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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ophy we discipline those intuitive faculties by which we rise in the last stages of explanation to liberty, and to that Infinite Personal Power by which we overshadow and enfold the universe. In the balance of these, we find safety, and in the excess of any, the anarchy and overthrow of thought.

While law, the idea of cause, towers in the one realm, and gathers into itself all explanation, liberty rises into no less prominence and authority in the other, the spiritual region, and from thence lets fall its mandates on the subject-world of matter, creating that law which so fills the fancy of one-eyed science.

ARTICLE II.

CONVERSION — ITS NATURE.¹

BY REV. AUSTIN PHELPS, PROFESSOR AT ANDOVER.

It was an exaggeration, yet one which contained more of truth than of hyperbole, in which a late writer affirmed that the most characteristic thing this world has to show to other worlds is a scaffold on the morning of an execution. It is true that to a holy mind the distinctive idea in the condition of this world is that of *guilt*. It is not dignity; it is not beauty; it is not wisdom; it is not power: it is *guilt*. It is not weakness; it is not misfortune; it is not suffering; it is not death: it is *guilt*.

Any thoughtful observer, therefore, must believe that this world needs to be changed, in order to become the dwelling-place of God. No historian, with any just conception of man, as he has been and is, on the theatre of nations, doubts this. No philosopher with any knowledge of God, as he is, doubts this. No man, with any honest insight into

¹ A Discourse preached in the Chapel of Andover Theological Seminary.

his own heart, doubts this necessity of change, to fit man for the presence of God. A seraph hovering over the field of Solferino could scarcely feel a more appalling conviction of this necessity than any individual sinner feels when his own heart and the idea of God are revealed to his conscience side by side.

Such has been the general belief of the race. They are the few maniacs who have denied it. The great religious systems of the world have been founded upon the conviction that man must be changed. Be the gods what they may, man must be changed, to be at peace with any deity. Our blinded and sickened race has sought to change itself by most laborious and cunning devices. Remorse has been the equivalent of genius in its inventions. By baptismal rites, by holy anointings, by branding with mysterious symbols, by incantations of magic, by sacred amulets, by ablutions in consecrated rivers; by vigils and abstinences and flagellations, and the purgative of fire; by distortions of conscience in rites of which it is a shame to speak; and by that saddest of all human beliefs, which would doom a human spirit to migrate for millions of years through metamorphoses of bestial and reptile existence,—man has struggled to change himself, that he might be prepared to dwell at last under the pure eye of God. Even those fools who have said in their heart, there is no personal God, have drifted unconsciously in their speculations upon a caricature indeed, and yet a resemblance of this very faith in man's need of a change to make him worthy of the divinity which is within him.

It is impressive to observe how Pantheism, in its wildest freaks, is dragged towards a doctrine of regeneration. The idea haunts it. It speaks in language which a Christian preacher need not refuse in describing the phenomenon of conversion. Its apostles tell us of a certain stage in individual history at which the soul must awake and "bestir itself, and struggle as if in the throes of birth"; that it must "wrestle with doubt, or cower trembling under the

wings of mystery"; that it must "search heaven and earth for answers to its questions"; that it must "turn in loathing from the pleasures of sense," under its "irrepressible longings after the good, the true, the beautiful; after freedom, immortality." They tell us of the tumult and torment of this "crisis of internal life." They profess to inform us how the soul may make its way out of this chaos of distress into a "noble, perfect manhood"; how, as one has expressed it, the soul may "once more feel around it the fresh breath of the open sky, and over it the clear smile of heaven; how the streams of thought may again flow on in harmony; how content is to be regained with one's position in the system of things; how all fear and torment are to give place to blessedness; how love is again to suffuse the world, and over every cloud of mystery, to be cast a bow of peace."

Thus, I repeat, the idea of regeneration haunts philosophy in its most impious departures from God. With a God, or without a God, philosophy cannot get away from the sense of the necessity of a change in man to fit him for something to which he is predestined. Put into the language of any philosophy on this subject the two ideas of the Holy Spirit and of sin, and a Christian preacher may adopt the whole of it in his delineation of conversion.

This necessity, therefore, of some great, critical, formative change in man, may be assumed as a truth on which the mind of the race is substantially a unit. On this theme, as on many of the first principles of religion, the wanderings of the human mind from God are forever checked by oceanic currents which draw it inward, and compel it to sail along the coast of truth, never far or long out of sight of the mainland.

WHAT, THEN, IS THE NATURE OF THAT CHANGE WHICH MAN NEEDS TO RENDER HIM AN OBJECT OF DIVINE COMPLACENCY?

To answer this inquiry will be the object of the present discourse. Our dependence upon the word of God for the answer is immediate and absolute. Philosophy, inde-

pendently of the scriptures, has taught the world almost nothing with regard to it. Even theological standards, uninspired, have added nothing to the wisdom of an awakened conscience in a child, except as they have translated the declarations of the word of God. We all wish to know, on a subject like this, not so much what philosophers or theologians have believed as what God has said.

I. It will be instructive, then, to recall briefly certain of the representative passages of the Bible which set forth the nature of conversion.

