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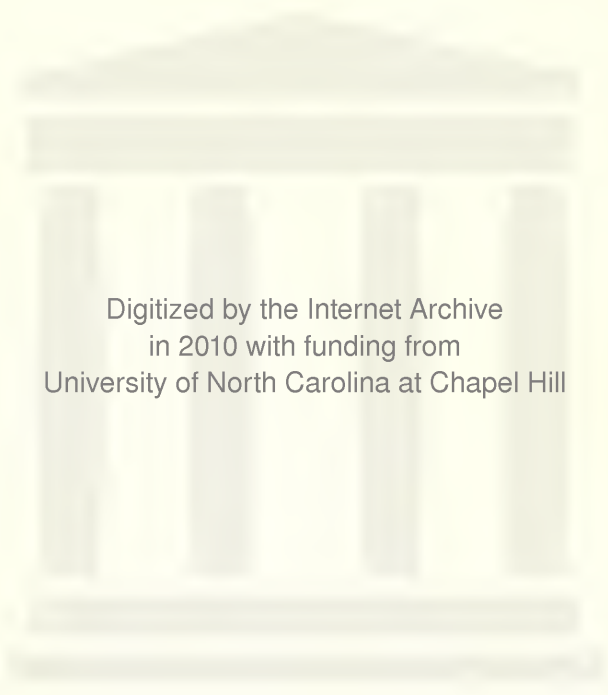
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CHRISTIANITY, THE ONLY RELIGION FOR MAN:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA,

JUNE 4, 1855.

BY B. M. PALMER, D. D.,
COLUMBIA, S. C.

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1855.



UNIVERSITY CHAPEL, CHAPEL HILL, N. C.,

June 5th, 1855.

DEAR SIR:—You will please accept the sincere thanks of the Graduating Class, for the interesting Sermon, addressed to us, last evening, in this house.

It is but little, that we acknowledge our more than satisfaction, and high appreciation of the effort; allow us to say, that we are not contented to have heard once, so learned and masterly a discourse, which convinced us so thoroughly of the *Truth* of Christianity; but, we desire to turn over its pages ourselves, and offer to others the same privilege. We would, therefore, respectfully solicit a copy for publication.

Adding our own earnest solicitation to that of the class, and hoping you may see fit to comply with our request, we beg leave to sign ourselves,

Your humble serv'ts,

JAS. H. COLTON,

JAS. PARK,

D. E. McNAIR,

Committee of the Grad. Class.

Rev. B. M. Palmer, D. D.

CHAPEL HILL, N. C., June 5, 1855.

To Messrs. J. H. COLTON and others, Committee,

GENTLEMEN—I herewith place in your hands, the Discourse delivered on last evening, hoping and praying that its serious perusal may, by the Divine Spirit, be blessed to those for whom it was prepared.

With sincere reciprocation of the kindly sentiments you have so gratefully expressed in your note,

I am, Gentlemen,

Very truly yours,

B. M. PALMER.



SERMON.

JOHN VI. 68, 69.

“ THEN SIMON PETER ANSWERED HIM, LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO.”

“ THOU HAST THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE : AND WE BELIEVE AND ARE SURE THAT THOU ART THAT CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.”

The miracle of feeding five thousand men with five barley loaves, was one so practical and useful, that the despairing patriotism of the Jews was suddenly revived. The spirit of sturdy independence nourished through fifteen hundred years of a supernatural and sacred history, but which had chafed under nearly six centuries of tributary subjection, was now panting for a deliverer, as when the cry of their Fathers went up to Heaven under the oppressions of Egypt. Might not this wonder-working prophet again judge Israel with such deeds as when the rams' horns of Joshua blew down the walls of Jericho : or when the companies of Gideon broke their pitchers against the camp of the Midianites ? And with such a champion might not the rainbow of the ancient glory once more encircle the throne of David ? With such thoughts, tracking the Saviour's mysterious path across the sea of Galilee, the excited patriots

were soon to learn that His kingdom "was not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for Him hath God the Father sealed." This plain language, the only answer which is returned to their ambitious proposal, the Jews with all their bias, could not well mistake. They evidently understood Christ as professing to found a new and spiritual dispensation; and requiring all other systems to be renounced, not excepting Judaism itself. As they fled away in disappointment and anger, He who came to His own saw with sorrow His own receiving him not; and turning with deepest pathos in His tone, He said unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" With that characteristic ardour which made him always the speaker of the Apostolic College, Peter replies,— "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the word of eternal life." He means to say in behalf of his colleagues and himself, that they adhere to Christ upon the very grounds on which others deserted him, because He was "the true God and Eternal Life." Religious wants were developed in their breasts, which made them require such a teacher as "that Christ, the son of the living God." The choice with them lay not between religion and

atheism; for a religion they must have, and the alternative was either of the true or the false. Upon a deliberate survey of all systems, both of philosophy and religion, christianity alone was found to solve their doubts and to satisfy their wants.

