

CHAPTER II.

RELIGIOUS DISTINCTIONS.

RELIGION is another source of honourable distinctions, and those who are thus distinguished are the excellent of the earth, superior in real dignity to earthly nobles—richer, happier, and infinitely more blessed. For what are wealth, birth, and station,—what are titles, talents, literature, or human accomplishments—promotions in the church, the navy, the army, or the senate,—what indeed are thrones and sceptres, crown-lands and principalities, suns of gold and worlds of pearl, compared with the rich blessings and distinctions of eternal life? Who ever gained the *whole* world? Yet the whole world has been pronounced unequal to the soul. It is less than the soul, and cannot fill it; worse than the soul, and cannot improve it; has no relation to the soul, and cannot save it. If you could gain the whole world, how could you *keep* it? And if you could keep it, how could you *enjoy* it? And if you could enjoy it, how can you be sure you could enjoy it for *life*? And if you could enjoy it for life, how many might be the interruptions to its enjoyment! But suppose you could enjoy it without interruptions for life, “*What* is your life? Is it not even as a vapour which appeareth for a short time and vanisheth away?” And what would the whole world avail you at the *end* of life? You could not convert it into a tomb for the reception of your remains? You could not occupy it; you could not use it, neither could you carry it away with you. Viewed in relation to the grave, to the judgment seat, to eternity, to time, to the

soul, and even to the body, the world and the things of the world are all labelled with this affecting scripture—“Vanity of vanities! all is vanity!” Connect with man’s immediate being his present accountability, his future resurrection, and his final destiny; and then estimate the worth of what he now possesses. Alas! how many profound geniuses, penetrating philosophers, wealthy capitalists, able statesmen, naval and military heroes, titled noblemen, poets, priests, and crowned heads will awake in eternity, each wishing he had been only an idiot, an infant, or a brute, that he might not have been rendered wretched for *ever* by the possession of talents neglected or abused!

We have spoken of moral virtue as a source of honourable distinction, and as a source open to all; but let it not be inferred from the encomiums passed upon its honours, that virtue is grace, or morality religion. Morality, any more than intellectuality, or immateriality, is not *spirituality*. Moral virtue is a *quality*, but it is not a *spiritual* quality. It may be called *religion*; but it is not *spiritual* religion. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and therefore spiritual; while that which is born of the flesh, is flesh, and therefore fleshly; “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit do mind the things of the spirit. “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be *spiritually* minded is life and peace.”¹ The religion of moral virtue has a certain value; but it is neither the new birth nor a substitute for it. And to mistake a system of morality, as some have done, for the gospel of Christ as expounded by the pauline doctrines of justification by faith, and of salvation by grace without works, is to commit a capital error.

The true foundations of morality are based upon religion. But between the religion of nature and the religion of sovereign grace, there is an incalculable difference; a difference in their respective natures, objects, mediums, principles, and economies—a difference too great for the balance to be ever determined.

¹ Rom. viii. 5, 6.

A similar distinction must be made between nominal and vital christianity. Vital christianity is an inward spiritual principle; not a speculation, an hypothesis, a catechism, or a ceremony. It has its deep foundations in the heart, and is more of a sentiment than a theory. A man may change his religion, but then if his religion change not him, wherein is he materially benefited? He may have religion enough to save his *credit*, but if he has not enough to save his *soul* what does it all amount to? A man may say, I have morality and you have theology, will his morality *save* him? Another says, I have theology and you have faith, will his theology save him? Another exclaims, I have faith and you have works, will his faith save him? While a fourth, in breathless haste, announces his belief in the scriptures, the creed, the catechism, the Book of Common Prayer, and his practical subjection to their authority; forgetting that "the devils, also, believe and tremble," and that works without grace resemble chaff without wheat, or blossom without fruit. Spiritual religion is a fine thing, but very scarce. Alas! how many pretendedly spiritual people think and talk *about* it, yet live and walk *without* it?

Speaking generally, nominal christians mistake greatly the nature and extent of human depravity, the official agency of the Holy Spirit, and the plan of salvation. Of the person, worth, work, loveliness, and mediatorial glories of Christ, they think but little and know less. Nor are the practical parts of religion well understood by them; for if a man does but profess a sort of general respect for what is vaguely called religion, avoid the grosser vices of mankind, commend morality, attend public worship, and practise a few cheap charities, they hold that such a course implies true religion, comprehends the whole duty of man, and secures a person against the contingencies of eternity. The value of distinguishing truth, too, is mostly depreciated by nominal professors; for if the *christian religion* is but admitted to be true, the admission is called christianity, and the non-importance of everything else in-

