

RE-TRACINGS OF TRUTH:

IN VIEW OF

QUESTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN LATELY RAISED.

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RE-TRACINGS OF TRUTH:

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QUESTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN LATELY RAISED.

I. THE PRESENT OUTLOOK ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE.

IN looking out upon the features of our own times, and even in proportion to our personal interest in them, we are apt to project our own personalities upon them. That a sanguine person will take a hopeful view, where a desponding one will only see gloom and shadow, no one needs to be informed. But every idiosyncrasy, whatever it may be, is quite apt to make its mark upon the canvas of the picture. Hence the taking of one in a manner perfectly trustworthy is a thing as rare as it is desirable. How thankful should we be, therefore, for the briefest testimony of Scripture as to the character of the times through which we are passing, when it is the pathway for our feet that is in question, and our responsibility to God presses upon us at each step we take!

Such guidance we have, through the tender mercy of our Great Shepherd, in the seven epistles of the book of Revelation; every one traced by His own hand, and our attention called to every address, as in no other part of the word of God: he that hath an ear being bidden to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches! We are not going to dwell upon this now: the application has been long familiar to those

for whom I am specially writing; but I would nevertheless press upon my readers the main points of that to Philadelphia, which (to myself at least) seems ever of more commanding interest as the time goes on, and the features of the last days develop themselves before our eyes.

There can scarcely be much difficulty in discerning what Philadelphia stands for. If the "woman Jezebel" makes popery absolutely plain in Thyatira, Sardis, having a name to live, though dead, yet with a remnant undefiled, marks out as clearly the state-churches of the Reformation. Philadelphia, following this, with its "brotherly love," as simply speaks of the movement to find and to separate the true Church out of this world-mass. Such has been more or less the character of many "revivals" since the Reformation, when there was sought a true "communion of saints" and subjection to the word of Christ, rather than the state-upheld creed. Laodicea nevertheless closes the series here; a picture, alas, less and less hard to be read at present, of a church made more and more popular to please the masses, and lukewarm as to the Christ outside. But we have to do now with Philadelphia.

Here, if "brotherly love" characterizes the assembly, that which the Lord specially commends is classed under three heads: first, that they keep Christ's word; secondly, they have not denied His name; thirdly, they have kept the word of His patience. Their danger is that, having but "a little strength," they may not hold fast that which they have; the overcoming will, therefore, be in holding fast.

Of necessity the stream will be against them: that is no more than is implied in every phase in which

men are found cleaving to God. The world is against God; and, the world having come into the church, the stream here is against God also. Where shall we find a haven of rest outside of it all? Not in any earthly refuge anywhere. Philadelphia is no place of rest, but the centre of a battle-field; and the cry of "overcome" is found here as elsewhere. Our rest is only in the glorious Leader, who covers our head in the day of battle, and in the power of the Holy Spirit who can make something out of things that are not, and out of weakness make us strong. Our trust cannot be in the attainment of an ecclesiastical position, though a right one,—in principles of truth, although divine; through all this the enemy made his way at the beginning, when things were almost in their first freshness; no! we need tireless energy to resist fresh inroads; never more likely to be successful than when we are beginning to believe that the battle is over, and that our victories are to be now only in the quiet harvest-field,—in the ingathering of souls from the seed sown by the evangelist, or the recovery of the people of God themselves out of the superstition and error that have inwrapped them. Then indeed it may be that, while we are congratulating ourselves that we are leaders of the blind, lights of those who sit in darkness, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes, the pit of darkness may be opening at our feet, to engulf us all.

A terrible thing it is, in fact, to think of that actual chasm which swallowed up the church of the apostles' days—the church of Peter and John and Paul—and left only as the successor of this the legal, hierarchical, ritualistic church of the so-called "fathers," of which one well-known to us has said, "It is quite

certain that neither a full redemption, nor, though the words be used once or twice, a complete possessed justification by faith, as Paul teaches it, a perfecting for ever by its one offering, a known personal acceptance in Christ, is ever found in any ecclesiastical writings after the canonical scriptures, for long centuries." In what, then, were *they* inferior to us, those men to whom apostles and prophets preached, —what have we that they had not, which is to assure us that we are not in danger of making such shipwreck of the faith as it is certain they did? What but the most foolish self-confidence could say, with such a warning before our eyes, that we were in none?

Nor can we seriously consider the epistle to Philadelphia in connection with the character of the present times, without realizing that Satan's batteries to-day are turned upon the very central points of Philadelphian position; and that we are contemplating the beginning of an apostasy from the Christian faith which will be more complete than any which have preceded it? What is the so-called "higher criticism," spite of its lamblike speech where the flock of Christ perchance may be alarmed, but the most thorough attack that can be imagined upon the Word of Christ? He Himself was hardly beyond His times in matters of criticism; and grounded His triumphant argument against the scribes as to David's Son being David's Lord upon a mere mistake as to the authorship of the hundred and tenth psalm! But, in fact, who knows if the evangelists have rightly reported Him? or who knows anything that the critics may please to question? Judgment is removed from the power of the common man: we have no more our Bibles with the appeal to every man's heart and con-

science; you must have trained specialists to settle the facts! and what they will leave you after they have completed their dissections is but the fragments of a corpse without voice or life!

Look again at the denial of Christ's Name! Was there ever a day in which heresies affecting His Person or work more abounded? or the tendency to leave out any particular demand for orthodoxy as to either, so long as people accept Him as their Leader in some way not to be too severely criticized. If you should have mistaken the Son of the Father for a mere servant of the Father's house, eternity will make that right, of course, and it is hoped that the mistake will not prove very serious! After all, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man are the broad lines upon which religions are to be reconstructed to-day; and we need not fear but that they will be found to run on into eternity.

This, it will be said, is outside the sphere of Philadelphia; but it is what infects the air which day by day we breathe, and Satan is the "prince of the power of it." There are plenty of modifications of such principles to ensnare those for whom the full poisonous dose would be too large; and what is even more to be noted is that there are apt to be contradictories and opposites of them, born, indeed, of reaction, which by this opposition may deceive the earnest-hearted. For the serpent's lie is scarcely ever the mere negative of truth; and he is apt himself to have an alternative to it, planned directly to catch the opposers. And he who goes by the safe-seeming rule of steering as far as possible from Scylla may find the enemy's Charybdis lying before him on the other side. With God is perfect guidance; but

even with the word of God before our eyes, how far from it may we swerve through the self-will to which we are so prone!

I have no desire to conceal the thought that prompts me in writing the present series of papers, which is to examine in the light of Scripture principles and doctrines which are being put forth at the present time among those who, I believe, have truly filled a position answering to what the Spirit of God has characterized as Philadelphian, and which are but the enemy's wile to seduce them from it. Nay, I fear, in the wide-spread acceptance which they are certainly gaining, the loss of that precious deposit of truth which the grace of God had committed to their trust. This is, to me, much more than any ecclesiastical position, however true, which owes its value so largely to the truth to which it witnesses. I therefore desire to take up, with whatever ability the Lord may give, the main points that are in question; in which I shall be in large measure but retracing the outline of truths once familiar, once how precious!—only necessarily to put them in connection and comparison with what is now presented for truth, and not without the hope of some fresh light being elicited by the discussion; which is what God would surely overrule all our differences for. We shall try to look at the moral bearing of things; as indeed the one who is very much the cause of the present inquiry rightly presses: without this they cannot get their just value for our souls; and this is what, speaking for myself once more, I can say I desire. Oh that the value of God's truth may be more realized by us all! It is inestimable, as that which alone can form in us the mind of Christ; and as this, one cannot

help contending for it, though it is no wonder if one's motives should be challenged, and one should be treated as a mere "accuser of the brethren." Protestations are of no avail in such a case; specially as those who charge this are not those most likely to seek to satisfy themselves if there may be a cause. One may be well content if there be some who go far enough with me to discern its gravity.

I do not propose, however, to try and establish any specific charges, or make any quotations from any one with regard to what we shall consider. I prefer to leave every one to make for himself the personal application, and thus to eliminate as far as possible the distressing personal element. Let the inquiry be strictly a scriptural one; though it must be along lines which are marked out by what has called forth these papers. Then, if after all one is only fighting a nightmare of the imagination, we shall still not have made, I trust, a wholly useless survey of some important truths. If, on the other hand, it should be found that there is some serious question raised with regard to views that are really current and finding acceptance with many at the present time, then let my readers, without regard to persons, take it into the court of their own conscience, with God alone as the Judge of all, and argue it out there, with all that could distract them put aside. Truth carries its own authority with it for the true; although that in no wise means the setting aside of needed exercise, and the absolute subjection of one's mind to Scripture where Scripture has plainly spoken. And indeed we have little truth, of any spiritual importance, outside of that which Scripture has given to us. We shall by the

course pursued be as far as possible delivered from the collision of opinion as to what Mr——has said, or what he means by what he has said, and fasten our minds upon the one question of any prime importance, "What saith the Lord?"

There is, however, one question with which I shall now conclude. Looking again at the epistle to Philadelphia, and referring to the first two points in the commendation there, they are plainly these: "Thou hast kept My word, and not denied My Name." Serious, then indeed, would be the issue which raised question as to both of these! If there were admittedly a question as to the Person of the Lord plainly raised, and permitted to go at least without any public settlement of it; the thing dropped, perhaps, yet the offending expressions never withdrawn! *not* justified; not condemned; not retracted! And again, if Scripture, while formally admitted to be the written and authoritative word of God, yet were always in practice distinguished from the "word of God, living and powerful," as that which does not exactly teach, and which, but for the failure of the Church, would never have been needed!

If these two things should demonstrably come together, what more would be needed to show the extreme gravity of the questions to be raised?

2. WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE WRITTEN WORD.

THINGS must have come to a pass indeed, when with Christians such as those for whom I am writing, one has to dwell upon—still more, *defend*—the value of the written Word. That which has been to us all the revelation of all the truth which

we possess (and it is by the truth we are sanctified); that which alone brings into communion with the mind of God; that which, as inspired of God—"God-breathed"—furnishes the man of God to all good works;—how needless, how unutterably foolish it must appear, to tell any one who owes his all to it, the value of the written word of God!

Is this what those are thinking who, to one's utter astonishment to-day are letting pass without word of audible comment (that has had power, at least, to come across the breadth of the Atlantic) statements that would seem as if they should rouse to indignation impossible to be repressed every soul divinely taught as to what Scripture is? There is only one way besides in which this silence is comprehensible to me. *Perhaps by some strange obliquity of mind words have lost for me their proper meaning, and I have failed to understand what I have had before me.* If it be so, still let me state this figment of my imagination, and meet it as if it were a reality. How good it would be to get a strong knock-down reply from some one somewhere, to dispel for ever this delusion of mine, and assure me that I was dreaming! Why does not some one in pity to me, who, I think, have no evil intent, but a real longing over souls who seem drifting away from truth whither they know not, prick this bubble for me, and give relief to more than myself from as uncomfortable a nightmare of the imagination (if it be that) as for long has visited them?

The delusion which I am combating (whether mine or that of others) begins with fair speeches about Scripture (always written characteristically with a

small "s") as being authoritative and the written word of God. It blurs this, however, immediately by saying, it is more the *record* of it than the thing itself. I suppose every higher critic of the decent kind would say as much. It warns us, for all that (as I have never known the decent critic do), enforcing this too by personal example, that one can study it too much, and that a Bible student is not much after all; which means, of course, that the study of the Bible does not count for much. In fact, we are told, the method of learning truth by Scripture was not God's original plan at all: if the Church of God had remained in its first estate, we would not have wanted the Scriptures. The mind of God which is in the Scriptures would have been livingly expressed in the Church without them; and that was the divine idea! A very important thought, as some one remarks, if true; and very important, of course, to know if it *be* true: for by it the whole Old Testament is practically discounted and set aside for us.

But how, then, without the Word, was the Church to become the "living expression" of the mind of God? Here a leaf is taken from an old book which is not Scripture, but which many will recognize. The truth is in the *Church*. The apostles had it and communicated it; Paul to Timothy; Timothy to faithful men, who were to teach others. Here are four generations: Paul; Timothy; faithful men; others: that is the way the truth was to be transmitted. It is the way which the church of Rome hold to-day; and the technical name for it is "Tradition."

But it failed! Yes; somehow it failed. Rome

may be excusable here in believing that God's plan could not fail; but it could and did. Have you not observed that it is in the second epistle to Timothy, not the first, that Paul speaks of the Scriptures in that well known eulogy? That was when failure had fully set in; and *then* it was that the Scriptures came to be so important!

But at any rate, one would say, the method of teaching by Scripture is that by which we come into the truth to-day; and all that one can say of it in this respect to-day is fully justified! Ah, but we must not seize that comfort yet, or all that has been said just now must go for little. No, the old method has not been given up like that. The Church is still the method as before; only supplemented by Scripture because of the failure that has come in. It is a kind of humiliation to have to send the Bible to the heathen, and it is no good sending Bibles, if there are not preachers. People do not learn exactly from Scripture, but from the Spirit of truth; and if you say, "Granted that it is always by the Spirit of truth that any true work is done in the soul at all, but do you say that God will not use the Bible to a man's soul without a preacher?" well, it is difficult to put it that way, because God is sovereign; in a day of decay and ruin, *He may speak through an ass's mouth*; but how shall they hear without a preacher? The divine way, undoubtedly, is preaching.

All as glibly said, as unquestioningly taken, even to the gross irreverence of putting the words of God alongside of the miracle of a speaking ass! Is it then a mistake of the apostle that they are "able to make wise unto salvation?" Well, that is asked and an-

swered, if any one is wise enough to interpret the answer: that "the man of God wants to be furnished with the Scriptures because of their disciplinary value"—the relevancy of which I confess I do not understand; nor do I think that the apostle's words need any explanation. Why should we not inscribe them in every Bible sent to the heathen as an all-sufficient justification?