Young gentlemen, you have seen in the Camera a broad landscape of lake and forest lie, in beautiful though diminished proportions, upon a sheet of paper. It is so with the text. Here in the pregnant reply of Peter is found an argument, which covers the whole breadth of our nature.—His rapid interrogation, “to whom shall we go,” confesses man’s need of a divinely extracted religion. His affirmation reveals the essential conditions it must fulfil, in teaching “the words of eternal life.” I propose now to fill up this bold outline with well-considered proofs of these two points:

I.—*That man’s religious nature constrains him to find repose in some form of faith and worship.*

II.—*That the wants of this nature, well understood, are met only in Christianity, as taught in the Gospel.*

I shall dwell chiefly upon the second proposition; though the first merits attention as antecedently the ground-form of the other. It would evidently be supererogatory to discuss the pre-eminent fitness of any one religious scheme, if men

can dispense with all schemes alike. The question then recurs:

I.—*Has man a religious nature which compels him to the faith and worship of God?* To answer this question, let us consider—

1. *The elements which enter into our own moral constitution.* Take *conscience*, for example. Without entering into abstract discussion of the nature of conscience—whether it be an independent and single faculty, or only a name given to the complex operation of all our powers, when directed to moral subjects—upon any view, it is that department of our nature which makes us cognizant of law. As the understanding distinguishes between the true and the false, and as the taste discriminates between the beautiful and the vile, so conscience authoritatively decides between the right and the wrong. Now the question arises, what is the original ground of these moral distinctions, the source from which they spring? Evidently, the theory of Hobbes does not exhaust the inquiry, that they are entirely the creatures of human prudence, and have their foundation in human legislation. It is sufficient to reply that human law is itself a creation, and can suggest nothing beyond the contents of the lawgiver's own mind. In tracing a stream to its source, the navigator will not pause thus at what is at best only the mouth of a single tributary. We

are yet to be told how these moral distinctions first occurred to the legislator, to be impressed upon his code; and how, when suggested by him, they should obtain so uniformly among men, as never yet happened with any institutes that were purely arbitrary. If, then, we discover these operations of conscience to be universal, and can trace them in an ascending series above all human legislation, nothing remains but to insist upon all morality as eternal and immutable, existing *ab extra*, anterior to all earthly enactments; and though requiring human relations as the sphere of its operation, yet having its ground in something far higher and more enduring. We have exhausted all analysis, when we refer it directly to the infinitely holy nature of God; and make the divine will, however revealed—whether in written statutes, or engraved upon our moral constitution—its ultimate standard. Since man was created originally in Jehovah's image, the divine law was stamped upon his nature, the essential condition of his moral activity, just as the atmosphere is the condition of life. To this law the conscience has respect in all its judgments, as the exponent of that morality of which the divine nature is the ground. Thus, if Conscience be a witness, sealing up its testimony to the Great Assize, its depositions state the contrariety or agreement of human conduct with the precepts of this law. If it be a

judge, sitting upon God's lower tribunal in the soul, its decisions are but the interpretations of the same law. If it be a rule, it only proximately reveals the contents of that primary law. Nor does it affect the integrity of this argument, that Conscience, as a witness, is often corrupted by interest; as a judge, is biassed by passion; and as a rule, is perverted by prejudice. Blinded by ignorance, defiled by sin, and paralyzed by resistance, it is still an indestructible element of our nature. Mistaken often in her judgments, decisions she does render; incorrect in her interpretations of the law, expositions she will give; and though drugged by opiates into occasional repose, the torments of the lost show she has power to awake, and take ample reprisals for the wrong. If Conscience, then, be this organ of an original law impressed upon the soul, every response is a witness for God; and every moral judgment is an oracle bidding man find his satisfaction only in a divine fellowship.

Precisely the same line of argument might be pursued with any other element of our moral constitution, say *the affections*. It is as natural for man to love, as to breathe or to think; and he does the one or the other by the uncontrollable necessity of his being. If he lock up his affections within his own breast, he pays the forfeit of disobedience to the social law of the universe in a blighted nature, mil-

dewing beneath the lichen and moss which cover its ruins. It is the peculiar property of love however, that it carries itself unbroken and entire, to each object lying within a given circle. It is not something parcelled out in measure to each, until the whole is exhausted; but flowing forth in a perennial stream, the volume is never diminished by the extent of its distribution. Thus the parent bestows upon every child, the entire wealth of his love; each having the whole, though it is shared by several.* Nor do the human affections, like the waters of the Nile, overflow only a single Delta, but are distributed over all the relationships of life, lying as these do in concentric circles; so that the whole undivided heart is carried over from one circle to another, until all are embraced in one comprehensive fellowship. What do the expansiveness and unity of our affections prove, but that when we have loved through the entire breadth of earthly relations, the undiminished heart remains to pour its treasures into the bosom of a Being higher and nobler than ourselves? As it sweeps inward with increasing intensity of love within each narrower circle, should it pause in its path until it rests upon the great I Am, who is the common centre of them all? Each radius of every circle in human society

* This thought is presented in Taylor's *Spiritual Christianity*.

conducts the heart to that central Being from whom all others spring, and around whose throne all human orbits are described.

