

In the two following pieces we see how the same subject may be viewed by two eminently able and good men, which accounts to a good degree for the difference of energy and hope displayed by equally pious people in regard to the world's conversion. We ought not to be ignorant of the enormity and wide spread prevalence of sin, nor should we entertain the slightest despondency in regard to the provision and agency divinely ordained to meet and overcome it.

#### SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

(From Bonar's Preface to the "Last Days.")

The time may not be so thoroughly and unexceptionably bad as he has represented it; still, the mass of manifold evil that covers it, and is transfused throughout it, is appalling. The enmity to God among the irreligious, and the shallowness, the incompleteness, the hollowness, among the religious, are things fitted to startle and to sadden.

Two extremes between which much of the religion of our day is oscillating, are abstraction and personality. The abstract religion is the religion of speculation—of philosophy—of the intellect. Of this the one terminus is chill, soulless orthodoxy, and the other rationalism or infidelity. The personal or concrete religion is the religion of the feeling or of the fancy. Of this the one terminus is mysticism—the system of frames and feelings; and the other Popery or Pantheism. In the former case we have truth without a person; in the latter a person without the truth.

In the Word of God, these are inseparable; and it is their conjunction that is the basis or the essence of true religion. Without this all is unsatisfying, unreal, hollow; the soul has no resting-place, no anchorage. The conscience remains unpurged and unpacified. Conscious reconciliation with God, conscious forgiveness, conscious friendship, in filial relationship, in virtue of which our whole life becomes a walking with God, a service, a ministry; these are only attainable or possible when the things that God has joined together are kept in harmonious unity, without displacement, or disproportion, or distinction.

One feels, in our day, how little there is of simple reading of the Divine Word, and simple understanding of it, unwarped by system, or undiluted by speculation. Not that Scripture is left unstudied, but it is little studied for the simple end of learning the mind of God, and of having the way that leads to the kingdom traced out for our personal guidance. One searches it in order to prove that the life of Christ is a mere mythical deception, imposing unrealities upon us for realities and histories. Another searches it in order to show that there is in it no such thing as prophecy, or miracle, or sign, or wonder, or mighty deed, and that the common laws of nature will account for all. Another goes to it for the purpose of demonstrating that it contains no such dogma as that of resurrection from the dead. Another gropes about in it for human flaws, or fancied contradictions, to prove that it is not wholly divine, and that the question of its entire inspiration is as yet unsettled and uncertain. Another goes to it for its beauty, its poetry, its lofty sentiments, just as he goes to Shakespeare, or Milton,—extolling it beyond measure, yet never finding in it "the Christ of God," the life of his soul, the peace that passeth all understanding.

One goes to it for truth, but loses sight of the True One, thereby deceiving himself with the mere shadow or spectre of knowledge and religion. Another goes to it for the True One—a person, not an abstraction—but, losing sight of the truth, he works out for himself a scheme of mysticism and dreaminess, which has in it, indeed, the appearance of warmth and vitality, but is still little better than religious sentimentalism.

The heaven of evil is everywhere doing its work—defiling, loosening, undermining everything that is divine and sacred. Satan is laying his last snares, and mustering his troops for the last battle that is to decide the empire of earth. He has sent forth the powers of darkness, and they are doing their work with strange rapidity. Atheism defies, scepticism doubts, blasphemy mocks, Pantheism is turning the world into God. Religion is meagre, hollow, and unhealthful, of a low and second-rate kind, not hardy, fearless, unearthly, heedless of toil and peril, ready to affront a world, braving pain, and bonds, and death. Sedition rages, lawlessness threatens, misrule prepares to triumph. Despotism and democracy have thrown themselves for a death-wrestle on each other; the tiger and the wolf have met

in the long-anticipated struggle,—and woe to the world, woe to the Church, whichever of the two may conquer!

#### The Signs of the Times.

We do not for a moment mistake them for signs of incipient conversion. We do not even interpret the most hopeful indication among them into a token of direct readiness to embrace the truth. The mind may leave one class of errors only to embrace a worse. All that we infer from the moral aspect of the world is, that if it be a more promising undertaking to assail a system of error in the season of its age and weakness, than in the hour of its strength, that encouragement is now held out for that season has arrived. If the time for recasting the metal is when it has reached a state of fusion, now is the period for employing the mould of the gospel, when the human mind is so generally indicative of being in the crucible, and of possessing unusual susceptibility for new impressions. Look in what direction we will, the horizon of hope enlarges and brightens. The practical zeal of the Mohammedan has burnt out. The priestly power of the Brahmin is broken, and his demons wait in vain for their prescribed libations of blood. The altar of the Chinese, empty but standing, is waiting to welcome the advent of an unknown God. The South African chief comes from the remote interior, and offers his herds for a Christian teacher; the vast kingdoms and isles beyond the Ganges are ready for the reception of a number of missionaries. In one quarter idolatry is losing its hold on millions; in another, the savage is awakening from the sleep of centuries; here, Popery, is falling off from a nation, as a snake casts its gaudy but shrivelled skin: there, philosophy is worn out with its ever-promising but unsatisfactory illusion; and elsewhere, childish credulity is becoming a man, and putting away childish things. Everywhere are to be seen an impatience of the present, a deep presentiment that it is hastening to decay, and a spirit of inquiry, anticipation, and change, looking out on the future. As it was with Judea and the East generally about the era of the advent of the Son of God, the world is waiting for the advent of some principles or means which shall change its destinies.—NOW, then, is the time for the Church to proclaim to it, "Behold your God."—Harris.