ferred ; as if religion was indifference and christian charity a polyglott of inconsistencies ! But the most favourite, and therefore the most pernicious delusion is, the darling dogma of *priestly* efficacy :—a dogma received in all ages, and adopted by all people. For only a short period did christianity exclude it from its sphere of operations. It became incorporated with primitive theology. The reformation was not equal to its expulsion ; and it reigns like a lion rampant in all the established forms of religion throughout Christendom. The doctrine suits all parties, and is too luscious to be lost—too potent to be expelled. By putting the priest in the place of God, royal criminals, learned profligates, and accomplished assassins, with offenders of every grade, obtain the remission of sins according to the practice of the priest. The church of Rome has its priesthood, its altars, and its sacrifices. It enjoins auricular confession, and claims power on earth to forgive sins. And, in what has been presumptuously styled “ the best constituted church in the world ”—the Church of England as by law established—priestly absolution is administered, sacramental efficacy relied on, and very gross delusions fondly cherished. Episcopal ordination, apostolical descent, christening, confirmation, eucharistical efficacy, priestly absolution and christian burial, are either mediums of grace or grounds of hope !

National hierarchies are nurseries for nominalists : emporiums of vice and delusion. They are national depots for nominal christians. For nominal christians they were formed, and for nominal christians exclusively. There may be real christians in them, just as there were saints in Cæsar’s household ; but the palace was not built by the saints, nor for them ; neither did the saints constitute the household. We doubt not but there are real christians in state ecclesiastical establishments ; but then these establishments were not framed for *their* advantage, are not adapted to *their* condition, and, therefore, not suited to promote their spiritual interests. Real christians are *there* ; but they are there by accidents contrary to the design of the legislature, against the

spirit of the hierarchy, without the sanction of Christ, and to the great scandal of religion as well as imminent peril of themselves. Let them come out. There is a way out as well as a way in, and they are not compelled to remain.

It must not, however, be inferred from these remarks, that nominal christianity is confined within the walls of national churches, or that state-paid hirelings are the only ecclesiastics who administer flattering unction to unborn souls. It is reasonable to suppose that secular churches should contain more nominal christians than other churches, seeing they were formed as a shelter for persons of this description, and given as a bonus to them. For a similar reason it must be inferred that a state-paid cleresy will naturally be more concerned about the privileges and dignity of their order than about the salvation of the cross, concerning which it would be an inanity to suppose they cultivate any very deep acquaintance. At the same time, while on the one hand there are real christians among nominal ones, on the other hand there are nominal christians among real ones; and both in the Establishment and out of it, there is not lacking a large class of persons who are as excessive in criminal passions as they are deficient in the exercise of benevolent dispositions. They habituate themselves to envy, malice, slander, sensual indulgence, and nearly every criminal passion. They are proud, heady, high-minded, covetous, and full of all unrighteousness; while they are remarkable for their want of charity, kindness, meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, and other graces of the Spirit. More especially are they devoid of humility, lowliness of mind, brotherly love, and devotional obedience; in which, more than in other things, the vitality and visibility of religion may be said emphatically to consist.

It must then be no longer assumed that the distinction between morality and religion is a distinction without a difference, or at most but a minute difference. The distinction it will be perceived is far otherwise; and the difference as obvious and palpable as that

which subsists between a cobweb and a fishing-net. It is a difference which involves the whole theory of morals, places religion under spiritual aspects, and tests the pretensions of men to endless felicity. It is a distinction which speaks out, and which tells these refined moralists—these flimsy nominalists, that their religion is *not* religion; that their christianity is not christianity; that it lacks the radical principle, is deficient in its grand constituents, and, therefore, incompetent for the sublime purposes of salvation. Need more be said? “Lo! this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it and know it for thy good.”²

Nevertheless, if we must be a little more explicit, and must wander a little from our main point for the sake of the young christian, whom at all times we would instruct patiently, tenderly, and even circuitously—if, for his sake we must curve a little, we would say, religion is not national, nor territorial, nor parochial, but *individual*; and when we speak of it as implying salvation, we speak of it as a thing of life, motion, and enjoyment. In this sense, religion is not carnal but spiritual. It does not lie in the flesh, but in the spirit; and it is therefore a spiritual principle—infused, implanted, or incorporated, by the Spirit of God. It influences both the head and the hands; but as both the head and the hands may be influenced without this spiritual principle, we say, religion, as involving the essential principle, is neither a ceremony nor a creed—a notion nor a habit. It consists not in methodism, nor in mannerism; in times nor in seasons. It is not intellect, nor conscience, nor moral sentiment, nor outward worship. Neither is it produced by these, singly or collectively, though it may be united to them all, and manifested more or less through them all. Viewed as a quickening principle, it is neither mechanical nor periodical, local nor provincial. With all these it may be associated; but from all these it must be distinguished, and from all these it differs. Nor is it merely an *appearance*. It is indeed visible as well as real, and so it should be; yet

² Job v. 27.

its visibility is not its identity, but a consequence of it. And here it may be remarked, the *native* visibility of religion differs as widely from the wear and gear of worldly hierarchies, and the cast-off finery of some mountebank dissenters, as the appearance of a village quakeress differs from that of Taglioni on the stage, or Victoria on the throne.

