering on the consideration of such a subject as the expected reign of peace and righteousness, it is impossible to avoid coming into contact with such questions as the preceding. We cannot evade them. They must be disposed of. No one with his Bible before him can fail to see that they are points naturally suggesting them-

selves ; and, in looking into them, it must be admitted that they are not subordinate questions, but weighty and vital. The tendency of theological theorists of the present day is to overlook these in their visions of the future ; nay, among some, there seems to be a strong feeling that such topics are, if not puerile, at least purely speculative. Nor is it quite uncommon to hear that system of prophetic truth which specially embraces these pronounced unscientific and unphilosophical. But a simple reader of his Bible, desiring to learn the mind of God, and to be taught by God himself, will not feel discouraged in making such questions the subjects of his search. The profit and the delight arising from discovering the purpose of God in any of its details will be found ample compensation for the time bestowed.

The manner in which many of our age are *philosophising* theology, and casting an air of mystery, if not of uncertainty,

over many of the simplicities of revelation, is no happy omen, and ought to be a warning. The literalities of a first and second resurrection are explained away; the promise of Satan's binding is made void; the hope of the glorious advent is marred and hidden; and it becomes those who would hold fast the truth of God to be more and more upon their guard against any departure from the simplicities of His Word. Our ideas of a coming reign of peace and righteousness must either be taken wholly from what God has made known concerning it, or else they ought to be confessed to be mere speculations of man's intellect, or the fables of his fancy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIVINE VERDICT.

God's purpose is to rule this world by a man. It is not to angels, but to man, that the "world to come" is to be made subject (Heb. ii. 5).

This purpose shall stand, in spite of Satan's efforts to retain the throne, and to prevent man from occupying it. In the human nature, not the angelic, the "royal priesthood" shall yet be exhibited, notwithstanding the apparent frustration of the purpose by the first Adam's fall.

But man's incapacity, *in his present state*, to carry out God's purpose, must first be proved. For this, ages are needed. It is

this process of proof that is now going on, or rather drawing to a close,—for the days of earth are numbered, its crowns are falling, its thrones are rocking, its palaces are crumbling, its glory is departing, and it stands like some old forest through which one hurricane has passed, with levelling, stripping, fury; and through which another, and a last, is preparing to sweep. The time of the world's gay song is well-nigh done, the noise of its viols is ending, its purple is fading, its court-pomp is passing away, its mirth is falling low, its feast-halls are emptying, and all Christendom, as one has said, is turned into “ope great forge, where every hammer is plied, and every inventive faculty strained, for such an explosion of war as the world has never yet seen.”

The thrones on which God has set the rulers of the earth are not irresponsible thrones. He has not given them sceptres to wield after their own pleasure, nor

set them on judgment-seats to act and speak as if their decision were final, and their sentences beyond the possibility of appeal or reversal. All earthly sentences, from the first ever pronounced, are now *under appeal*. They are on their way to the highest court of appeal; and though they must of necessity have all the force of *interim acts*, yet they are all, small and great, standing over for review, awaiting the arrival of the Supreme Judge, and the decision of the highest court, from which there is no appeal—whether confirming or reversing the proceedings of earthly judges—and all whose sentences are according to righteousness and truth.

All along, God has been reminding kings and judges of the tenure by which they hold office under Him, and of the appeal which lies to Him from all their proceedings, even in the case of the poorest and most helpless. He has been giving them instructions how to rule for Him, how to

govern the earth in the absence of His Son, how to care for those over whom He has set them; so that they are without excuse, if they oppress or misgovern, or forget *by* whom and *for* whom they reign. But as the world grows older, and as the tenure of their office is drawing to its close, He multiplies these instructions and warnings. For He sees that they are ruling for self, not for His Son; for self, not for the people whom He has intrusted to their care. Hence those Psalms which refer so specially to the state of the world in the last days, just before the Advent, take up this subject, and abound with special messages to the princes of the earth. God would not have them unwarned. He would not overtake them by surprise. He sends to them their particular instructions, telling them the things He expected of them; telling them His disappointment in finding His world misgoverned and ruined, and giving them *final* warning ere He sends the Supreme

Judge, who is to set them all aside, to review all their proceedings, to re-judge all their judgments, nay, to sit in judgment upon themselves.

In the present day these messages to princes come with peculiar power. God is now putting earth's rulers upon their last trial; and by his shaking of their thrones He is reminding them of the coming reckoning. For the last twenty years God has been specially speaking to rulers. His voice has rung through Europe as a word of solemn warning. Every event has spoken to them with a plainness not to be misinterpreted or turned aside. It is as if now for the last time He were calling their attention to His written instructions in His Word, that they may repent and amend, and save their own souls, if it be too late to save their kingdoms. Daniel's message to the king of Babylon is now God's message to the potentates of Europe—"Wherefore, O king, let my counsecl bc acceptable to thee,

and break off thy sins by righteousness,
and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to
the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy
tranquillity."