Commencing with that class of them which the text¹ so forcibly exemplifies, we may observe it to be one of the favorite methods of inspiration to represent religious conversion by the change which occurs in natural birth. One can almost feel the fascination of the calm, subdued authority with which our Lord taught to his timid pupil the paradox of regeneration: "Except a man be *born* of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "Except a man be *born* again he cannot see the kingdom of God." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Birth of body — birth of soul! The one stands over against the other, as if for the sake of reflecting each by its resemblance to the other. Then, to check the astonishment excited by the seeming extravagance of his speech, he adds: "*Marvel* not that I said, Ye must be *born* again." "*Marvel* not" — this is no cause for dumb amazement; it is but one of the rudiments of truth. Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not this thing?

A similar boldness of imagery is manifest in that class of passages which represent religious conversion under the figure of a change from death to life. As if birth from non-existence were too natural an emblem to express the whole truth of the anomalous change effected by regeneration, we hear an apostle exclaiming: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." "You hath he quickened, who were *dead* in trespasses, and sins." Another, in

¹ John iii. 3.

the assurance of a regenerate experience, declares: "We know that we have passed from *death* unto *life*." Conceive what intensity of significance this metaphor must have had to those of the apostolic age, in which the miracle of resurrection from the tomb was a reality in current history, a fact of common fame!

A similar vividness of contrast is preserved by a third class of passages, which express conversion by the figure of passing from *darkness* to *light*. What is the force of such language as this? "Ye are a chosen generation;" he "hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." "Ye were sometimes darkness." Not *in* darkness only, but darkness itself. Night was the symbol of your very souls. "But now are ye light in the Lord." Not *in* light, merely, but light itself.

"Holy Light—offspring of heaven, first-born."

The noonday is the emblem of your being. Among the most beautiful of the scriptural titles of the regenerate, are these: "children of the light," "children of the day," "saints in light." Some of the most stirring exhortations to renewed men are founded upon this contrast in nature! "Cast off the works of darkness, put on light"—"we are not of the night"—"have no fellowship with the works of darkness"—"what communion hath light with darkness?"

The force of such language is not diminished by a fourth class of passages, which speak of conversion under the figure of a change in the most central organ of physical vitality. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." "I will take away the stony heart." "I will give you a heart of flesh." "Make to you a new heart." A new heart! To this day, what words of wisdom have we learned by which to express a regenerate state more intelligibly or more vividly than by these, which we breathe into the prayers of our children?

But perhaps the climax of the daring imagery of the scriptures on this subject is exceeded in a fifth class of passages, of a literal force, which represent God and Satan

as the sovereigns of hostile empires; and the change which man undergoes in conversion as a transfer from the one dominion to the other. Paul did not scruple to affirm his commission to preach a gospel which should "turn men from the power of Satan unto God." "The power of Satan!" This was no fiction of a distempered brain, in an age when demoniacal possession was a common and an acknowledged form of bodily affliction. "The Father hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." "The power of darkness!" This was no feeble image to the thought of an Oriental people, whose faith had filled the night air with demoniac spirits. "In time past ye walked according to the prince of the power of the air. But God, rich in mercy, hath quickened us, hath raised us up, hath made us sit in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." "Walking according to the 'prince of the power of the air!'" This was no mysticism and no hyperbole to the ancient faith, whose angelology peopled the elements with spiritual intelligences, some of whom swayed the atmosphere malignantly. "The kingdom of Christ" — "the kingdom of the dear Son" — "heavenly places in Christ Jesus"! These were conceptions of unutterable meaning to minds whose only ideal of government was that of absolute empire, and whose thought of obedience was wrapped up in that eternal idea of *loyalty*, in which self is forgotten, and the sovereign of the realm is all in all.

These passages may suffice as a specimen of the methods by which religious conversion is described in the style of inspiration. Yet no possible selection of proof-texts could be the strongest evidence of the scriptural doctrine of regeneration. The climax of proof of such a doctrine is that it pervades the system of biblical teaching. It is one of the constructive ideas of inspiration which are not so much here or there, as everywhere. It is pervasive, like the life-blood in the body. It is like caloric in the globe. If a tortuous exegesis evades it in one passage, it is inevi-

table in the next. Expel it from a thousand texts, and it remains in secret implications all along the interval pages between them. Wrench it away from every text in which theologians have found it, and its echo still reverberates from one end of the Bible to the other. We can get rid of it, only by flinging away the system of revelation in which it breathes — everywhere present, everywhere needed to complete the symmetry of truth, and everywhere imperative as an oracle of God.

II. Our chief inquiry, therefore, should be: What does this language mean in which we are taught man's need of a change to render him a friend of God?