Spiritual religion has its springs in spiritual life. It exists in the moral affections like a fountain, pervades the whole economy of mind, and distributes the secret gushings of life throughout the little world within. Spiritual in its nature, in its origin, and in its attributes, it is of necessity the same in its cravings and tendencies,—the same in its perceptions and sympathies,—the same in its appetites and enjoyments. It creates a gust for spiritual food, produces a seeking frame of heart, and brings the soul into fellowship with God. Being, moreover, accompanied by the agency of the Holy Spirit it conducts its subjects into the way of life, gives access to the throne of grace, the blood of sprinkling, and the gospel feast. This being the case, true believers are made free from the law of sin and death, are rendered independent of the will of a priest, stand in no need of sacramental efficacy, nor of human absolution; but are well content to trust the will of the Father in election, the worth of the Son in redemption, and the work of the Spirit in sanctification.

This, however, involves the humbling doctrine of human nothingness, the entire prostration of our moral nature, and the utter insufficiency of all its willings and runnings, which, though grateful to the unsubdued and half-enlightened soul of man, are notwithstanding of no value in the sight of God. Upon close examination they are found to have their origin in the “will of the flesh,” to seek the interests of the flesh, and to aim at the enthronement of an unconquered selfishness.

To mistake the gaudy trappings of worldly worship, or the carnal splendour of aristocratic formalism for the inward workings of spiritual life, is to mistake a may-

pole for a man. To place bodily actions in the room of evangelical sentiments, is to substitute animal mechanics for spiritual operations,—the mechanics of life for the dymnaics of mind, or the motions of an automaton for the stirrings of rational existence. Without a vitalizing principle the performance of external duties is not the religion of the Son of God. It is not living in the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, following the Spirit, nor minding the things of the Spirit. It is not worshipping God in Spirit and in truth, which is the worship he requires. He who is a Spirit will have a spiritual service in which the homage of the heart is embodied; for he “looketh to the heart,” and takes all for nothing where he sees not this. To be satisfied with the externals of religion, and to have only a legal principle in the performance, is not rejoicing in Christ Jesus and having no confidence in the flesh. Outward services are the drapey of religion—the terrestrial habiliments of a divine principle; and to mistake the *cultis* of religion for religion itself, is to mistake the costume for the individual, or the body for the soul. Outward services, standing in the revealed will of God, have doubtlessly their uses, or they would not have been divinely prescribed,³ but

³ Let not the young christian stumble at these remarks. There are two classes of persons with whom we have no sympathy—viz. the ultra-spiritualists and the ultra-ritualists. The former, conceiving that all religion lies in principle, discard exterior services; the latter, supposing all religion to consist in a code of duties, exclude the vitalizing principle. Both classes are at fault. Both classes err. One from not knowing the scriptures; the other from not knowing the power of God. External worship is adapted to the internal principle; and serves not merely to employ it but to improve it. Religious duties are designed not merely to *direct*, but to *excite*; not merely to *guide*, but to *breed* religious feelings. They are *aids* as well as *modes*; *incentives* as well as *mediums*. They are not grace, but they are the *means* of it; they are not life, but they are the garments of life; and what is life without them? How can it act, stir, or breathe, without some connexion with the human and outer systems? And as the body is not merely the *case* of life, nor yet simply the medium of its expression, but acts upon the life which it contains, and excites it; in like manner the scriptural duties of christianity, are not *merely* the case, or covering of religious principle—the outward tissue of an in-

they are no more devotion itself than the breathings of the lungs, or the tones of an organ; and he who distinguished between the repentance of the Ninevites and the lowing of oxen with the bleatings of sheep, distinguishes between the actings of mind and the exterior of worship. Heartless attendances upon prescribed religious duties, and the merely rational feelings which sometimes accompany them, are but imitations of spiritual life, which, however cleverly executed, are still imitations and nothing more. They are paintings of life, which, though painted to the life, are not the life that is painted. They exhibit the semblance of a spiritual religion, but it is *only* the semblance, for reality there is none. A religion stereotyped on the brain, or printed prayer-book wise, is not the religion which God accepts. Mechanical contrivances embodied in legislative machinery may have the merit of ingenuity; but the spirit of the living creatures is not in the wheels, and God-moved hearts are no part of government inventions. A merely formal religion is utterly useless for all the purposes of salvation; and worldly formalists, however coated, or by whomsoever sainted, are no more than shapes or shadows. They lack the vital spiritual element—"the spirit of life in Christ Jesus." They are professors but not possessors; sinners but not saints. They have a name to live, but are dead; the form of godliness, but not the power. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him," being alienated in their hearts, without faith, destitute of love, and even "dead in trespasses and sins."

