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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE.

BY THE REV. S. NOWELL-ROSTRON, M.A., B.D.,  
Rector of Bradfield.

**T**HERE is one question of the deepest importance that we may not escape. It transcends all our discussions. It concerns all our theories. It closely affects our practical life. In its broadest issue it shapes itself thus: Can the Christian be sure of the great affirmations of his creed? Can he be sure of God? of Jesus Christ? of the Holy Spirit? Is his conviction based on eternal realities or on doubtful grounds of human reasoning, credulity or imagination? In regard to the subject specially before us, the Reconciliation of God and Man, it asks: Can the Christian be sure of his salvation, of his entire and complete forgiveness? When all has been said and done, is he still left with a wide margin of uncertainty about this great matter of his standing before God?

The analogy of the experience of human forgiveness readily suggests hesitation. How can God fully forgive man his sin, when man finds it so hard fully to forgive his brother an injury, when he often finds it so difficult to forgive himself for his own follies and errors? In the quiet spaces of his self-communing does he not ponder the possibility that the past may not after all be completely forgiven or forgotten by God, and that it still may come up against him? How will it be when the "Books" are "opened" (Rev. xx. 12), and that other Book, "which is the Book of life?" When we give account of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or evil, can we then escape the horror, the heartbreak of the damning record of the past? Will not its story, traced with invisible but indelible writing, both on the tablets of memory and on the tablets of God, then shine forth in all its accusing shamefulness? As Sir Percivale found in his questing for the Holy Grail:

"Then every evil word I had spoken once,  
And every evil thought I had thought of old,  
And every evil deed I ever did,  
Awoke,"

will they not "awake" for us also in the searchlight of the Day of God that is to dawn? Does God really forgive us now, take us back to Himself, treat the wrong we have done Him as though it had never existed? If it is hard to forgive, it is hard to realise we are forgiven. This is no casual question. It is a matter of life and death that we should know. It is not enough for us that it is possibly or even probably true. For upon our assurance of the fact of our forgiveness depends the peace that pardon brings as its most comforting gift to the soul; and the liberation that sets the heart "at leisure from itself," free for eager and concentrated service. If we are still left in the region of doubt, the Christian message is no good news of salvation. It is but another (though

the noblest and loftiest) of the many systems of human thought and striving that begin and end in the worship of an Unknown God.

#### PROBABILITY AND ASSURANCE.

We are met at once in the making of such a demand by the assertion, and the true assertion, that in many matters, to quote the great fundamental principle of Bishop Butler's argument, "probability is the guide of life." Why not then in this? In many regions of human thought and activity we cannot have and we should not expect certainty. Whilst there are facts of the physical universe such as the law of gravity, or of mathematical science such as "two and two make four," in regard to which there is no room for questioning, there is also a very large area of life in which choice has to be made between two opinions or courses both of which present elements of doubt, and in regard to which Butler's principle of probability must be our guide. It has its application in the sphere of religion and in the consideration of the so-called "proofs" of Christian doctrine. It is indeed a powerful and unanswerable plea that all human beings are bound by the principles they apply to the affairs of daily life to give to the claims of Christianity their urgent consideration. It turns upon the barren Deism of to-day, as it did upon that of the eighteenth century, the dry, dispassionate and gentle light of a philosophy broad-based on wide observation and honest thought. But it does not bring us, and does not profess to bring us, into the inner shrine of Christian experience. Butler and Wesley are not antagonistic but complementary. The Evangelist and the Philosopher have much to teach each other. When we approach the personal relation between the soul and God the desire for certainty no longer, to use Gladstone's words, "enervates and unmans the character."<sup>1</sup> If it be said that with our limited and fallible powers we cannot attain to certainty, I would reply, again in Gladstone's words, "The fallibility of our faculties may not prevent our having knowledge that in itself is absolute."<sup>2</sup> The Psalmist's cry, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Ps. xlii. 2), is not satisfied by speculative probabilities but by a draught of the living water. Butler himself was to feel that deeper need. When he lay dying his mind was sore troubled. He asked his chaplain to say somewhat to comfort him, and the chaplain repeated the verse, "Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "But," said the Bishop, "how do I know that He came to save me?" "The Scripture also saith, my Lord, that 'whosoever cometh, He will in no wise cast out.'" And so the great Bishop found assurance. "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me." "I am the way, the truth and the Life." Christ takes us beyond the region of probability into that of assurance if we trust His claim.

<sup>1</sup> *Studies subsidiary to Butler's works*, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 342.