But there is one of these "burdens of princes" that I would now call attention to more particularly, as, from first to last, it is entirely addressed to the rulers of the earth. I mean the eighty-second Psalm. That Psalm sets forth to us God's watchfulness over the earth and all that it contains. His eye is both upon rulers and ruled, the judges and the judged. He looks for judgment, but behold oppression; He listens to hear what sounds may be coming up from its inhabitants, but He hears only a cry—the cry of the afflicted and the misruled. He then summons His vicegerents whom He has set in power, and utters His displeasure against the injustice which is taking place, and His determination to bring it to an end. Then He lets us see His ultimate design in reference to the

earth, viz., to supplant and supersede these unfaithful judges, to introduce His own faithful and righteous King, to give Him the heathen for His heritage, the whole earth for His possession.

We divide the Psalm into the following parts:—

I. THE SCENE (ver. 1).

God is standing in the assembly of God.
In the midst of the gods he will judge.

He summons His representatives, who, because they are His representatives ("a divine sentence is in the lips of the king," Prov. xvi. 10), are called "gods." He gathers them together into one august assembly, that He may speak with them face to face. He takes His place in the midst of them, and calls them to account for the exercise of their vicegerency; for He hears that there has been a mal-administration of power, an abuse of office. He demands a reckoning for their stewardship, for the cry

has gone up to Him that all has been mismanagement and wrong. He appears among them as "He by whom kings reign and princes decree judgment," as the Sovereign among His vassals, as Prince of the kings of the earth, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Such is the way in which God deals with those whom He calls gods, and to whom, in the absence of His Son, He has intrusted the government of the earth, to see whether they can rule it. And while these words give forth an admonitory message to princes, they say also to the people, "be subject to the powers that be;" "speak no evil of dignities;" abjures the irreverent, disloyal, insubordinate, rebellious, murmuring spirit of the times. Stand aloof from those who seek to undermine authority. Beware of the leaven that is abroad, decomposing, equalising, overturning everything in the state. Learn God's order of the world, that it is a king-

dom, not a republic, that is His model; and, for teaching us what He is ere long to establish on the earth, He has set up, and still keeps up, those earthly types of dignity, authority, and honour. Learn that the source of power is neither in kings nor people, but in Him who standeth in the assembly of God, and judgeth among the gods.

II. THE EXPOSTULATION (ver. 2).

How long will ye judge in iniquity,
And the faces of the wicked will ye lift up?

He has heard the sighing of the needy. It has gone up into the ear of the Lord of Sabaoth. He has heard the pleading of the injured widow—"Avenge me of mine adversary!" He has marked the injustice, the partiality, the preference of the ungodly (see Isaiah i. 21-23; v. 7-23; x. 1, 2). And now His forbearance is exhausted. He cannot tolerate much longer

this sad misrule. He must interpose. "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." But, before doing so, He gives one warning more. He will try what expostulation will do; for He is most unwilling to smite. He is full of compassion even to the most stubborn and high-minded. He would fain give these rulers a little longer time to repent, that they may be saved from the overflowing judgments which are ready to burst upon their thrones. He pities nations; He pities kings; He is "long-suffering and slow to anger, of great kindness, and it repenteth Him of the evil."

III. THE EXHORTATION (ver. 3, 4).

Judge ye the poor one and the orphan;
The afflicted ones and the needy ones do justice
to;
Deliver the poor one and the oppressed one;
From the hand of the wicked ones deliver them.

Thus He admonishes and exhorts the great congregation of the assembled princes, reminding them of the end for which they had been set on thrones, and calling on them to consider that end, and fulfil it. It is not for personal honour that they have been raised up; it is not for enjoyment of courtly pomp and splendour that they have gotten a place and a name above the rest of their fellows; it is not for the indulgence of their lusts, or the gratification of their wills, or for larger opportunities of getting vent to their capricious selfishness, that they have been intrusted with earth's gold, and arrayed in the world's purple. It is for the administration of laws, for the upholding of order, for securing equity and righteousness, for the restraint of man's boundless selfishness, for the protection of the weak against the strong, the few against the many, that they have been constituted God's representatives. Such is the design of their

office—the end for which God has placed the crown upon their head, and the sceptre in their hands. But He sees that they forget this; that, instead of fulfilling their high calling, they are taking their pleasure, standing aloof from their fellow-men, aggrandising themselves, nay, using their power for unrighteousness, and turning their sceptre into an iron rod. Seeing all this, He summons them, and comes into the midst. He lifts up His voice, and calls on them to consider their office, just as He has of late been so solemnly doing to the sovereigns of Europe. “Have you fulfilled your office? Have you used your power aright? Have you acknowledged me in using it? Have you remembered the poor and needy, the afflicted and the fatherless?” What answer can the world’s princes give? The exhortation may be the last they are to receive ere the iron rod of the avenging Judge comes down upon them, crushing them to pieces, crumbling

their thrones, and making their kingdoms like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor.