But how then with regard to the truth as ministered to the believer? Well, in general, in the early days, we are told that they had to take things on trust. The Old Testament did not give the truth of Christianity; and the New Testament was not written till the Church's decline, of course; otherwise, the whole system taught here would be subverted. The safeguard people had is said to be (what again is somewhat difficult to understand) that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets;" words which are certainly found in Scripture, though scarcely in that connection. However, now that failure is come in, and Scripture as the resource in view of it, it is of the utmost importance to prove all things. Here the Bereans are commended to us as a model for imitation; somewhat in forgetfulness that this example comes to us from before the failure of the Church, and when it is supposed that another method was in order; yet it seems that they had Scriptures in their hands which they searched to some purpose. Only it is assured us that what they heard they first received; and only searched the Scriptures to get confirmation! A severe critic might say, perhaps, to see what mistakes they might have made in receiving it! Our day is an evil day; and God has given us

the Scripture that we may have a standard of truth. Scripture is the limit; and though you don't exactly learn from Scripture (and indeed it is legality to want chapter and verse for doctrine) yet the more familiar people are with it the better: because a man's mind is thus *continually pulled up* in its tendency to go beyond the limit!

Thus for the outside world Scripture is not to be reckoned on for the conversion of souls. God may use it for that, because He is sovereign, and might be pleased to use the speech of an ass; while for the flock of Christ it is as it were a tether, to prevent their natural tendency to stray! You are right to search it for confirmation of what you hear; only you are to receive this first, and search afterwards. Even then remembering that it is legal to want chapter and verse for doctrines, and that it is possible to study the authority too much!

It would be perfectly natural to say that that must be a caricature of anybody's teaching. My comfort is that, at least, those who think so cannot have received it themselves. If they can find no one who has, or who knows of its existence, that would only show to me how few take in what they read; perhaps even while they applaud it. However, let us make it an occasion for examining what is the use and value of the written Word.

Only think of it as that!—the written word of God! a word prepared for us as the outcome of past ages which have contributed, age after age, their quota to the full result; the whole, in every line and word of it, "God-breathed,"—the quickening breath of the

Spirit in it!—from the heart of God to the heart of man! The more we look into it, the more in faith we credit it with a divine message and meaning, the more it responds and opens,—the more it draws and wins us to itself. Had I my life to live over again, I would study it *more*, not less, drink it in, live in it, have it my meditation all the day long. Where else shall I find the Voice of Him who seeks me for Himself? Can any one tell me where? Fancy one telling me that the use of Scripture is in its being a “limit” to *my* poor human thoughts; when it is that which, as far as may be, leads me out into the limitless,—into the “deep things of God”! Here are the things that the Spirit searches—the Spirit, wonderful to say, in me!—and which, having set before me the infinite, leads me into the measureless delight of exploring my inheritance! How many people, handing down to me with flawless accuracy, the traditional truth, could replace for me the scriptures of prophets and apostles which God has put into my hands, with their tale which they are never weary of telling,—which I can read and re-read, carry into my room, set down before me, pray over and look again,—listen to in the quiet of His Presence who is in them and with them, till the music of their chime begins in my soul, soothing, quickening, harmonizing, subduing all my nature to them! If I owe my possession of them to the failure of the Church, then blessed is that failure which, under God, has secured me so priceless a result. I speak soberly and deliberately while I say, that not the presence of the whole of the apostles with the Church to-day could replace for us the loss of Scripture. Could they all together give

us one truth more than God has seen good to give us in it? *Did* they communicate, in fact, one truth besides, which we have lost? More than that, is it certain that they even *knew* all that was in their own communications? still more, can we believe that they knew all that all other inspired writers had communicated from the beginning? Have we one shred of truth, or of interpretation of Scripture even, which has come down to us by this so much lauded tradition, that any one can show us, much less show us value in to-day? What can we glean from apostolic "fathers"? Has not God been pleased to make a clean, broad mark of absolute limitation between Scripture and all else that went before or followed it, so that it should shine out to us in its own peerless character to-day? What has God given us through all the centuries since, which is more than a development from it,—a bit of the treasure from this exhaustless treasure-house?

I do not expect, then, with whatever amount of prayer or meditation, to obtain from my poor thoughts, which have indeed to be kept in order so, one thing which directly or indirectly has not come to me from the Word. Nor can I think of anything higher for myself or any other, than to be an expositor of this glorious Word. Tell me, then how I can study it too much? You need not tell me that I can pray too little: Alas, I know that well.

I suppose, we have nothing to assure us how early in Christian times the Gospel of Matthew may have been written. It is pre-eminently, as all are aware, the Jewish Gospel; as the church in Jerusalem was for some time a Jewish remnant, and little more.

Luke shows us at the end of his Gospel what special pains the Risen Saviour took to ground His disciples from the beginning in the Old Testament, and its relation to the New. Here their feet always stood firm; and the example of the Bereans a good while afterwards makes plain to what good use it could be put by those who had not had the advantage of such instruction. When they had thus assured conviction as to the trustworthiness of those through whom they had received the knowledge of the Saviour, and the pledge and witness of the Holy Spirit, there was of course abundant warrant for their reception through a channel so certified, of those additional communications which God was pleased to give. But notice here that the very slowness with which we know such communications came, gave the fullest opportunity to incorporate them one by one with all that they had known before; the scattering of the truth abroad being itself gradual, so as to carry better together the whole body of disciples. The more we reflect upon all this, the more we shall realize how fully from the beginning of Christianity the Lord grounded His people upon the written Word; and that this was no after-plan when the Church had fallen. Such thoughts may catch those who do not study Scripture too much; and alas, there are plenty of them. They are the mere vagaries of a dreaming mind, to which the word of God is not even a "limit."

We have no need to undervalue the preacher, because of the efficacy of the Word. I would emphasize it more, indeed, than all this system does. Instead of saying for instance, that God does not use us in-

strumentally as effecting *anything*, Scripture assures us that men can "so speak" that others shall believe (Acts xiv. 1). It makes the character of the speaking effective in the production of the result. But there is another reason for "how shall they hear without a preacher?" without dishonoring Scripture to furnish one; and that is serious and sad enough. It is that men, alas, have to be pursued by the grace that seeks them and the living voice of the preacher is the most effectual means in this way. Wisdom has to cry aloud, and utter her voice in the corners of the streets. "Go out into the highways and the hedges, and compel them to come in!" Scripture had always been, while necessarily safeguarded by the barrier-wall thrown around Israel, yet placed in the very centre of the chief civilizations of the old world, and on the highways of commerce. Had men desired the treasures of it, they were readily accessible, and there was no prohibition of their acquirement; but they manifested no desire. And in the midst of Christendom to-day, with the completed Word in our hands, what would we do without that publication of it in various ways, by which it is forced upon the notice of the unwilling-hearted? That does not in the least affect the power existing in the Scriptures to make men wise unto salvation which they assuredly have—a power which is being proved continually.

We have spoken, perhaps, enough of the Bereans, and their readiness to receive the word preached to them. No doubt that there is in the truth always an inherent acceptability to an earnest mind. But the belief of it is distinctly put here *after* that searching of the Scriptures which they are praised for, *not*

before it. Think of the consequences of a principle such as is advocated, of receiving first, before proving! when the proving will surely follow with a laggard and indifferent step; and during the delay how many falsehoods may spring out of one error received, which may not be destroyed, even when they have lost their attachment to the root from which they sprang! How would such a principle account for the rapid and wide spread of a movement like that which we are now contemplating, in which the captivating brilliancy of many new ideas may with the ready aid of the emotions sweep the traveller off his feet too far away for any present recovery. A voyage of exploration always has its charm; and to be told that you need not know whither you are going, but may give yourself up to the guidance of one who seems so impressively confident of his ability to carry you safely, is a luxury in itself. Certainly you make progress: everything moves. By and by you can take your bearings and see where you have arrived. You can return by the way you have come, if in the end you are not satisfied. But have you gauged then the strength of the stream that is bearing you on it?

3. LETTER AND SPIRIT.

WE have not yet done, however, with doctrines which affect Scripture; and I place these first, because the character of all the teaching may be rightly judged by them. If that which is the standard of truth be taken from us,—if it be obscured even, or made less available to the common mass of Christians,—it is plain that this will

have disastrous effect upon every truth drawn from it, or to be compared with it. Rome herself makes great parade of late of her reverence for the word of God. She will exalt it as much as you please,—and the more she does the more gain will it be to her,—*if only you will let her interpret it for you.* It is the interpretation that is the great point; and if a system of interpretation is adopted which takes this out of the reach of the simple man, then you have set up an esoteric teaching which is not subject to Scripture, however much you may accredit those who receive it (as it is quite easy to do) with a higher spirituality which enables them to do so. No doubt spirituality is of all importance in the things of God; but it is not this which will refuse to submit to the plain word of Scripture: “If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. viii. 20).

Now the system before us, as represented in its chief exponent, avowedly sets aside the letter of Scripture, in the interests of what it is pleased to consider the “spirit” of it. Scripture, has been put alongside of a supposed faulty hymn, to say—“I do not read those hymns in the letter; *I do not read Scripture in the letter:* I try to get the spirit of the hymn, and I do.” The self-complacence of the last two words is characteristic. Are we not left to infer that as with the hymns, so with Scripture, he not only seeks to get the spirit of Scripture, but he *does?* Most people would have left others to say that of them. Whatever conviction they might have as to their success in such a matter, they would not expect to move others by their own conviction—at least

those of the class that it would be worth while to convince: "let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth" (Pro. xxvii. 2) is a rule which has long been commended to us as a maxim of wisdom.

But the important point is, that we are not, as it seems, to read Scripture in the letter. It would be gratifying to know whether this is what the Book itself teaches, and how it teaches it. The thought is not altogether a new one; others have equally proclaimed their belief in Scripture as "read by the illumination of that Spirit of Christ which dwelleth in us," as contrasted with "the letter that killeth."* But one can hardly think of the one from whom I before quoted as meaning to refer us to a text which gives the contrast between the old covenant and the new, and this last even as ministered by grace to us in the present gospel. It could not be said indeed rightly of the new covenant in any wise that the letter killed, although as Gentiles we should not come under it. Those who do come under it will certainly not be killed, even by the letter of it. The spirit is the spirit of the letter and that is the sweetest grace.

In Romans again (vii. 6), "the oldness of the letter," in which as Christians we are not to serve, is that legal bondage which the old covenant implies, and has nothing to do with Scripture as such. For the Christian in the liberty to which God has called him, the very letter of the law as such remains, not only without injury, but with plenty of profit in it. There is absolutely no scripture which so much as suggests

* Canon Farrar.

that the letter of God's blessed word is something to be put aside, even in favor of the spirit which resides in it. If I want to be in communion with the spirit of a man, I do not kill his body for that purpose; and grotesque as such a comparison may seem to be, it is a joy to me to believe that God's word is as it were a living organism, in which even far beyond what we find in man (as man is now) the spirit residing is expressed in every part; so that every jot and tittle has importance from it, and must be preserved, for the spirit to be in any proper manner realized.

I own, therefore, with gladness and thankfulness of heart, that I *do* read Scripture in the letter—that is, in the very form and expression which God has been pleased to give it—and that more and more. Can I give it a form more suited? To convey to another what I find in it I may use other terms, and find them useful, to break through that crust with which a mere external familiarity often encrusts them:—all well; yet shall I find that not only will the same crust form over these new inventions, so that to those familiar with them in the same external way they shall become still a lifeless verbiage, but also that, after all, the words by which I have expressed what I have found will in the end be proved too narrow to contain the fulness of the divine meaning, if happily they may not be proved in some way inaccurate and really misleading. I do not deny at all the very great usefulness, therefore, of other phraseology than that of Scripture, for the explanation of Scripture; while yet I am sure that for the rectification of all our phrases, and also that Scripture may not be narrowed into the littleness of hu-

man conceptions, we must go back, and ever back, to refresh and purify and enlarge our thoughts by the very words—the only adequate, the *divine* words of the peerless Book which infinite grace has given us.

Distil the blessed words in your alembic and give me the result: to justify it, you must show both the material and the method. But to show me that what you have got is the full equivalent of all the material is still another matter; when your material is scripture, a very difficult thing indeed. But at least you must justify all that you speak of as the spirit by the letter, which is the only thing to begin with which we have. The Spirit within us does not give any new revelation, but “searches the deep things of God” which are contained in what has been already given. The spirit of Scripture is that contained in the letter: it is the spirit of the letter; I read it in the letter to get the spirit of it. The letter has the spirit in it, and more than all that we may please to call the spirit. How important to remember, when you contrast, as in this case, the letter and the spirit, that the letter is of God, the *spirit* is that in which you have to fear the intrusion of an element which is not of Him!

The principle which we have had asserted is, undoubtedly, one of contrast: “I do not read Scripture in the letter;” but, if that which has been stated is the truth, then there is as to practical apprehension, in this case, no such contrast. The letter is but the wisest possible expression of that which you may express otherwise sometimes with benefit, no doubt, but yet in a way which is still in reality something

less wise than the old one. How unsafe then would it be to say, "I do not read Scripture in the way it is written, but according to what I take to be the meaning of it"! Would it not assume, in fact, that wisdom was in my poor words, beyond that of those who wrote, "*not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth?*" (1 Cor. ii. 13). Where can you show me the spirit of Scripture in words which have the sanction that such words have? After all, will it not be *your* letter in contrast with the actual letter, neither more nor less?

The whole statement is such arrogant assumption that it is hard to believe that a spiritually sane man could make it. The effect of it, if carried out, would be to give us a Bible, or rather, Bibles many, which would be anything rather than the endeared, familiar, well-proved friend of all our hearts. The adoption of such a principle would be at once to blur all lines and bring in everywhere confusion and uncertainty. This is not the Voice of the Spirit that would enfeeble and degrade what the Spirit Himself has given, as this system does; putting it at one time in company with a faulty hymn, at another time with the speech (miraculous though it were) of Balaam's ass! I do not envy the quietness of those who can take all this (go with it or not, as they may) without a protest.

"I do not read Scripture in the letter"! Why, it is just the most literal part of it that of necessity must be used to interpret all the rest. That there are figures, types, parables in it, who is not aware? But who would like to build his soul upon things

such as these, without the plain letter of doctrine which alone can interpret them definitely and surely? Is it not "letter" that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"? Am I to read that in the spirit, and not in the letter? Who will stand forth then and tell me, in contrast with the letter, what the spirit of it is?