I must be content with merely sketching the outline of an argument, which cannot be filled up without expanding this discourse into a treatise. But you will readily see how the argument might be conducted from *the intellectual powers*, feeling onward through all nature to God, who is the sum and source of all knowledge. And how again *the active powers* should find their rest and exercise alike, in obeying that Sovereign will which moves the whole machinery of the universe. But these side glances are sufficient to reveal that, place ourselves at what point we may, in that moral constitution we possess, not a single element but has a separate voice for God; and whose passionate yearnings find no adequate expression, but in the language of adoring worship.

2. *The existence of a religious nature may be inferred from the tenacity with which religious ideas, once communicated, are retained by the mind.* The necessary existence of God, His moral government, the holiness and immutability of His law, lie at the basis of all religion. It is remarkable, that whatever be the source of our knowledge upon these points, they are accepted upon the first statement, and can never afterwards be dislodged. Received, like the

light, upon their own evidence, however capable of proof by reason, they do not depend upon argument for their propagation in the world. They seem to enter at once into the very texture of the mind; so that though overlaid, obscured, perverted, they are never forgotten nor erased. Thus, for example, while "the glory of the incorruptible God has been changed into an image, made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and to creeping things," yet the great idea itself of God's existence has never been eradicated. The very superstition which has multiplied the one living Jehovah into "Lords many and Gods many," and the idolatry which has attempted to symbolize and bring the Deity within the range of human thought, only show how originally cognate to the souls of men is the notion of a God. It would be easy to descend into a particular enumeration of religious opinions, which have resolutely maintained their dominion over the human conscience. The admission of man's sinfulness and consequent exposure to the divine curse, is expressed in the deprecatory rites of every false religion. The myths and legends, which form the oracles of Pagan antiquity, universally recognise God's conversableness with man, notwithstanding his apostasy. The incarnation of the Deity looms out in the numerous Avatars of the Hindoos, as well as in the anthropomor-

phic manifestations of the gods of classical mythology. The altar-fires which have burned upon every hill, lift up a universal testimony to the doctrine of redemption by sacrifice. Indeed, these truths, broken off from an original revelation, have intermingled themselves, fragmentary and distorted, with all the superstitions of men. They have become interwoven with all their religious associations and emotions; and though rendered grotesque by the additions of a credulous superstition, they are nevertheless the archetypes of all those fables which describe God's commerce with mankind and contain thus the essence even of Heathen religion. Now, could these truths command so universally the immediate assent of men, if there was not a susceptibility for their reception? And to what but the congeniality of a religious nature can we ascribe the fact, that amidst a thousand distortions and obscurations, they have never yet been eliminated from the human soul?

3. But once for all: a conclusive argument for man's religious nature is found in *the universal prevalence of religion and worship in so many diverse forms over the globe*. Man is no where without a religion. Even in that savage state, where the attributes of humanity are scarcely discovered, the traces of worship can be detected among the Bushmen and Hottentots of Africa. We perceive it equally in the

symbol-worship of ancient Egypt, in the fire-worship of ancient Persia, in the star-worship and divination of ancient Chaldea. We trace it in the dreamy contemplations of the Hindoo, seeking absorption into the pure being of Brahm; and in the mystical theism of the Buddhist, who seeks in the Grand Lama a glorified man who shall be the High Priest of the Universe, the central manifestation and representative of the Divine intelligence. We discover it in the old patriarchal faith of China, which makes social order the first principle of religion, and the Emperor the abiding representative of fatherly authority. It sparkles before us in the poetical mythology of classic Greece, whose beautiful conceptions, eschewing an abstract Divinity, transfigure men into Gods, presiding over all the departments of nature and forming a grand senate upon the top of Olympus. It clothes itself in the steel armour of ancient Rome, and sits upon the Capitol as a religion of Government and law. It utters itself in the wild battle cry of the Mahometan, claiming as his mission the practical assertion of a sovereign will ruling over the earth, which had nearly become obsolete amidst the theosophic speculations and idolatrous Image-worship of Christendom. Amidst the dark forests of Germany, the Goth worshipped the earth as his mother, and bowed before the God of the mist and the storm.

But I must not omit to mention what will strengthen my argument as much as it will awaken your admiration, the wonderful vitality of these ancient faiths, inadequate as they seem to resist a violent pressure from without. Buddhism, for example, passed over from Thibet and Burmah into China, and drove before it the cold state worship of Confucius. But it could not entirely expel it: and now the two religions with all their antitheses are seen side by side, dividing the homage of the Celestial Empire. During five centuries the old Persian faith lay crushed and smothered under the Parthian dynasty. Yet it experienced at last a resurrection to power; and the religion of Zoroaster, restored by the Magians, connected the new kingdom with the old empire of Cyrus. Again it was overborne by the stern proscription of Mahometan fanaticism; yet is it seen cropping out from the surface in an element of Pantheism it has breathed into the doctrine of the Koran. In like manner, the dreamy Hindoo religion, now hoary with the lapse of thirty centuries, survived the invasion of its kindred Buddhism; and though again overlaid by the conquering creed of the Musulman, its secret life was still preserved, surviving merely by its own passive endurance. How shall these facts of history* be explained, unless these various

* All of which have been taken from Maurice's "Religions of the World."

systems are admitted to contain some element of truth which finds an echo in the human soul? We stand nowhere upon this broad earth where a capacity for religion does not appear a characteristic of the race. Wherever we find the power of reason and the exercise of thought, we discover traces of the religious sentiment—often dark and gloomy, grotesque and wild, sensual and licentious, fanatical and bloody; yet sufficient to prove that man is, in the broad etymology of the term, a religious being.