In reply, we may observe: The scriptural emblems of conversion represent a change of *character*, as distinct from any variety of change by ceremonial observance. No single conception of religious conversion is more forcibly suggested by the Bible than this — that it is a reality, and not a form. If the sole object of the scriptures in their teaching of this doctrine had been to prevent mistake on this point, and to reprove the proneness of the human mind to degrade religious experience into religious form, their language could scarcely have been more happily adjusted to its object. With this volume in our hands, we do not know how to reason with men who exalt ceremonial ordinances or formulae as substitutes for a change of heart. We must rank among the tokens of intellectual disease, we must regard as a degradation in a civilized mind, that taste which leads one to protrude a Christian baptism, or the imposition of consecrated hands, or the profession of a Christian creed, or communion with a Christian church, or the reception of the Lord's supper, in advance of that work of God's Spirit by which a sinner is born again. It seems like solemn trifling to debate on such a faith. "How readest thou?" is the only query by which we can suggest the remedy for the sickliness of such a mind. To the law and to the testimony! If the scriptural idea of regeneration be definable in any particular of its versatile exhibition

here, it surely is so in this, that the change it portrays is independent of external form or symbol. It is an event in spiritual experience. It is a change in the man. The man — the vital, the immortal part of him — feels the change. He lives it. When we pass from this substance of the thing, to consider forms, ordinances, creeds, professions, as distinct from the thing, as its substitutes or its superiors or its constituents, we descend from realities to mimic playthings. These incidents to a religious life lose their significance as symbols even. They are symbols of nothing. They are a forgery and a mummery.

In the nature of conversion there is nothing that we know of which should forbid its occurrence in a disembodied state. If we could know that probation encloses the intermediate state of the departed, we might conceive of regeneration in all its majesty, as experienced in that land of pure spirits. Without a form to signalize it, without a whisper to proclaim it, there would be joy in heaven. When, therefore, men degrade the dignity of this change to that of an appendage to a ritual; when they overlay its simplicity by imposing upon it burdensome and intricate ordinances; when they overshadow its delicate spirituality by building around and above it even the scriptural symbols which express it, we only speak the uniform language of the Sacred scriptures and of common sense, when we catch the tone of an apostle and say — “we do not know whether we have baptized — Christ sent us not for this — lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”

A second feature to be observed in the scriptural theory of conversion is, that it is a change of character, as distinct from a *constitutional* change. John Randolph, in a letter to a friend, written at a time when his mind was agitated by religious inquiry, speaks of a volume which he had then before him, and in which it was affirmed, he says, “that no man is converted without the experience of a miracle.” “Such,” he continues, “is the substance” of the author’s

faith: A man "must be sensible of the working of a miracle in his own person. Now, my good friend, I have never experienced anything like this. I have been sensible, and am always, of the proneness to sin in my nature. I have grieved unfeignedly for my manifold transgressions. I have thrown myself upon the mercy of my Redeemer. But I have felt nothing like what this writer requires." "It appears incredible that one so contrite as I sometimes know myself to be should be rejected entirely by infinite mercy." Yet "I fear that I presume upon God's mercy. I sometimes dread that I am in a far worse condition than if I had never heard God's word."

This extract illustrates the method in which minds not accustomed to the technicalities of a theological dialect will often interpret and misinterpret unguarded or confused speech respecting the doctrine of regeneration. It is the legitimate interpretation of any language which degrades conversion from the level of a moral change to that of a change in the constitution of a soul. I say "degrades conversion"; for what do we mean by a constitutional change? As applied to a spiritual intelligence, a constitutional change is a change either in its essence, or in its susceptibilities, or in its executive powers. But a change in either or all of these is, in respect of the ends of moral government, of less profound significance than a change of character.

The world has been very slow in learning that miracles are not the grandest disclosure of Omnipotence. In the material world there are more sublime displays of power than those of miraculous dignity. The sidereal universe swayed by the forces of law, is a nobler work of God than that in which he said: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou moon, in the valley of Ajalon." In the animal creation there is a grandeur of divine working which no miracle has stamped upon it. The government of animal nature, by laws which make it as true to God's will, as the line of a bee in its flight, or the swoop of an eagle from its eyrie, is a more illustrious expression of the divine mind,

than the piling up of the quails in the wilderness two cubits deep.

So, in the world of mind, law is itself a more majestic thought than that of the suspension of law. The government of an intelligent universe under the law of moral freedom exhibits a more imperial reach of God's power than the government of such a universe outside of that law. The government of finite mind, speaking anthropologically, is a more august achievement than the creation of that mind. The idea of *character* is an advance upon the idea of *nature*. Character in a soul, conceived of as an effect of God's working, is a more sublime product than the make of that soul. Do you conceive of moral character as a something in the constitution of a soul, like the grain of a piece of wood? By such a conception you abase the soul itself, for the purpose of moral government, to a level with a piece of wood. Do you define to yourself depravity as a viciousness ingrained in the very build of a spirit, like the gnarl of an oak? By such a definition you precipitate the spirit itself, for the ends of moral government, to a level with the gnarl of an oak. Do you imagine gracious affections as inserted into the very nature of a man, as one would infuse a new gas into the atmosphere? By such a fancy you degrade the man himself, for the intents of moral government, to a level with a gas in the atmosphere. Do you describe regeneration as an act which impregnates a sinner's being with a new power, as you would magnetize a piece of steel? By such a description you drag down a sinner's being, for the objects of moral government, to a level with a piece of steel. Omnipotence can no more rule the one than the other by a moral system.