See now how it all works together: I am justified in accepting this guidance that is offered me, of one so spiritually wise and competent that he can give me the spirit of that which I, poor dullard, have been reading in the letter. What can I do but submit myself to this, and let the proof abide a more convenient season? I may be bewildered at first to find how things immediately begin to change, and how little remains absolutely what it was before. But then, if I am humble, this is all proof of how I needed a teacher,—how without a teacher (and indeed, with all the teachers I have had hitherto) I have been going astray. I learn to distrust myself the more, and cling to my guide. By and by indeed, I must come to a halt, and begin to see where I am,—to see if perchance anything may have gone wrong with me. I have heard that "in a day of evil it is of the utmost importance to prove all things, and not accept the dictum of anybody." That is all right, I suppose: it is the same guide says it; I am yet to prove all by Scripture! But Scripture, what Scripture? *He* does not read it in the letter; no more must I then, if I am to reach the same results! God has somehow provided me with a Bible in the letter; and this Bible in the spirit I have got to form for myself out

of it, and by its help; or, at least, I have got to prove the new Bible in the spirit which has been put into my hand by that old Bible which is so different, and which it will be my wisdom in due time to give up! Think of the perplexity to a simple soul, of using in this way a standard which has to be renounced, and for the very purpose of being able to renounce it; while at the same time, it is capable in some way of putting me on a platform higher than itself! Must not all this end in inextricable confusion? Is it not, in fact, confusion all the way through?

4. NEW BIRTH: WHAT IS IT?

There has doubtless been so much said of late with regard to new birth and eternal life that many will wish that controversy as to these could stop; and many will think that all has been said that can be said about them. One can surely sympathize with those who think so, and what is said may be the briefer on that account; still these subjects are so central in their importance in relation to Christian truth, and the novel doctrines concerning them have so central a place also in connection with the system which we are reviewing, that it would be impossible to treat this in any satisfactory way without looking at what is in question here. So far also as we are individually concerned, whatever might be the purpose of God with regard to us, and whatever the blessed work upon the basis of which that purpose can alone be justified and take effect, yet where it begins to take effect is in new birth. Thus our review may well begin here, although as to the sys-

tem before us it is rather in this case a blank than a doctrine—a denial than an affirmation. Yet a denial may have all the importance of an affirmation, and the meeting it be absolutely necessary in order to laying securely the foundations of truth. If we do not know what new birth is, we cannot rightly know what eternal life is either, and much else will become uncertain as the result of this. Amid this uncertainty many suppositions may assume the character of truth and be accepted for it which will for ever prevent the truth being received. If Scripture can clear up this cloud-land for us, it will not only be in itself a gain, but it may prove a way made clear to further progress. Let us inquire at least.

Not merely has the confession been made, "I cannot tell you what new birth is," but it has been openly challenged that no one has any better ability. This is the ignorance of the agnostic, which requires more knowledge than anything that knowledge would pretend to. For in this case one has to be sure that the level of one's own capacity is at least as high as any other whatever can possibly be; and with such knowledge as this, every humble mind would readily concede the palm of superiority to its happy possessor.

Such an one will naturally teach, or at least tell his thoughts; and safely, where no one has better knowledge. Thus it is not thought that there is in new birth a communication of anything, but simply an effect produced. It is the *man* that is born again: whatever may be the extent of it; it is I myself, the individuality. That is how Scripture speaks of new birth. It is a human idea that something is im-

parted, but Scripture says, *I am born again*. Then the Lord puts it more abstractly—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh," for it would go too far to say, "he who is born of the Spirit is spirit": it would make *me* spirit and nothing else. Yet if the wick of a lamp may represent the individual, it is as though a thread of another description were introduced into the texture of the wick! The result is a collapse of the man,—of all that makes him a man of the world, of all his self-importance. Then there is a cry, a very feeble cry! the first sign of life in a babe is a cry of want or pain; yet Scripture does not apply the term "life" to such a state!

One feels so often as if one needed to make apology for such statements, and as if it must certainly be thought that there is some misrepresentation here; but while the putting together is indeed my own, every statement made is an actual quotation. New birth makes a man appear alive, but he is not alive. In it there is no communication of anything at all, but only an *introduction* of something; with very important consequences, no doubt; but still there is as yet no link in the soul with God.

I am not responsible for the contradiction that appears in these things, either among themselves or with scripture. Scripture says,—yea, the Lord Jesus Himself,—that that which is born of the Spirit is spirit; and to say that here nevertheless there is no link with God, seems as near a direct denial of the divine word as could be uttered, if we are not to assert that it is that. And again there is a similar thing when the Lord speaks of the man as being born again, and we are assured notwithstanding that

he is not alive! What kind of birth are we to call it, when although the "renewing of the mind is the outcome" of it, yet there is no life! one is born of God and yet not His; yea, has no link with Him as yet at all!

Is it necessary to go further in the examination of these statements! There should be no need. But let us look at the Lord's words themselves, and see if they leave us so much in the dark as is supposed, as to what new birth is. There is nothing imparted, says this teaching; because it is *I* who am born again. Scripture says, we are born again, not of "corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth" (1 Pet. i. 23); and it adds, "and this is the word which in the gospel is preached unto you." The word of the gospel then, brought home by the power of the Spirit of God, is that by which the man is born again.

But here again the truth as Scripture gives it to us comes right up against the theories; which as usual also clash with each other. For we have already seen that it is denied the Scripture is of any use to souls away from God, without the voice of the living preacher. It is conceded indeed that God is sovereign, and may be pleased to use it, in the same way that He could by an exceptional miracle make use of the speech of Balaam's ass. It is useless to send Bibles to the heathen, because this is so very exceptional. God's way is undoubtedly by preaching! And yet, strangely enough (if anything is strange here) in connection with this theme of new birth we are informed that the work of the evangelist is to *enlighten the new born soul*. When by the power

of God's Spirit a man *has* been born again, the next thing is that the soul has to be enlightened.

Thus here again we seem to be in a dilemma. It is of no use to send Bibles to the heathen: God's way is undoubtedly by preaching. And yet the preachers' work is only to enlighten those already new born! Scripture however declares that men are born again by the incorruptible seed of the word of God in the gospel, and that the Scriptures are able to make one wise unto salvation; while the preacher is God's great instrumentality for getting the saving truth before unwilling men. There is here no semblance of contradiction, the word of God being in all cases that by which new birth is effected in the soul,—whether it be in the page of the inspired Word or by the *mouth of the evangelist*. In either case the Spirit of God must act: as the Lord puts it in His pregnant figure, “water” and “Spirit” must go together.

The incorruptible seed is thus imparted. The seed is not the mere word, but as nature itself teaches, *the word with the life in it*. Every fruitful seed carries in it that mystery of life, which we may be little able to analyze, but which we cannot reason away: it is *there*, reason as we will; and without it there would be no growth or good whatever.

Thus there is that which is born of the Spirit, and what is born is “spirit.” Will any one say that that does not convey the thought of a new nature, akin to that from which it has originated? And “the Spirit is life” (Rom. viii. 10); everything here speaks of the communication of life; look through Scripture as you will, there is no dead spirit anywhere. “The

Spirit quickeneth" (2 Cor. iii. 6): "the spirit is life;" dead spirit, dead spiritual birth, dead child of God, or new born child with yet no link with Him,—these are all thoughts so foreign to Scripture, so contrary to it, that nothing but the exigency of an untenable theory could ever suggest them to one even tolerably acquainted with it.

As for the argument that the *man* being born again is in contradiction to the idea of something being imparted in this, the answer has been given by the one who uses it. "The Scripture teaches that *I* am born again, *whatever may be the extent of it.*" There is the whole difficulty, such as it is; and it is no very great one. The man is born again, and yet he is not new in all that he is. His body does not partake in this transformation; and he has yet the old nature—the flesh in that sense. The moment you say, The man is born again, whatever may be the extent of it, you state the difficulty, and admit it to be one that you must recognize, as well as the person you are arguing with. But it is no more a difficulty than abundance of fully admitted things. The man is born again; and yet, when you come to define more closely, you speak of "*that* which is born again," and could not say of the man what you say of this. You can say, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit," while you cannot say, "The man who is born of the Spirit is spirit." It argues nothing whatever in the way desired. Let us only change the figure, as Scripture itself enables us, so as now to take into consideration what was before omitted, that this is a yet incomplete change in a moral being, the figure of grafting furnishes you with the needed means of tak-

ing in, as before you could not, all the facts. The tree which is grafted yet retains enough of its old nature to need care lest, by allowing shoots from below the graft, it should become practically wild again. Yet we speak of it rightly enough as a grafted *tree*. In a figure taken from the human sphere, which alone fits with the Lord's application for Nicodemus, one cannot find what will fit all round; no unusual thing in figures constantly made use of. The Lord's purpose does not contemplate the old nature,—that is all; and therefore the figure of birth, in other respects so perfect, is thoroughly suited.

But the man is born again; and the thought of a new life imparted is inherent in this. This life, moreover, is all that counts for life before God. The man was dead previously; now he lives; there is but one death in this sense, and but one coming to life; and if a man is no longer dead, he is alive: there is no intermediate state between the two, and therefore no interval. The one born of God is a child of God, and He has no dead children. Spirit from the Spirit is the nature of that which is born; the child partakes of the father's nature. If life is communicated, as despite all protests it most surely is, then the life so derived is necessarily eternal life. Whether or not you allow that it is what Scripture designates under that term, (and as to this we shall have to inquire directly,) yet it is impossible to deny that life attaching to a spiritual nature originating in a new birth of the Spirit must be in the fullest sense eternal life.

How important then, in connection with questions that lie before us, is this doctrine of new birth! and how significant that the system which is sought to be

imposed upon us as the truth of God has to begin with a confession of blank ignorance, which is really a denial of Scripture testimony upon so important a matter! According to the system, to be born of God is somewhat that involves neither life, nature, nor relationship,—no link in the soul with God at all! It is no wonder, but a necessity of this, that those born of Him should be denied to be His children. Thus it is asked, “Is it so that ‘children’ speaks of *descent*?” And the answer is,—“I do not think that is quite just. It is not the scriptural thought of children. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit: it is by the Spirit we understand that we are children. . . . You ought not to take that place, except as born of God; but the place is given you of the Father”!—an argument quite as inconsequent as anything we have listened to on the same side. Naturally, eternal life is something far beyond, and although you are born of God, if that is all, you have yet to pass from death unto life!

Thus I repeat it, the doctrine is that one that is simply born of God is not a child of God, has not life, nature, nor relationship. To put it in the dreariest form of the negation made, he has no link in his soul with God at all!

5. LIFE AND ETERNAL LIFE.

IN considering the subject which is now before us, there are two questions which lie at the foundation: first, is there any spiritual life which is not eternal life? And then what is eternal life? I shall as usual state the view from which I dissent, and then give as clearly as possible the reason for my dissent.

1. Is there any life for the Christian which is not eternal life?

As to this we are told: In Romans you see life, but not eternal life. The two and a half tribes typically had life; they stopped this side of Jordan, but they had life. Everybody who has the Spirit has life, because the Spirit is life. In Rom. viii. life is the consequence of the presence of the Spirit in a believer; that is, "The body is dead on account of sin, but the Spirit is life on account of righteousness." But that is connected with the wilderness and practice, and is connected with your pathway, which will come to an end. You can very well understand that the experience of Romans viii. comes to an end. It is not eternal life, and yet life is there; life comes out morally, in view of righteousness; the evidence of life in the Christian is that he does righteousness; he proves that he is born of God. The Spirit takes that place in the Christian till he is quickened. You are not said to be quickened in Romans; but in our state down here the Spirit displaces the flesh, and takes the place of life in the Christian, in order that practical righteousness should be accomplished. In Colossians and Ephesians we get a step further, and that is, "you hath He quickened," but you must understand that in a limited, not in an absolute way. It is at the coming of Christ we are quickened; only it is anticipated in Colossians and Ephesians in a limited way as the work of God fitting us for the assembly. At the coming of the Lord we shall be quickened and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. [?!] In that chapter it is viewed as anticipated.

2. What then is eternal life?

The answer given is: It involves a state of blessing consequent on the setting aside of death. "Life for evermore" (Ps. cxxxiii.), in regard to Israel is in the public setting aside of death. We come to that on resurrection ground, that makes the difference between us and Israel: they don't come into resurrection, we do. A person cannot say that he has actually eternal life, unless he is clear of death. If he is going to die, how can he say he has actually got eternal life? For us, eternal life is the heavenly condition and blessedness in which in the Son man is now placed, and lives before the Father. It is a sphere and order of blessing. It is to live in the blessed consciousness of the love of God, in the out-of-the-world, heavenly condition in which Christ lives.

I believe persons have made great mistakes with regard to eternal life in viewing it as a something substantive which is communicated to us. I can understand life in God, because God is eternal; He lives, He is. But I live, and so does every saint, simply by the quickening power of God. I am made alive now in my soul together with Christ, after His order, and eventually I shall be made alive in body after His order. People have looked at it as if it were a kind of material thing given to a person. People think they have life in themselves instead of in Christ. It is life in Christ Jesus, yet the Spirit being in me, it is practically my life.

It used to be commonly said, I know that I have got eternal life. Why? Because the scripture says, "he that believeth hath everlasting life." I say that

you have thus the faith of eternal life, but that does not prove that you have the thing itself. Many a person has had a promise, but not the thing promised; that was the case largely with the Old Testament saints. It is the mind of God for every Christian, and God has put it there in His Son, and the whole question is as to reaching the Son. In the last chapter of John's epistle it says, "that ye may know that ye have eternal life"; because you are come to it; you are conscious of it, but not as a possession. If I talk about having the Son, the Son is not a possession, and yet I am said to have the Son, I have appropriated Him; affection has really reached Him: you cannot make the word "have" always mean possession. In scripture eternal life is not a subjective thought as a possession, but it is placed in the Son, and the whole point is reaching the Son.

This will probably be sufficient for quotation, at least for the present; we can see that there is an apparently careful grading and measurement of the spiritual life, supported by a few texts which, if we can overlook others, and accept the positiveness of an assertion as proof of its reliability, may be held for a success. Let us examine it, however, and see what may be the effect of introducing some omitted texts.

