

A FEW THOUGHTS.

BY A MEMBER OF THE BAR.

OCCASIONED BY A REQUEST

FROM

A BROTHER IN THE SAME PROFESSION.

PUBLISHED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

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EXTRACT FROM A LETTER ADDRESSED BY ONE MEMBER OF THE BAR TO ANOTHER, AND TO WHICH THESE PAGES MAY BE REGARDED AS AN ANSWER.

"You too, it seems, have joined the church. What does this mean? I have been inclined to think, that men of business could find better employment.

"Give me your honest thoughts on the subject."

ABOUT eighteen hundred years ago, a small tract of country bordering on the Mediterranean sea, and commonly known by the name of Palestine, or the land of Judea, and which now forms a part of Asiatic Turkey, was inhabited by a peculiar race of people, called the Jews. The northern and most barren province of this country, in consequence of its frontier position, was called Galilee of the Gentiles; and although the inhabitants were principally Jews, yet their habits, their language and accent, differed so essentially from those of their southern and more polished neighbors, that they were generally esteemed the most simple and ignorant part of the Jewish nation.

In the interior of Galilee there was a small lake of fresh water, about twelve miles in length, by some three or four in breadth, near the head of which was situated a small village called Capernaum, and which was supported chiefly by the fisheries on the borders of the lake. Shortly after the Roman empire had extended itself over the entire civilized world, and Herod, through the joint interest of Cæsar and Mark Antony, had been appointed king of Judea by

the senate of Rome, a person about thirty years of age made his appearance in the obscure village of Capernaum, as a public teacher in religion; or, as was supposed by some of his contemporaries, as a founder of a new religious sect. Of his early life little is known, except that he was born of poor and illiterate parents, who resided in the small town of Nazareth, about fifteen or twenty miles distant from Capernaum. His father was a carpenter, and it is probable that the son followed the same occupation, until about the time he removed to Capernaum, where he first commenced his public instructions in religion. As he travelled from place to place, on the shores of lake Gennesaret and its vicinity, he collected about him a few poor, illiterate fishermen and tent-makers, whom he called his disciples; a common appellation, in that age, for the followers of any sect in religion or philosophy. In the space of about three years, in company with his disciples, he visited most or all of the towns and villages in Palestine; but the doctrines he taught, and the principles he inculcated, were almost everywhere spoken against, and himself and his disciples were most commonly ridiculed and despised by the wise and learned men of that day. He at length came to Jerusalem, the metropolis of the Jewish nation, then one of the most populous and beautiful cities of the East, where he was arrested upon a charge of high treason against Cæsar, and of blasphemy against the Jewish religion, and was put to death as a malefactor. His disciples forsook him, and fled; and thus there seemed to be an end of the religion of Jesus Christ.

His disciples, however, within a few weeks after his death, reassembled at Jerusalem; and having made some preliminary arrangements, undertook to carry into execution one of the last commands of their Master—that, “beginning at Jerusalem,” they should “go into all the world,

and preach his Gospel to every creature.” The consequence was, that the religion of Christ revived and spread with renewed vigor, not only in Judea, the soil that gave it birth, but throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe; and it has ever since prevailed, to a greater or less extent, in most or all of the civilized nations of the earth; and at the present day, we see it exerting no small influence over quite a large portion of the human family.

In tracing the history of this system of religion, a fact somewhat remarkable presents itself at every step in our progress. It is, that in every age, and in every country where the religion of Jesus Christ has prevailed, his true disciples are, generally, found among the common and humbler classes of mankind; while few men of wealth and rank have embraced his principles, or submitted to his authority. That such was the character of the early Christians, we have authority much less questionable than that of Tacitus, the Roman historian of that period. Among the converts to Christianity in the first century, was a learned Jew, a contemporary of Tacitus, and a native of Tarsus, in Cilicia. He was a Roman citizen by birth, and resided in the city of Rome about two years, during the reign of the emperor Nero. He travelled throughout Asia, visited Spain, and, as some think, the southern parts of England; and from his writings, several of which are still extant, he appears to have been a man of talents, and an accurate observer of human character. In one of his letters, written at Ephesus, a city of Asia Minor, to his friends at Corinth, in speaking of the Christian religion, and of the character of its professors, he says, “Not many wise men of the world, not many mighty, not many noble are called.” This character, drawn by one of the ablest advocates of Christianity, has been confirmed by the experience of every succeeding age, throughout a period of eighteen hundred years.

It is true, that the wise men of the world have bestowed their honors upon the Christian name. In about three centuries from the death of Christ, not only the city of Rome, which Tacitus, in the first century, considered as polluted by the mere introduction of Christianity, but the whole Roman empire, with all its dominions, principalities, and powers, had renounced their national superstitions, and adopted the religion of Jesus Christ. The inhabitants of the earth have assumed the Christian name by nations; and Christian nations have congregated themselves into one vast dominion under the general name of Christendom. The rights of property, of reputation, and of life, have been made to depend upon the sacredness of an oath administered upon a book purporting to contain his history and the principles of his religion; and instead of the Olympiads of Greece, and the foundation of the "Eternal City," *Anno Domini* has become the landmark in the history and chronology of the world.

But how does it happen, that Christianity has so long been the prevalent religion among the most refined and opulent nations of the earth, and yet so few men of talents, wealth, and distinction, have embraced its principles, or acknowledged its authority?