Is it, then, to be supposed that such conceptions as these underlie the scriptural emblems of that change which a sinner needs to render him an object of God's complacency? There is in these emblems a height and a depth, a length and a breadth, of significance which such thoughts of regeneration and its surroundings in the system of truth do

not fill up, and fill out, and fathom to the bottom. By the side of such emblems these thoughts appear sensuous and materialistic. Nothing but a literal interpretation of the language of these emblems can bind them to the sphere of constitutional phenomena. The instant we leave their literal force, — that is, the moment we conceive of them as *emblems* of truth, — truth is buoyant within them. It springs up above the sphere of merely creative power, into that of moral empire, where God makes flexible to his will the immense populations of intelligence and of liberty which fill the universe with his own image. There, man is a man, and not a manikin. A sinner is a sinner, and not a wretch only. He is responsible, self-acting, free; responsible *because* self-acting, self-acting *because* free, and free *because* otherwise moral government over him is a fiction. Conversion being thus a change in the character of a free sinner, *regeneration*, in respect of its moral solemnity, is something other and more than *re-creation*. It belongs to another and a loftier plane of Omnipotence.

If anything more than the natural interpretation of the scripture were needed to establish this view, — that conversion is a change of character, as distinct from constitutional changes, — two very simple facts would corroborate this as the *necessary* interpretation of the scripture.

One is, that Christian experience proves no other than a change of character in conversion. Conversion is an experience. It is one of the most ancient and one of the most modern facts in the mental history of this world. Consciousness has taken cognizance of it in unnumbered hearts. Real life has proved it by innumerable tests. Yet no regenerate man knows anything of a re-creation of his nature, or a multiplication of his powers. No Christian is conscious of new faculties. None exhibits such in common life. A converted man thinks, reasons, remembers, imagines now; and he did all these before conversion. A regenerate heart feels, desires, loves, hates, now; and it did all these before. A new-born soul chooses, resolves, plans, executes; and it

did all these before. The chief subjects of thought are changed — they are revolutionized. The prime objects of love and hatred are changed — they are transposed. The supreme inclination of the affections is changed — it is reversed. The *character* of the purposes is changed — it is transformed. In these respects, indeed, old things are passed away, and all things are new. But beyond this neither consciousness nor observation testifies to any other change. No other could add to this any weight of moral significance. The man could have been, so far as we know, no *more* a Christian, no *more* an object of complacency to God, no *more* at peace with his own conscience, if regenerating grace had been a solvent of his nature, and had reduced it to its elements, and reconstructed the man by an improved process of creation.

The other fact is, that the unregenerate man cannot be made intelligently to feel the reasonableness of God in making salvation dependent on any other change in a sinner than a change of character. The way of salvation is urged upon the acceptance of men, in the Bible, as a reasonable way. God lays open the whole subject, as our Lord did to Nicodemus, as one which is susceptible of reasonable defence. It is to be presumed to be capable of *seeming* reasonable to an unregenerate mind. The revelation of the mind of God on the subject is addressed to an unregenerate world. Its appeal is to the good sense of men — that sum total of the intellectual virtues equipoised and symmetrical. “Marvel not” — “Come, let us reason together” — “Are not my ways equal, saith the Lord?” — “What more could I do to my vineyard that I have not done in it?” — “O fools, and slow of heart to believe.” — Such is the tone of inspiration in exposing its great organic truths to the test of reason.

But the theory of the necessity of any other change in a sinner than a change of character, as the condition of salvation, does not bear this scrutiny of the good sense of men. A sinner's conscience does respond to it reasonably; his

reason does not respond to it conscientiously. Therefore it does not deepen his conviction of guilt intelligently. If he reasons consistently upon it—and some minds will reason consistently here, to their own hurt—if he reasons consistently upon it, the inevitable inference from it seems to be that he has no responsibility respecting his soul's salvation until regeneration has been performed upon him. I cannot rid myself of a sense of sin; guilt seems to burn within me, like an unearthly fire; yet in *reason*, with this view of conversion, I cannot see myself to be any more responsible for sin than for my shadow. I *feel* guilt to be my character, and the whole of it; but in *reason*, upon this theory, it seems to be my organism only. I feel the burden of sin as if I were its creator, and yet in *reason*, with this conception of it, it seems to have been born with me by no act of mine. Then by whose act? I *feel* the unworthiness of my depravity; I am speechless as if I deserved to be damned for it, and yet in *reason*, with this view of it, the very marrow of my bones seems to be as much responsible for it as the immortal part of me. Then, when by *reason* I pursue the phantom which yet I *feel* to be no phantom, where do I find its last refuge? Where is the *crime* lodged of originating the thing for which I am damned? Yet shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