The only exceptions, I confess at all perplexing, are those persons in Christian lands, who seem to live without any restraints of piety or forms of devotion; who enter no sanctuaries, and bow before no altars, and who speak only the language of profaneness and blasphemy. It is a portentous fact that the only men, who even in appearance are apostates from all religion, should be found in the heart of Christianity itself. Yet the strange paradox admits an easy solution. Where the forms of religion are such as suit the carnal taste, man is under no temptation to be a dissenter from the national worship. But where idolatry, in its Protean shapes, is excluded by the light of the Gospel, there is no resource for that carnal mind which is enmity against God but in this practical Atheism. Yet is it more apparent than real. The current religious opinions taken up

Deity. I might tell you of the long process by which this conception was transferred to the human mind, and wrought into human belief. How that for three thousand years, the inspired prophet has stood side by side with the historian, pointing to the judgments with which an avenging providence has overtaken the transgressions of men, converting all history into a discipline of this great truth, God's abhorrence of all impurity and sin. I might describe minutely that splendid Mosaic ritual given amidst lightning and tempest from the top of Sinai; its sacrifices, lustrations, and ablutions, creating a language of symbols to convey and express accurately to man the abstract idea of God's infinite holiness.* But the waning moments warn me not to attempt an exhaustive argument.

I must be content with asking where but in the Jehovah of the Scriptures do we find such a cluster of perfections as is set forth in this answer of our Sabbath Scholar? If we pass through the Pantheon of Pagan Greece, the God within each separate niche is but the personification of a single attribute.—Apollo, with his quiver and bow, embodies the conception of Wisdom; Venus, that of love; Mars, of power; Bacchus, of inspiration; Chronos, devouring his own offspring, of time stretching back into an

* See this well presented in an anonymous work entitled "Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation."

untold and unreckoned duration; while Jupiter himself represents only the abstract notion of supremacy, or dominion. And when the acute Philosophy of Greece applied itself to the interpretation of these poetical Theogonies, and sought the deep and hidden ground out of which they sprung, even the Heirophants of the mysteries failed to combine these separate qualities into one complex conception; but lost themselves in the abyss of God's unfathomed being, or traced His manifestations only in a degrading pantheism.

But Christianity differs not less from all heathen religions in asserting the distinct personality of the supreme being. The term God in the Scriptures is not a mere envelope, binding into one complex conception these separate and abstract qualities, converting the Deity only into a bundle of attributes. The Bible presents Jehovah to our faith and worship as a personal being, of whose living nature these perfections may be predicated, and from which they are unfolded. When on the contrary we turn back to the religions of antiquity, we discover either the mythical popular faith, through the creations of the poets, deifying the powers of nature, and multiplying Gods until they shall equal all her diversified phenomena; or else the speculative spirit resolving all into a philosophical pantheism, in which the universe was viewed as a concrete deity, and

God was regarded only as the animating soul of nature. In both cases, the personality of God was lost, and He was hopelessly entangled with His universe. Nor is it better when we pass to the more profound and speculative theosophy of the East.—The Indian mystic is lost in the dream of compassing the absolute intelligence of Brahm or Buddh; and the Persian Magus is swallowed in the abyss of that illimitable Being, out of whom light and darkness alike spring. How shall the Infinite pass out from the *Buthos* of His own essence into manifestation, and how shall he pass back again into pure being? How shall the chasm be bridged between the Infinite and the finite? In vain does the oriental hypostatize the powers of Deity, and substitute living personalities for abstract mental conceptions. He has either peopled the universe with whole generations of fantastic æons, or, his dualism resolves itself into pantheistic manicheism. God is not a personal subsistence, but only a name given to the general notion of spirit; which becoming mysteriously coagulated with matter, passes back through various stages of development and purification, until it is swallowed and lost in the abyss of the primal essence again.

Here, then, does apologetic Christianity take her first ground of defence. She presents to man the living Jehovah as the object of worship: not the

personification of this or that single trait; not the deification of this or that power of nature; not a Pantheus wearing the universe as His outside garment; not the symbol merely of such abstract conceptions as absolute intelligence, or illimitable being, but a living, personal God, a spirit infinite and eternal, separate from matter, creating all things by the word of His power, and by whom all things consist. It is not simple being, and then it is Brahm; it is not pure intelligence, and then it is Buddh; it is not a destroyer, and then it is Siva; it is not a restorer, and then it is Vishnaⁱⁿ; it is not a malignant hater, and then it is Kali; it is not an arbitrary and mighty ruler, and then it is Allah; but it is the one living and true God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises and doing wonders: one God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, infinitely blessed in the communion of the Trinity, the living Jehovah, maker of Heaven and Earth, the creator, preserver, Redeemer; the lawgiver, ruler and judge, the everlasting father and unfailing portion of all who trust, and love, and worship him.