The first inquiry obviously is, *What is Christianity?* What are its pretensions? Is it based upon the principles of common-sense? Does it open a field for thought and the exercise of intellect? Or is it adapted only to men of uncultivated minds, like the illiterate fishermen of Galilee, to whom it was first promulgated? Is it consistent with human reason and the dignity of human nature? Or is it, like the religious systems of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, a mere instrument in the hands of the crafty and the ambitious, to keep an ignorant and unruly populace in subjec-

tion? Will it stand the test of a sound, discriminating judgment? Or is it, like the Pagan and Mohammedan superstitions of our own day, grounded upon the fears of the timid and the passions of the sensualist? Is it based upon the principles of truth and justice? Or is it an imposture, palmed upon the credulous and superstitious by a cunning and ambitious priesthood?

In order to obtain a more satisfactory answer to these questions, it may be well to take a brief survey of *ourselves*, as rational and intelligent beings. Let a man, for a few moments, turn his thoughts upon himself. He finds that he has a body evidently material, but which assumed its form and advanced to maturity by the operation of causes over which he had little or no control. Within this body there is a mysterious something, called the soul, conscious of its own existence and identity, and possessed of powers capable of improvement and expansion beyond any assignable limits. It is the arbiter of all his movements, and uses the various members of the body, like instruments in the hand of a mechanic, to execute the purposes of its own will. It is the seat of a constant restlessness and solicitude; dissatisfied with what it has, and ever grasping for what it has not; and oftentimes, from its own action upon itself, it feels an agony of suffering almost beyond endurance. There was a time when it began to exist, and to be conscious of its existence; but whether that existence shall ever end, whether that consciousness shall ever cease to be felt, what was its origin, and what shall be its destiny, are questions not to be solved by any exertions of its own powers. It exists, it thinks, it feels—all beyond is doubt and mystery.

If he directs his attention to other objects than himself, he finds them equally mysterious and incomprehensible. He is located upon the surface of a globe many thousand

miles in diameter, and which, by the aid of certain instruments of his own construction, he finds to be one of a vast number of worlds, at immense distances from each other, and moving with inconceivable velocity around a common centre, which centre is itself supposed to be moving through unknown regions of space. He occupies this globe as a tenant in common with a multitude of other beings of like powers and faculties with himself, divided into numerous families, and kindreds, and tongues, and nations, capable of a mutual interchange of thoughts, and feelings, and sympathies; actuated by a thousand different motives, and in pursuit of a thousand different objects; but whose origin and destiny, like his own, and that of the universe around him, are beyond the comprehension of the human intellect.

Among these mysterious objects there is one calculated above all others to arrest his attention and concentrate his thoughts. By the operation of some unknown cause, one of his companions is seized with a weariness, and anxiety, and lassitude. His bodily powers gradually become disorganized, and cease to perform their ordinary functions. At length his limbs and trunk become motionless. His blood stagnates at the heart—his breath ceases—he loses what is called his life—his body, if left to itself, soon becomes a mass of putrefaction; and his friends and neighbors, from motives of self-preservation, are compelled to remove him from their sight, and deposit him in the earth, where he moulders into dust, and his name and memory are forgotten. Nor is this a phenomenon of rare occurrence. The whole population of the globe varies but little from ten hundred millions: and of this number, not less than *eighty-six thousand four hundred* every day, or *three thousand six hundred* every hour, become thus motionless and lifeless, and are either committed to the flames, plunged into the deep, or buried beneath the earth by their survivors. Nor

does this happen for a single hour, or a single day. From very remote periods it is found, that upon an average the whole globe has been depopulated by this mysterious agency called death, and repeopled by another agency scarcely less mysterious, once in about every thirty years; and thus generation has succeeded generation, like the waves of the sea, from the time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary.

And is this the destiny of all who now inhabit the earth? Is this immense throng, with all its bustle, and business, and luxury, and dissipation, and sport, and folly, to close its career in the silence and solitude of the tomb? Is this the common portion of the young and the old, the high and the low, the rich and the poor? And am I too included in this general doom? Is it a fact, that I too must leave for ever all my present employments and pleasures? Is it a fact, that the places which now know me, will know me no more for ever? Is it a fact, that these active and vigorous limbs will become cold, and stiff, and motionless? Is it a fact, that the time will come when this heart of mine, which has so long and so faithfully circulated the current of life, must exhaust itself in its own struggles, and cease for ever from its labors? Is it a fact, that the time will come when I too, in the agonies of dissolving nature, must breathe forth that last, convulsive groan, which proclaims that death has won another victory? Is it a fact, that this body which I have so long and so carefully fed, and clothed, and nourished, must lie buried beneath the earth, and there in silence and solitude moulder into dust, and be remembered no more for ever? And is this the *end* of my being—the end of consciousness—the end of thought? Is this longing after immortality—this inward dread—this startling and shrinking back of the soul upon itself, at the thought of its own annihilation, the dream of a disordered fancy?

Or will this mysterious something within me rise above the ruins of its earthly tabernacle, and enter upon some unknown and untried state of being? What then shall be my employment, and where shall be my home? Shall I be still myself? Shall I mingle with other kindred spirits, and unfold new energies, and find new employments, new joys, and new sorrows? Or is death an endless sleep; and will the soul, faithful to the tenement which it has so long inhabited, sink with the body into one common grave, and for ever cease to feel—cease to think—and cease to be?