That is an awful antagonism—it seems irreverent to conceive of it—in which a sinner's conscience and reason are thus arrayed in conflict, the one condemning him, the other accusing God. It is more than a "conflict of ages." Under the theory before us, it would be the conflict of eternity. Unregenerate mind in the agitations of such unnatural warfare, with unregenerate passions boiling over under the inevitable sense of injustice, cannot be reasoned with. You might as well reason with Vesuvius. That soul can be made to feel helpless, hopeless, reckless; but in *reason*, that will be the helplessness, the hopelessness, the recklessness of a *victim*, not a *sinner*. We may silence the

victim. We may overwhelm him with arguments which *he* cannot answer. We may overawe him with learned and abstruse conjectures. We may teach him what the wise men have recorded of the pre-existence of souls; and *his* soul may be troubled because he cannot disprove it. We may discourse to him of his personality in Adam, his participation in the Fall, his taste of the forbidden tree; and he may be speechless because he cannot conceive of it, and because if he should speak, he could only say: "This is my infirmity, that I cannot remember Eden; it is not so much to me, even, as a dream when one awaketh." We may expound to him the "federal representation," and the "imputation of sin"; and, for the moment, *he* may impute it as a sin to his soul that he cannot help shuddering at the shock which that conception gives to the conscience with which *Adam* has endued him! We may weigh him down with theologic definitions and qualifications and distinctions, and may back these up with authorities and catechisms, till, through his sheer bewilderment at our prodigious learning, his faith may be held bound by our dogma, like mercury compressed in a globe. But the instant the theologic weights are taken off, the globe flies open, and the prisoner springs out into the free air. Once more in his right mind, his faith falls back to the logic of the common sense, and he feels as John Randolph did, that, on such a theory of depravity, if regeneration means anything, it means that conversion is a miracle. *He* has no more to do with it than he had with his birth. Then the eternal conflict in his nature — conscience on this side, and reason on that side — breaks out with redoubled rage. Conscience thunders "There is no peace saith my God to the *wicked*." Reason flings back in defiant answer, "There is no peace saith *my* God to the *victim*."

The doctrine of a constitutional change in conversion is seldom, if ever, consistently preached. It cannot be thus preached by a man who is intent on results in real life. I may hold it as a theorem, but I cannot preach it. I may

defend it as a thesis among theologians, but I cannot press it home upon men from the pulpit. I cannot preach it to careless sinners. I cannot preach it to awakened inquirers. No man can preach it to an audience of anxious men who are seeking after God. No man can preach it in a revival of religion. There is something which stifles it in the very atmosphere of the place in which earnest men have come together, to ask what *they* must *do* to be saved.

One preacher of distinction in our own country, during the early part of the present century, who thought that he held this view of regeneration, very consistently acknowledged that he could not preach to impenitent men in a revival of religion. He could preach, and as some of his published discourses prove, with great power to professing Christians on themes of Christian experience, but he could not preach to unregenerate hearers at a time when they felt salvation to be a present business, and the business of an emergency. On one occasion, when invited to preach at such a time by Professor Stuart, then a pastor in New Haven, he declined the service, and, with tearful eyes, assigned as his reason that his preaching was not adapted to the demands of such scenes as he had witnessed there. He could not adjust to them his views of the nature of a change of heart. A revival was an emergency for which no provision was found in his theory of the way in which the gospel should be preached to unregenerate men. Was not such a confession the strongest possible corroborative evidence that he had mistaken the doctrine of the scriptures?

We cannot err, then, in adopting as one of the first principles of revelation on the subject of the new birth, that it is a change of character, as distinct from constitutional changes in the soul. It is a change in that, and only that, for which conscience *and* reason, reason *and* conscience, hold a man responsible, as for a thing of his own originating and his own nurturing.

A third feature in the scriptural doctrine of conversion is, that it is an *intelligible* change of character, in distinction

from a mystical change. Some doctrines of the scriptures are so clear that their very perspicuity is their vindication. A statement of them amounts to proof. Other doctrines are so mysterious that statement and testimony are all the evidence we can have of their truthfulness. We can reason upon them no further than to observe that their statement is not internally a contradiction, and that the testimony which supports them is authoritative. But there are other truths in which the mysterious and the intelligible are so interwoven that to an unpractised eye they may seem inseparable. Such a truth is that of regeneration.

On the one hand, what God's working in the change of a sinner's heart is, as distinct from the effect of that working, in other words, what regeneration is, as distinct from conversion, who can tell? We know scarcely more of the interior of the work of God in regenerating a soul than we do of the mechanic power in creating a soul. The dynamics of the phenomenon elude all our philosophy. When Coleridge said: "By what manner of working God changes a soul from evil to good, how he impregnates the barren rock with gems and gold, is to the human mind an impenetrable mystery in all cases alike," he uttered only what every thoughtful mind feels. Thus our Lord taught to Nicodemus, The wind bloweth where it listeth, but the whence and the whither ye cannot tell; so is every one that is born of the Spirit. But this is very far from affirming that the change itself, the result of God's working, is an enigma. A change of character, in itself considered, is one of the most intelligible of historic facts. It is like a transparency in the sun. It has the simplicity of contrast. It is like a change from "yes" to "no," from "no" to "yes."