## MAN'S NEED.

But let us be quite clear what manner of assurance we expect and desire. We do not seek and we do not find a world from which the possibility of error has been removed. In Browning's "Asolando" there is a study of such a world where there is no room for doubt, and it is therefore a world that is eternally stagnant. The earth with its conflicts and perplexities is for that very reason the sphere of progress and of hope and of the victory of faith. Christian assurance is often that of doubts conquered, not of doubts removed.

" With me, faith means perpetual unbelief  
Kept quiet, like the snake 'neath Michael's foot  
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe."

Nor is it a kind of assurance which it is easy to come by, I mean the facile self-assurance which is the pose of the ignorance, deliberate or unconscious, that results from blinding the eyes to difficulties. We have no desire to share the confident dogmatism of the sectarian, which is narrow, not as the path of Christian discipleship, but as the hard lovelessness of the Pharisee. Nor again do we wish for the assurance of the self-reliant, rejoicing in the strength of body or brain, making himself his own god. The Gospel of individual sufficiency for life has in it a stirring appeal to youth and inexperience. "Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string," writes Emerson. It is a call to resolution and action and self-expression and self-development that our modern world is not slow to heed. But we know that in the wider processes of living this is a Gospel doomed to spiritual disillusionment, and, it may be, to bitter material disappointment and failure. The prayer that voices the universal tragedy of human experience is not hyperbole but simple fact: "Almighty God, Who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves."<sup>1</sup> The assurance we need is not in ourselves or of ourselves. It is not in the world or of the world. It is in God and of God, or it is nowhere. It is the assurance for which the soul yearns that has realised the horror of its sin, that has been humbled to the dust by the sense of its own unworthiness, that has lost all trust in its own achievements or its own Righteousness, and that, helpless, looks to God for grace. Will He indeed receive us, will He re-create His broken image within us, will He take foulness and make it clean, weakness and make it strong, put a new song upon our lips, and set us in the company of the Redeemed?

## THE PURPOSE OF GOD.

The answer of God is so wonderful that many cannot credit it. How often has been repeated the wistful remark of a brilliant fellow-undergraduate to me during J. R. Mott's Mission in Cam-

<sup>1</sup> Collect for 2nd Sunday in Lent.

bridge, "If only I could be sure of that." How many have asked as they have listened to the promises of God,

"Can it be true, the grace He is declaring?"

The question takes us swiftly and directly in our consideration from our human need to God's purpose. Nor should we shrink from trying to discover this. Though His ways are not our ways and are "past tracing out" (Rom. xi. 33) we are not shut out completely from His counsels. If St. Paul is led to cry, "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?" he can add without presumption and with radiant certainty, "But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. ii. 16). The Divine purpose was that man should be redeemed and know of and rejoice in his redemption.<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament writers, Psalmist and Prophet alike, leave no room for doubt as to the conviction behind their message. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow" (Isa. i. 18); "The work of Righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of Righteousness . . . confidence (assurance—A.V.) for ever" (Isa. xxxii. 17); "As far as the East is from the West, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. ciii. 12); "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more" (Jer. xxxi. 34); "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away" (Hos. xiv. 4).

The elaborate ritual of the Old Testament Ordinances had for one of its purposes the bringing of such assurance to the offender that life might not thereafter be burdened by sin repented of, but unexpiated. It symbolised a deeper need, that of spiritual cleansing, and so prepared for Christ, for it is in Christ we may see set forth fully before us the loving purpose of the Father. The "divers portions" and "divers manners" of God's Revelation of Himself belonged to the past. Now perfectly His will was revealed in Christ. The Divine purpose is seen in the self-humbling of Christ and in the Father's supreme gift of His Son. Because God is love He must save, and give to the uttermost that He might save. Because His love is holy, He must destroy the barrier of sin. Nor could Love, unless we fatally misunderstand it in its Divine source and nature, contemplate saving action in the world that would leave the rescued in doubt as to their Salvation. The Incarnation, the earthly life and ministry, the Death and Resurrection of Christ, have each their part in that loving purpose for us. But especially in the Cross and the work of atonement there done do we find the final, the outstanding, source of our assurance. It is not our love for God, our desires, affections or feelings, that save us. It is God's

<sup>1</sup> Though few would now accept all the Calvinistic "Lambeth Articles" of 1595 on Predestination, Art. VI may so far be subscribed: "A truly faithful man, that is one endowed with justifying faith, is certain by the full assurance of faith, of the remission of his sins." Whitaker's draught of these articles read "certainty of faith." The phrase was altered by the Lambeth Divines who seemingly saw in the alteration a subtle difference (see Browne on Art. XVI). Cf. St. Luke i. 77.