And is it a fact, that these momentous questions are still open—still undecided? Has nothing occurred in the history of our race to tell us what we are, or what we shall be? Did the progenitor of our race, if progenitor we had, leave no record behind him to tell his posterity how and whence he derived his being, and what should be their final destiny? Of the innumerable millions of our race, which for so many ages have been thronging the regions of the dead, has no one ever returned to tell us what there may be beyond the dark confines of the grave? And is this the state of man, with all his wisdom, and forethought, and mighty intellect? Must he live, and die, and sink into the grave, in the midst of such uncertainties—so ignorant of himself, of his being and destiny; with such startling doubts whether, To be, or not to be—happiness or woe—life eternal or death everlasting, is to be his portion beyond the tomb? No—the mystery is solved. Glad tidings have reached us from beyond the grave. JESUS OF NAZARETH—the despised, the rejected, the crucified JESUS OF NAZARETH—has solved the mystery. JESUS OF NAZARETH, the SUN of the moral universe, has risen over the night of the grave, with healing in his beams, and revealed the most momentous truth that ever can be brought within the

range of the human intellect, that THE SOUL OF MAN SHALL LIVE FOR EVER.

The question then recurs, *What is Christianity*; and what does it tell us of our being and our destiny?

It tells us, that there is one great, invisible, self-existent Being—infinite in wisdom—infinite in power—a spirit, infinitely pure—infinately holy—the Maker and Ruler of the universe, and whose existence is from everlasting to everlasting—without beginning, and without end. That at some remote period in the eternity of his existence, this great and good Being saw fit to create the earth we now inhabit, gave it a place in the magnificent system of worlds of which it continues to form a part, and subjected its movements to those great laws which regulate and control the material universe. That about six thousand years ago, God, out of the dust of the earth, created MAN in his own moral image, breathed into him an immortal soul, and fixed his habitation in the plains of Asia, then a paradise, with directions to dress, and cultivate, and people the earth. That Adam, as he came from the hands of his Maker, was pure and holy, with all the affections of his heart centered upon God, and his supreme delight to worship and adore his great Creator and Benefactor. That to Adam, thus created and thus blessed, God, as his Sovereign, gave certain laws, holy, just, and good—the sum of whose requirements was, that man should continue to obey and love his Creator supremely; and, to the violation of which, not only death, or the dissolution of the body into its original dust, but banishment of the soul from the presence and favor of his Maker, and consequently misery and woe, without limitation and without end, were annexed as penalties. That Adam was fully endowed by his Creator with a capacity either to obey or disobey the divine law, according to the free, voluntary determination of his own will. That in the

exercise of this absolute, unqualified freedom of choice, Adam did wilfully and deliberately transgress the divine law, and thereby lost at once the moral image of his Maker, all actual enjoyment of him, and all true desires to know and serve him. That upon this act of disobedience the earth was cursed by its Maker, and Adam was cast out of paradise, a fugitive and a wanderer, justly exposed to the tremendous penalties of the violated law. That this same Adam became the progenitor—the common father of the whole human family; and that all his posterity, from generation to generation, have continually followed in his footsteps, wandering far from God, disliking to retain him in their thoughts, loving supremely other and unworthy objects, and living in continual disobedience to his holy commandments; and thus all are guilty, and consequently deserving the fearful retributions of divine justice. That man being thus lost and ruined, God, in his infinite mercy, devised a plan which preserved inviolate the purity and integrity of his law, and at the same time opened a way by which Adam and all his fallen race might be pardoned and restored to the love, and favor, and presence of their Maker. That by this plan it was provided that at some future time God the Son would descend upon the earth, and take upon himself a human form; and by a perfect obedience to the holy law of God, and by his own personal sufferings and an ignominious death upon the cross, make an atonement for the sins of the whole world. That the atonement thus to be made is sufficient to cover all the sins of all mankind; but that in order to receive its benefits, and secure the salvation of the soul, every man must exercise a genuine sorrow for having violated the laws of God, and place his entire reliance for salvation upon the atonement thus made by the Son of God; in the just performance of which, the heart, under the influences of the Spirit of God, becomes

renewed, and all its affections restored to God as the supreme object of love and gratitude. That the life of man is a state of trial or probation, during the continuance of which the terms of salvation are freely offered to his acceptance. That death, the great crisis in our being, terminates for ever this state of probation; and upon the dissolution of the body, the soul enters at once into the world of spirits, and there receives its doom according to the character it formed while an inhabitant of this earth. If it has truly repented of its sins and led a life of holiness, it receives the approbation of its Maker, takes up its everlasting abode in his presence, feels no more pain, no more sorrow, no more trouble; mingles with other kindred spirits of just men made perfect, and lives and expatiates for ever in the enjoyment of such blessings “as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive:” but if, on the other hand, life has passed away without repentance, and without reconciliation to God through the atonement, the soul is banished from the presence of its Maker; and, overwhelmed with a consciousness of its own guilt, sinks into the world of despair, where hope never comes, and where those dreadful agonies which are sometimes felt in this life, take complete possession of the soul, and become “the gnawings of a worm that never dies, and the burnings of a fire that is never quenched.”