2. *Christianity is the only religion for man, since it alone reveals his true character and his future destiny.* What satisfactory accounts do Pagan theologians give of the human soul; who now consider it a spark emitted from the divine essence. and now regard it as matter in its most sublimated and ethe-

rial form? Plato sought to establish, by probable reasoning, the soul's immortality; yet with arguments so airy and unsubstantial that Cicero mournfully confesses they eluded his grasp, so soon as the book containing them was laid aside. In what way the soul survives the shock of death, and whether in the world of spirits it will have an individual subsistence as on earth, were left wholly unresolved. The more positive and adventurous theosophy of the East, gave a reply indeed, but a reply which reduced all religion to emptiness and air. In their scheme, after countless transmigrations, the soul was stripped of all limitation and individuality, and merged into the substance of the Deity, as a drop of water loses itself in the abyss of ocean.

While the Pagan conscience too, like Laocoon in the embrace of the serpent, was writhing under a sense of the divine displeasure, what rational explanation was given of sin? Blindly conscious only of disruption from God, and of the power of evil, their utterances were only the inarticulate groans of a sick man under the oppression of frightful dreams. Knowing nothing of a perfect moral law, impressed upon us as the guide of our nature, which man, in the exercise of his freedom as a responsible being had violated, sin was nothing but physical evil, arising from the soul's alliance with matter. Instead of being the corruption and defile-

ment of the moral nature, it was only the thralldom of spirit in the fetters of material bondage. Redemption was only deliverance from this hateful alliance—the only purgation was metempsychosis; and salvation but a name for final re-absorption into Deity. Their moral discipline of necessity, either diverged into a gloomy asceticism on the one hand, or else apostatized into lawless licentiousness on the other.

What light again did Pagan theology shed upon the awful mystery of death? What hand lifted the dark curtain which falls upon the stage of human life, showing whither the actors have fled? A little chattering nonsense of Charon and the river Styx, and the shades seen fitting through the gloom of Tartarus, is all that we find written upon the leaves of the ancient sibyl. When the sepulchral lamp revealed the body “clothed with all the dishonors of corruption,” what heathen gospel “brought life and immortality to light?” The total ignorance which prevailed as to the resurrection of the body, vitiated the whole Heathen doctrine of a future state. Even Cicero, illuminated as he was with all the science and philosophy of antiquity, declared himself unable to conceive of ^{an} embodied spirit. And take away the retributions of a future world, what sanctions has religion with which to bind the consciences of men, putting her police into every hu-

man breast? "There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and through the scent of water will bud and bring forth boughs like a plant:" but which of the ancient augurs interpreted these analogies to the soul exclaiming in the torture of despair, "If a man die shall he live again?". Socrates could say, when asked by Crito, how he should be buried, "as you please, provided I do not escape out of your hands," and enjoined upon his friends not to mourn over his lifeless corpse, as if it were Socrates. And this was the highest reach of Heathen Divinity, to disown a part of ~~one~~ being, and to the extent of one-half our nature, to consent to certain annihilation. How much more thrilling the language which the scripture put in the mouth of one who lived five centuries before Socrates; "My flesh also shall rest in hope, for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither shall thy holy one see corruption; thou wilt show me the path of life, in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." Christianity reveals one to us, of whom these words were prophetically uttered a full millenium before his advent, one who is the Lord of the Resurrection, who has redeemed both body and soul, and made them partakers of the same adoption; one who both died, and rose and revived, that he might be the Lord, both of the dead and of the living; and who henceforward proclaims

himself, in this royal style, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, and have the keys of hell and death." A religion then, whose inspired voice authenticates such truths, discloses the real nature of that disease it designs to heal, and brings the distinct doctrine of a future state to sanction its claims, is beyond competition. And upon this ground does christianity challenge your verdict as the only true religion of man on earth.

3. In the third place, I present you the argument of Isaac Taylor, though in a different form, *that Christianity rests upon a historical basis ; it is a religion of facts.* The religions of antiquity, from first to last, were wrought in the forge of metaphysical speculation. Destitute of a written revelation, and with only a confused traditive remembrance of God's primitive manifestations to the race, they substituted fancies for facts, and reasoned rather than believed. Thus from age to age their cosmogonies were weaved with endless toil, mysteriously unravelled as fast as they were spun. Not content to know God, simply as the creator of the universe, they would determine *how* He is the author of all existence. Postulating a process of development in the very nature of Deity, they construed all existence to be an efflux from the Supreme being. The necessary result of grounding

all religion upon reason rather than faith is the introduction of an aristocratic element. The worshippers are divided into two classes; the initiated or sacerdotal caste, whose theosophic speculations are locked up in hieroglyphic and esoteric symbols, and the unelect masses who must be content with a mythical faith expressed in concrete and sensible images. Thus was it ever impossible for these ancient systems to embrace the race of man in a close religious brotherhood: and during six thousand years the world has rocked uneasily between the desperation of unbelief, giving it over a prey to superstition, and the irrationality of superstition driving it back to infidelity.