IV. THE REFUSAL (ver. 5).

They have not known, and they will not understand;
In darkness they will walk!

No voice of warning can pierce their ear. They are as the deaf adder. Intent on pleasure, bent on self-indulgence, pursuing ambition, delighting in pomp, carrying out their own capricious wills, they will not listen to reproof, though it comes not from their subjects, but from their Sovereign, not from man, but from God. Their proceedings all along have been marked by ignorance, blindness, folly; and in this they persist. They hate the light, they love unrighteousness; they will not learn. Security has taught them nothing in time past; insecurity is teaching them nothing still. Prosperity has

taught them nothing; adversity is equally unavailing. Neither mercy nor judgment reaches them. They close both eyes and ears. "They have not known, neither will they understand." Some exceptions there have been to this,—brighter gleams in this dark scene of sad history. In some respects our own land stands out as a noble exception. With all its ills, and faults, and misgovernment, there is more of high principle and strict justice in the judgment-seats of our kingdom than has been exhibited in any nation of the earth. Bribery, legal persecution, deliberate unrighteousness, are things which dare not lift up their heads among us. And doubtless for this we are favoured of Him who loves righteous judgment. But still the general characteristic of government in our world is such as has been described above.

And so it will be till the Lord come. Reformation of abuses, change of constitu-

tions, the force of public opinion, are much insisted on as quite sufficient to accomplish all that is needed. But in vain. Man's selfishness remains the same, and no reforms can reach the real seat of the disease. Yet mark how calmly these words of the Psalm are spoken, and how simple and unexaggerated they are—"They have not known, neither will they understand." There is no angry outburst against the unrighteous judges; no furious utterance of vengeance; no bitter execration or invective such as fills men's lips, or breathes through all the journals of our day, self-styled "liberal." No; the language is that of august and solemn dignity; nay, it is that of mild forbearance and tender pity. "They know not, neither will they understand." How like the words of Him who said in the sorrowing language of disappointed affection—"Ye will not come to me that ye might have life!" How like the words of Him

who wept over doomed Jerusalem, longing
to gather her that would not be gathered ;
to bless her that would not be blest !

V. CONSEQUENCES (ver. 5).

All the foundations of the earth shall be moved.

Failing in the discharge of their high trust, they bring on the world's day of confusion and disaster. Their abuse of power ends in the ruin of all things. God set them up in order to consolidate and cement and clasp together the different parts of this world. But they fulfil not their office, and the earth becomes clean dissolved;—that state of things is introduced which is described by the prophet Isaiah in his twenty-fourth chapter. The roots of government are torn up; the foundations of the earth are shaken; society is disorganised, decomposed, dissolved!

This terrible derangement is here traced

by God himself to its true cause, and declared to be the fruit of misgovernment and unrighteous judgment. It is in vain to blame a rebellious and headstrong people; it is in vain to ascribe the evils of the day to the wide-sown seeds of infidelity and anarchy among the nations. God will not allow rulers to forget that they themselves are first of all guilty. Had they discharged aright their office, and ruled in the fear of God, would there have been now a revolting people, or would there have been heard the cry of nations breathing vengeance? Is it not the misgovernment and oppression of rulers that has generated the explosive force that is now tearing empires asunder, and splitting into a hundred fragments the solid rocks of ancient constitutions and dynasties? This may be a most unwelcome truth, and they who proclaim it may be ranked among the abettors of anarchy. Be it so. It is the truth of God; not the less needed because unwelcome; and it is a truth which in

faithfulness we are bound to proclaim, even when most urgently enforcing subjection to the powers that be. That which is dissolving society, which is levelling ranks, which is unknitting communities, which is undermining thrones, which is corroding the strong pillars of empire, which is pouring out defiance against law, is an agency called into being, and ripened into strength, by the princes of the earth themselves. It is they to whom the world is indebted for the spirit of lawlessness which has infected the very air of earth, and is preparing the way for the Lawless One himself! Every act of misgovernment tells upon the world. It does not end with the wrong inflicted, but spreads itself on every side, and gives birth to an endless train of mighty results. Every act of misrule cuts into the very core of social life, snapping some vital tie, dissolving some part of the cement which gives compactness and solid strength to the structure. Not one un-

righteous sentence is there but goes to a future account, and tells ultimately upon the condition of the earth. The oppressor may say, "Oh, it is but a widow, it is but an orphan, that is injured; it will go no further." Ah, but was not this God's command, "Defend the poor and the fatherless"? and therefore not to comply with it is helping to tear up the foundations of the earth. Or the misruler may say, "Oh, it is only a saint that is wronged, or it is only a sect of Christians that will suffer; what matters it?" Ah, but all such deeds are telling fearfully upon the constitution of the kingdom, destroying the social structure, digging a mine not only under the thrones of kings, but under the very foundations of the earth. And shall we hesitate to lay our finger upon the world's fretting sore, and trace its present evils to their source? The people are not guiltless. Far from it. Who but a fiend or an atheist would defend the wild outbursts of anarchy such

as France has witnessed? But the rulers are at fault. They have not been a terror to evil-doers, nor a praise to them that do well. They have either perpetrated or winked at enormities. They have hated and proscribed the Bible. They have not taught the people. They have not given the nation a Sabbath. They have exalted Antichrist, and done homage to Rome. They have cherished the false Church and frowned upon the true. They have sown the wind, and they are now reaping the whirlwind. With one hand they have torn up the foundation, and with the other they have plucked out the keystone. Need they wonder that the whole arch is falling to pieces above them, and that they find it so vain to endeavour, by scaffolding and under-propping, to prevent the total ruin of a fabric which they themselves had so recklessly undermined?