#### Do we know how to Pray?

The Rev. Dr. Hamilton of Leeds, while solemnly enforcing on the church its duty, in reference to the conversion of the world, asks the following significant questions: "And has not the church almost to learn what is the power of prayer? What conception have we of believing prayer, before which mountains depart? What, of persevering prayer, which causes us to stand continually upon the watch tower in the day time, and which sets us in our ward whole nights? What, of importunate prayer, which storms heaven with its violence and force? What, of united prayer, gathering us together to ask help of the Lord? What, of consistent prayer, which regards no iniquity in our hearts? What, of practical prayer, which fulfils itself? Let but such prayer be understood, let our spirit but break with such longing, and the expectations of our bosoms shall not be delayed.—And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

#### An Old Negro's Religion.

A preacher of the gospel relates the following conversation, which he had with an old negro, while travelling in Virginia. He says "I was travelling from Stanton to Bean Station in Tennessee, and on the road I overtook a Virginian planter, with his family and effects, moving to Missouri. Soon after, I came up with two old colored persons, a man and a woman, and judging that they belonged to the family I had just passed, I addressed the old man thus:

"Well, old man, had you not rather be in heaven, than travel this long road on foot?"

He looked at me, and said, "Yes, massa, I had."

"Do you expect ever to get to heaven?"

"Yes, massa, I do."

"Why, do you think God would ever have such an old nigger in heaven as you are?"

"Yes, massa, I believe I shall get to heaven when I die, if I is black."

"Why, what makes you believe so; can you read the Bible?"

"No, massa, I can't read, but I can feel."

"Well, what do you feel?"

"Why, massa, I long since felt that I was a sinner, I felt very sorry for my sins, and then I felt that God for Christ's sake, would forgive them all."

"What, you say that you can not read, and yet that you know that your sins are forgiven. Are you not mistaken? Why, there are many white persons who are very learned, and do not know that God has forgiven their sins; you must be mistaken, ain't you?"

At this time, we were close to a very large black oak, which was at least three feet in diameter, and a hundred feet high. The old man pointed his finger toward the tree, and said:

"Massa, do you see that tree dar?"

"Yes, but what of it?"

"Why, massa, if you had that dar tree on your shoulder, and was to carry it two hundred yards, and then lay it down, don't you think you would know when you laid it down?"

"Yes, old man, I think I should."

"Well, massa, just as sure you would know when you laid down that tree after carrying it two hundred yards, just so sure I know when God Almighty took that heavy burden of sin off me; and now I do believe I shall get to heaven when I die, for I love God and have tried to serve him many years." The old man looked at me, with a smile on his face, his eyes beaming with a lively hope of eternal life, and said, "Massa, don't you 'sess 'ligion."

"What makes you think I profess religion?"

"Why, massa, I think if you did not 'sess 'ligion, you would not have asked me these questions."

I replied: "Yes, old man, I do profess religion, and hope to meet you in heaven."

"I then asked him how old he was. On his answering that he was sixty-three years of age, I took him by the hand, and told him to remain faithful a little longer, that his time of servitude would soon be over, and then bade him farewell, to see him no more until he shall be as free as myself."

Reader, are you as certain that your sins are forgiven as was that poor old slave? You say you hope so, but do you know it?—S. W. Baptist Chronicle.