Let not these remarks be deemed severe. They are not intended to be so? They are meant to be as friendly in admonition as they are faithful in descrip-

ward spiritual principle, or the media of due expression; they also tend to stir up the spiritual principle, promote its workings, and subserve its interests. They are nothing without the spiritual principle; what is the spiritual principle without them? The body is nothing without the soul; but can the soul act *without* the body? Our clothes are not our bodies; but what would our bodies be without them?

tion. But what is religion without *life*? Can you conceive of a fire without heat, a sun without light, or a soul without sentiment? Can you put warmth into a painted fire, scent into an artificial flower, life into a drawing, or mind into a piece of statuary? You cannot make these things more than what they are; and to take them for more than they are worth is to practise upon the understanding.

True, there is much in a name; but names are not *natures*, neither do they change the natures to which they are applied. You may call a painted fire a real fire, but will that make it burn? You may denominate an artificial nosegay a real one, but will that perfume it? You may call a drawing Gabriel, but will that render it angelic? You may designate a marble bust Napoleon, but will that make it talk—will it make it breathe, and think, and act? In nowise. We may alter the names of things, but we cannot by so doing alter their natures, seeing the predicaments of their being remain unchanged by a change of terms. They continue just what they were, and nothing more, however we may pervert language and violate common sense. In like manner we may call nominal christians real christians, but will that make them so? We may call formal worship spiritual worship, but will that make it so? Oh! no. A worldly worshipper *is* a worldly worshipper, and nothing more; a mere formalist *is* a formalist, and nothing more; a dead man *is* a dead man, and nothing more. We may nickname men and things; but God calls proper things by proper names—righteous things by righteous names—and wicked things by wicked names. A believer he calls a believer, an unbeliever he calls an unbeliever; and respecting both classes he says, “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.” We may think a part of this severe, but there it stands, and there it will stand as long as the world stands. We may change men’s names, but if God does not change their hearts, wherein will they be benefited? We may call them christians, but

if God does not make them christians, they will continue in their sins. We may say they are believers, but if God says they are not, how are we to reverse his decision? We may recognize them by names of honour, but will that recognition make them honourable? Is the perversion of language the conversion of nature?

To believe the gospel as a *scholar*, and to receive it as a *sinner*, are very different actions of mind arising out of very different states of being. Assenting to the truth because it convinces my understanding, is one thing; embracing it because it suits my condition, is another. In the one case I treat the gospel in the character of an *intellectual being*; in the other as a *condemned criminal*. In one character it is an *outward*, in the other an *inward* witness. In one relation it reaches my *understanding*; in the other it touches my *conscience*. The literal evidence satisfies my *reason*; the spiritual evidence sanctifies my *nature*. By the first I ascertain its *authenticity*; by the second I perceive its *spirituality*. In the one case I *see*; in the other case I *feel*. My intellect discovers the *plan* of salvation; my faith receives the *salvation* planned. What in one point of view I *judge* to be true, in another I *know* to be so. That which in one sense belongs to the *eye*, in the other belongs to the *heart*. In one case the understanding works upon the *truth*; in the other the truth works upon the *affections*. Intellectually viewed *I* sit in judgment upon the truth; spiritually considered the truth sits in judgment upon *me*. As a *reasoner* I may be said to penetrate the truth; as a *sinner*, the truth penetrates me. In one instance I examine like a *philosopher*; in the other I am humbled as a *transgressor*. As a scholar, I look for *evidence*; as a criminal, I seek *forgiveness*. In one case I resemble a botanist in search of plants, or an idler who wants amusement; in the other a dying patient inquiring after a physician, or a hungry man begging bread. As a *verbalist*, the words of *scripture* are signs and sounds; as a *spiritualist*, they are spirit, and they are life; for the gospel acts upon us according

to what there is in us, and not according to what there is not. The light of the gospel fills my understanding; but the grace of the gospel feeds my regenerate mind. Under one condition the gospel is a *dry light* which leaves me speculative and barren; in the other it is a dew from the Lord, which invigorates inward life and secures spiritual fruitfulness. By my understanding, I know the gospel in the *letter*; by my faith, I know it in the *spirit*. As a nominalist, my understanding is the only ground of my knowledge; as a realist, my experience teaches me. In the former capacity, the gospel is the word of God only; in the latter, it is the power of God unto salvation.

These distinctions are important. But to understand religion in the spirituality of its principles, the depth of its workings, the simplicity of its character and the variety of its blessings, we must displace the millinery by which it has been tricked out, pluck off the counterfeit brilliants by which it has been distinguished, and remove cart loads of screens, habits, and ornaments. The accumulated inventions of imaginative minds,—comprehending all the garish frippery, all the fancied finery, and all the formidable foolery, of ages, artists, and allegorists—of priests, poets, and popes, must be carefully and even anxiously separated therefrom. The ingenious manufactures of religious shrine makers, who, counting gain godliness, have actually treated religion as a thing of sense and form, dealt in it as an article of trade and commerce, converted it into a state pageant, a pantheon, or a puppet show—must be eschewed. “Curious books” must be burnt, “curious arts” dispensed with, and whole bales of ecclesiastical folly seized as contraband goods,—no matter by whom manufactured, nor by whom imported. ‘Ere we can see religion “as it is,” we must see it with a spiritual eye, in true humility of mind, and apart from human devices by which it has been so corrupted and so metamorphosed, that were Peter to go to Rome and Paul to come to London, neither of them would recognize the presence of that religion he once proclaimed and glorified.