VI. THE SENTENCE (ver. 6, 7).

I said, Gods are ye,
And sons of the Most High all of you;
Surely as man ye shall die,
And as one of the princes ye shall fall.

Such is God's sentence against earth's rulers for their unfaithfulness in office. It is a sentence which has been long on its way to them; its execution has been long deferred; for with its execution stand connected all the terrors of the day of infinite vengeance to the world. God lingers long, loving to spare, reluctant to smite; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But long-suffering has its bounds, and righteousness must at length have free course. The higher the elevation, the deeper will be the shame and ruin; the greater the trust reposed in them, the more terrible will be the judgment that overtakes them for its non-fulfilment or betrayal. Their station

screens them no longer. Their names of honour are no pleas for leniency or respite. Their thrones are no bulwarks, no battlements for defence in the day of evil, but surer marks for the thunderbolts of wrath. “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down” (*Is. ii. 10–22*—see there the whole picture of ruin; see also *Rev. vi. 15, 17*). Let us observe here:—

1. *The honour conferred by God.*—He called them *gods*, and *sons of the Most High*, and in so naming them He implies the vast honour put upon them, as well as the source of their dignity and authority. They are God’s representatives, on whom He has bestowed His own name. They are made partakers of God’s authority, dignity, power on earth. It is *He*, not *themselves*—*He*, not the *people*, who has bestowed the honour, and delegated the power. These honours and titles are not usurped or self-assumed, nor are they indi-

cative of lordly pride or contemptuous arrogance on the part of the possessor. They are given by God, and as such are to be recognised and reverenced by us. Hence the sin of "speaking evil of dignities," or of uttering contempt against those whom God has set over us, unworthy though they be. Moses was commanded to say to Israel, "Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people;" and Paul thus expressed himself, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts xxiii. 5). Let us not, then, scorn the name of kings, yielding to the infidel clamour of these last days. It is God who has given them their seat and name. Let us not fret and chafe at the thought of rank and title and regal state. It is God's will that it should be so; and did we but see into the nature of things, and comprehend the Divine ideal of a well-ruled world,

we should see that such a state of things is unspeakably the best. Let us not murmur against the rulers of the earth, nor envy them their lofty thrones, nor their purple raiment, nor their jewelled crowns. These are God's giving, not man's usurpation. They are, moreover, types of the dignity and honour yet in store for the redeemed. "Kings and priests," a "royal priesthood"—such are our names even now; and the glory which they imply is that with which we are to be invested when the true King shall be revealed, and the great kingdom shall come.

2. *The sentence pronounced.*—"As man ye shall die; as one of the princes shall ye fall." Ye shall die as other men die, undistinguished, unheeded, unhonoured, perhaps unwept, not buried in the sepulchres of kings. Ye shall fall like Lucifer, son of the morning, cast out like an abominable branch (*Isaiah xiv. 12*), like Egypt, or Asshur, or Elam, or Meshech, or Tubal

(Ezek. xxxii. 17-32), whose “graves are set in the sides of the pit; they are slain, fallen with the sword, going down uncircumcised into the nether parts of the earth, bearing their shame with them that go down to the pit.”

Who is it, then, that is shaking the thrones of Europe? God himself! God has risen to call rulers to account, and He is making them feel that it is *He* who is speaking—speaking to them in that wild roar of anarchy that is gathering round their palaces. It is not man that is wielding the sword of vengeance. It is not man’s might or fury that is accomplishing these scenes of terror and of wonder that are unfolding themselves. It is God. He has summoned His legions. He has marshalled His hosts. He has unsheathed His glittering sword “bathed in heaven,” and is now bringing it down for judgment upon Christendom; nor shall it again be sheathed or cease its work of death till His

own right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory. There is now no safety, either for rulers or ruled, save by taking the side of God, and ranging under His banner. There is no refuge from the world-wasting tempest save in the clefts of the rock. There is no security from being crushed under the weight of falling thrones, or swept away with crumbling kingdoms, like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, save by being found in Him who is our shield, our shelter, our hiding-place, our pavilion in the day of storm and battle.

VII. THE CRY (ver. 8).

Arise, O God,
Judge the earth!
For thou shalt inherit all nations.