Is there a spiritual life which is not eternal life? Scripture emphatically denies this. The passages have been so often quoted, that one may fairly ask why they are not considered; especially as they used to be quite familiar texts, and face us in very familiar parts of Scripture. Here is one that will bear every effort that can be made to induce it to speak the

doctrine that is being commended to us as truth, and will not do it,—one that is sufficient in itself to destroy the whole system down to the roots:—“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have *no life* in you; whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath *eternal life*” (Jno. vi. 53, 54).

Notice how many things fundamental to the views we have been listening to are swept away for ever by words so plain as these. First, we have either *no life* or *eternal life*; if you eat not you have *no life*; if you eat, you have *eternal life*. Is there any possible middle ground between these alternatives? If there be, why not let us know it; if there be not, why not be candid enough to own that there is not.

But again, look at the alternatives: “ye have *no life in you*”; “hath *eternal life*.” If *eternal life* is not really *in you*, then you may eat His flesh and drink His blood, and have *no life in you* still! Otherwise there is no antithesis, as is most plainly intended: whether you eat or do not eat, it is one and the same thing! Who can accredit the words with such absolute want of meaning?

Still again, it is the flesh and blood of the Son of *man*, of which the Lord speaks: if you eat the flesh of the Son of *man*, you have *eternal life*; but in what we have been looking at a distinction is made between apprehension of the Son of *man*, and reaching the Son (of *God*); and it is only this last that gives *eternal life*. The Lord speaks quite differently here.

What remains of these subtle theories, if the words of the Lord are allowed any real force?

John supplements them with the remark, simple as it is, that "ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John iii. 15); a strange sentence, according to this system, with all its self-evidence! For why speak of eternal life in this connection, when "many a good Christian" even has not eternal life? Would you not expect the apostle rather to say simply that he has not life? or, still better, that he is not born again? How strange a thing to associate a murderer, even by a negative, with the thought of eternal life, if this be an advanced condition, even for a Christian! What would you think if I asserted of a murderer, that he was not completely sanctified?

But again, he "hath not eternal life abiding in him!" Did not John know that there is not so much as a single Christian who has eternal life abiding in him? Did he not know that eternal life is a "sphere," of which you could not speak in such a way? If he did, how could he pen such an unmeaning sentence?

Once more:—it is the Lord who says, and in His strongest style of affirmation, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My words, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life" (John v. 24). These words are actually used in the interests of the system we are reviewing, to show that it is the *Christian* that has to pass from death unto life, which here as elsewhere is not distinguished from eternal life! The Lord, we are told, is here speaking as the Son of God, and it is an advanced attainment to hear the words of the Son of God, and to believe on the Father as having sent

His Son! Consequently a large number of Christians are dead and not alive. They may be born again, have the Spirit, have learned deliverance, and yet not have passed from death unto life. And this too although in having the Spirit, you have life "practically," because the Spirit is life! Yet this life is in Christ, and not in you, things which even seem to be considered in opposition to one another. But this we must look at elsewhere.

Now Scripture does indeed say that, "if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin;" and it never speaks of the *body* being quickened before the Lord comes. It speaks also of the believer being dead with Christ *to* sin: a very different thing, of course, from that of which we are now speaking; but I am not aware that it ever speaks of the Christian being "dead" in any other sense. Most certainly, it never puts forward such a contradiction as that a man can be "practically" alive without being really so, nor makes in this way the blessed influence of the Spirit of God in such to be an effect produced upon a dead man—a life which does not make alive! Here it is no wonder if the things said should be in apparent conflict with one another, when practical life is yet taught not to be life, and he who is working righteousness in the power of the Spirit of God may yet, as we are assured, be waiting to be quickened!

Here is an argument we must not pass over: "It used to be commonly said, I know that I have got eternal life. Why? Because the scripture says, He that believeth hath everlasting life." Well; is not that a straightforward conclusion, for one who knows himself to be a true believer? It seems not: we are

to be taught a new logic, as all else. "I say that you have thus the *faith* of eternal life; but that does not prove that you have the thing itself. Many a person has had a promise, but not the thing promised." Truly! I suppose we shall all at once acquiesce in that; the misfortune is that it does not apply. The Lord's statement here is not a promise, but a direct assurance of the simplest kind. The believer has eternal life; I am a believer; I therefore have eternal life. If the premises are sure, how can the conclusion fail? If that may be doubted, how can any assurance be given, which cannot?

The argument fails so badly, that it is no wonder if another has to reinforce it. So we are told "have" does not always mean possession; "if I talk about having the Son, the Son is not a possession"(!) That is not argued, it is supposed not to need it; but is it the truth? Is not the Son ours *in any sense* now? Who will say so? Is having the Son a promise that we shall have Him? Clearly not. But it says, "He that hath the Son hath life;" does that mean, "He that hath the Son is going to have life?" True, the Son is not ours now in all the fulness of what eternity will give to this; and life too is not ours in such fulness either; for the body is still a mortal body, and will be quickened then. But there is a present "having" in both cases.

A false definition of eternal life is at the bottom of much of the confusion. Rightly enough connected with the Old Testament "life for evermore," it is forgotten that life and incorruption are brought to light through the gospel (2 Tim. i. 10), and that therefore we must not expect their definition to be

gained from the Old Testament scriptures. New birth is not found in doctrinal statement in the Old Testament; and it is in new birth that we shall find what underlies the New Testament doctrine. One born of God is a child of God; the child derives its life from its father, and partakes of its father's nature. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit;" and the life given is eternal life. Here is the fulness found of this expression: it is a life which not only has no end, but had no beginning either, being divine life. It is eternal in the full meaning of eternal, though in us, of course, beginning. This has been dismissed with the strange, curt remark, that "the life of divine Persons is *themselves*;" they cannot, therefore, it is meant, communicate themselves! But the statement and the reasoning are as crude as elsewhere, and are confuted at once by those facts of nature which God has given us as parables of spiritual things. The parents' life and nature in the child are not the *parents*; they *have* a power of communicating life which, mystery as it is, is undeniable; and God has adopted our human language, based upon the facts of creation which He Himself has created, to give us at least such thoughts as we are capable of in regard to all these things, which the strange system before us rudely cuts across. It gives us birth without life, children who are not such by descent, a practical life in those that are still dead, and similar absurdities, against which nature protests absolutely, and Scripture no less.

In life, we are assured, nothing substantive is communicated; that there is nothing *material*, will not be disputed; nor that when we speak of life, we may

be unable to define it. Infidel scientists have mocked at a vital principle on this account, and told us that we might as well talk of "aquosity" as the principle of water. Yet we believe in a vital force, as well as in vital phenomena. Spiritual life will be naturally still more difficult to define, but that is no reason for denying it to be more than phenomenal, and certainly not for defining it as a sphere, etc. Personality it is not; it is not a "self"; yet there is that which is born of the Spirit, which is spirit, and which gives character to the new-born soul. There is that which is communicated to us, and abides in us, an incorruptible seed that abides in us, and because of this, "whosoever is born of God doth not commit," or better, "practise," "sin" (1 Jno. iii. 9). The phenomenal life is just the display of this in its activities; in other words, there is a life by which we live, as well as a life we live: without the former there cannot be the latter. So Scripture, in harmony with nature, speaks; and in both ways of eternal life.

That in eternal life, according to its very nature, there is the setting aside of death, is too plain to be denied: yet here also, strange mistakes are possible; though to any one who has grasp of the doctrine they should not be possible. First, we are told, and rightly,—“I am made alive now in my soul together with Christ, after His order, and eventually I shall be made alive in body after His order.” And yet with the most entire forgetfulness of this limitation, we are told elsewhere: “A person cannot say that he has actually eternal life, unless he is clear of death. If he is going to die, how can he say that he has actually

got eternal life?" And this is made the ground for saying that while in Rom. viii. life is the consequence of the Spirit in the believer, yet the experience of Rom. viii. comes to an end. "*It is not eternal life, and yet life is there!*" and much doctrine is built upon this;—a mere and extraordinary piece of forgetfulness: for the experience is not the life, but the result of the life in the present circumstances. The death of the body brings this to an end, and the life is transferred to another sphere; but how does this prove that the life so transferred is not eternal life? Yet he must not say, it seems, that he has actually got eternal life (in his soul), because he has not yet got it in his body! A pebble indeed, to turn one from the path of truth!

Let us remember the words of Him who said, in the consciousness of what He is for men as the Resurrection and the Life, "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die" (Jno. xi. 25, 26). Against the life, then, that He gives, which is eternal life, death has no claim,—over it no sovereignty. The body still awaits its change and its redemption; none the less is it true for the present partaker of His resurrection life, that death is behind, and not before him. For him, Christ has abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel.

6. STANDING AND ACCEPTANCE IN CHRIST.

WE have been occupied so far with the work in us—with new birth and eternal life: things which are in nearer relation to one another than the

views we are examining would at all allow. Yet it is surely true, as has been stated, and as Scripture fully recognizes, that there is a life we live, as well as a life by which we live. The life we live is pressed in the new system, not merely to forgetfulness of the life by which we live, but actually to the denial of it. The consequence is that the whole thought of eternal life is lowered. It becomes merely a kind of triumph over death, which when we enter heaven ceases to be even of much significance! Here is a conversation which will enlighten us in this respect:—

“Is the expression ‘heavenly’ included in the idea of eternal life?”

“No, I don’t think so. I think eternal life refers to earth. I don’t think we should talk about eternal life in heaven.

“Only we have it there.

“I don’t think the term will have much force there.

“The thing will surely be there.

“WE shall be there.

“I will have to get this clear, for I don’t understand it. How do you explain as to eternal life? I have understood that a sphere is included.

“I think it implies a sphere of relationship and blessing, but that is not necessarily heaven. I don’t see much sense in connecting the idea of eternal life with heaven.

“Well, I don’t, but still I have understood that it is connected with heaven also.

“I don’t know the connection. The point of eternal life is that it comes in where death was. I think it stands in Scripture in contrast to death.”

In another place an objector questions, and is answered thus:—

“I don't understand; do you mean that when we go from this earth eternal life will cease?

“I don't think the term has any longer force.

“Is it only the term then?

“What the term expresses has not any more force.” (!)

So man's “thoughts” (of which there are plenty here) belittle and degrade everything they intrude into. In new birth we are taught that no life is communicated. Life itself is not to be understood as anything “substantive” that *can* be communicated. “Nature” disappears in this way along with life, as we find in the following:—

“Have we not had a wrong idea as to what ‘nature’ means?

“It is the looking upon nature or life as something substantive: any *substance* is characterized by its nature; but you cannot talk of the nature of a thing till the thing is there.” (!).

So as we (like the “murderer”) have no “eternal life abiding in” us, we cannot, of course, talk of a nature as attaching to what does not exist. The argument is demonstrative if the basis is sound; but it shows how far a false step may carry one. Let us listen again:—

“I have sometimes said that Scripture does not recognize two natures in the Christian: the *flesh* is the nature in an undelivered man; when he receives the Spirit he is not in the flesh but in the Spirit, and the Spirit is not a nature but a Person.” (!)

Poor Christian! when undelivered he has nothing

but the flesh; when he receives the Spirit, it would seem he must have no nature at all; for the flesh is no longer that to him, and the Spirit is not a nature, but a Person! No doubt there is some way of filling up the void eventually; but with that we are not here concerned.

But this leads us on to what is before us now, the question of our standing in Christ, which according to Scripture is connected with the life we have in Him. Our natural life in Adam has involved us in the fall of the old creation; our spiritual new life in Christ has given us what we have been accustomed to call our standing in Him. The very term (although they use it) seems offensive to those who accept the views we are considering: "ecclesiasticism, *standing*, ground, and such ideas," we are told, "have almost ruined us." Yet, as I have said, the term is retained; perhaps it is only in accommodation to the weakness that has been induced by it: "If you talk about standing, I am a justified man, who have received the Holy Ghost." When it is asked, however, "But what about being in Christ?" the answer is, "The moment you bring in 'in Christ' it is new creation." And again:—"The moment you come to 'in Christ,' you get the revelation of God's purpose in Christ, and the work of the Spirit in the believer according to that purpose; that is new creation, it is not a question of standing."

Yet it is allowed that "the presentation of my justification is in Christ: He is my righteousness." One would think that to be in contradiction to what has just been stated; however that may be, it is only what is needed for the earth: "in heaven he

will not be a forgiven or a justified man. He will not need that in heaven: nothing enters heaven but new creation."

Of necessity then the being in Christ has nothing to do with any thought of His being our Representative. Our Substitute in death, it is allowed, *He was*, and His resurrection therefore for our justification; but this does not involve any thought of representation in glory. "In Christ" is my state, as we have been told, a state which God has wrought by His Spirit, true, but still my state, and nothing else. So thoroughly is this maintained, that a Christian is said to be "in Christ as he is formed in Christ;" and "in Christ is the measure of our spiritual state."

The complete denial of all the positive side of representation in glory is made plainer perhaps by a quotation I have elsewhere given, which for its importance I shall give again here. It relates to the meaning and value of the burnt-offering, and I quote it fully that there may be no possibility of mistake:—

"*The blood of the burnt-offering never went inside; but that of the sin-offering did.* I have thought this remarkable. The blood of the burnt-offering is connected with acceptance *down here*, but the blood of the sin-offering goes in to meet and vindicate God's glory—all His claims met and vindicated, and on the ground of this we can enter. We go in *in the life of Christ*. It was on the day of atonement that the blood of the sin-offering was carried in: we go in in a life which needs no acceptance, but the burnt-offering being all burnt on the altar is the ground of acceptance for man here on earth, and that will be equally true in the millennium. We get it set forth

in figure in Noah's offering. There is *no ground of acceptance for man down here* save the death of Christ."

Let us look now at what is here presented to us as the *scriptural and beneficial truth, in opposition to* the well-nigh ruinous idea of "standing." Since it is allowed, however, that we may use the term as applying to our justification, and that Christ is our righteousness, the idea so far cannot be ruinous. Acceptance as symbolized in the burnt-offering is allowed also, and that "Christ has gone into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God for us representatively, *that we may reach there.*" How far acceptance differs from justification is not apparent in this scheme, and the representation which brings us to heaven must have to do with the sin-offering aspect of Christ's work simply, as is plain: for the blood of the burnt-offering, we are told, never went inside the sanctuary, and avails only for man down here.