When thus beheld religion will stand forth in the true revealments of spiritual worth, the splendors of divine brightness, and the loveliness of a beautiful simplicity. Men will then be prepared to value its surpassing excellencies, and to do homage to the divinity of its truth. All mental and moral distinctions; all worldly honours and pleasures; all the blandishments of life; all the august illusions of regal existence—the pious pomp of royal christenings, royal weddings, and royal burying too,—all, all will fade before the spiritual glory of the gospel, like the lamps of London or the hosts of heaven before the luminary of day. Then will it be unreluctantly confessed that the only dignified being in this world, is a christian; the only grand pursuit, eternal life; the only great attainment, conformity to Christ; and the only substantial thing, spiritual religion; without which man is but an appearance, a phantom, or a shadow.

“Since thou hast been precious in my sight thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee,”⁴ said the God of Abraham to his chosen seed. In the scriptures we read of the “precious things of heaven,”⁵ and the “precious things of the earth.”⁶ Of “precious jewels”⁷—“precious gifts”⁸—“precious gold”⁹—“precious onyx”¹⁰—“precious seed”¹¹—“precious ointment”¹²—“precious clothes”¹³—and “precious vessels;”¹⁴ but “the precious sons of Zion,”¹⁵ are far more precious than all these precious things put together. They are precious in the sight of God; and *his* estimate is free from error. If *he* therefore says they are precious, depend upon it they are so; for *his* judgment is invariably correct, and can never be affected by the petulant speculations or adverse opinions of worldly minded criminals.

Perfectly well do we know that the precious sons of

⁴ Isa. xliii. 4.

⁵ Deut. xxxiii. 13.

⁶ Ibid. xxxiii. 16.

⁷ 2 Chron. xx. 25.

⁸ Ibid. xxi. 3.

⁹ Ezra. viii. 27.

¹⁰ Job xxviii. 16.

¹¹ Psalm cxxvi. 6.

¹² Eccles. vii. 1.

¹³ Ezek. xxvii. 20.

¹⁴ Dan. ii. 8.

¹⁵ Lam. iv. 7.

Zion, "comparable to fine gold," are not unfrequently "esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter." But then the world is full of false calculations, and that which frequently is "highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."¹⁶ That which is the most valuable is not always the most valued, for men commonly judge after the flesh; and judging according to appearances they overlook the secret distinctions of grace, which are the only distinctions of essential importance. God speaks of his "hidden ones;"¹⁷ and we know who is always being quoted for having said,

" Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

This description is especially true of the people of God, who are the "excellent of the earth;" "men of renown," and of whom the "world is not worthy." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, heirs of the promise of eternal life, and "famous men," how were they estimated? Among their descendants were men of the finest character. How were they treated? *How?* Why many of them were tortured; "others had trials of cruel mockings and scourges, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented."¹⁸ Did the times *improve*? Hear the noblest men that ever lived: "we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men—even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of

¹⁶ Luke xvi. 15.

¹⁸ Heb. xi. 36—37.

¹⁷ Psalm lviii. 8.

all things unto this day.”¹⁹ Did the times mend from this period? Read ecclesiastical history: read the history of the Waldenses, in Italy; of the Huguenots, in France; and of the Inquisition, in Spain. Have they been better in our favoured country? Look into Neale’s history of the Puritans; Robertson’s history of Scotland; and Cobbett’s history of Ireland. Is human nature better schooled *now*? Not in the least. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and always will be, school it as you may. And as he who was born after the flesh, persecuted him who was born after the Spirit, even so is it now. Principles never change. *They* always operate alike, though under different modifications, and with different degrees of intensity according to the relative proportions of the compound into which they enter, or the aspects under which they present their manifestations. The world *is* the world, whether the church be the church or not. “The world cannot hate you,” said Christ to some of his hearers. Why not? Because they were so much *like* it. Did the world hate *him*? Indeed it did. And *why* did it hate him? Because he testified of it that “the works thereof are evil.”²⁰ A righteous man bears a righteous testimony; a righteous testimony is unwelcome to a world lying in the arms of the wicked one, and therefore really righteous men are sure to be disliked. “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you,” said the apostle John.²¹ Why not marvel? Because there is nothing marvellous in it. “If the world hate you,” said Christ, “ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”²² “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: and whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”²³ Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew

¹⁹ 1 Cor. iv. 9, 11, 12, 13.

²⁰ John vii. 7.

²¹ 1 Epis. iii. 13.

²² John xv. 18, 19.

²³ 1 John iii. 10.

he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."²⁴ "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."²⁵ This is the secret of the whole matter.