Christianity also tells us, that at the appointed time the Son of God did descend upon the earth, and in the person of Jesus of Nazareth dwelt among men for the space of thirty years. That he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; was despised and rejected of men; was mocked, and buffeted, and spit upon; and at length, pressed down and overwhelmed with the accumulated load of human guilt, he was crucified between two thieves: an event which filled all heaven with wonder and amazement

and the contemplation of which will swell the bosoms of redeemed spirits with love and gratitude throughout the never-ending ages of eternity. That he was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead; that he ascended into heaven, and now sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, the Prince and Saviour of the world. That the earth is not to remain for ever the habitation of man; but that a day is fixed by Him who made it, when the Son of God shall again descend from heaven in his glory, and all the holy angels with him; that at his presence the earth and the heavens shall flee away, and no place be found for them; that all who are in their graves, both small and great, shall stand before him, and he shall separate them as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left: then shall he say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: and then shall he also say unto them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal. And thus shall end this world's eventful history; and the destiny of every son and daughter of Adam being thus irrevocably fixed, the ages of eternity will again roll onward, and this earth, with all its concerns, will be numbered among the things that have been, but are not.

Such, Christianity tells us, is the origin, and such the final destiny of our race. Nor need we stop to show that what Christianity tells us is true, and entitled to our confidence. No: the foundations of the Christian religion are laid too deep and too broad; its evidences are too clear and too convincing; its provisions are too kindly adapted to the wants, the necessities, the longings of an immortal

mind, ever to be rejected by the sincere inquirer after truth and happiness; and it may be asserted, without the fear of contradiction, that no man ever yet lived, in any age or country, and remained an infidel, who read the Bible with an honest heart, and a sincere desire to know the truth.

The question then recurs, Why is it that so few men of wealth, of influence, of rank, are found among the true disciples of Jesus Christ?

The answer may be given in a few words. *They will not take time for serious reflection.* Look abroad throughout the length and breadth of our land. How many of our lawyers, and physicians, and statesmen, have ever examined the evidences of the Christian religion with any degree of faithfulness? How many have ever read the Bible with a sincere desire to know whether its contents are true or false? How many who may chance to read these lines, have ever spent one single hour in the serious contemplation of death, and its momentous consequences? How many have ever permitted the mind to dwell, for a single hour, upon that great truth, that the soul is immortal; that this life is but the dawn of its existence, and that it yet has an eternity to spend in some unknown and untried state of being beyond the grave? Not that religious thoughts are entirely excluded from the mind. At some leisure moment a superficial view is taken of the Christian world as divided into sects, regulated by various forms and ceremonies, governed by different constitutions and laws, and, alas, too often distracted by sectarian and theological controversies. Without stopping to notice the great and important fact, that all Christians harmonize upon the fundamental principles of Christianity; that all unite upon the essential requisites to fit man for happiness in this world and the world to come; the hasty inference is drawn, that religion is nothing more than opinions and disputes, or a talk about

outward duties, alike beneath the serious regard of a cultivated and an intelligent mind.

It is true, the claims of Christianity are sometimes more closely pressed upon the heart and conscience. Take, for instance, the lawyer.* It is Saturday night. Court has adjourned late. He returns home weary and exhausted in body and mind. He seats himself in his office. "To what purpose is all this labor, and weariness, and anxiety? What real advantage do I hope to derive from all these struggles, and projects, and speculations? Suppose I acquire wealth and reputation, can they make me happy? Alas, I am weary of them even now. I know and feel that this soul of mine was created for nobler purposes. My possessions too I must soon leave. Leave?—and where shall I then go? To a world for which I have made no preparation. To a world of disembodied spirits, where nothing of all that I value here will be of the least use to me. Why, then, this labor and anxiety? What folly! What madness! Why not at once follow the dictates of reason and common-sense, and begin to live for something better?"

To one ignorant of the human heart, it would seem that this man was almost a Christian: but mark the result. A thought connected with the transactions of the day strikes his mind—an important cause just decided—a bad debt secured—a speculation—a motion in court—and thus thought after thought drops into the mind and expels at once all serious reflections. He plunges deeper than ever into his business; and the consequence probably is, that the same scene will be repeated again and again with similar results, till at length death dissolves the spell, and ushers his immortal spirit, unprepared, into the presence of his God.

* A similar train of thought is found in *Abbott's Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 12.

Take the physician. He has just witnessed the last moments of a Christian. During the progress of the disease nothing remarkable was observed, except a somewhat more than usual degree of patience and resignation, accompanied with a uniform feeling of thankfulness for all the little kindnesses bestowed upon him by his friends. Once, upon receiving some little refreshment tendered by the kind hand of some one of the family, there was seen on his countenance an expression of anxiety amounting almost to anguish. It was the thought that he was so soon to go away, and leave behind him those who were so kind to him, and whom he so tenderly loved. But the cloud soon passed away, and his countenance resumed its wonted calmness and serenity. At length the hour of his departure arrives. There is no wild commotion—no enthusiastic extravagance. His features are much wasted, and his eye, though somewhat sunk in the socket, is full of calmness and hope. His countenance beams with unwonted serenity, and a kind of mysterious energy comes over him which is felt by all about him. "I am going," says he, "the way of all the earth. I feel that the hand of death is upon me, and that I am about entering upon the realities of the eternal world. But I am willing to go. I have tried to love and serve my Saviour; and O, now he does not forsake me. Wife and children, grieve not for me. Be diligent—be faithful; and after a few more days of sorrow and affliction, we shall all meet again—root and branch—all gathered home—a family in heaven." A long, deep respiration announces that the soul has gone to Him who made it.