Now at the outset, whatever may be conveyed to us by the burnt-offering becomes, in this way, of comparatively small account. The sin-offering is competent for the removal of sin, and to bring us to heaven. When we are once there, we need it no more. If a man were taken to heaven immediately upon believing, he would not, so far as appears, need it at all. Israel as an earthly people will somehow need it till the close of the millennium; the heavenly people (*as that*) never need it, though as in the meantime upon earth, they do.

What does it symbolize? It seems to be an-

swered in the quotation given, "the death of Christ." But the death of Christ is shown forth in all the sacrifices, and the sin-offering is as competent to express that as the burnt-offering. The evident point of contrast between the two is not found in this, but that in the one the necessary judgment of sin is set before us, in the other the peerless obedience of the Sufferer. For this reason it is that, in complete contradiction to the place assigned it in what we are examining, while the sin-offering is offered in the outside place, and upon the ground without an altar, the burnt-offering gives its very name to the altar upon which it is offered, and upon which it all goes up as a sweet savor to God! The one is for the removal of sin; the other is for positive acceptance of the offerer. Thus while the one had indeed its absolute necessity with a holy God, the other was His delight, and was continually to be burning upon the altar, never to go out. The work which Christ had to do to put away sin was seen in the one case; in the other the glory of Him who knowing all that was to come upon Him, could say, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God."

Did this avail merely for the putting away of sin or sinner from before God? and was there no overplus of value to give corresponding blessedness to our acceptance in the Beloved? Is this to be lost when we enter heaven? left as an old garment no longer needed, to be inherited by the millennial saints? "We go in in a life which needs no acceptance," is to be our comforting assurance; and in consistency with this we are informed that the "best robe" which

is put upon returning prodigals is "really new creation, Christ formed in the Christian!"

After the millennium, therefore, it is to be supposed that the sweet savor of an infinite sacrifice will go up no more. With the saints' state perfected, they need no more that which covered them for a time until they could shine out in their own beauty! Is this your thought also, reader? and does this song please you better than that we used so lately to sing:—

"Jesus the Lord, our righteousness!
Our beauty Thou, our glorious dress!
Before the throne, in this arrayed,
With joy shall we lift up the head.

"This spotless robe the same appears
In new creation's endless years,
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new."

There are some, we trust, who if they are offered this so called advanced and heavenly truth as the new wine, will say with their whole hearts' approval still, "The old is better."

"If any man be in Christ, it is new creation:" for that we have the full authority of Scripture; for it is by a new creation alone that we come into relationship with Him who is its Head. Adam, says the apostle, "is the figure of Him who was to come" (Rom. v. 14). Our connection with the fallen head is by our part in the old creation, and so by the life communicated to us. According to the type the communication of spiritual life from the Last Adam who is a quickening Spirit (1 Cor. xv. 45) brings with it consequences in blessing more than commensurate with the inheritance of sorrow entailed by our relation to the first. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ

shall all be made alive" (ver. 22). In Rom. v. the apostle carefully develops the heritage on each side of the many from the one, before he goes on to enlarge upon the results to us of that death with Christ which frees us judicially from our place in Adam. The sixth and seventh chapters cannot be understood aright until we have made our own the teaching of the latter half of the fifth. The study of it ought to assure any one of what is a riddle yet to the leader in this new departure, "where the idea of standing comes from." As in our former head we fell, so in our present One we "stand;" and "in Christ" means identification with our new creation Head. Thus the apostle can say, "If any man be in Christ, old things have passed away," as he could not if merely the inward change were contemplated: for the new life does not accomplish in itself this passing of the old things; but looking at the new place which accompanies the new life, it is absolutely simple. Identified with Christ before God, the flesh is gone: we have our part in His perfection. "In Christ," in its natural force, neither speaks of Christ in us, nor of association with Him, with both of which these teachings confound it; and this is seen in the very text which is claimed by those who hold them as conclusive in their behalf.

The simple fact that there are two opposite modes of expression for these two opposite ideas, we in Him and He in us, ought to be convincing: they surely do not mean, as they are made to mean, only the same thing! The Lord puts them together for us in His parable of the Vine and the branches. We have only to remember in the application of it, that no

one is naturally in Christ, and that the scriptural figure which takes in this fact is that of grafting. This prepares us for what has stumbled some, that in a parable of vital relationships there should be branches that are taken away because they bear no fruit. It is simple enough if we only realize that they are grafts which have not *struck*. The Lord does not speak of grafting, because He is not showing how the connection of His branches with Himself is begun, but only the necessity of fruitfulness, and how it is realized: but the difficulty suggested is accounted for by what we know to be the truth. That the branch should abide in the vine is needed for fruit, and the graft that does not abide has formed no vital connection. That vital connection is that by which alone, the branch being *in* the vine, the vine (in its sap) comes to be in the branch, needs no demonstration.

Living connection is that which, as we have seen, subsists between the Last Adam and those to whom He has become a quickening Spirit. The nature of the parable forbids more than a certain idea of the results in blessing of the identification of the living soul with its Head of supply; but there is the same limitation in all parables. The parable of the Vine is found in the midst of such expressions as those we are considering, and shows, if there were otherwise cause to doubt, the essential difference of the two things which are vainly sought to be made identical.

It is simple enough that the new creation "stands" in the sufficiency of its glorious Head, and that our standing individually results as part of this; while our acceptance in Christ is much more than the put-

ting away of sins or of the "old man;" it implies the positive value of the wondrous person of the Man Christ Jesus, of which our place before God is the due recompense. And this is expressly declared in the apostle's statement, that "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the *righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Cor. v. 21).

So far then as we have gone, the system we have been examining is negative and destructive wholly. New birth is robbed of life; life is nothing substantive, and can have therefore no "nature" attaching to it, for there is nothing for it to attach to; eternal life will have no particular force just when you have fully reached it; standing (if you talk of standing) is merely that you are a justified man who has the Holy Ghost; the best robe in heaven is just the change wrought in yourself; you may need to be accepted in Christ until you get to heaven, then you will be so perfected as not to need it; your being in Christ, and Christ being in you are only equivalent expressions: and so, like the blast of a simoom the work of desolation moves along.

7. RECONCILIATION, AND THE REMOVAL OF THE OLD MAN.

THE presentation of what is claimed to be the truth as to reconciliation is a very good example of the style of argument which largely prevails among teachers of the school we are reviewing; with whom boldness of assertion seems to make up for lack of demonstrative force. It is amazing in these reports of conferences from which our knowledge of their utterances have mostly to be gained, how little serious attention is given to the Scriptures

which are professedly before them, and how little serious attempt there is to hold them to Scripture. Texts are cited, of course; and sometimes a feeble demurrer is made, sure to be silenced immediately, though it were only by an emphatic repetition of the statement *questioned*. It is easily seen, as the present leader, though with a certain wise caution, says himself, that they are not "simply!"—who are "simply?"—expositors of Scripture, but only of what Scripture has taught them; but we are right in expecting that what Scripture has taught them shall be able to stand an appeal to both text and context; and this one finds here indeed little asked or proffered. There are *remarks*, to be sure, upon texts many, the effort to connect which with the context, and so with serious exposition is sometimes remarkable enough.

For instance, in a question raised with regard to the assertion that "fellowship with the Father and the Son," as spoken of in John's first epistle, was limited to the apostles, reference is made to the sixth verse of the first chapter, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him." The answer is ready: "That is saying, if we say we have it. *It does not say we have it.*" And here is the exposition: "The pretension is, that you have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness. The truth is that we walk in the light, and have fellowship with one another" (!!) But the pretension then is, in fact, to be apostles; and the walking in darkness (which cannot be part of the pretension, but is the mournful reality which exposes the pretension) is a strange and round-about proof in denial of so exceptional a claim. The "we," as

spoken by an apostle, would in that case be as strange as all the rest. For manifestly he would not exclude himself or any one else from the searching test of such a principle; and in this is putting himself in the common rank of Christians, and not separating himself from them as one of a peculiar class. The "we," all through his various use of it, is that of Christian profession, and the light or darkness characterizes the true or the false profession—nothing else. Notice also whence the light shines: it is that of the sanctuary, where God Himself is revealed. *He* is in the light; and that light is just what creates Christian fellowship: "*we* walk in the light, as *He* is in the light;" and that establishes the true fellowship for us all, into which every true Christian enters. The apostle is bringing to bear upon this the great central truth of Christianity—the open holiest, and thus has already shown the fellowship to be divine, as to which he is now concerned to maintain the fact that no Christian can be found outside of it. "Our fellowship" is thus not a different one from this, but that into which (by the ministry of the apostles indeed) all believers are introduced; and in the "we" so constantly repeated here, we have the apostle putting himself thus with all the rest, instead of claiming for himself or others a peculiar and exceptional fellowship.

Fellowship is rightly said to be participation in common; but community of thought is strongly objected to: "they that eat of the sacrifices have fellowship with the altar; it is evidently not community of thought there." But if we look at this more closely, we shall surely realize that it is after all the

principles which are identified with it that the altar embodies. The altar itself literally is only an inanimate structure, with regard to which the term can only be used as it is idealized. But as to all mental objects, ideas, fellowship in these may be rightly spoken of. One might quote, I suppose, every dictionary that exists, only that, as we shall see directly, the dictionary goes for nothing with those whose views we are examining. Let us take Scripture then, and the very Scripture which they cite against it, and it may be maintained without possibility of successful denial that the altar in this case, apart from the principles which it represents, would mean nothing—be utterly senseless in the connection in which it stands. And just so with the idol of which the apostle speaks in the same relation: the idol in itself is “nothing in the world.” Take it in connection with all for which it stands, and for idol you may write “devil.”

But there is another interest in maintaining things like these: “Is it not helpful to see that on account of the difficulties and opposition around, there must be a fellowship?” “The word (fellowship) implies to me a special bond in a scene of contrariety; that is, I believe, the force of it in Scripture. *And there will be nothing in heaven to call for fellowship.*” Thus we see how to preserve consistency, and rule fellowship out of heaven, it must be denied that any element of it exists that would entitle it to be there. Thus it is another of those terms, whose number seems continually increasing, which in the hands of these teachers lose their significance for eternity, and are lowered from heaven to earth; and thus error to

be maintained requires continually fresh concessions to be made to it. Alas for him who has committed himself in anywise to it, and has not lowliness to judge his departure and draw back his foot from the ever more devious and downward way!

But to come to what is our theme at present—reconciliation; we shall, as usual, put together the statements made regarding it, and without comment, that they may speak thus for themselves, and make their own impression. Afterwards I shall examine them. It is a pity that the doctrine is only to be found in these conversational remarks which, as already said, can hardly, save by courtesy, be called “readings.” Yet the sense is after all sufficiently clear, and the extracts are, save where noted, from one speaker who is entitled to be considered the foremost leader in a movement which is rapidly changing the aspect of many of the central doctrines of Scripture for those who are being carried by it.

Reconciliation, then, we are told, “is one of the terms the force of which you must find from its use in Scripture. The dictionary would not give you the scriptural use of it. In the ordinary use of the word the sense is that two persons estranged have been brought together. That is not the scripture-idea. It is not *minds* that are reconciled. There was no enmity on the part of God towards the world; and certainly the mission of Christ was not to make people more pleasant. Yet in Christ God was reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. If you say that ‘it came out in the Lord’s ministry of grace here on earth,’ then you will be bound to admit this, that His ministry

was ineffective." "The truth of reconciliation is plainly stated in 2 Cor. v.: God was in Christ; He ignored every other man in a sense, for the moment; there was one Man before Him, and that was Christ." "The ministry of reconciliation began with Christ Himself, and meant that in the presence of Christ here everything was under the eye of God on a wholly new footing in connection with Him. That was the effect of the presence of Christ. The new footing was grace and favor. God was in a new light towards man. He saw what was perfectly suitable to Himself in Christ.

"The ministry of reconciliation was effected in Christ in His life. God approached the world outside of it. He was favorable to the world in Christ, not hostile; but when you come to the word of reconciliation it is the testimony that reconciliation has been effected in death. It is not now simply that God has approached the world in another Man, in Christ being here, but the man hostile to God has been removed. So you have both things now, God's approach to man, and the man antagonistic to God removed in death. That is what I understand by the word of reconciliation, and we have to accept it."

"The difficulty," says another, "with many of us as to reconciliation is, that we have looked at it as reconciling us to God, instead of seeing it as the abolition of us, that all might be in a new Man."

"That is the idea."

And now in opposition to the dictionary meaning:—

"We have stopped at this, Alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled."

“*How* could that man be reconciled? you could not reconcile a man who is an enemy in mind by wicked works. He can only be so as being in another individuality.”

Again:—

“You cannot reconcile *what* is alienated; it is impossible to reconcile that which is at enmity. If enmity is there, it is there; it is enmity of will; that is not to be reconciled. ‘They that are in the flesh cannot please God.’”

“It is you that were alienated.”

“But the point is that you are reconciled by being removed, and where the distance was complacency is, because Christ has come in. Hence it is that reconciliation involves new creation.”

“That which you are morally has to go; personally you are reconciled. Is that the thought?”

“I don't object to that, but you may depend upon it, if you press that on people you will give them the idea that reconciliation is some kind of change of sentiment in them. I have no doubt that this is in the mind of the vast proportion of Christians.” . . .

“That is, in new creation the saints are presented ‘holy, unblameable, and unproveable.’”

“It must be that; you could not conceive of any process which would change the man who was an enemy in mind by wicked works into holy, unblameable, and unproveable; no such process is possible, even to God.”

Elsewhere we find:—

“The reconciliation of things is remarkably simple. Everything is taken up in Christ. The reconciliation of persons refers to individuals, and has to be

individually accepted. 'Through whom we have now received the reconciliation.' In Corinthians it is, 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' Reconciliation has to be accepted when it is a question of persons, therefore there was the ministry of reconciliation."