Yet an inquiring mind sometimes suffers confusion from permitting the mysteriousness of the methods of regeneration to overspread the chrystalline character of the fact of conversion. The idea seems often to be entertained that this change itself is the great secret of Christian experience. An unregenerate mind cannot know *what* it is, any more

than *how* it is. It appears, in the view of some minds, to bar the entrance to the church, like the watchword of a brotherhood, to which, from the outside, none can be initiated. Said one, in deep anguish, to a pastor, "I do not understand it. I do not comprehend what I must do, or what I must be. I seem to myself to be doing all I can do. I am not conscious of hostility to God. I long to accept Christ and him only as my Saviour. What more is requisite to give me the peace which others feel, I do not know. The mystery of the thing shuts me in. Yet guilt weighs upon me like the hills. I feel as if I were buried alive."

The state of mind expressed in this language is, in more respects than one, unnatural and unscriptural. It is not an experience to which men are ever exhorted, or invited, or intimidated, in the Bible. But the point of its erroneousness which demands notice here is that of its confounding a change of heart with the divine methods which induce the change, and conceiving the one to be as enigmatical as the other. This is like confounding light with the voice which said: "Let there be light." An inquiring sinner wrongs his own soul, and distrusts the Saviour's heart towards him, when he lingers in dumb anguish before the cross, hoping that he shall by and by understand the subject of conversion, and thus be *enabled* to become a Christian. To a sinner in the condition which I here imagine, there is nothing further to be understood in order to his salvation. There is no abyss of mystery to be fathomed. He has the truth, and the whole of it. How does our Lord address Nicodemus in this condition of purblind anxiety? He chides him, as one would a child whose knowledge was needlessly beneath his years. Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things? These emblems of conversion, too—what boldness of contrast pervades them all! When we mean to express an idea with indubitable clearness, we seek the aid of contrasted images. We have no difficulty in distinguishing ice and fire. We never mistake the fall of thistle-down for the tread of an elephant. Nothing else reveals

midnight like a flash of lightning. So the inspired mind paints the reality of a change of heart by depicting the two states of character between which the change occurs. It is from non-existence to being; from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh; from darkness to light; from death to life; from the empire of fiends to the kingdom of Christ. There is a meaning in such intense symbols of the truth which is meant to be as intensely understood. An unregenerate mind can understand them. No other difference exists between regenerate and unregenerate perception of the truth in them than that which divides the knowledge of experience and the knowledge of theory on all other subjects. A sinner—an unregenerate sinner—a sinner who feels his own desert of hell—the chief of sinners—may come before God with none but reasonable fears, none but intelligent convictions, none but manly yearnings after peace, and in conscious helplessness may ask of God, “What shall I *do* to be saved?” It is a reasonable inquiry. God will not mock him in the answer. God will not say to him, “It is a mystery: it is the great secret of the universe. Thy destiny is unsearchable by thy dim eye. Be still, and know that I am God. Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call thee with an effectual calling. Go—go thy way.” Sinners often treat the Saviour thus; he is never so merciless to them.

Certain couplets in a very precious hymn, expressive of the sinner’s last resolve, though they are true to a sinner’s desponding experience, still are not worthy, because that experience is not worthy, of the riches and the freedom of God’s grace. “I’ll go to Jesus”:

“I’ll to the gracious King approach
Whose sceptre pardon gives;
Perhaps he will command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.

“*Perhaps* he will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer!”

There is no “perhaps” in God’s promises. There is no

stammering speech in God's invitations to an inquiring sinner. There is no hesitancy of love in God's offers of regenerating grace. More honorable to the truth as it is in Jesus is the language of the very next hymn in our collection :

“ Just as I am — without one plea,
 But that thy blood was shed for me.
 Just as I am — and waiting not.
 Just as I am — though tossed about
 With many a conflict.
 Just as I am — poor, wretched, blind.
 Just as I am — thou *wilt* receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve.
 Because thy promise I believe ;
 O Lamb of God, I come.”

The fourth feature in the scriptural view of the nature of conversion is, that, in distinction from every variety of secondary change, it is the most *radical* change of which human character is susceptible. This conception of the radical nature of conversion is involved in all the scriptural statements of its necessity, and specially in the scriptural metaphors by which it is symbolized. Indeed the conception with which the inspired mind appears to have struggled most sturdily under the poverty of language, was this of the greatness of the change. What else is signified by the frequency with which the inspired thought forsakes literal speech, and falls back upon such startling and unqualified metaphors as the creation of light ; the resurrection from the dead ; the mysterious and unknown change of birth ; and translation from the realms of the prince of the power of the air ? Sane minds do not employ such emblems of thought recklessly. We cannot suppose inspiration to prompt extravagant speech. This is but the sobriety of human dialect, crowded with and struggling to encompass the magnitude of divine thought. Scriptural utterances on this subject exhibit the same evidence of the conflict of truth with the feebleness of language — I had almost said

the impatience of truth at the imbecility of language — which we find in the scriptural modes of representing the being and majesty of God. Truth, in the one case as in the other, seems to weigh down the most elastic tongue, and to exhaust the most voluminous vocabulary, and to search through the inventions of the most creative imagination, and to pass from one emblem to another, from one kingdom of resemblances to a second, till, by the mysteriousness of its drapery, we are compelled to feel that the naked truth, as appreciated by the mind of God, surpasses our reach of expression. We can only exclaim: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard it." We cannot define the greatness of the change in literal speech, otherwise than by pronouncing it the most profound, so far as we can know, that human nature can experience.