The physician retires, and proceeds slowly towards home. "This certainly was not a nervous affection, nor an affection of the brain, nor any thing of a spasmodic nature. What was it? He was a Christian: that is the secret—

and I too am determined to become a Christian. I will set about a preparation for another world. Nothing else is comparatively of any importance. To be ready and willing *to die!* O, let me have the Christian's hope. Let *me* die the death of the righteous, and let *my* last end be like his." Such are his reflections: and does he become a Christian? Alas, these serious thoughts and serious promises are all chased out of the mind by the bare recollection of some unusual symptom which manifested itself in the progress of the disease, or by some trifling inquiry of a neighbor; or else the consideration of the whole matter is postponed *for the present*.

Incidents like these are of daily occurrence. Men of business, professional men, politicians, men of intelligence, have not time to think seriously on the subject of religion. Wealth, reputation, intellectual gratification, are paramount objects; and such indeed is their influence over the human heart, that it is noticed as a remarkable fact, that few men ever become truly pious after they arrive at the age of *thirty* years. At or about this period in life, almost every man experiences a kind of constitutional change—a change in his intellectual faculties—a change in his feelings—a change in his views of men and things. If he be not a Christian, the mind settles down composedly and firmly upon the acquisition of wealth, or honor, or pleasure, or whatever else is fixed upon as the great leading object of life. The heart becomes harder, and colder, and more selfish. The ruling passion grows and strengthens. The admonitions of conscience are less and less regarded, till at length he is cut down, and sinks into the grave, without God, and without hope—lost, and lost for ever.

Besides, Christianity treats of some matters, the serious consideration of which is not congenial to the natural feelings of the human heart. To one who is not a Christian,

no three words in the English language convey more repulsive ideas than DEATH, JUDGMENT, and ETERNITY. Whatever may be his professions—whatever may be his philosophy—whatever may be the strength of his intellect, there is a kind of mysterious meaning—a kind of indistinct foreboding of evil to come, connected with these terms, as used in the Christian religion, at the serious contemplation of which his mind almost instinctively revolts. The language of the heart, if not of the lips, is, "Go thy way for this time; at a convenient season, I will call for thee."

Such are some of the main reasons why so few men of intelligence and influence become Christians.

It sometimes happens, however, that men of this character are led to examine the subject of religion with a very considerable degree of care and attention. They become satisfied of the general truths of Christianity, and think and speak well of its institutions, and entertain a kind of indefinite hope that all will be well with them in another world. They perhaps regularly attend public worship, and lead moral lives, and do many things. But there are parts of the Christian religion which are mysterious, and which they do not comprehend. "Our clergymen tell us—and the Bible seems to warrant the assertion—that in order to be happy in another world, a man must be born again; must be born of the Spirit of God. Now I do not understand this. To be *born again!* To be *born of the Spirit of God!* What does this mean? How can these things be?"

There is nothing unnatural, or contrary to the soundest principles of human reason, in the supposition that the soul of man may be operated upon by an unseen and supernatural power. The death of a Marshall can awaken emotions of sorrow and regret in the bosoms of millions of his countrymen. A few threatening words in the message of the President of the United States, can excite the apprehen-

sions, and concentrate the thoughts of three of the most populous nations of the earth. The brief military order of a Napoleon, in the shape of a Berlin or Milan decree, can shake the very foundations of civil society, and change the occupation, if not the destiny, of half the civilized world. If the mind of man can be thus wrought upon by human agency, it surely is not unreasonable to suppose, that there may be such an intercommunication between man and his Maker—between the infinite, eternal Mind, and created intellect, as to produce in the latter a change, not inaptly called a *spiritual regeneration*, or *new birth*.

This difficulty is not of modern origin. Soon after the spirit of prophecy had ceased, and when there were no inspired persons to whom the Jews could apply to decide their religious doubts and settle their disputes, a body of men in Judea associated themselves together under the name of the “Pharisees”—an association which existed in the time of our Saviour, and which embraced most of the learned and influential men of that day. Of this number was a certain Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, a man of sound judgment and great acuteness of mind. He had watched the movements of our Saviour from his first entrance into public life—had seen him give sight to the blind, cleanse the lepers, make the dumb to speak, and raise the dead. The possession and exercise of such powers satisfied the cool and reflecting mind of Nicodemus, that whether this Jesus of Nazareth was the long-expected Messiah or not, he was certainly clothed with supernatural energies, and had in fact been sent from God into this world for some important purpose. Nicodemus therefore, believing this to be a fit opportunity for acquiring some satisfactory knowledge of the world of spirits, and the place and mode of our existence after death, determined to gratify his curiosity, and seek a private interview with our Saviour. Ac-

cordingly, on a certain night, shortly after the celebration of the passover at Jerusalem, he came to our Saviour, when the following conversation took place :

“Nicodemus saith unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a Teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old ? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born ? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be ? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things ? If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things ?”