Men judge of character carnally, selfishly, partially, and perversely. How can it be otherwise? Can worldlings judge of spiritual excellencies when the god of this world has blinded their eyes, and they are led captive by him at his will? Such men compute the worth of character by tables framed upon wrong data. They try it by a wrong test, and measure it by a false standard. *Real* excellencies are hid from their eyes; and nothing but what is tangible, earthly, and coarse, enters into their calculations. They seek honour one of another, labour hard for the maintenance of futile distinctions, marvel much at men who declare plainly that they seek another country, and, as appearances govern worldly minds, they attach vast importance to externals, convert the world into a theatre and the church into a masquerade.

Let them do so. Spiritual christians are not of the world, nor need they wish to be. They know the world; and they are the only people who *do* know it, and who, therefore, are competent to decide upon it. They have tasted that the Lord is gracious; and have found in religion what they never found in the world—what the world has not, and what, therefore, the world cannot give. They are distinguished from the world, and are dignified above the world; for as the heavens are high above the earth, so are heavenly above earthly distinctions. What are temporal blessings when compared with spiritual? What is time when contrasted with eternity? What is a puddle to a fountain?—A drop to the ocean?—An atom to the globe?—A rushlight to the blazing sun?—Or a spark to the last conflagration? What comparison is there between a painting and a person, a peasant and a prince, an insect and an angel? Whether the quality,

²⁴ 1 John iii. 12

²⁵ Rom. viii. 7.

the quantity, the number, or the duration of spiritual and temporal distinctions be considered, the former present a noble and glorious contrast to the latter.

For example: what are the princes and aristocracy of a land, compared with the people of God? Why nothing; or next to nothing. At most they are but shapes and shadows; which, when laid in the balance—if in the balance they can be laid—are “lighter than nothing, and altogether vanity.” The saints are the real aristocracy of the countries in which they live. The proudest aristocracy on the face of the whole earth, are the aristocracy of Great Britain; but in point of real dignity and worth they are vanity itself, compared with the saints, the latchet of whose shoes they are not worthy to unloose. Believers are the true nobles and princes of the land. They are of the seed royal. Mansions, thrones, and kingdoms belong to them. All things are theirs, and for their sakes; and they are to reign with Christ upon the earth. When the proud distinctions of time shall fade into their primitive nothingness—when pampered pretenders shall resolve themselves into the original elements of their own mean insignificance—when tyrants and men-killers shall call for mountains and rocks to hide them—when earthly thrones and crowns, sceptres and diadems, titles and orders shall be swept away—when monarchs, nobles, statesmen, poets, heroes, and heroines, with all the magnates of worldly attraction shall have disappeared—when

“ The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, this great globe itself,
Yea, all that it inherits shall dissolve,
And, like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Leave not a wreck behind”—

When “ the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up”²⁶—“ *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun*

in the kingdom of their Father"²⁷—" *Then* shall ye turn and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not."²⁸

Let us examine the *origin* of believers. Who are they? From whom did they spring? What is their pedigree? Who shall declare their generation? We know that some of the lords of creation are distinguished by parentage and family association; but even here we must beg permission, as believers, to claim superiority of distinction, by stating that we belong to the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."²⁹ "Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God:"³⁰ named, registered, described, and recognized as such.

If it be asked, what constitutes us sons? our answer is—adoption and the new birth.

If it be inquired, "how do you *know* that you are adopted?" our answer is, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."³¹ Those that are led by the Spirit have the Spirit of adoption—the white stone—the new name—the hidden manna—an inward seal—a divine witness—an unction from above, and the earnest of their inheritance. They have a certificate copied from the heavenly register; for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant." We deny the parish register to be the book of life; and maintain, that between the registration of infants, episcopally aspersed, and the writing of men's names in "the Lamb's book of life," there is an infinite difference—a great gulph which the ages of eternity will be insufficient to fill. We hesitate to accept as bible truths the doctrines of apostolical succession, episcopal ordination, baptismal regeneration, and priestly absolution. We refuse to accept of aspersion for conversion, of christening for the new birth, of water for grace, of the sign of the cross for the cross itself, and of

²⁷ Matt. xiii. 43.

³⁰ 1 John iii. 1.

²⁸ Mal. iii. 18.

³¹ Rom. viii. 14.

²⁹ Eph. iii. 14, 15.

the priest for God Almighty. Not only do we hesitate and refuse,—we deny their validity. And not only deny them, we denounce them as suppositions the most monstrous, as pretensions the most preposterous: suppositions and pretensions unfounded alike in scripture, in reason, in philosophy, and in common sense: suppositions and pretensions containing a moral miasma, fraught with infinite mischiefs, more deadly than the deadly upas, more destructive than “the arrow that flieth by night, and the destruction that wasteth at noon day.” There are no elements of moral evil, no heresies upon the record of ages, no delusions more fatal, more general, or more to be deplored than what appear in the pestiferous principles now alluded to. We give utterance to the full conviction of our minds when we say, the whole is a contrivance of the “deceiver” of mankind,—the “god of this world,” who hath “blinded the eyes of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”³²

“Ye must be born again” is an aphorism which people professing religion, however worldly, will hardly think it decent to dispute. The question therefore is, how the doctrine can be explained so as to be effectually obscured: how the conditions of the will can be set aside, and the property enjoyed. Now this difficulty the christening theory meets. And it is a theory which appears to suit all classes, high and low, but more especially the aristocracy, who by virtue thereof get booked for another world as soon as they enter this; and who, by converting the parish register into the title deeds of an heavenly inheritance, contrive to monopolize both worlds without being fit for either, and are christians as well as gentlemen by accident or courtesy.