What the birth of the body is to the consciousness of the mind that inhabits it we do not know; but, for its significance to the moral government of God over the mind, it cannot be so momentous a change as that mind's conversion. What disembodiment at death is to the experience of the spirit which thus goes out into an unexplored eternity we cannot conceive; but, in respect of the solemnity of moral government, it cannot be of such magnitude as the regeneration of that spirit. What the resurrection of the body is to the history of the soul which has been again enrobed in it we cannot conjecture; but, in its relation to the moral government of that soul, it cannot be so elemental a change as that soul's conversion. Such physical transformations and transitions can be hints only, and feeble hints, of the spiritual phenomenon which transcends them.

Let us, then, for our practical instruction, observe several mental and moral changes with which conversion is often confounded. Observe briefly, that a change of external deportment is not the chief result of regeneration. No matter how pervasive that change may be, it can bear no comparison with religious conversion. When a man who has been addicted to sensual vice becomes a sober man, a

chaste man, an industrious man, a good citizen, a kind father, brother, son, there is a notable change. It is a real change in character. It is a change for which a man deserves to be respected. But that is not a change which fills up the language of the scriptures in designating the translation of a man into the kingdom of God. In other words, conversion and reformation are not synonymous.

Again, no increase of seriousness of mental habit is synonymous with religious conversion. A young man often experiences, as the natural result of expanding intellect, an increase of thoughtfulness. When he was a child he thought as a child; now he has put away childish things. Manly thought awakens manly sensibility. He acquires some sense of the reality of life as a conflict. A certain dignity of character is formed, which is as natural a growth of manhood upon the stock of youth as the addition of a cubit to the stature of an infant. It is indeed a valuable change, a change necessary to success in life, a change which will command respect, as it deserves respect; but it is not conversion. No growth of earnestness is synonymous with that new birth which a soul experiences under the regenerating act of God.

Further, the abandonment of any single passion does not constitute conversion. Such a change as this often occurs as the fruit of increasing years. Often the effect is to mellow a man's character, by substituting for a turbulent vice one more mild and comely, and yet a vice as deeply seated, as odious to God. Warren Hastings, after his ambition had burnt itself out in India, realized the favorite dream of his youth, by returning to spend his old age in the homestead where his ancestors had lived in luxury. Here was a change indeed. It must have involved in some sort a change in character. It was an abandonment of a fiery passion for a harmless indulgence of an aged man's love of repose. But this obviously is no such change as the word of God portrays by the emblem of the dawn of light on a benighted wanderer.

Once more, conversion is not the development of character by natural germination in the heart. Character often undergoes a change by which qualities long concealed spring to light under a change of circumstance. Traits of generous manhood, the germs of which have been repressed, shoot up thriftily under improved discipline. Energies which have slumbered are roused by emergencies. No man knows the compass of his own nature till it has been distended by some great sorrow or great opportunity for achievement. Such facts in life tempt us to self-conceit respecting the hidden nobleness of man. Much of the religion of literature is founded upon the idea of concealed virtue. A divinity is imagined to dwell within us, and to be awaiting only the incitement of occasion or the felicity of circumstance to develop itself in all that man should desire or respect in character. Yet no such change as this can be the complement of the scriptural conception of that revolution of character which is no *less* than resurrection from the dead. What a satire on developed goodness in man is expressed in the tone of the scriptures towards the best embodiment of the natural virtues! Breathe into Nature's good man the most comely of her graces; educate in him the most refined of her sensibilities; develop in him the most magnanimous of her impulses; fashion in him the most docile obedience to her teachings; nurture in him the most elegant and placid of her tastes; so that to the silken judgment of the world, his character shall seem to be a paragon of beauty — "fair as a star when only one is shining in the sky"; yet if that fascinating being — that young man of whom it shall be said that Jesus, beholding him, loved him — has not been changed by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, the honest eye of God sees him as a naked soul in bondage to the prince of the power of the air.

If the scriptural dialect on this subject means anything, it must indicate that conversion is a change which brings into existence a character which had no being before.

Does not birth introduce to a new existence? Is life only a development of nonentity? Is vitality a germination of the life of a corpse? Is light a growth of the midnight? Is the kingdom of God a superstructure upon the kingdom of Satan? If development, growth, germination, are the things in which regeneration exhibits itself, we need no such emblems as these to express it. They are out of character and out of place. They are untruthful. The scriptures are full of puerile extravagances and grimaces of diction. There is no propriety in recognizing two classes of mankind, such as the scriptures separate by a gulf of fire. There are no such beings as sinners and saints,—enemies of God and friends of God,—natural men and spiritual men,—men who are in darkness, and men who are in light,—men who are dead, and men who are alive,—men who are in God's kingdom, and men who are in Satan's kingdom. These are unreal and unjust distinctions. Men are all of one class. They differ not in kind, but in degree of character. Here, then, we have a large and varied class of descriptions, uttered by the Spirit of God of men and to men, to which among men we find no counterpart in reality. But one half of the Bible is opposite to this world. Is this credible? The development, then, of an existing germ of holiness is not the scriptural idea of a change of heart. In other words, no process of self-culture can be equivalent in its fruits to the divine act of regeneration.