This conversation was had more than eighteen hundred years ago, and the question, “How can these things be ?” has been repeated in every succeeding age, and still remains unanswered. The world has been inundated with scholastic controversies ; theologians have disputed, and lost their temper ; councils have decreed, and synods adjudicated ; and after all, the question remains precisely where our Saviour left it : “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

But it is to be remembered, that the *manner* of operation is one thing, and the *matter of fact* another. The wind may be felt, and we may hear the sound thereof, though we can neither tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. The inquiry of the husbandman is, Is it a *fact* that the earth, by proper culture, will bring forth and bud, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater? not, *how* is the process effected? The merchant intrusts his fortune upon the ocean, because he knows it to be a *fact* that the needle is true to the pole; not because he can tell *why* it is so. The lawyer appeals to the sympathies of a jury, because he knows that such feelings exist in the human breast; not because he can tell *how*, or in what *manner*, they exist. Physicians may disagree in opinion as to the *manner* in which the body is nourished by food—they may perplex each other with hard words, and argue themselves into a quarrel; while the plain, honest countryman eats his meal in quietness, and gives God thanks for it. So here, the proper inquiry is, Is it a *fact* that men are born again? Is it a *fact* that men are born of the Spirit of God? Let the reader for a moment look into his own neighborhood, and among his own acquaintances. There is an individual, who, for some reason or other, forsakes the company of his former friends and associates, and attaches himself to a body of professing Christians. He abandons his former evil practices—becomes the friend and supporter of the religious and benevolent institutions of the day—is honest and upright in his dealings, and apparently at least, is governed by right principles and right motives. He is a regular attendant upon the public worship of God, participates with his brethren in the social prayer-meeting, and is regular and constant in family and private devotions. Thus far, as to his outward actions; but look into his heart. You there find a thorough conviction of the evil of *sin*. That

in which he once delighted is now loathsome to him. He no longer hears the reproof of sin as words of course, but the mention of his sin comes home to his very heart and conscience. He is convinced, too, of his own misery by reason of sin. He once read the threatenings of God's law, as he did the history of some foreign war; but now he sees and feels that his own everlasting welfare is at stake. He feels, too, the absolute necessity of pardon. Neither credit, nor riches, nor pleasures can heal his wounded conscience. "Jesus Christ and him crucified" is now his only hope of happiness and salvation. These are the real feelings of the heart—the genuine convictions of a man that thirsts; and not merely a change in opinion or theory. The spontaneous, unsophisticated breathing forth of his soul is, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." Now this man has been *born again*—has been *born of the Spirit of God*. He may not be able to tell you the time, or the place, or the manner, or the order of these workings of the Spirit; all this may be involved in uncertainty; but in point of *fact*, the very foundations of his heart have been broken up, and he has come forth into the world a new creature, with new hopes and new fears, new joys and new sorrows—an heir of the kingdom of God. Not that new faculties or greater intellectual powers have been implanted in the mind; but simply, the great leading object of his pursuit is changed. All the affections—all the better feelings of the heart, have been taken away from the things of this world, and elevated, and purified, and fixed upon God. The great business of his life now is, to love and obey God, and to do good to his fellow-men. He is as enterprising as ever in all his plans; as persevering and as industrious; but he no longer labors for *himself*. He now acts for God. He is an *agent*, not a *principal*; and he feels and realizes that he must one day render an

exact account of his stewardship to God. Nor is this an irksome employment, and one which he would gladly avoid. No; it is his daily food—his pleasure—his delight. He knows and feels that he is fulfilling the great end of his being; and in all his trials, and in all his troubles, he enjoys a peace of mind, an inward satisfaction, such as this world can neither give nor take away, and with which a stranger intermeddleth not. His treasure is in heaven, and to heaven he looks for a final resting-place, when the storms of this life shall have passed away. Such is the man who is *born again*—who is *born of the Spirit of God*.

Nor are cases of this kind so rare in society, as to leave in the mind a rational doubt as to their true character. Instances occur within the range of every man's observation; and it seems to be a part of the general providence of God, that in all places, and in all grades of society, there shall be men of known integrity and uprightness, who have felt in their own hearts this great moral change, and who not only with their lips, but in their lives, say to all about them, There is a reality in this thing called the religion of the heart.

But what are the means necessary to be used on the part of man, in order to effect this great change? As in most other cases where God makes provision for the real happiness of his creatures, the means are plain and simple. *The pride of the heart is to be humbled*. The prodigal son must arise, and go to his father, and say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." There must be this humbling of one's self before God and man. From a broken and a contrite heart, there must ascend that humble, penitential cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." There must be this absolute, unqualified giving away of one's self, soul and body, mind, might, and strength, to God and his

service. This done, and a man is born again: this done, and a man is a Christian.

There is yet another objection, which sometimes embodies itself in language like this: The Bible represents *faith* in Jesus Christ as alone necessary to salvation. I have examined the evidences of the Christian religion, and I do believe in Jesus Christ. I believe he came into this world, and suffered, and died, to make an atonement for the sins of mankind: now, what more is necessary?

It is obvious, that the assent of the understanding to any abstract truth, is one thing; and that such a belief in the same truth, as to excite feeling and action, is quite another thing. The philosopher in his closet, may demonstrate and fully believe the truth of some mathematical principle applicable to the science of navigation; but who does not see the difference between his *faith* and the *faith* of the shipmaster, who, amidst the perils of the ocean, is constantly reducing the same principle to actual practice, and thus brings the ship and her crew home in safety? The principle is all the while the same; but in the one case it is abstract and merely *intellectual*, while in the other it is used, practised upon, and *felt* to be true. The latter illustrates the faith of the Gospel; one of the fruits, or rather a constituent part of spiritual regeneration.