Blessed be God *we* have not so learned Christ. *We* have another kind of birthright, another pedigree—other witnesses than godfathers and godmothers, other sources

of proof, and other fountains of honour. "He that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."³³ As a nation the Jews received not Christ; "but as many as received him to them gave he power (or the right or privilege) to become the sons of God even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."³⁴ "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself;" *i.e.* the thing witnessed of, even eternal life. For, "this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath (received) the Son hath life; and he that hath not (received) the Son hath not life."³⁵ "Now are we the sons of God:" made partakers of his grace, and brought into his family.

Between civil and spiritual adoption there is this important difference:* the former implies no inward

³³ 1 John iv. 7.

³⁵ 1 John v. 9, 12.

³⁴ John i. 12, 13.

* The word adoption compounded of *ad* signifying to, and *optio* denoting choice, literally means, to choose, to add to a family by choice. The Greek word *uiothesia* means putting among the children—the exact form of expression used by Jeremiah when describing the free and sovereign grace of God towards the afflicted Hebrews. Thus explained, adoption denotes the participation of Jehovah's favour through the medium of relationship, based on the free and sovereign choice of the adopter. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." This is adoption as set out in the archives of eternity; and as emblazoned upon the escutcheons of the heavenly family. *Eternal* adoption marks the dispositions of the parent; *internal* adoption moves the affections, and produces the dispositions of children;

change, and therefore the adopted may bear no resemblance to the adopter either in features or dispositions; the latter always supposes likeness to him who has adopted. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren."³⁶ This conformity consists in those filial dispositions called the "divine nature,"³⁷ which bespeak parentage, and supply evidence that the adopted have "received the spirit of adoption whereby they cry, Abba, Father."³⁸ This being the case, we need not the testimony of ghostly sponsors, or a certificate from a parish clerk; for "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." What more can be necessary?

"Pronounce *me* gracious God a son!
 Call *me* an heir divine;
 I'll pity princes on the throne
 When I can call thee *mine*.
 Sceptres and thrones unenvied rise,
 And lose their lustre in my eyes!"

while *external* adoption denotes an addition to the church. In the first the dispositions denoted are paternal; in the second filial; and in the third fraternal. By eternal adoption we were brought into the family *above*; by external adoption into the church *below*. By God's act we were joined to the general assembly; by our own to some particular church. In each, there is the idea of addition by *choice*. There is the choice of the Father in election, of the Son in redemption, and of the Spirit in vocation; and there is the choice of the saints themselves; for outward adoption is a voluntary act in all the parties interested. Ancient adoption is *eternal*; inward adoption *experimental*; and outward adoption *practical*. What was done in eternity is made known in time, and the revelation is threefold—scriptural, experimental, and practical; or the word of God, the work of God, and the will of God. The first reveals a fact; the second operates upon a subject; and the third prescribes the rule of obedience. By the first a particular act is described; by the second that act is individualized and by the third it is developed.

³⁶ Rom. viii. 29.

³⁸ Rom. viii. 15.

³⁷ 2 Peter i. 4.

These dispositions have their root in what is emphatically styled the "life of God."³⁹ The production of this life is called the "seed of God," because it seminally contains the whole of spiritual existence. The development of this secret germ is called the new creature, and the act of bringing forth its subject into the kingdom of Christ, the new birth. Frequently it is denominated regeneration. It is a *generation*, because it is the production of a living existence—of a creature provided with spiritual appetites and faculties, designed to subserve the ends of its creation. *Re*, signifies again, and it is therefore called *regeneration*, or being generated *again*. The person thus regenerated has been born of man; but this is being born of God. It is receiving a second life; from the same Being indeed, but from the same Being in a new relation, under new aspects, and for new ends and uses. It is being born *again*, because (1) The subject born is the same being as to *identity*; it was the *man* who was born an infant in nature, it is the *man* who is born an infant in grace. It is not something born *in* him; but "ye must be born again:" not have something born *in* you, but be born *yourselves*. (2) Not only is a christian the same as to identity, he is the same as to physical structure, local properties, &c. (3) Something is added to rational and moral creatureship, so that the believer has two lives, natural and supernatural. (4) The superadded life is not a new *soul*; but new affections and desires are produced in the soul, thus evincing a divine change. (5) This change is called the "*new creature*." (6) The new creature is the *regenerate man*. (7) The regenerate man is not a *spiritual principle*, but a *spiritual being*—or a being *reformed*, or *refashioned*, *i.e.* formed again, or fashioned again by the plastic hand of Almighty God who works upon the soul by the presence of spiritual life. Nicodemus understood this new birth to consist in the regeneration of the body by a certain process in nature. It was on this point he erred, seeing it is the *mind* which experiences the change; for

³⁹ Eph. iv. 18.