These words may be the utterance either of a command or a prayer. If they are a command, they are the utterance of the Father addressing the Son; if they are a

prayer, they are the words of the Church calling on the Son to arise and take to himself His great power and reign.

1. *Take them as the Father's words.*—It was He who said, “*Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool*” (Psalm cx. 1). It is in obedience to the Father's will, and in fulfilment of the Father's purpose, that Messiah continues to sit there until the time appointed. Then He who said to him “*sit*,” shall say “*arise*.” The Father calls Him by the name of God, just as in the 45th Psalm, “*Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever*.” He is the God mentioned in the beginning of our Psalm; it is *His* name that is given to princes and judges; and when they dis honour that name, then He to whom it belongs arises and vindicates its honour. How soon the Father's voice may be heard, saying, “*Arise!*” and, in answer to it, how soon may the Son arise and judge! The end of all things is at hand. We may daily

be expecting "terrible things in righteousness"—"the punishing of the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth" (Isaiah xxiv. 21).

2. *Take them as the Church's cry.*—The saints have been specially made to feel the oppression of the evil judges—"wearing out the saints of the Most High." They see the increasing misrule over the earth, and they cry, ARISE! They see the needy and the orphan suffering, and they cry, ARISE! They hear the groans of creation, and they cry, ARISE! They feel the universal shakings, all things out of course, and they cry, ARISE! They mark the growth of Antichrist, and they cry, ARISE! They long to see a peaceful, happy, holy, well-governed world, and they cry, ARISE! (see Ps. vii. 6; xliv. 26; lxviii. 1; cii. 13). Thus the passage resembles the closing prayer of the Apocalypse, "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come;" and it resembles

the longing of the spouse, “ Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices” (Cant. viii. 14). As if they would say, “ O thou whose name is truly God, who alone art worthy of the name, who alone can be Jehovah’s representative and vicegerent, arise, judge the earth, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory!”

For eighteen hundred years He has been *sitting*: He is afar off: He interferes not. Only once has He *arisen*, and that was when His martyr Stephen was falling under the stones of his enemies (Acts vii. 56); just as He shall yet arise, when His little band of believing witnesses are falling under the sword of their persecutors. But, since then, He has not arisen. He allows matters to take their course. Sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed. He lingers still; for it is the mercy-seat which He now occupies, and that to which He comes is the throne of judgment. His

lingering is in love—deep, vast, unutterable love—love that survives many a rejection, love that coldness, hatred, rebellion, have not quenched, love that leans down in sad fondness over its unworthy objects, and yearns with more than parental tenderness over this vile but still well-beloved earth. What a message does this lingering bring to this unprepared world, that rejects His grace and refuses to be blest,—that lingers on its Sodom-plains in spite of warning and entreaty! *He* lingers in love; *man* lingers in hatred. *His* lingering is the expression of His willingness to bless; *man's* lingering is the expression of his determination not to be blest. Everything on earth—each object, each event, each passing day—has a voice which says, *Arise!* yet He lingers. The world's long misery and misrule say, *Arise!* yet He lingers. The groans of creation say, *Arise!* yet He lingers. The cruelty and selfishness of earth's mighty ones say, *Arise!*

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yet He lingers. The tears of His suffering Church say, *Arise!* yet He lingers. The sighing of scattered Israel says, *Arise!* yet He lingers. Each sad sick-bed, each cold death-bed, each bitter parting, each opening grave, says, *Arise!* yet He lingers. Each new tumult, each war, each revolution, says, *Arise!* yet He lingers. Each wasting pestilence or famine, each dark storm or wasteful earthquake, each smoking battle-field or dreary dungeon, says, *Arise!* yet He lingers. Each swollen river, each tossing wave, each frost-bound plain, each snow-wrapt mountain, each heavy cloud, each leafless tree, says, *Arise!* yet He lingers!

Not that He heeds not the groans of creation or the voice of His turtle-dove, that sits lonely in her olive grove, cowering beneath the wintry blast, and sighing for spring. Not that He has not "respect to His covenant," or loves to see the dark places of the earth full of the habitations

of cruelty. No; it is in love that He lingers. It is because He has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, no desire to hasten on the last withering curse, no delight in pouring out the vials of His wrath upon a heedless world—a world that has had the curse and the blessing presented, yet has chosen the curse—a world that, rather than have God for its governor, and Christ for its king, will risk the devouring fire, and brave the horrors of the darkest night that has ever fallen upon earth, and encounter the eternal ruin which must be its irreversible and unendurable doom.