A father and his son, late in the day, come to the banks of a stream swollen by a heavy rain. The fears of the boy are excited. Night is at hand. Thoughts of home rush into his mind. He casts an anxious look, first upon the dark and rapid stream, and then upon his father's face. At length the father says to him, The stream is too deep for you, my son. I must carry you in my arms. Be not afraid. I have crossed the stream before. Hold fast to your father, and we shall soon be safe at home. Now, as the son silently clasps his arms around the neck of his kind and affection-

ate father, is there on his part nothing more than the mere assent of the understanding—nothing more than a simple, cold belief, that the father has bone and muscle sufficient to carry him safely across the stream? Far from it. His heart is overflowing with that sincere affection, that warm and filial confidence, which great waters cannot quench, nor floods drown; and as they approach the middle of the stream, and he feels the waters rising upon him, he clings the closer to his father's bosom, and soon is carried beyond the reach of danger, and safely arrives at home. So, too, with the Christian. The days of his pilgrimage draw to a close, and he approaches the cold stream of death, which all must pass. He looks upon the dark and turbid waters with fear and apprehension. But soon he hears the cheering language, "Let not your heart be troubled—Put your trust in me—Fear not—I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Nor are these mere unmeaning words. No. They lie as a cordial at his heart; and as he sinks into the stream, and its waters close over him, he feels beneath him the everlasting arms of his heavenly Father, and is soon carried to those mansions of rest which remain for the people of God.

A day is appointed by law for the session of the supreme judicial tribunal—a court of the last resort. Among other matters waiting a trial, is the cause of a plain, ignorant man, occupying a small tract of land left him by his father, and from the cultivation of which, by the use of great economy, he obtains a scanty livelihood. This little tract of land adjoins the possessions of a rich, and powerful, and avaricious neighbor, who having discovered some supposed defect in the title, has commenced a legal prosecution to recover the possession, and the cause now stands for final hearing at the head of the trial docket in the court of the last resort. Now, the citizens generally, in common with

this poor man, *believe* that this court will sit. They have read it in the statutes, or newspapers, or it is so understood in the neighborhood. A large proportion of the people, however, feel little or no interest in the matter, and give themselves no trouble about it. It is true, they fully *believe* the court will sit; but with them all is well, and they go in peace and quietness about their ordinary vocations; one to his farm, and another to his merchandise. Not so, however, with the man who feels that his little all is at stake. Many a day you will see him laboring in his fields with a sad and heavy heart. He is sowing, but he knows not who may reap. His little inheritance, which has hitherto furnished him and his children with food and raiment, may pass into other hands. His thoughts are continually recurring to the day of trial. He talks of it with his neighbors and friends. All his plans, all his domestic concerns, are arranged in reference to it. To him it is a day above all other days. His counsel advise him to be on his guard, to be constantly preparing for his defence; that he has a subtle and powerful adversary; that the contest will be a severe one, and that without constant watchfulness he will be overcome. At length the day arrives, the cause is opened, the testimony is heard, the opinion of the court is pronounced, and the sentence of the law recorded, "That the defendant go hence without day." The poor man goes home with a heart full of joy, and spends the residue of his days in peace and happiness upon his little patrimony, endeared to him a thousand-fold by the trials and troubles it has cost him.

So, too, the Christian. God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness; when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, and every man shall be rewarded or punished according to the deeds done in the body. This, too, is a matter of public notoriety. It is

promulgated in the Bible, the statutes of God's kingdom, from the pulpit, by missionaries, by Sunday-schools, by prayer-books, by Tracts, and in a thousand other forms. And even in our courts of justice, we daily and hourly witness the appeal made to the "Searcher of all hearts," for the truth, as it shall be answered for at the same "great day." The fact, too, is *believed* by a great proportion of mankind. Indeed, few men express any serious doubts upon the matter. But, like the session of the supreme judicial tribunal, the great mass of mankind feel little or no interest in it. It is yet a great way off. They have not time to think of it. They must make provision for their families. The Judge, too, is a merciful being, and they hope all will be well with them. Besides, religion is a rational thing. "The best of Beings did not send us into the world to go weeping through it; nor will he call us to a severe reckoning because we have snatched at some of its fugacious pleasures." Not so, however, with the real Christian. In the book of God's law—and which is to form the rule of final judgment—he finds language like this:

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure. If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

He not only *believes*, but he *feels*, that the well-being of his immortal soul, throughout the ages of eternity, will depend upon the decision of that great day; and he acts accordingly. It occupies his thoughts—enters into all his arrangements. His family and neighbors all bear witness of his care and watchfulness. In short, he makes it the

great business of his life to prepare to meet that searching glance of the eye of Omniscience, which he knows will penetrate the inmost recesses of his soul. He, too, has his troubles and his trials, his doubts and his fears. He, too, has a subtle and a powerful adversary, who is continually seeking his destruction. "Without are fightings—within are fears;" and oftentimes there bursts forth from his troubled heart the involuntary cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But he, too, has an Advocate; his name is "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace." His language is, "Son, be of good cheer. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." And when the great and notable day of the Lord shall come; when the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and the assembled universe shall stand up in final judgment before him, there will fall upon his ear in the same kind accents, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" and then with all those who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, with joy unspeakable and full of glory, he enters upon an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens. *Who would not be a Christian?*

Say not, then, that there is want of evidence, or want of ability. "If any man will do my will, he shall know my doctrine." No earnest, *humble* inquirer ever yet failed in the search. If you will believe with the heart what the mind knows to be true, and will faithfully *act* after the convictions of conscience; if you will unite the affections and

the will, with all the faculties of the mind, in doing what you know and feel to be right, the way of truth will open broad before you, and you will find that all her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

Nature with open volume stands,
To spread her Maker's praise abroad,
And every labor of his hands
Shows something worthy of a God.