The radical nature of conversion may be still further illustrated, by observing for a moment a principle which we often lose sight of in meditation upon this theme, but which lies at the bottom of all genuine notions of man as a subject of government. It is that character itself has *fixedness*. In the profound and ultimate sense in which we employ the term to indicate what a soul is as a subject of moral government, character has an element which approaches immutability. Character, good or bad, once formed, tends to perpetuate itself. Once *in* it, a soul

grows *to* it, and rises or sinks with it. The necessity of creating a character is the most transcendent privilege, and at the same time the most appalling peril, of a moral being. The law of perpetuity is deep-laid in its very nature. By this law a moral being tends to be always what it has been and is. It is this which renders guilt so fearful. The law of guilt is to perpetuate guilt. "Once a sinner, always a sinner," expresses the tendency of fallen mind.

A truth is enveloped in those forms of expression which eminent and holy men have often used to express depravity, when they have spoken of "a sinful nature"; of "a depraved constitution"; of a "helpless corruption"; of "inability to repent." Much as these modes of expression are misconstrued, and much as they need qualification, there is still a truth in them. The use of them often indicates the struggle of a pious heart to express that truth. They are not without resemblance to some of the forms of scriptural phraseology. They have their counterpart in the common usage of men in figurative speech. The truth they express is that of the natural fixedness of character in a sinner's heart. On the principle of the tendency of all character to perpetuate itself, a sinner's character is fixed. What he has once made it, its tendency is to be forever. That it will be forever, unless the power of God be interposed to reverse it.

True, we do not conceive of this as an invincible tendency. It exists by no compulsory law. It asserts, therefore, no fatal authority. It is not a destiny. We do not reason upon the laws of character as we reason upon the laws of matter, or even as we reason upon laws of intellect, as intellect only. Character, in the ultimate conception of it as a moral phenomenon, is unique. It is not a metal; it is not a mind. It has laws of its own. Its laws are but the expression of the human mind which creates it, as the laws of light are an expression of the divine mind which created that; as the laws of intellect are an expression of the infinite Intelligence in whose image it is made. When, there-

fore, we apply the term "nature" to character we cannot mean by it the same thing as when we speak of the "nature" of silver or the "nature" of memory. We must not confound the laws of character with the emblems of these laws, which we sometimes seek for in the laws of matter and in the organic laws of mind. Matter and mind are God's creation. Human character is man's creation. The creative power is as absolute in the one case as in the other. God rules finite character not by creation, but by government. He governs it as *character*, not as the wind or as the springs of the sea.

Yet, after all, such is this imperial will of man, by which it is his privilege and his peril to be what he will, that a pressure towards immutability grows out of its nature and accumulates with time. Once bent one way, the spring coils itself that way forever. Once set in the chosen mould, the compound indurates into granite. Such is character in the ultimate notion of it. A creation by man's own act — a free creation — a creation which *can* be reversed — yet, once in being, it *tends* to deathless being, like that of God. It is a start on a journey into eternity, in a direction from which, but by God's interposition, no traveller returns. It is in the light of such a conception of the awful immortality of character that we must judge of the radical nature of its change in conversion.

It remains, then, to observe, that there is but one change of character conceivable which shall meet all the peculiarities affirmed of religious conversion. It is the change from sin to holiness. It is a change from absolute sin to the first dawn of holiness in the soul. It is that unique change which has no parallel and no adequate similitude, in which an intelligent mind, a free mind, a self-acting mind, a mind which has intelligently, freely, of its own will, abandoned God, is led for the first time in its moral history by Almighty grace to return, and *give itself* to God. For the first time, then, a sinner appreciates God. For the first time he loves God. For the first time he chooses God.

For the first time he enjoys God. For the first time he is born of God. For the first time his life is hid with Christ in God. God, *God*, GOD, is the one being to whom his soul mounts up, and in whom he enters into rest. He may be flooded with joy unspeakable, because he is engulfed in the blessedness of God.

ARTICLE III.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

BY REV. GEORGE N. BOARDMAN, BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK.

THE science that has for its object the laws of wealth must have many relations to a gospel intended specially for the poor. The names of Chalmers, Whately, and Wayland suggest to every mind an association of Political Economy and the Christian Ministry. The sermons of the period of the American Revolution show that the pulpit has heretofore in stirring times considered the public weal as properly coming under its survey. The essays of such men as Dr. Palmer, Dr. Thornwall, Prof. Hodge, called forth by our civil war, show that those who expound the laws of God consider it their right at least, no doubt their duty, to expound also the principles of civil government. The clergy of our land have never, to any considerable extent, relinquished the right to advocate such social virtues as temperance and the observance of the Sabbath, nor will they, until they expunge the decalogue from the Sacred scriptures, cease from their efforts to suppress profaneness and licentiousness. Still it may be questioned whether they have not left these works too much to occasions and transient excitements, whether they have sufficiently considered that the godliness which they preach has the promise