But the cry proceeds, “Judge the earth!” These rulers have failed to judge it, though thou hast tried them long. Judge thou it. Nothing but this will do. A change of law will not do ; reforms will not do ; remodelling of constitutions will not do ; republics will not do. Only one thing will do—a change of *dynasty!* Thou must come and displace all these rulers. There

is no remedy for a ruined and misgoverned earth but one. Thou must ascend its throne : Thou, its own true king, long-expected, long-desired—Thou must take the sceptres from the hands of these misruling monarchs, and reign thyself in righteousness.*

This, then, is our poor world's only hope, its one resource ; all else is vain. There is nothing to fall back upon but this, in the midst of that anarchy that is sundering the communities of earth. This is the only anchor that can hold us fast in the burst

* To judge, according to Scripture usage, means *four* things :—1. *To hold a judicial court* for the trial of the accused (Exod. xviii. 13, 16, 22; Dan. vii. 10; Ps. cix. 7; Isa. xvi. 5; Rom. xiv. 10). 2. *To execute vengeance* (1 Sam. iii. 13; 2 Chron. xx. 12; Ps. cxlix. 9; Ezek. vii. 3; viii. 27; Rev. xviii. 8; xix. 2, 11). 3. *To vindicate the righteous* (Deut. x. 18; Judg. ii. 16-18; Ps. vii. 11; x. 18; lxii. 2; ciii. 6; Prov. xxix. 14; Isa. i. 17; Jer. xxii. 16). 4. *To rule or reign* (Judg. iv. 4; x. 2; xii. 7—see the Book of *Judges* throughout, in which book we have the best illustration of what the meaning of *judging* really is; 1 Sam. ii. 10; Ps. ix. 8; xcvi. 13; cx. 6; Isa. ii. 4; xi. 3; xxxii. 1, 16; xlvi. 1-4; Jer. xxviii. 5; xxxiii. 15).

of the storm that is at hand. *We* have a judge, *we* have a king. Though the world's judges and kings should all be found unfaithful, *we* have one whose faithfulness has been proved, and to whom we look forward as the great successor of them all. They have been proved and tried, but it is found that they cannot be trusted with the world's rule. It has been a long trial, and a patient one on the part of God. He has given them every advantage, every conceivable opportunity of doing well and fulfilling their stewardship. But it has been demonstrated by ages of history that they are not fit for rule; they have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; their trial is just about to close. The great demonstration of ages as to man's total incapacity to rule is now nearly consummated; the evidence is summing up, and the decision will soon be given. Then shall the handwriting be seen upon every palace, "Mcne, Tekel;"

and the whole world shall read it, written legibly by the finger of God.

What are the thoughts of our statesmen and men of the world in these days ? They are thoughts of bewilderment, perplexity, and trouble. The wisest of them are utterly confounded. They see no hope. Nothing seems to lie before them but an era of war, bloodshed, anarchy, wretchedness, calamity. Of anything better they have no real expectation. The evil, they think, may be repressed and restrained for a few years ; but, ere long, it must take its unobstructed course. And they tremble while they strive to calculate or conjecture what that course may be, for they see no dawn beyond the night, no calm beyond the storm ; the evil is too great and too wide to be ultimately crushed by any resources that they are acquainted with. It may not yet be quite ripe for the outburst, but that is all that they can say. They know of no balm for the world's bruises, no binding up for its run-

ning sores, nothing wherewith to stanch its ever-bleeding wounds. In all their stores of state-policy and diplomatic wisdom, they have found nothing that can reknit its broken members, or heal the sickness under which it is wasting away; they can devise nothing for bringing back its lost peace, or order, or obedience, or prosperity. These seem gone for ever. Their hearts fail them for fear, and for looking after the things that are coming on the earth. It is a sad and thankless thing now to hold the reins of government, for the foundations of the earth are out of course.

But the thoughts of the saint are those of hope and cheering anticipation. He sees indeed a world falling to pieces, but he sees a hand ready to reconstruct and reconstitute and bless it with peace and order and stability far greater than it has yet enjoyed. For he has promise of a glorious era still to come; and he can plead, “Arise, and judge the earth, *for thou shalt inherit all*

nations ;" that is, there is a promise to *thee* that the nations shall be thine, and on this promise I rest, expecting the day when the inheritance of the earth shall be given thee (Ps. ii. 8). He sees unrighteousness and oppression on the one hand, and anarchy, sedition, insubordination on the other ; but he looks peacefully, beyond all these, to the day of order and obedience and holiness and universal joy. He knows the remedy that shall, ere long, be applied to the world's festering wounds, and he pleads for its speedy application. He sees, and that not afar off, the coming of Him who is to deliver creation from its bondage of corruption, who is to break in pieces the oppressor, and to set up a righteous throne on earth.

The "wise of this world," statesmen and philosophers, are becoming, as if by necessity, interpreters of the future. Fear, curiosity, restlessness, a sense of want, urge them on. The sharpness of outline which the shadows of coming events are

assuming, and the swiftness with which the event follows its shadow, encourage them in their speculations. It is not a brief or casual glance that they are casting into the future, but an intensely eager gaze. At every new event we observe them turning the eye forward, attempting to pierce the mist that overhangs them.

As interpreters of the future, or as commentators on passing events in their bearing on that future, they cannot but fail.