love for us, revealed in its certainty and fullness on Calvary. "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8). Christianity was proclaimed to the world first by men who were sure of their own forgiveness by God, and who preached a Gospel of assurance (Acts ii. 36) to a despairing and sin-stricken world. To the eager and pathetic cry, "What shall we do?" the answer was the same, for Jew and Gentile alike, "Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins." The New Testament rings with the trumpet note of certainty. So far, at least, there was understanding of the Will of God (Eph. v. 17). It had been a "mystery," but was now a "mystery" made known (Eph. i. 9). This was the "good pleasure" of God's will (Eph. i. 5). So St. Paul prays for the Colossians (i. 9) that they may be "filled with the knowledge of His will," and in striking phrase that they may be brought "unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they might know the mystery of God, even Christ, in Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (ii. 2). It is impossible to begin to quote the indications everywhere of the glorious certainty of the Good News that ran like a fire of cleansing, light and warmth through that ancient world. "Who-soever believeth . . . should not perish"; "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; "By Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." There is no tremor of doubt in these words. They describe not hypothesis, but fact; not probability but assurance.

#### OUR ASSURANCE IN CHRIST.

If this, then, be God's purpose, what can we say of the Assurance He offers us in Christ? It is the assurance of knowledge which the soul can reach, and of which it can be as sure as of life itself. It comes not from a mechanical arrangement, an external, forensic declaration. It arises from a reunion of sundered souls, a passing over<sup>1</sup> of sin, a relationship restored, a bringing together of hearts that love and are meant for each other. It may be noted, therefore, that the Divine assurance bears three marks. First, it is immediate. "Thy sins are forgiven thee" (St. Matt. ix. 2; St. Luke vii. 48). Secondly, it is complete. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1). Not that some of sin's effects do not remain to scar the life though the wound is healed.

"Yes, Thou forgivest, but with all forgiving  
Can'st not renew mine innocence again."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes sin's consequences have to be endured by oneself and, still more terribly, by others, long after they are forgiven. Yet the heart can go singing upon its way for God now is with us.

<sup>1</sup> The commonest word for "forgiveness" in the New Testament is ἀφεσις (aphesis) which implies "sending away," "letting go" or "releasing."

<sup>2</sup> F. W. H. Myers, *St. Paul*.

It knows "the glory of the lighted soul" that dawned upon John Masfield's converted ploughman :

" That I should plough, and as I ploughed  
My Saviour Christ would sing aloud,  
And as I drove the clods apart  
Christ would be ploughing in my heart,  
Through rest-harrow and bitter roots,  
Through all my bad life's rotten fruits." <sup>1</sup>

And thirdly that assurance is free and for all and of God's loving mercy and purpose.<sup>2</sup> No money and no effort of ours could win it. Its cost was the travail of Christ's soul. If He died not to give us this, His death is the deepest tragedy in the story of the race. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. vi. 23). It is wine and milk without money and without price.

#### THE WAY OF ASSURANCE.

How is such assurance attained? The essential human preliminary condition is Repentance, with all that repentance implies. This was in the forefront of the preaching not only of the Baptist (St. Matt. iii. 2), but of our Lord (iv. 17) and of the Apostles (Acts ii. 38). The means by which assurance is mediated to us is Faith. Through faith we are saved (Eph. ii. 8), by faith we are justified (Rom. iii. 28), by faith we toil and fight, secure from the fiery darts of the evil one (Eph. vi. 16). Assurance through faith is gained by experience, confirmed by authority, and realised in character and action.

##### (a) Assurance gained by Experience.

Forgiveness is an experience. It brings the kind of assurance that experience provides. This is the primary ground of our certainty. The faculty which we use is faith. Faith involves the whole personality. It is not merely an intellectual exercise, nor a passing emotion, nor blind resolution of the will. Hartley Coleridge's words are worthy of our note,

" Think not the Faith by which the just shall live  
Is a dead creed, a map correct of heaven,  
Far less a feeling fond and fugitive,  
A thoughtless gift, withdrawn as soon as given ;  
It is an affirmation and an act  
That bids eternal truth be present fact."

We make a serious mistake when we identify faith with any of the powers of the soul that faith brings into its service. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen" (Heb. xi. 1). Faith alone can enter into the realm of the unseen and the eternal, and find assurance. But faith brings that assurance to the reason, and the reason tests and harmonises and expresses it in thought and word. Faith brings it to the will, and the will

<sup>1</sup> *The Everlasting Mercy.*

<sup>2</sup> Attention is called to the careful and guarded statements on Freewill and Predestination in Articles X and XVII.