"Is there any thought of the enmity being brought to an end in reconciliation?"

"The enmity is only brought in to show that the one marked by it must go. You cannot improve with reference to enmity. You cannot reconcile what is at enmity. It is the purest folly to think of reconciling what is hostile."

"It says, 'When we were enemies we were reconciled.'"

"Yes; but it was by learning that what was at enmity had been removed by the death of Christ. That is the way of it. I do not think that the apostle refers to a change of feeling on the part of people, but to acceptance of the truth that what was at enmity has been removed. They had received the word of reconciliation—'When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.' They had accepted that as their death. This is the truth on God's side—on the experimental side it is somewhat different."

Once more, even though it may be *ad nauseam* :—

"Do you think a man, an enemy to God by wicked works, could ever be changed into unblameable and unproveable in His sight? It could not be. That *person* could be, but not that *man*." . . .

"How would you explain our identity remaining?"

"That is the point; the complacency is where the

distance was; that is in you. It is not that God sweeps all away and brings in an absolutely new race. He does so morally, but not actually. The old man has gone, and where he was Christ is; this has come to pass in the Church."

What then is reconciliation?—

"I think the idea of the text is a bringing into conscious complacency with the divine mind and pleasure." "What I understand by it is, that where distance was there is complacency. . . . The distance has been removed in the removal of the man. I don't see in what other way God could remove distance. The distance came in by man, and the removal of the distance means the removal of the man. But the point is that where the distance was now there is complacency."

"Would you preach the ministry of reconciliation to sinners?"

"It would not be much good to them."

"Where is the ministry of reconciliation to be exercised?"

"I think very much amongst those who believe."

"But do they need to be reconciled?"

"I think so, if they are to be for the satisfaction of God."

"When the apostle says, 'Be ye reconciled to God,' had they touched it?"

"I do not think the Corinthians had touched it. . . . I think it is practical; the Corinthians had not left Adam for Christ. They were practically very much in Adam. They had believed in Christ; I don't doubt for a moment they were Christ's, and had received the gift of the Holy Ghost. But certainly,

judging by the epistle, they had very little readiness to leave Adam for Christ."

"The truth for the Christian is this, that in the acceptance of reconciliation he has put off the individuality connected with sin, but at the same time he has put on the new man which after God is new created."

We have now before us—produced, some will think perhaps, at unnecessary length—what ought to enable us to arrive at a sober and sufficient judgment of what is presented for truth with regard to the doctrine. Truth there is in it also, along with much that is new, as generally in these teachings. The misfortune is that here, as in so many cases, the true is not new, and the new is not true. Not merely so, but some of the statements seem absolutely wild and reckless, easily as they were accepted by those who heard them when first made. Only the knowledge that they have been and are being so by so many could make it worth while to repeat or challenge them now. Their currency and the gravity of much with which they connect themselves, give them an importance which in themselves they are far from having.

At the outset we are warned against the dictionary meaning of the word; though it is not and cannot be denied that it is the correct translation of that which has been chosen by the Spirit of God as fittest to convey His meaning, and it would not seem to be one of those words for which, as is well known, when Christianity came in, it had to coin a meaning of its own. Scripture also, at first sight, would certainly

appear to confirm the dictionary use. Any simple person would suppose so upon reading that "when we were enemies, we were reconciled," "you that were alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled," and "to reconcile both to Himself, having slain the enmity." The general consent, one may say, of Christians for many centuries has without suspicion accepted Scripture and the dictionary as speaking in the same way.

It is startling to find, in what might seem to be the same line of things,—that is, in arguing against some kind of change of sentiment, as from enmity to friendship (which the dictionary use favors, if not involves) the strong assertion that no process of changing a man who is an enemy to God by wicked works, is possible to God! To save the speaker's character for sanity, we have to assure ourselves that he is only using the word "change," so confusing in this connection, for "whitewashing," perhaps. God cannot whitewash a man, of course, and take him for what he is not. And we are encouraged to believe that that is his meaning by what he says elsewhere, that "it is impossible to reconcile that which is at enmity; if enmity is there, it is there." Truly; we shall not dispute about this; but why so earnestly and with such extraordinary emphasis, insist upon this? was it ever in dispute? while another passage still, very similar to the one we have been trying to mend, seems to assert for it that "change" is really meant: "Do you think a man, an enemy to God by wicked works, could ever be changed into unblameable and unproveable in His sight? It could not be. That *person* could be, but not that *man*."

So it is evident that we must walk very carefully, and define very closely, to suit these leaders of the poor perplexed sheep of Christ! How good to have a Bible that always remembers that God has chosen the poor! But we may say then that a "person," an enemy to God, may be changed in this manner; but a "man," an enemy to God, may not! Is that intelligible? Let us go on and see what is to come of this.

Some one asks, seemingly in the same perplexity with ourselves, "How would you explain our identity remaining?" Perhaps he wants to know whether he is after all still a "man," or only a "person." But happily he is assured that his identity remains:—"That is the point; the complacency is where the distance was; that is, in *you*. It is not that God sweeps all away, and brings in an absolutely new race. He does so morally, but not actually. The old man has gone, and where he was Christ is."

"The *old man* has gone!" Ah! does not a ray of light break in there? Is perhaps the *old man* the "man" about whom our guide was thinking, when he spoke of the impossibility of the *man* being changed? But then why distinguish so carefully between the man and the person? The old man is in fact the person that was, before grace had brought him under its dominion, the child of Adam in all the sad inheritance of his fallen father; and because we were all naturally alike in this pre-Christian state, Scripture speaks of "our" old man. But it is not the nature—the flesh—which still remains in us, and with which so many confound it; "our old man was crucified with Christ," and for every Christian is put

off, and non-existent. Thus the question is never raised of "changing" the old man, nor could be raised by one properly acquainted with its force in Scripture. This new man does not dwell in us alongside of the old, but displaces it; yet it is the same man who was once "old" who now is "new." He has put off his former self, which the cross of Christ has ended before God in judgment, but from which it has thus liberated him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that henceforth he may no longer serve sin (Rom. vi. 6).

The old man cannot then be distinguished as man or person distinct from the one individual alone existing throughout. The assertions made are false and preposterous; and, of course, you do not find a trace of them in Scripture. They are simply the inventions of a fertile but unbalanced mind. It is the man who was once alienated and an enemy to God by wicked works, who in every case of conversion becomes the holy, unblameable and unreprouable child of God. There is no impossibility with God of changing the one into the other; and there is no unchangeable "man" to pronounce or speculate about. And reconciliation, instead of being so far on in Christianity that persons who are indwelt of the Spirit (as the Corinthians) may yet be strangers to it, is at the threshold of Christian life. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled;" not as Christians, but as "alienated and enemies to God by wicked works, He hath reconciled us;" "God was in Christ, reconciling the *world*" — and not believers — "to Himself." No subtle distinctions can take away from us what God has thus written with a pencil of

light in His immutable Book. "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

How plain, therefore, that the reconciliation does involve a change in the man from this alienation and enmity, wherever it takes effect! How plain that the answer given to the invitation, "Be reconciled to God," involves the dropping of resistance and estrangement, upon the assurance of gracious provision made by which His banished may be restored to Him. The weakness of God is stronger than man, and the foolishness of God is wiser than man; and the amazing spectacle of the Son of God dying for His enemies has power still, through the might of the Spirit to subdue enemies to the love that seeks them.

Consequently the testimony of reconciliation is not that of the removal of the old man; nor can this be found in connection with it: it is merely forced in in this way where it does not belong. One wonders at the feebleness that can either put forth or accept such triviality as the following. In answer to the objection that Scripture "says, When we were enemies we were reconciled;" it is replied—

"Yes: but it was by learning that what was at enmity was removed by the death of Christ. That is the way of it. *I do not think* that the apostle refers to a change of feeling on the part of people, but to acceptance of the truth that what was at enmity had been removed. They had received the word of reconciliation—'When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.' They had accepted that as their death."

Now the whole of this is necessarily and at once

overthrown by the very sentence which it is supposed to explain. We have the testimony of the very man who says this, that [such a] ministry of reconciliation preached to sinners "would not be much good to them;" and the very words he is explaining assert that it is enemies who are reconciled! Where are we told that it was "by learning that what was at enmity had been removed"? One can only answer, "Nowhere." Instead, we have confessedly the speaker's thoughts: "*I do not think!*" And where does it say or suggest that "they had accepted that death as their death," in any such sense as the removal of the old man? Not a hint is given of this in that part of Romans from which the text is quoted. It comes afterwards in the sixth chapter, and in quite another connection from what is given to it here. Would it not be well if there were indeed an expositor to help us, instead of men whose knowledge is of fragmentary texts, threaded together with their own thoughts, and in supreme disregard of context?

Before we close we must look at what is said concerning the ministry of reconciliation on our Lord's part, as it is stated in the second of Corinthians: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Here, as it was in the ministry of Christ on earth that this was accomplished, there could, of course, be no word of the removal of the old man; but here is the comment:—

"God was in Christ: He ignored every other man in a sense, for the moment; there was one Man before Him, and that was Christ. The ministry of reconciliation began with Christ Himself, and meant

that in the presence of Christ here everything was under the eye of God on a wholly new footing in connection with Him. That was the effect of the presence of Christ. The new footing was grace and favor. God was in a new light towards man. He saw what was perfectly suitable to Himself in Christ."

Now that it is the truth that in every intervention of God for man Christ was before Him, the justification of the love manifested, is fundamental truth, surely; and that when Christ was born into the world, His good pleasure in men had not only decisive expression, but its justification in the Son of man. But that does not make the interpretation of the apostle's words which has been given us the more exact. True as what is said in itself may be, it is yet assuredly *not* the truth which is stated in them. God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself is not at all the same as God having Christ before Him; and one may say, manifestly not. God in Christ as seen in His gracious ministry to men, is that identification of God with Him who represented Him on earth which showed Him in a grace which did not deal with men according to their trespasses. It does not speak of Christ as the ground of such favorable regard, but as the One who expressed this regard on God's part. The effect or otherwise of the Lord's revelation of God in this way is not in question; and His sorrowful complaint through the prophet, of laboring in vain and spending His strength for nought, should have hindered this being pleaded as an objection. Yet was His work with His God, as He declares. It could not be in vain, whatever the effect

among men, to reveal God thus; and where must one be to say it? God's attitude is what is declared: "He was favorable to the world, not hostile," is the truth of it. But the whole object of the proposed interpretation of this passage is evidently to make reconciliation in it as far as possible in accord with what I can only call the theory that reconciliation means the removal of the old man. The reconciliation here, therefore, cannot be permitted to involve the invitation to a change of attitude on man's part, however much this is favored by the direct appeal of those to whom the word of reconciliation is now committed, "Be ye reconciled to God." This too is enfeebled as much as possible by being turned into "accepting the reconciliation." You must guard this from any suggestion of *minds* being reconciled, which we have been told is not in it! You are only to think of enmity being removed as this may be contained in the old man being removed.

"*Minds* are not reconciled"; and yet to be reconciled is, according to another definition, to be "brought into *conscious* complacency with the divine mind and pleasure!" How is this to be done *without* the mind? But indeed there is no putting together the various and conflicting statements. Reconciliation is, of course, on God's part towards man—*He* reconciles; man is reconciled—not reconciles: reconciliation is that "where distance was, there is complacency;" and this means divine complacency. God has removed the distance by removing the man; that is the reconciling to Himself, and no work in us comes into this.

Well, then, is the whole world reconciled? Why

no! we must accept the reconciliation. After all, then, if divine complacency is to be where the distance was, and that is in us, reconciliation there is not until *we* are reconciled: the "be ye reconciled" must take effect. Reconciliation awaits, then, the response on our part before it is accomplished; that is, before it *is* reconciliation. This is the opposite of what has been so strenuously contended for, and is proved by the very statements which are meant to be the denial of it! Scripture does not negative the dictionary after all.

But more than this; if this is true, and it is as asserted, Christians who have to be reconciled—people, it may be, as in the case of the Corinthians, who have already received the Spirit of adoption, and cry, "Abba, Father,"—then they must be doing so, and rightly doing so, while yet in them the distance is not removed, and divine complacency has yet no existence! There is no divine complacency, but distance unremoved, for those whose souls refuse the distance and draw near to God in the place of children! This is the contradiction into which men fall who "do not read Scripture in the letter," in which God has been pleased to give it, but in that which their own minds have distilled out of it, and which they call, the spirit. How plain it is, that if reconciliation means divine complacency now where distance was before, then, unless there are believers who are not in the value of Christ's work before God, reconciliation *must* be coincident with the very beginning of true faith in the soul, and not in the place in which these teachings put it; and then, as a further consequence, that the word of re-

conciliation is not the announcement of the removal of the old man, but the simple story, than which nothing deeper or more wonderful exists, that "while we were yet without strength Christ died for the ungodly," and that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son" for the salvation of the lost! By and by those who have received the message of reconciliation will still need to know about the crucifixion of the old man; but God's reconciling kiss waits not for this, but meets us in our very rags and wretchedness. When we are enemies, we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

8. DELIVERANCE AND DEATH TO SIN.

In taking up what is now before us, we shall be treading ground already plentifully trodden by the feet of combatants, and where we shall find ourselves under the necessity of recalling what has been elsewhere said, and in connection with the doctrines also which we are now reviewing. But the topic is one of such great importance for doctrine and for practice, and is still so little clearly understood by many who might be expected to be most clear, that it cannot be in vain to take it up once more, and in view of statements and arguments which it cannot but be for profit to appraise at their full worth, both scripturally and experimentally. The experimental test is necessarily of great value in a matter so eminently practical as this.