They have no data to reason upon; nor is their reason strong or keen enough to handle such data, were they given. Hence their opinions on such topics are but visions, guesses, gropings. One of them could write—"In that ferment of religious discussions which now invade the world, a new future, a new order of things is stirring, and it is the duty of all well-disposed men to work to prepare its advent."* Another could say to a friend, "I begin to believe

* Quinet's *Ultramontanism*, Lect. ix.

that the future destiny of the human soul lies prophesied in the dark oracle of the material creation; each coming spring which attracts the budding plant from the earth's bosom, gives me insight into the sad enigma of death, and confutes my anxious fear of an eternal sleep.”*

Thus they give utterance to their own vague guesses, not knowing on what ground to rest them. They will not be taught by prophetic revelation, yet they cannot cast aside their presentiments and longings. They conjecture at random, yet cannot refrain from conjecturing. They feel thrown forward into the future by inextinguishable instinct, as well as by the pressure of events; yet, of that future, they can only speak with a stammering tongue.

It is interesting to observe the direction which their speculations are taking. They are going forth in search of what they call “the true and the beautiful.” Sensitive

* Schiller's *Philosophical Letters*.

alive to the conviction that there surrounds them much of what is both untrue and unlovely; persuaded that this is not a state of things which can endure; unconsciously acted on by the very Scriptures which they slight; they fondly anticipate a time when all that is untrue shall perish, and all that is unlovely shall vanish away.

They know not, indeed, what these expectations amount to, or what their prophetic utterances truly mean. The true and the beautiful are but gay dreams to them—no more. That what is true shall be succeeded by what is truer, and that what is fair shall give place to what is fairer, is their hope. Their perfection lies in “the Ideal ;” which consists of disembodied creations of their own philosophy,—as if the *personal* forms and palpable outlines which God, in His Word, has thrown round His truth, were poor and childish, tending to limit and to lower the perfect and the infinite.

Yet they long for a day of manifestation and development, unconsciously uniting their voices with the groan of universal creation, which is all around them sighing for deliverance. Thus one of them gives expression to his feelings—"An intellectual conflict about truth, and indeed about Divine truth, is the struggle of our age. This fact is already seen and admitted by a few, but ere long it will be still more generally acknowledged."* And another of them thus utters his fears and hopes—"Here on earth we are as soldiers, fighting in a foreign land, that understand not the plan of the campaign, have no need to understand it; seeing well what is at our hand to be done, let us do it like soldiers, with submission, with courage, with heroic joy. Behind us, behind each one of us, lie six thousand years of human effort—human conquest; before us is the boundless time, with its as yet uncreated and un-

* Schlegel's *Philosophy of Life*, Lecture vii.

conquered continents, and Eldorados, which we, even we, have to conquer, to create, and from the bosom of eternity shine for us celestial guiding-stars."* In this manner they breathe forth their vague desires and hopes, as men in whose souls there glimmers some bright idea of what is fair and good, and who feel that, as yet, that idea has never been allowed to expand into reality.

In this idea of theirs—vague and poor as it is—there is something that is not wholly baseless. The germ of truth is in it, just as there was in the undefined anticipations that preceded the birth of Christ, and opened even the lips of heathen poets to sing of coming peace. Yet, after all, it is but the germ—no more. It is the dim expression of a dim longing; not the well-defined, well-based hope which, resting on a Divine promise, knows that it shall not be put to shame.

* Carlyle's *Miscellaneous Writings*, vol. iii. pp. 91, 92.

The day of the true and the beautiful is coming; and, beyond the skirts of that heavy darkness that is now falling down upon the world, we can descry the gleams of its uprising. Yet the truth and the beauty then to be disclosed are strangely different from what the wise of this world are looking for. It shall be far deeper truth, and far brighter beauty, than man has yet known,—more holy, more blessed, more imperishable.

The outline which God has sketched to us in His Word of the condition of things on earth, both as they are and as they shall be, is very unlike any outline ever drawn by man. The Divine theory of a fallen world in its varied movements, and especially in its mode of ascent to a perfect state, is widely diverse from the human. God's world moves onwards and finally upwards by a series of checks, reverses, desolations. It is not a world at present where all is ever-brightening day; but a

world of alternate day and night, sunshine and shadow. It is not a world enjoying one long spring or summer, with no frost, or blight, or leaf-fall. It shall ere long be so; but not now. There is the blooming and the blighting, the springing and the drooping, the bursting bud and the falling leaf; there is the calm and the tempest, summer and winter; the sickening and the healing, the joying and the sorrowing;—these, and such as these, are the alternations by which God is carrying up His world to the perfection which He has in store for it. Life is coming, but it is to be reached through death; there is joy, but it is to be reached through sorrow; there is glory, but to it we must pass through shame. There is the kingdom that cannot be moved, but it comes only after the shaking of all things here! There is the “restitution,” the “regeneration,” the “Sabbatism;” but not until the foundations of the earth have gone utterly out of

course ; not until there has been a time of trouble, and terror, and tumult, and blood, and death, threatening to engulf, nay, to consume and annihilate, the world.