Now, in glowing contrast with all this, consider the influence of Christianity as a religion of simple facts. It opens with the grand announcement that God is; and to all presumptuous inquiries into his essence, the rebuke comes with a voice of thunder from His pavilion, "Canst thou, by searching, find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as Heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know: the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.¹⁾ If men would inquire into the generation of the universe, it turns the eye of faith, beyond the whole series of outward phenomena, to God's infinite power, and contemplates

creation as a great incomprehensible fact: "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear." It does not suffer a metaphysical trinity like the Hindoo, Buddhist, or Platonic to be spun from human speculations, but baptizes us into the name of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It deals in no allegories of incarnate deities, but declares as fact, "the Lord was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld His glory." It reveals God, not as a blind fate, working concealed behind necessary laws of nature, but God moving up and down in Human History, "doing His pleasure among the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth." It proclaims an Historical Christ, who lived and wept and died among men, and who now reigns "a Prince and a Saviour at the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens."

It has a philosophy, indeed, which reason's golden reed shall take an eternity to measure, for the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal; a philosophy, whose depth shall not be plumbed this side the gates of heaven. Yet, as a religion, its basis is the testimony of God, accrediting the facts which are level to the peasant and the sage alike.—Both accept it upon the same grounds, and by the same faith in a divine testimony. Thus Christiani-

ty is competent to be, what Paganism is not, a catholic religion for man as man, embracing within its comprehension, sympathy, and holy fellowship, all ranks of social condition.

4. I draw your attention next to a point most material in this defence: *that Christianity is pre-eminently a religion of law, and alone solves the problems which arise from the Holiness and Justice of Jehovah.*

We cannot conceive of a finite moral being who is not, *ex vi termini*, a subject of law. If he is endowed with understanding, conscience and will, he must be cognizant of duty; and if he is a created being, his limited faculties require the guidance of a perfect standard of virtue. Angels in Heaven, and devils in Hell are neither of them exempt from the jurisdiction of law, simply because they have passed the bounds of probation. The blessedness of the one consists in the reward bestowed upon a perfect and confirmed obedience, as the penalty inflicted upon continual and hopeless transgression occasions the misery of the other. No heresy can be more glaring or fatal than that of the anti-nomian; who not only strikes at the authority of God, but repudiates also the nature which is given to man, and utterly destroys the morality of every human action. Here was the capital defect of Pagan theology. It regarded simply the abstract existence, or

else the natural perfections of the Deity. Its effort was by transcendental speculations to compass the mystery of his being, and then to explain how he can be the author of the material world so alien from his essence. Such inquiries were however rather physical than moral. The infinite purity of His nature formed no part of their conception of God; nor did they recognize a holy and immutable law which should express his claims upon the love and obedience of his subjects. Hence the grand problem of all religion, how God shall be "just and yet justify the ungodly," was never even proposed for solution. If hecatombs smoked on heathen altars, it was to placate the capricious anger of beings who were mighty, rather than to appease the holy wrath of a wise and righteous ruler.

Precisely the same fatal defect vitiates all the fond schemes devised by the Deists of the 17th and 18th centuries, who labored to trick off natural religion and to set her up as the rival of ^{mere} moral Christianity. Whether it be contended—as in one school seduced by a false analogy with human governments—that God may, in the exercise of mere supremacy, remit the penalty of the law and grant a general amnesty to transgressors; or, as in another, that simple repentance is a sufficient ground of Divine forgiveness; or, as in a third, that God may punish sin in part, either in the sufferings of this life or in the purgato-

rial torments of the next; in all alike, the holiness of God is sunk out of view—the law, which from its absolute perfection must be immutable, is cancelled—or else sentence is craftily commuted, by the substitution of another penalty than that which originally enforced its claims.

Yet this difficulty, which baffles alike the wisdom of the rationalist and the mystic, Christianity boldly and honestly meets in its doctrine of atonement. It openly proclaims the unchangeable holiness of the Divine law; but announces salvation to the sinner, through a perfect satisfaction rendered to its dreadful curse. It provides a surety for the sinner in the person of God's Eternal Son; who, being above the law, owes no obedience for himself; who, having infinite resources, is able to endure the Father's wrath; who being God, has power to lay down his life and power to take it again. His Divine substitute becomes a true man by supernatural birth of a virgin, and for man passes under the law to endure its curse. By legal union with Him, this obedience glorious above all other obedience in being rendered to both precept and penalty alike, is reckoned to the believer as though accomplished by himself. And in this righteousness which meets every challenge of the law, the sinner is henceforward acquitted and accepted before the Judge. Nor is this all. The transgressor's own conscience is purged

from a sense of guilt, and by this reconciliation with the law the very ground is removed upon which all accusations rested. Thus does Christianity build itself upon eternal principles of righteousness and of law; and justice no less than mercy becomes the guarantee of our salvation. Not more surely Gerizim and Ebal of old echo to each other across the vale of Shechem the blessings and the curses of the Mosaic covenant, than from Calvary to Sinai the fulfilled curse rebounds across a ransomed world. And in the porch of that august temple which Christianity has reared, wherein all nations shall gather to worship, the Justice and the Grace of God shall forever stand, the Jachin and the Boaz, the pillars of stability and strength as well as the glory and the ornament.