According to the writer whom, as in general, I shall quote here, "If I were to put the question, 'How is deliverance effected for the Christian from sin and from the world?' the natural answer would be, 'By death.' I admit it; it is effectuated in that

way. *But then the Christian has to die to it*, and how is he to be brought to that? I dare say some would answer, 'We have died to it in the death of Christ.' That will not do. I say the death of Christ is your title to die to it, to die to one as to the other. 'Our old man has been crucified with Him'—that is your title to die to sin; and the world is crucified to the believer in the cross of Christ—that is your title to die to the world. I quite admit the title of the Christian to die by the death of Christ both to sin and to the world, but my present point is what it is that gives power in the soul to die to sin and to the world. I believe Scripture makes it very plain; if a Christian is going to travel that path, and to enter into the thought of God about him, he must be attracted by the grace of God and by what God presents. . . . There are two things in Scripture to which the Christian is said to die, sin and the world. In regard to law you are become dead to it; God has released you from one bond, and formed another. Then in regard to the flesh 'You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you;' that is the change that takes place in the Christian, he is no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit. You are never said to die to the flesh, that I know, but by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the body. But you can very well understand that in that case deliverance stands on a different basis. The law is compared to a husband; and you could not be free from law if God had not dissolved the bond. On the other hand you could not be in the Spirit, if you had not received the Spirit of God. But in regard to sin and the world we have to die.

. . . I could not think of dying to sin if our old man had not been crucified with Christ. That is my title to die to sin. What I understand by it is that all that comes under the idea of our old man, what a man is as in the flesh, God has dealt with judicially in the death of Christ for Himself and for me too. If it were not so you could not die; if our old man had not been crucified in the cross of Christ, you would be on the footing of responsibility as to the old man; but our old man has been dealt with in the cross of Christ, that we might not be on that footing, but might be privileged to die with Christ."

Let us pause here, and try to get clearly hold of what is being taught us. The language is plainer than it often is, and there ought not to be much difficulty in arriving at the meaning, whatever we may think of the conclusion that we reach. The scripturalness of it will not be hard to settle either, when this is done.

Deliverance from sin, it is stated, is effected for the Christian by death—true; but not simply by Christ's death for him: this gives him *title* only to die to sin, the death which in fact delivers him. And in the same way exactly as to deliverance from the world. It is *not* the same as to deliverance from the law: here a bond existed which only God could dissolve; and therefore here he becomes dead by the body of Christ. Then as to the flesh, while you are not said to die to it, you must have received the Spirit to be in the Spirit; and that is (or shows?) your deliverance.

How far does this asserted difference exist? It is allowed that "our old man was crucified with Christ,"

—“was dealt with in the cross,”—and that that is equivalent to what we were as men in the flesh. This was “crucified,” put to death, so that “we died with Christ,” says the apostle; and He thus having died to sin (*our* sin) we are with Him dead to sin; our old man—we, such as we were in nature and in practice, were crucified, died, are dead, with Christ: our reckoning ourselves dead to sin is only simple acceptance in faith of a most blessed fact, which must be true before we reckon it, or we should have no right to do so.

But thus we have no need of dying. We start with being dead, through the death of Another for us, but which is in this way our death. The reasoning of the apostle with regard to it (Rom. vi. 7, 8) makes it perfectly plain in what way we are to understand this; for he argues that “he that has died is *justified* from sin”—so the Greek—and that “if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” He is speaking, therefore, of atonement and its results for us, not of any work *in* us. It is evident that our having died and being dead with Christ have, all through, the same meaning and application: there are not two deaths or two modes of dying. Our dying with Christ is not something accomplished by the energy of our own wills, —even of our renewed wills; and so the full significance of the change proposed for us becomes apparent. Change it is indeed; for no one can pretend that Scripture anywhere exhorts us to die with Christ; and it may be safely trusted to give us its own meaning, and not to leave us to the tender mercies of interpreters to supply us with more competent

phraseology. We die to sin (we are told elsewhere) in reckoning ourselves dead! On the contrary, as surely as we do reckon ourselves dead, we cannot think of dying. Dead men do not die, but only living men. Scripture, perfect here as always, has given us the very contrary of the thought suggested to us, and in complete consistency with what we have seen of its argument all through. It could not bid us to die with Christ, because the dying with Christ of which it speaks is on the cross and the cross is, blessed be God, not a thing in any sense in the future, but an accomplished fact. We have to accomplish nothing, but to accept thankfully what is done. We can reckon it done, just because it is done: the death which is ours is that which Christ died; and therefore not a title for us to die,—which would mean of course, some other death. The apostle in bidding us reckon ourselves dead is not exhorting us to aught else than to set to our seal in faith to that which he has been proclaiming to us. It is a living faith he wants; not a cold assent to an orthodox creed. This surely we need to press, and shall always need; but not to exhort Christians to do what they cannot, and what needs not to be done, because it is done.

After all, it may be urged, are we not contending about a mere clumsy expression, when the same thing is meant at bottom? One would certainly be wrong in making a man an offender for a word, and are bound to give all the credit that one can to those who may in their very zeal for a godly walk have used strained arguments, and misinterpreted, perhaps, some texts of Scripture. But with the motives

or influences which incline people to the views they hold we have nothing really to do; and we may easily make great mistakes about them. Besides, the misinterpretation of Scripture may have the most serious consequences, whatever the rightness of intention on the part of those who make it. The heart may indeed be better than the head; but that affects only the question of one's own responsibility. Error is that with which the enemy continually works, and which he is constantly recommending by the respectability of its advocates.

In this case there is a recklessness about the statements which involves a treatment of the word of God most dangerous in its character. We are not to say we have died to sin in the death of Christ: "that will not do;" although Christ died to sin, our old man was crucified with Him, and we died with Him! But again,—we *are* to say that we *have* to die to sin (which Scripture never says), and that His death gives us *title* to die to sin,—which it never says. Then comes up the very important question, how we are to find power to do what Scripture has never told us to do; and to do which is indeed, as is elsewhere said with regard to parting company with the first man, "not quite so easy as it may seem!" So this gap has to be filled. And exactly the same thing with regard to dying to the world; there is "leverage" needed to enable one to accomplish it. Here it is: "I believe that the apprehension that such a circle (the heavenly circle of the church) is revealed in Scripture, and the anxiety to reach it, encourages and strengthens a person to accept the place of death to the world, for if I am going to have part in that

circle, all that binds me to the world must go." *Paul* was content to say in such a reference, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world;" but the modern commentator has found that the cross is only *title to die to the world*, and not attractive power, and "believes" that he has found something more effective in the New Testament representation of the Church!

All this, alas, goes but too well with what we have heard from the same person, that if he had his life to live over again, he would study Scripture less! Evidently his study of it hardly yields satisfaction to himself. May one suggest to him that, if he *did* read it more (as he says he does not) "in the letter,"—if he attended more to its every jot or tittle, and thus showed it more the respect that the word of God should inspire, while there might be less of meteoric brilliancy in his expositions, there would yet be much more of what would command the confidence of those who require to know whence as well as what the teaching to which they bow may be.

But to return to what is (thank God) the unscriptural injunction that we die to sin; if that is to be the definition of our separation from it, who that knows the treachery of his own heart could ever satisfy himself as to his accomplishment of such a complete and absolute separation as is implied in *death*? How many of us would venture to claim being in such a condition? There is power for it, we are told, in the attraction of Christ as the Second Man! The plain answer is, that attraction is one

thing, and power to fulfil what we desire is quite another. It is a strange thing to be told that what a Christian needs is to be "strengthened and encouraged to part company with sin." One can understand, alas, the conscience of a Christian being too little exercised with regard to the less manifest forms of it, and the hindrance to going on with God that is the necessary result of this; but in the man in the 7th of Romans, the specific case by which the apostle illustrates the need of deliverance, the lack of either will or exercised conscience is not what is supposed, but that when he would do good, evil was present with him: the thing which he *hated* still he did.

It may be said that it is deliverance from the law that is in question here. Of this we hope to speak at another time; yet it is evident that the "law of sin in the members," which the experience here reveals, is not produced by law, and has no essential relation to it. The inefficacy of the law to deal with it, (nay, the aggravation of the case by the would-be remedy,) is indeed insisted on, and the need of deliverance from law for any deliverance from the bondage of sin revealed by the experience is emphasized in a way which clearly the teacher before us does not understand. But the point before us is at present, that here is a man who, as is represented, needs no "encouragement to part company with sin," and yet cannot do it. Indeed the man who, without compulsion, yields himself to sin is dealt with by the apostle in another and much severer manner (Rom. vi. 16): "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey? whether of sin unto death, or

of obedience unto righteousness?" So that the apostle evidently does not consider the Christian as needing to be encouraged to part company with sin, but supposes the readiness to this to be implied in his conversion.

Spite of this, a death to sin is "not so easy as it may seem;" and the effort to accomplish this is, in fact, the lure that, in some form of it or other, leads so many astray from God's true remedy. God must help us, of course; that is easily conceded; but God does *not* help us to produce in ourselves the state we are seeking to find satisfaction in; and, on the other hand, He has already done for us what, when in faith we lay hold of it, is effectual deliverance. "Our old man has been crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be annulled, that henceforth we should not serve sin; for he that has died is freed (or justified) from sin." We are in Christ before God; and while we identify ourselves in faith with Him, the whole difficulty that we had drops away and is gone. His death is not our title to die in some other way, but is that in which we died, and died to sin, because He, our Substitute, died to sin once for all. "In Him is no sin;" and "he that abideth in Him sinneth not." He is the storehouse of every blessing for us, upon whom as in Him the favor of God continually rests; and as we are in Him, identified with Him, before God, so is He in us, identified with us, in the world. He is in heaven for our interests, which are thus amply, and beyond all need of anxiety, secured in Him; while we have the privilege of being here for Him. In proportion to the simplicity of our faith in receiving this will be

our realization of peace, and joy, and power over circumstances, as well as over the sin in us that still remains, and remains to make self-confidence impossible to us, and Christ our continual necessity and dependence.

9. DELIVERANCE FROM THE LAW.

For deliverance from the practical dominion of sin, we must of necessity be delivered from the law; and therefore the order of truth in the sixth and seventh chapters of the epistle to the Romans. Deliverance from the law and the necessity of this are dwelt upon in the seventh chapter; where the great point is that being under law means self-occupation in a religious way, the attempt to make something of that from which God would turn us away; and in which we find ourselves confronted with an unmanageable evil rooted in our very nature as born of Adam, and from which God Himself does not, in the way we look for it, come in to deliver us. Alas! pride tends ever to come in by the natural and conscientious endeavor to be right with God carried out by legal ordinances and self-culture, with all forms of asceticism superadded. God's remedy for all is the eye off self and upon Christ, with the apprehension, as given by the Spirit, of our identification with Him, so as to make God's delight in Him the joy in which we dwell, and thus the power by which in self-forgetfulness we live and serve Him.

We have therefore only to express our cordial and entire agreement with the teaching we are now examining that the true lesson of the law is that of one's own powerlessness. It is curiously put as a supposi-

tion, though it is to be hoped that the writer does not mean that it is no more than that with him: "*I suppose* it works in this way, that law brings home to a man the truth of his own utter powerlessness. That is the lesson to be learnt; I do not care how it is learnt, in all probability by law, but it has to be learnt." It is evident, one would say, that the apostle expected it to be learnt in that way; and that law is so entirely the human method of religious accomplishment that, apart from the revelation of God in the matter, we have no reason to imagine any excogitation of another. But we need not dwell upon this: so far we are glad to agree with him that the entire "end of the law" is Christ.

When we come, however, to the necessary question as to what is the practical outcome of this for us, we find our agreement soon reaching its end, and a doctrine laid down which we have already sketched, but which is being pressed with continual earnestness, and (one must say) audacity. It is undoubtedly the root of the whole system presented to us. We have, of course, things inconsistent with it presented to us too; if it were given clean cut and with entire consistency, it is hardly to be thought that Christians could go on with it as they manage to do now; but this evasive character belongs naturally to the devious ways of error wherever found, a kind of Jesuitism which may be perhaps unconscious, but which all the more does its work. One may boldly assert that it passes the power of man to reconcile the different statements made. When for instance we have the question directly asked,—a question apt enough if we consider the many depre-

ciatory remarks about it,—“*What is the use of Scripture to us?*” we are comforted and quieted by the assurance: “It is for doctrine, and is a guard to us, and it is a very important point in regard to it that our minds are thus kept from getting out of bounds.” Yet none the less confidently is it declared that if you *go to it* for doctrine, it only shows you are not yet delivered from the law! Here are the words:—

“This question of law is a very great hindrance to many of us, and I think it takes us a long time to get free of law. I will tell you how it works—people go to the Scriptures to find exhortations and rules; *they want chapter and verse*, as they say commonly, *for their doctrine*, and they want precepts for their conduct. *That is all legality*, it is the letter, and I think people are uncommonly fond of the letter; they go to Scripture in that sense to a large extent.”

So, though Scripture is “for doctrine,” to go to it for doctrine is legality! and although it is a very important point that by it our minds are kept from getting out of bounds, yet where the bounds are in this case is a mystery which must remain a mystery. When it is suggested that “the unsearchable riches of Christ are accorded to us by the Scriptures,” that supposition is promptly repelled with a “No; you cannot get them except by the Spirit”! Who ever thought you could? But are they communicated to us apart from those inspired Scriptures the possession of which has been thought of as furnishing us with all the mind of God for His people here? But let us go on:—

“The idea of the word of God is, that God puts Himself into direct communication with man. . . . A man preaches effectually only what he has learned from God, *not* from what he has found in Scripture.”

These things are put in fullest opposition; and yet what a man supposes he has learned from God is to be kept from getting out of bounds by what he has learned, not from God, but from Scripture! “I do not think people learn exactly from Scripture, but from the Spirit of truth, but the more familiar people are with the Scripture the better; because a man’s mind is thus continually pulled up in its tendency to go beyond the limit”! To make the contradiction more complete and absolute, it is the same person who says, “I claim only the light of Scripture.” Thus, though of course, he did not find it in Scripture, the light of Scripture is all he has! He was taught it, perhaps, independently; and then taught that it was all the while in Scripture, although he himself did not find it there, and “effectually” no one could. There is thus a continually fresh revelation being made to souls, not derived from Scripture, and which yet Scripture gives them authority to press on others, although it cannot, of course, teach others what it did not teach them, and people are legal and wrong if they go to Scripture for doctrine at all! Surely, as the wise man says, “The legs of the lame are not equal.”