“that which is born of the flesh (produced by fleshly agency) is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit (produced by spiritual agency) is spirit.”⁴⁰ This new birth, like the first birth, depends upon the sovereign will and pleasure of God, is a divine mystery, and therefore inexplicable. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”⁴¹

As that which is born is not life, but a creature endued with life—is not a principle but a person—in like manner a dead sinner whenever endued with spiritual life is transformed into a resemblance of the Divine Being. And this transformation not being according to nature, and therefore subsequent to the first birth, is called a “*new creature.*” For though no new soul, any more than a new body is produced, yet as this life is really new, as it is really a new power, existing in a new connexion, producing new results, and acting upon the intellectual and moral affections so as to control and employ them, the person thus circumstanced, sees, and feels, and acts, in a new manner. Therefore, if any man be in Christ (by a *vital* union) *he* is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”⁴²

This new birth is of infinite importance. It is essential to eternal life. In fact, it *is* eternal life, subjectively and incipiently understood. Nothing, therefore, can be a substitute for it; nothing can supply its place. For though in nature one thing may be equal to another, and though in grace this may be the same, it can never be said that nature is equal to grace, or moral sentiment to spiritual life. And as animal life is essential to animal existence, and the human compound to the human being, so are spiritual life to spiritual existence, and the work of the Spirit to the formation of christian character. There can be no equivalent for life; no sub-

⁴⁰ John iii. 6.

⁴¹ John iii. 8.

⁴² 2 Cor. v. 17.

stitution for essential properties. Nature is full of substitutions we know ; but where has Nature provided substitutes for the wings of a bird, the fins of a fish, or the legs of a quadruped ? Has God provided a substitute for reason in the mind, lungs in the body, or blood in the veins ? There is no substitute for natural, neither is there for spiritual life. "Ye *must* be born again." There is no alternative ; no substitute ; no equivalent.

And why should the new birth be thought unreasonable or unnecessary ? Were the fishes of the sea destined to become quadrupeds, a new creatureship would be held necessary. Were four-footed beasts and creeping things appointed to fly in the air, a transformation would be considered indispensable. And were certain human beings predestined to inhabit the sun, or float in the regions of space, who does not see that new adaptations would be necessary ? Were it the will of God to translate us to a distant region, where all the happy inhabitants had one sense less and two faculties more than we now possess, and all their senses and faculties different to ours, it is obvious that we should require a radical change adapting us to this new state of being, residence, employment, and felicity. To participate their happiness we must be made like them ; in other words we must become new creatures. The bodies of believers are to be taken to heaven, but not in their present state. Heaven is a spiritual place, and therefore their bodies are to be raised spiritual bodies ; *i. e.* bodies possessing adaptations and conformities to the heavenly world.

The physical world is full of adaptations and conformities ; so is the moral ; so also is the spiritual. Spiritual adaptations and conformities are as necessary as either physical or moral. To be where glorified saints are, to do as they do, and enjoy as they enjoy, we must be *like* them. If *like* them, we could partake of their happiness and engage in their employment. Now, they derive their happiness from God ; they are therefore *like* God ; and to be like them we must be like *him*. Hence, the importance, necessity, honour, ad-

vantage, and final blessedness of true godliness. For what is godliness, but God-likeness? And what is this but God's likeness—"The new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness?"⁴³ Except a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. To enter a spiritual world he must be made spiritual—he must have spiritual adaptations and conformities; and these spiritual adaptations and conformities are regeneration. The man who has them is born of God—is radically fitted for his inheritance and will finally possess it.

Here then is real dignity combined with real sanctity, which is more than worldlings can boast. A sanctified aristocracy might be a blessing to mankind; but where can you find one? *Religious* nobility is a fine thing; but alas! how few of our nobles have *this* nobility! "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." How is this? "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." And why has he done this? "That no flesh should glory in his presence."⁴⁴ This is the secret.

But what is it the world can boast? Is it *rank*? Some people, we know, talk of rank, and rank enough they are; but theirs is rank without reason, and shadow without substance. We too have rank. Rank of another kind, and of better quality. The mitre and the crown both belong to our order; for we are constituted kings and priests unto God.⁴⁵ We are a kingdom of kings; a land of priests; "a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."⁴⁶ Crowns are laid up for us; thrones are prepared for us. Crowns more splendid, thrones more potent, with empire more extended than earthly

⁴³ Eph. iv. 24.

⁴⁴ 1 Cor. i. 26, 29.

⁴⁵ Rev. i. 6.

⁴⁶ 1 Peter ii. 9.