But in the grace that rescued man,
His brightest form of glory shines ;
Here, on the cross, 'tis fairest drawn,
In precious blood and crimson lines.

Here I behold his inmost heart,
Where grace and vengeance strangely join ;
Piercing his Son with sharpest smart,
To make the purchased pleasures mine.

O, the sweet wonders of that cross,
Where God the Saviour loved and died ;
Her noblest life my spirit draws
From his dear wounds and bleeding side.

I would forever speak his name,
In sounds to mortal ears unknown ;
With angels join to praise the Lamb,
And worship at his Father's throne.

Watts

GOD'S CARE OF THE INFANT.

Look at *man*—his first introduction to this world is marked by entire dependence on the care of others. There is no living thing which requires the hundredth part of the solicitude, the constant attention, and the patience which never tires, in order to preserve and rear it; and how completely are all these secured by that instinctive affection which springs up spontaneously in the bosom of the parents, which waits for no acquaintance to produce it, which needs no argument to enforce it, no example to direct it, but which, with a gush of feeling which only the parent knows, hears the first cry of life, sees the helpless and unconscious babe incapable of the most distant recognition, and presses it to a heart which would shed its choicest blood to secure this precious embryo of humanity from harm. What can equal the delicacy and strength of the mother's fondness, which in one moment starts into full maturity and power, and which continues unabated by all the toils, and watching, and privations which she endures for the babe which hangs upon her breast? In the bosom of the lowliest and rudest peasant a new fountain of sensibility is opened when he feels that he is a father; the mother of his child becomes incomparably more interesting than when he first beheld her in all her virgin charms; his home is still dearer; and while his toils are sweetened by the thoughts of tenderness which work within him, he looks forward with delighted anticipation to the period, when in his cot he shall behold the mother and her lovely babe, or receive into his own sinewy arms the precious treasure. Can this instinctive affection, on which the preservation of man depends, at that helpless period, when he can neither solicit aid, nor even be conscious of it when rendered, be the result of chance? Is not the supposition a wild extravagance, rather than sober reason? Or does the heartless

attempt at explanation which atheism offers, account for it? What mother, whose heart has throbbed with maternal tenderness—what man, through whose soul the first announcement that he is a father, has thrilled with unspeakable emotion, can hear, without surprise bordering on indignation, all this depth of sacred feeling attributed to the physical attraction of matter, or the chemical affinities of the elementary substances which enter into the composition of our bodies? See *System of Nature*, Vol. I. pp. 33, 82, 83.

But again: look at the helpless condition of the young stranger, and the admirable provision which is made for his subsistence. The new-born infant has not only no sense or power to provide for his sustenance, but he has no teeth to masticate his food, and while much nutrition is necessary to his growth, his digestive powers are very weak. Just at this time a glandular apparatus which had always existed from the infancy of the mother, though never before needed, performs, in a most active manner, its functions, and secretes a liquid precisely of the kind which the infant needs, moderately warm, mild, and grateful to the palate, at once easy of digestion and highly nutritive. No sooner is the child applied to the bosom where his sustenance is already provided, than his lips and tongue, with the various muscles concerned in deglutition, begin, as though instructed by experience, to perform most skilfully their functions. How inveterate must be the atheism which can deny design in this. Was the breast of the mother formed by the mere concurrence of certain particles of matter, without any reference to the infant whose existence was to depend on it? Was it by accident that such a fluid, so bland and nutritious, should be formed just at the time when the infant needed it? Was there no intention in placing the breasts just where the arms of the mother could fold her helpless babe to her bosom, while her eyes could gaze with fondness, and the very look of affection assist in exciting the

excretion of this balmy liquid? Was it chance that gave to the child the power and the instinct of sucking as soon as he entered the world; or had this instinct no design, no reference to the mother's breast? What but infatuation the most unaccountable, or prejudice the most desperate, can deny the evidence of benevolent design, and consequently of a benevolent Designer, in the provision thus made for a new-born babe?

Godwin on Atheism.

THE HUMAN HAND.

How well adapted is the hand to give a sudden stroke or a delicate touch, a tenacious grasp or a gentle pressure: it can take up by the points of its fingers the finest needle, or by the application of both hands, embrace and hold fast a circumference of several feet, and all the intermediate dimensions. How fine and rapid are the movements, how astonishing the accuracy with which the fingers fly over the strings of a harp, or the keys of a piano; and how exquisite must be the working of the nerves, and muscles, and tendons, and bones, and joints of the hand, this "instrument of instruments." The hammer, the axe, and the saw, made and employed by the human hand, produce effects which would defy the strength of the lion, and to which the gigantic might of the elephant would be but infantile weakness. Thus, before man all living creatures bow, and pay to him their homage and their service. Neither the flight of the eagle, nor the fleetness of the antelope, nor the vast bulk of the whale amid the polar ice, gives security from the power of man—of man, weak and feeble as he is, but armed with reason and a hand.

Now, does it look like *chance*, or *design*, that there should be this adjustment of the hand to the mind—that the perfection of the instrument should be in such accordance with the power of the agent which is to employ it?

Ibid.