And after all it may be doubted whether any of us know what deliverance from law is, even the one who is teaching it to others. He has been himself studying Scripture, (only too much, he thinks,) and all his teaching he finds in Scripture, and only thus

can press it with authority on others. How can he himself know for how much he is really indebted to this, which has thus been floating in his mind, and which he recommends us all to be familiar with? Really it seems as if the only thing that we could be quite sure he did *not* learn from Scripture is just this doctrine of his not learning from it. A good deal more, however, will be found to be involved in this.

It is legality also, we are told, to go to Scripture for precepts as much as doctrine. Precepts there surely are, in the New just as well as in the Old Testament: is it meant that we are not to listen to them? Well, at any rate, we are not to go to it for them. Are we to be taught them outside of Scripture? But then we must go to Scripture, to find out if our minds are betraying their natural tendency to get out of bounds! Nay, it would seem that we must be taught even more decisively by Scripture thus, than we have been already taught without it. Yet this primary teaching is supposedly by the Spirit of God, which after all we cannot rightly accept save under the "guard" of Scripture! What a wilderness of perplexity and unreality it is, which nevertheless cannot escape from the control of what the Spirit of God has provided for us all, except as, alas, this loose and careless slighting of the Spirit's instrumentality may enable us to leap the "bound," and follow our own thoughts with little check from aught beyond them.

And this is sure to be the result where (although it is confessedly good to be familiar with it) the *study* of Scripture is treated lightly: "a Bible student is not much after all." Aye, but "if thou criest after

knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. ii. 3-5). Where but in Scripture shall we search, where find, after this fashion? Let us set then these human thoughts within the so necessary bounds which befit them.

Notice once more, that the precepts of the epistles were never anything else than part of Scripture. They address themselves directly to the heart and conscience of those to whom they were addressed. Precepts as they were, they were not legal; or else the great apostle who gave us the lesson of deliverance from the law made a terrible mistake. We at least will not charge him with it. He knew surely also, that the Spirit must act through the written Word in order that it may be effectual, whether for sinner or saint; yet that did not hinder him from claiming the most absolute obedience to what he wrote; and that obedience is no less due from us than from them. It is not merely that we are in a loose way to have it before us, but to learn from it, and to give heed as to the voice of the Lord Himself: "If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. xiv. 37). The Spirit of God does not come in between, to make this a degree less direct or decisive, but to give it all its power for the subject soul.

10. THE SUPPER, THE ASSEMBLY, AND THE SANCTUARY.

It is not my purpose to pursue the doctrines which we have been considering much further. The fundamental point as to the Person of the Lord has been already and by others sufficiently gone into. We are told that the Lord was not personally man, but man only in condition. His Spirit seems to be spoken of always as His deity which tabernacled in a human body. Thus He was not Man in the truth of His nature, as we understand man, or as He, in the way in which Scripture constantly speaks, is represented as able to enter into the full realization of manhood apart from sin. The Christ presented to us, if a man at all, is truly another man, far other than the One "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," the One "crucified through weakness," now "living by the power of God." But I do not intend to enter upon this further now.

There is yet one thing which should be considered before we close,—a doctrine which is indeed, as it would seem, rather shaping itself than already having received its final shape, but which, nevertheless, presents certain features that can be distinctly enough set forth. It is, in fact, a new ritualism, a sacramental doctrine which, however, in contrast with most doctrines of this character, lowers instead of exalting this so necessary sacrament itself. The doctrine is, in other words, that the sanctuary in which we approach God is the assembly, come together, with the Lord in His place; and the Lord's supper is the way into it, it is the introductory act into the assembly. Once in the assembly your wor-

ship becomes of another and distinctly higher character. It is a distress to have hymns and praises expressing the worship of the sanctuary in connection with the remembrance of the Lord in the supper or before this. The supper is the way in which He makes His presence good to and felt by us. When He instituted it, He was about to leave His own after the flesh, and shows them how He would make good His presence to them after He left them. It is a question whether the remembrance of Him connects itself with the sufferings at all. It is calling Him to mind. The instant you call Him to mind, you call Him to mind as the living One. It is the Person. The bread and the wine set before us death accomplished, not accomplishing. One would be slow to make limitations, to prevent the heart traveling over all His sorrows, but we must have it set in the right direction.

In some expressions of this doctrine there is, in fact, a perfect confusion between the remembrance of Him and His presence in the assembly; but it is agreed that as soon as the supper is ended you are in the assembly proper. The praises assume a new character, a character of worship in a higher sense than you were capable of before. In fact, now the sanctuary is open to you, although this must be a practical realization for each one; as to the mass of those gathered, a realization little found, but it is what we are now invited to. Outside of the gathering of the assembly you may have a sense of boldness, but you cannot really enter into the sanctuary except when gathered together, because all is dependent upon Christ, upon the place which He has

taken, and it is in the midst of the church that He gives praise unto God; that is, He does not sing with you individually. You sink your individuality in the assembly. His presence makes it the holiest.

This will suffice at present for the doctrine. In taking it up, let us first of all consider how Scripture puts these various subjects before us, the manner of its doing this having great importance, as we shall see. The doctrine we are considering is evidently based largely indeed upon a supposed order of Scripture,—the order in the first of Corinthians. You find there the supper first, then you go on to the assembly and the various gifts exercised according to God. It is admitted, however, that Corinthians omits this very important view of the “sanctuary.” The sanctuary constituted by the gathering of the saints is, in fact, nowhere in it, nor the worship of this highest sort, of which we are told. This is noted, indeed, by the advocates of this view. It is explained very simply by the fact that the Corinthians were too unspiritual for the apostle to enter into it with them, so that the omission of what is essential to the doctrine is quite easy to be understood!

To find the doctrine you must go on to Hebrews; only in Hebrews, in fact, you don't find it either. In Hebrews you have, as is evident, no gathering of the assembly as such at all, no constitution of the gathered saints into the sanctuary, no supper of the Lord as introducing you in. All these things, Scripture in the most distinct way, and surely with divine wisdom, has separated widely from one another, in order that there may be no possibility of founding a ritualistic doctrine upon anything for which it can be

really quoted. The simplicity of Scripture as to all this is indeed of the most striking sort. No doubt you have in Corinthians the assembly as the temple of God, but it is not connected with worship in any way whatever. Both in the first and second epistles, the doctrine is given to show you the *holiness* that attaches to the assembly and to warn against any thing that would be a profanation of this. When we come to the supper, you have what is simplicity itself. It is the remembrance, not of a living, but of a dead Lord. We show the Lord's death. Living He is, surely; if He were not, all this would be in vain, but it is not as living we remember Him. This is the confusion which, as we know, Romanism has made, but which it is strange to find continued by those who are almost at the other *extreme* from it. Nothing is plainer than that the bread and the wine signify for us the body and blood of Christ, the body and blood separate, a dead Christ and not a living One. You remember Him, you don't realize His presence with you; that is not the way it is put, but the very opposite.

You remember the past in the present. It is a past indeed, which presents the One who is a living Person in the most blessed way to the soul. His death is that which surely expresses His love in its fullest, in His gift of Himself for us. Nevertheless, we are looking back, not forward. We are looking down, if you please, not up. Our fellowship is the fellowship of His body and of His blood. The blood presented to us in memorial is, nevertheless, that which was most distinctly shed in the past. He is not entered as flesh and blood into heaven. He is not with us

now in that character upon the earth. Yet we know Him by what He was upon the earth, and in no way more deeply than in all this story of His love-death for us to which the supper recalls us. Think of being told that the highest character of worship cannot be *rightly found in connection with that in which the Lord's heart is told out as in nothing else!* Yet this is only the threshold. It is only the way in. We must leave it behind and get beyond it, although in the Acts the disciples were gathered together to break bread,—not by means of the breaking of bread to do something else. The breaking of bread was the object of the gathering, and how simple is the language used ever!—“the breaking of bread.” With all the wonderful implications there are in *it for us, yet how sedulously does Scripture keep us to the most perfect simplicity about it!* We are not even told that we gather together to worship God. It is sufficient, it expresses all that need be said, to say that we are gathered together to remember Christ,—on the resurrection day indeed, but to look back upon His death. Resurrection is surely needed in order to put the remembrance in its right place, but to say that we must get past the remembrance in order to enter into the worship aright, is the most presumptuous violation of Scripture and of all propriety for the Christian soul that one could think of, as committed by those who own, nevertheless, what Christ's death is for them.

When we come to the assembly afterwards in the fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, we have the regulation of gift in its exercise for the edification of the assembly. We have no doctrine of the as-

sembly as the sanctuary at all. It is not even worship that is spoken of. It is *ministry*; and that so clearly that there cannot be a possibility of question as to it. If, therefore, the way in which these truths are put together has any meaning for us, the ritualism which is now intruding amongst those who might be thought the freest from it, can have no place.

When we go on to Hebrews, as already said, there is no gathering of the assembly as such, that is contemplated at all. The approach to God in the holiest is entirely separated from every question of circumstances. It is as open, so far as Hebrews leads us, to the individual saint anywhere, as it is to the assembly; and how important it is to realize this; for the rent veil, (which indeed is denied to be in Hebrews at all,) is that which is the very characteristic of Christianity itself. It is that in which the true light already shines for us and which is the sign of the full liberty of worship that belongs to us now, as those no more at a distance, but brought near to God. Our drawing near does not depend upon a meeting, but it depends upon power in the Spirit alone. We have access through Christ, by one Spirit, unto the Father.

It is surely true that Christ, in the midst of the Church, gives praise unto God. No doubt it is true that we are able by grace to be in fellowship with Him in these praises of His,—nay, in our measure to express them as gathered together. Nevertheless, that is an inference, and not a direct scripture doctrine. The doctrine is that it is He who in the midst of the assembly,—not by means of the assembly,—

—gives praise to God. As we find it in the twenty-second psalm it refers indeed to the gathering of the disciples after His resurrection when they are put into the place in which His work has set them. The praises at that time were surely His alone. Let us make whatever inferences are legitimate from it. No Christian will make any objection to that, but every right minded Christian will make an objection to having an inference forced upon him as a doctrine of such weighty import as is supposed, and which is used, in fact, to divert him from the very object for which the assembly comes together, which is to remember Him.

In Hebrews there is no supper and no assembly. We have a blessed way of access to God. There is a new and living way which He has opened for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, and we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. It is remarkable that where, in the doctrine before us, we have the gathering of the saints, as in Corinthians, there is no sanctuary worship, and that where we have the sanctuary worship, as in Hebrews, it is denied that there is a rent veil, and therefore a way of access in that way at all. The fact is we are told that the object of Hebrews is to give us boldness to enter, but there we stop. There is no entrance actually spoken of; yet we are of course to enter, but the very idea of entering *through* the veil, it seems, shows that the veil is not rent. How it shows it will be a mystery to most, probably, to understand. It is quite true the veil is not looked at as put away, but that we do enter through it. The veil is the flesh of Jesus, and the entrance is

made for us by His death. We enter by the veil, but by a way of access opened for us through it. Where is the contradiction between the *rent* veil being there, and our entering through?

But this unrent veil in Hebrews has another purpose in the view that is held. It cuts off still the holy place from the holiest, only with this effect, that the holy place, the place of the table, the candlestick and the shew-bread, has dropped out now. It is Jewish and we have nothing to do with it. All that you have in the present time is the holiest. You have no holy place. That has no present standing; and if it is still said that Christ is the the Minister of the sanctuary,—or, as we are reminded we ought to take it, as the Minister of the holy places, that has a sort of general reference, wider of course than Christianity, in order expressly to guard against the thought of the holy place having any reference to the Christian. It has been asked, why does it say, then, that Christ entered into the *holy place* with His own blood? but that is very simply settled. It is supposed that that *means* the holiest. There is no other word for holiest and you must take it in its connection; and if it be asked, did not the rending of the veil bring the holy place and the holiest together? it is answered, the ground taken is that the first tabernacle has no standing. Therefore you have nothing left except the holiest.

Now the doctrine of Hebrews is, in fact, quite otherwise. "The first tabernacle," as the apostle says, was practically the holy place for Israel. They could not (except the high-priest, on one day in the year) enter into the holiest at all. There was a first

tabernacle that they could enter, and a second tabernacle that they could not enter. This first tabernacle, as such, has necessarily come to an end by the rending of the veil. The moment the veil is rent you have a holy place which is formed of the two holy places contemplated before. The first, *as first*, has come to an end. There is for us no *first* tabernacle; that is true; but as the word really is, we have "boldness to enter into the holy *places* by the blood of Jesus." That is the express doctrine as taught in Hebrews itself, that the holy place exists still,—nay, the holy places; while indeed they are one for us. Thus it is that Christ entered by His own blood into the holy *place*. It is sufficient to say that, while this holy place is by that very fact holy and holiest all in one, thus we have liberty to draw nigh indeed, and we enter not by some new experience of our own about it, but simply "by the blood of Jesus." This in its essence abides for us as Christians wherever we may be,—alone, together, in the assembly, or in our daily walk. It is the character of Christianity; and we are not Christians at certain times or occasions, but we are Christians all the time. A "better hope" has come in for us than the law could give men, for the law made nothing perfect, but we now, by Him who has entered into God's presence for us, draw nigh to God.

In a word, all this ritualism is a plain invention. Neither Corinthians nor Hebrews knows anything of it. Let anyone take simply the passages in which the Lord's supper is spoken of, and let them realize the impression that is made upon them by the deepest consideration that they can give such things.

The simplicity of Scripture appeals to us all and would put the simplest believer into his place with God, privileged to be a worshiper, not through any attainment of his own, but through the work of Another. The constant aim of all that view of things that we have been considering is aristocratic. It is to make a distinct class amongst Christians, to comfort some perhaps with the thought of how much they have attained, to occupy others with themselves after another fashion, and put them practically at a distance.

It is not Christ Himself that in all this is rightly set before the soul, but our experiences with regard to Him; which indeed the Spirit of God works in us as our eyes are upon Christ and our hearts realize His love, but which are put in the wrong place, so that, in fact, we lose very much that which it is the apparent effort to make us gain. Let us keep Scripture as God has given it to us, surely best so, and let us not supplement it with thoughts to which Scripture may perhaps be supposed to give the limit, lest we should go astray, but which Scripture itself has not inspired.

F. W. G.