5. I ascend another step in reaching to "the height of this great argument," when I say that *Christianity is the only religion which provides for the renovation of our nature, in its doctrine of the new birth.*—Sin has not only deranged our relations to God, but has cut us off from Him who is the only source of the Creature's holiness, corrupting all his nature.—Even supposing reconciliation with law to be effected, how is this new difficulty to be met? Should the sinner by a judicial decree or by the exercise of arbitrary power be elevated to Heaven, the necessary repulsion between his defilement and the Divine

purity would precipitate him even from the steps of the eternal throne, or change the joys of Heaven into instruments of torture :

“ ————— From the bottom stirs
The Hell within him ; for within him hell
He brings, and round about him, nor from hell
One step, no more than from himself, can fly
By change of place.”

What remedy does the intellectual idolatry of the Deist, or the grosser idolatry of the Pagan, provide for this exigency ? Neither the cold ethics of the one, nor the bloody rites of the other, undertake to rectify the inward nature of man and to fit it for obedience or worship. Hence communion of soul with God forms no part of either scheme. It is as though a pardon should be brought after the poor criminal lies cold under the executed sentence of the law. The form of a man is there, with all the organs perfect and entire, but no more instinct with life. Just here Christianity interposes with its divine remedy. An almighty energy quickens once more that prostrate form ; and the supple organs play again, obedient to the mysterious principle of life, which actuates and moves the whole. Were I called upon to select a single verse from the Bible upon which the last issue of Christianity should be staked, the oracle of Christ to Nicodemus should be that pass of Thermopylae where its truth should stand or fall : “ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, ex-

cept a man be born again, he shall not see the kingdom of God." And with the air of one who is assured of his triumph, I would proclaim the challenge of Isaiah of old: "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations; tell ye and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together; who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? Have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me." Ah! this is the glory of the Gospel, that it reveals the religion of a sinner. It not only tells of a great propitiatory sacrifice, smoking ever upon the altar in the outer court, and proclaiming "without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin;" it not only tells of a great High Priest within the veil, interceding before the mercy-seat, with hands which never, like those of Moses, hang down: But it tells of this almighty Spirit, who comes with a silent, yet resistless power, into the sanctuary of the human soul; who quickens the sinner dead in trespasses and sins, breathing into him a new life of holiness and love; who pours into his understanding the beams of light from his own glorious person; who turns the affections back in their flowing current, till they empty into the bosom of God; who sways the will not by an external necessity, but magnetizing it through the operation of grace, "makes it willing

in the day of his power," so that in its own polarity it points freely to the law of God, and "every thought is brought into captivity and obedience of Christ." It tells of the same Spirit, who dwells forever within the renewed soul, and brings the newborn nature to maturity of growth; and finally satisfies its craving for an immortality of virtue, by translating it to the presence of God, where in the immediate vision of the Good it is confirmed, like the angels, indefectibly in holiness. Produce now from the records of deism or of priestcraft, one form of religion, which professes to beget the sinner anew in the holy image of God, and I will be staggered by a rising doubt; but until you shall do this,

" I'll bind the Gospel to my heart,
And call *them* vanity and lies."

6.—Christianity will set up but one more plea in her defence, *that of being the only system of religion, to absolute certainty of whose truth it is possible to be brought.* By the inward work of God's Spirit upon the soul, in regeneration and sanctification, all the doctrines of revelation are brought within the range of experience, so as to be confirmed by the testimony of consciousness. Truth is collected in the Scripture, as light is gathered into the sun.—Yet the sinner's mind, like the eye of the blind, is closed against its rays. If now the Holy Ghost re-

moves the veil which has shrouded it in darkness, quickens it enfeebled by sin, renders it congenial with the truth it is to receive, and then without the aid of artificial symbols, so to speak, impresses that truth nakedly upon the mind, there must be a correspondence between the objective revelation on the one hand, and the subjective illumination on the other. Not more certainly does the seal leave its impression upon the softened wax, than do the doctrines of grace upon the believer's heart. There is not one so abstract and unpractical, but it is the type or mould of christian feeling : nor an emotion of the renewed heart, but is awakened by its kindred truth. Is it not obvious that such a system admits a certainty of conviction which is attainable in no other? It is seen not only in the direct light which beams from itself, but in the reflected light of human consciousness. The truths are known, because felt as well as seen. And there was a deep though unsuspected philosophy in the reply of the unlettered peasant to the subtle sceptic: "Sir, I cannot answer your arguments," but, laying her hand on her breast, "I feel here that the Bible is true." We *know* the doctrine of regeneration to be true because we are quickened, who before were dead in sins. We *know* the doctrine of spiritual illumination to be true; for "whereas we were blind, now we see." We *know* union with Christ to be true, be-

cause conscious that we walk by faith in Him. We *know* adoption to be true; for the spirit of sons is spread abroad in our hearts, crying Abba, Father. We *know* justification by faith to be true; because we who believe have peace with God, which passeth all understanding. Thus we may pass around the entire circle of christian doctrine, and like the notes marked upon the keys of a well tuned instrument, the sanctified heart will give to each its own responsive sound. He, who by the teaching of the Holy Ghost has felt the power of all truth in his own soul, comes through experience to "the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." While, too, the written word reproduces itself in the heart of the Christian, it is the perfect standard by which all the secret exercises of that heart are to be judged; precisely as in the Photographic art, the light beaming from an object draws the image on the plate, while the original remains to test the accuracy of the resemblance. In this way an important check is imposed upon the wayward and licentious tendencies of the imagination. The mystic cannot easily mistake his dreams and reveries for the inspirations of the Spirit; for, as He works outwardly from the scripture upon the mind, we have a law

and a testimony to which these inspirations can be referred; and if "they be not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