#### The Love due to Christ.

But, O sweetest, kindest Jesus, how shall I thank thee as I ought, or what requital can I make for thy wonderful condescension? How is it possible indeed, that dust and ashes, as I am, the meanest and most unworthy of all thy creatures, should be capable of return, that might bear proportion to that amazing excess of unmeasurable love, which I am not capable so much as worthily to conceive? What could be done, what could be thought of, for my benefit and salvation, which thou hast not submitted to do for me? From the sole of the foot to the crown of the head, thou didst plunge thyself in sufferings and sorrows, that thou mightest pluck me out, and rescue me entirely from the deep water, when all the waves and storms of misery had overwhelmed me, and were come in even unto my soul.—Thou countedst not thy own life dear unto thee, but didst pour out thy soul unto death, to redeem that forfeit life of mine, over which death, entering by sin, had gotten the dominion. Thus hast thou bound me to thyself by a double obligation. And I am now thy debtor, both for that which thou hast restored to me, and for that which thou hast laid down for me. And, since my life is thus made twice thy gift, first by creation, and afterwards by redemption, how can I make thee better payment, than by devoting entirely to thee, that everything which I received from thee? For that part of the debt then in which my life is concerned,—somewhat I have, though very small, to offer thee by way of satisfaction. But, for thy own life,—so precious, and yet so exceedingly afflicted for my sake, I must acknowledge myself utterly at a loss, and am sensible it is not in the power of all mankind to make thee any manner of compensation.—For, though I were master of heaven and earth, and all the glories and treasures of both, yet could I not, upon these terms, make thee a recompense at all suitable to the value of the debt. Nay, even that little, which I am bound and qualified to do, cannot be done without thee; and if I give thee anything at all, it is because thou givest me power to give it.—Thou art pleased to require, and most reasonable it is, that I should love thee with all my heart and with all my soul, and with all my mind, and with all my strength; that as thou hast left me an example, so I should walk in thy steps. And can I dispute my engagement

to live to thee; who hast condescended not only to live, but even to die, for me? No, dearest, I am duly sensible of the obligation, but sensible withal, that this obligation can never be discharged without the assistance of thy grace. O draw me then, that I may run after thee; knit my heart to thee that I may love thy name; and let my soul cleave steadfastly to my Lord; for I am not sufficient of myself to do or think any thing as of myself, but all my sufficiency is of thee, my Lord and my God.—Anselm.

#### Sufficiency of the Gospel Remedy.

A king published a wide and unexpected amnesty to the people of a rebellious district in his empire, upon the bare act of each presenting himself, within a limited period, before an authorized agent, and professing his purposes of future loyalty. Does it at all detract from the clemency of this deed of grace, that many of the rebels feel a strong reluctance to this personal exhibition of themselves, and that the reluctance strengthens and accumulates upon them by every day of their postponement; and that, even before the season of mercy has expired, it has risen to such a degree of aversion on their parts as to form a moral barrier in the way of their prescribed return, that is altogether impassable? Will you say, because there is no forgiveness to them, there is any want of amplitude in that charter of forgiveness which is proclaimed in the hearing of all; or that pardon has not been provided for every offence, because some offenders are to be found with such a degree of perverseness and obstinacy in their bosom, as constrains them to a determined refusal of all pardon? The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; and there is not a human creature who, let him repent and believe, will ever find the crimson inveteracy of his manifold offences to be beyond the reach of its purifying and its peace-speaking power. And tell us if it detract, by a single iota, from the omnipotence of this great gospel remedy, that there are many sinners in the world who refuse to lay hold on it? To the hour of death it is within the reach of all and of any who will. This is the period in the history of each individual, at which this great act of amnesty expires; and, to the last minute of his life it is competent for every minister of the gospel to urge it upon him, in all the largeness, and in all the universality which belong to it; and to assure him that there is not a single deed of wickedness with which his faithful memory now agonizes him, not one habit of disobedience that now clothes his retrospect of the past in the sad coloring of despair, all the guilt of which, the blood of the Saviour cannot do away!

#### The Danger and the Refuge.

The interest of modern history is indeed intense, and the importance of not wasting the time still left to us may well be called incalculable. It is truer now than it was during the progress of an earlier revolution, when the words were first uttered, that "everything in the condition of mankind announces the approach of some great crisis;" and for this, as an eloquent writer forcibly observes, "nothing can prepare us but the diffusion of knowledge, probity, and the fear of the Lord." While the world is impelled with such violence in opposite directions; while a spirit of giddiness and revolt is shed upon the nations, and the seeds of mutation are so thickly sown, the improvement of the mass of the people will be our grand security; in the neglect of which, the politeness, the refinement, and the knowledge accumulated in the higher orders, weak and unprotected, will be exposed to imminent danger, and perish like a garland in the grasp of popular fury. *Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure.*

#### The Two Schemes of Salvation.

Men differ much about salvation. Yet all their plans may be reduced to two. One is by man himself. The other is by God. One is by human works and sufferings. The other is by divine doings and sufferings. One puts down the law. The other puts down the law breaker. One exalts human merit. The other abuses it. The one lowers the standard to its own attainments. The other leaves the standard unimpaired, and seeks to be saved without trampling on law. One quarrels with God and justifies self. The other never ceases to fight against self, and justifies God. The very best offering that one makes is that of Cain. The very least that the other allows is that of