This is the “theory of the world” which Scripture in such manifold forms presents to us. God’s purpose—His eternal purpose—is spread out before us, not darkly or briefly, but in detail; and this purpose, by which all things, great and small, are steadily regulated, is, in regard to the *future*, manifestly a continuation or unfolding of principles already in play, and which have been acted on from the beginning. Whatever view we may take of the details of that purpose, respecting the events of the latter day, it is of no small moment that we should recognise a *Divine purpose* throughout,—a settled, adjusted scheme of action and course of event,—a determinate ordering of all things, which, while it bears on unswervingly in its own fixed line, throwing aside to right and left the thou-

sand vain schemes of man, leaves no room for the infidel to mock, and gives no excuse to the fatalist to fold his hands.

Many seem to be fully persuaded that the darkest days of the earth are over, and that, though its history hitherto has been a series of sinkings and risings, yet that now such vibrations are to cease, and the buoyancy of the world is to be left unhindered to bear it upward. The Divine finger, both in providence and prophecy, is pointing to a different scene. It shews us this mysterious purpose of Jehovah still at work, pursuing its resistless though apparently most tortuous course, whatever statesmen or philosophers may plan or speculate. It reveals many a winding, many an obstruction, many a fearful break still in prospect, many a terrific descent down which our world shall be precipitated, ere it reach its destined elevation and stability. It tells us that the world's worst days are not yet passed, and that, however

near morning may be, midnight is between.

Thus there is set before us the same theory of the world that has been unfolding itself from the beginning—the only theory that can light us through the gloom of present or coming evils, and save us from the vile delusions which, in the shape of panaceas for the evils of the age, are flung abroad upon society by a crude theology that grudgingly recognises inspiration, or a vain philosophy that hardly owns a God.

The simple study of the Divine Word, under the teaching of the Spirit, is the only way in which we can hope to be set right, and kept right, in “our theory of the world.” There we shall soon detect the difference between the human system and the Divine. God himself is the centre of the latter, just as He is the great centre of the universe; man is the centre of the former, even as he, in his pride, conceives of all things made for him.

One great end of God's purpose is to prostrate the creature, and yet to lay the foundation of its future and everlasting elevation—an elevation which, connected as it is with previous ages of debasement, shall not minister to pride. God first proves the vessel to be thoroughly worthless, and then He makes it a vessel of honour fit for the Master's use. He gives time and opportunity for the utmost depths of man's nature to be stirred, that it may be seen what "mire and dirt" are cast up. He shews that man is totally unfit to rule the world, and that, under him, no permanence could be expected, no unity, no greatness. He demonstrates that, place man in whatever circumstances of advantage you can devise, his heart will still pour out its turbid, bitter waters. Arrest him with judgment such as the deluge, he will still rebel; alarm him with the sudden burst of vengeance such as the fire of Sodom, he will still rebel; hedge him in with laws, as the broad statute-book

of Sinai, he will still rebel; rear a tabernacle, build a temple, overshadow him with the cloud, shine down on him with the visible emblem of Jehovah's glory, give him judges, kings, prophets, he will still rebel; extend to him long ages of grace, ply him with the gospel of God's free love, he will still rebel; place him in millennial days, on a renewed earth, with Anti-christ consumed, fierce judgments executed, righteousness abounding, the King of kings exercising glorious sway, all things blessed,—still, at the close of that period, and under the very eye of the King, he will still rebel. From the day of the first temptation, downwards to the last on the millennial earth when Satan is loosed for a little season, man shews himself the weak and helpless creature, whom God cannot trust with anything, either with the keeping of his own soul or with the rule of the world.

Then it is seen that no state of creature-

hood is so good but that it will lapse into evil, if not directly upheld by God; and yet that no state of creaturehood is so evil, but that the highest good and holiness may be educed from it. And thus we get some insight into the mind of God respecting both the evil and the good. The complicated mechanism of the world is in part made plain; its movements are more fully understood; the vastness of Jehovah's purpose is in some measure comprehended; the glory to be revealed more eagerly waited for; and the kingdom, which cannot be moved, anticipated as the only kingdom that can meet the wants, or realise the hopes, of the race.

For the day of that kingdom we wait, looking out for its arrival amid overhanging storms. None of these shall hinder its dawning, or mar its brightness when it dawns. Nay, these are its sure forerunners—the signs of its appearing. These terrific convulsions are but indications of

that crisis which shall throw off the world's long-lasting fever, bring back its primal health, and leave the past all behind it, as a delirious interval that has passed away for ever.

The same summer-cloud that sends down the wasteful lightning fringes itself with the iris and pours on the parched soil the living rain; so on that vast thunder-cloud, now piled above our earth, there is braided the covenant-rainbow, and out of it at length (after it has spent its fiery wrath and swept off the mockeries of man) are to come the joyous showers that are to bring down freshness and fruitfulness to a scorched and smitten world.

THE END.

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