It is time, young gentlemen, to pause and see whether the swelling tide of this discussion has drifted us. I have not spoken in vain if you are brought to a practical conviction, that you cannot dispense with all religion. You may select any one of the systems which you shall find ticketed and labelled in the vast museum of history. You may dream among the mystics of India, or divine among the star-gazers of Chaldea. You may sacrifice to the sun upon the hill-tops of ancient Persia, or veil yourselves before the consecrated fire of the Magi. You may wreath garlands around the sacred Bull of Egypt, or dance with amulets and fetishes among the devil-worshippers of Caffraria; or turning with contempt from these gross and obsolete idolatries; you may echo the profane wit of the French Encyclopedists, or boast in the starched proprieties of intellectual Deism. You may look forth upon this beautiful world and exclaim, in the Pantheistic language of Pope,

" All are but part of one stupendous whole,
Whose body nature is, and God the soul:"

or, you may write your own inscriptions upon the altar reared by natural religion to "the unknown God." You may cast aside all the forms of worship

and walk the steep path of earthly ambition, to wear the thorns with which heroes are crowned; or you may go tripping through the world, a devotee of pleasure, to the sound of timbrel and harp; or, standing under Heaven's high arch, with your eye upon the stars, you may proclaim in this vast, yet vacant temple of Jehovah, "there is no God!"—yet still you shall not escape from the imperishable instincts of your religious nature. Crush out as you may, this element which most allies you to angels and to God, in secret hours you must hear awful whispers from an oracle within, warning you that you can only become an apostate from God, by being first an apostate from yourself.

I have come from afar to ask you solemnly, which of these religions do you accept as yours? If you reply with Peter in the text, to whom shall we go but to Christ, who has these words of Eternal life, I thank you for the answer; but have you considered what is involved in the acceptance of Christianity? Resting as an historical religion, upon the testimony of God himself, given in an authentic revelation, it is not to be received by an easy traditional faith, as an ancestral heir-loom. To appropriate an argument of Dr. Chalmers upon the being of God, if Christianity only presents you with a presumption of its truth, this binds you to a close and earnest investigation of its evidences, that you may

come to an absolute conviction of that truth. Jehovah is a jealous God, who will not give his glory to another: and He claims this homage of our intellect, that the system of faith of which His veracity is the pledge, should be received only upon that personal conviction which flows from a knowledge of its contents, and an examination of its claims; such a conviction as shall forever exclude even the possible rivalry of other systems. Especially is this demand just upon you, who have here been taught those secrets of nature, which science breathes but to few, and which are the foot-prints of the christian argument for the being of a God.—You who have conversed with Plato in the Academy, and with Zeno in the Porch—you who, with your hands upon the records of learning and philosophy treasured in these archives, are so competent to institute the comparison which I have drawn to-night between the religion of God and of men:—upon you, it is specially incumbent to give in your adhesion to christianity, not upon a traditional and hereditary trust, but upon the faith of the intensest personal conviction.

Remember, too, that Christianity is not to be accepted simply as a philosophy, explaining the otherwise insoluble problems of human life. If it were nothing more than this, the Bible would still deserve to be studied above all the tomes of human

wisdom, under which our bookshelves groan ; for it contains the utterances of Divine wisdom. But the Gospel reveals not a philosophy which explains man's wants, but a religion which meets them. It proposes reconciliation with God through an atonement which satisfies all the requisitions of law ; and it renews and sanctifies the soul, fitting it for an eternal and blissful communion with its Maker, in this world and in that which is to come. If in this aspect you accept it, you can only do so by an inward experience of its power. Let me impress upon you this distinction. The Scriptures may be to you only the grove of Academus, and Jesus Christ but a diviner Socrates.

Initiated in all the mysteries of its philosophy, you may wither and die whilst standing at the very fountain of life. Remember, I pray you, that if Christ be a teacher, his are "the words of Eternal Life." You must touch the hem of his garment and be healed. You must be sprinkled with His blood, so as "to have no more conscience of sins." You must have fellowship with him in his death and resurrection. You must experience the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost : or, nominally Christian as you may be, you will sink from the very shadow of the Saviour's cross into eternal perdition. Young gentlemen, I speak these words in deep solemnity of soul. Through

your partial kindness I am here to-night: but I am here as a minister of God, to speak His words upon which the destiny of souls is suspended. This night has the kingdom of God come nigh unto you: and if you receive it not, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for you. "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see, therefore your sin remaineth." "But I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak." "To God and to the Spirit of his grace I commend you." May his guardian providence shield you in this life, from sorrow and from sin! and may it be yours and mine to hear together the benediction of the last day, "come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"