makes its surrender to the will of God, and translates that surrender into a holy life. Faith brings it to the heart, and love and peace and joy fill the soul with steady light. Where faith is confused with reason, we believe only what we perceive. The dying robber was not invited to weigh the probabilities of the situation, but, against them, to make a mighty leap of faith. Where faith is regarded as only a matter of the will, the will to believe may be unreasoning credulity and prejudice that shapes the life and creed but leaves the heart untouched. Many believe what they wish to believe, but this is not faith nor is the resultant assurance Christian assurance. Nor is faith only feeling. To feel assured is not necessarily to be assured. Feelings change. Some, like Schleiermacher and his followers, reduce all religion to feeling, but others impatiently go to the other extreme, like Flint with his "Pure feeling is pure nonsense." Certainly many a spiritual tragedy has resulted from the identification, though more has been laid to its charge than it deserves. The pathetic instance of the poet Cowper leaps to the mind. Time and again his gentle soul was plunged into dreadful gloom. For a while, like his friend Newton, he felt the sense of "assurance" of salvation. But his dying words to his physician were "I feel unutterable despair." His last poem was entitled "The Castaway," a comparison between the lost sailor and his own storm-tossed soul.

" No voice divine the storm allayed,  
 No light propitious shone,  
 When, snatched from all effectual aid  
 We perished, each alone ;  
 But I beneath a rougher sea  
 And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he"—

We must not attribute to his Evangelical faith what was due to mental instability. Nevertheless a clearer understanding might have brought more lasting comfort to his stricken spirit. Might it not be said, as William Law objected, that, if assurance is only a matter of feeling, it but means "I am self justified, because my justification arises from what I feel and declare of myself. . . ?" The truth is that feeling, like the will and the reason, is the inseparable ally and comrade of faith. We cannot have enduring assurance without all three. We are sure because spiritually we live, and life is more than feeling, more than thought, more than resolution, more than action. Till we realise this we are perplexed by the neurotic types of spiritual experience, by the doubts of many as to its reality or its source, and by the excesses in the name of religion to which unregulated emotion has sometimes brought its devotees. William Law truly writes: "The spiritual life is its own proof." The first Epistle of St. John (v. 10) puts it still more emphatically: "He that believeth . . . hath the witness in him." Faith then brings assurance because it brings life, and that new life quickens mind and will and heart that they may make "one music," and give to us that "full assurance"<sup>1</sup> of faith (Heb. x. 22), which means also

<sup>1</sup> The same word *πληροφορία* (plerophoria) is used in each case.



“ full assurance ” of hope (Heb. vi. 11) and “ much assurance ” of conviction (I Thess. i. 5).

(b) *Assurance confirmed by Authority.*

From one point of view the search of man for assurance has been the search for an authority he can trust. The criticism of the assurance that comes from experience has often been made, that it arises from ecstasy or self-delusion. It may be valid for oneself but not for others. It may not represent eternal reality. “ There is always room,” to quote Mr. Gladstone’s words, “ for the entrance of error in that last operation of the percipient faculties of men, by which the objective becomes subjective.”<sup>1</sup> I have already quoted above his own reminder of the limitation to that objection.<sup>2</sup> But it is clearly right that our assurance should be confirmed by the voice of some authority other than that of our own personal conviction,<sup>3</sup> nor does God leave us without this. In three ways the experience of forgiveness is attested by authority:

(i) By the living voice of God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> Christ has not left us orphaned. The Holy Spirit has come, and “ Spirit with spirit can meet.” We have the testimony of the Holy Spirit (the “ *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* ” of the Reformers) within the soul. Where is there room for doubt when “ the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God ” (Rom. viii. 16)? He who convicts the world of sin, convinces the world also of righteousness (St. John xvi. 8). When the Gospel comes “ in the Holy Ghost,” it comes in “ much assurance ” (I Thess. i. 5). The fruit of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul is that which grows out of the ground of assurance (Gal. v. 22). The Holy Spirit, Who is given to be our guide into “ all truth,” is our Teacher in “ all things,” bringing all things to remembrance that Christ has said, glorifying Christ and revealing the will of God not only for the past but for the present and the future (St. John xvi. 13-15). Through the Holy Spirit Christ dwells within us and we in Him. The “ *unio mystica*,” the mystic union, becomes a reality. The indwelling Christ is our strength, our confidence, our very life. As of old He speaks to us and within us “ with authority.” He shares with us, as Dr. Dale reminds us, His own royal heritage, “ His vision of God, His Righteousness, His eternal and infinite blessedness in the Father’s love, His glory as the Son of God.”<sup>5</sup> May we not also share with Him His own assurance of the perfect accomplishment of His own redeeming work of love, “ It is finished,” and let His living Presence subdue every doubt and fear.

(ii) By the Bible. We believe the Bible to be the living word

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> p. 342.

<sup>3</sup> We must, of course, be true to our own experience. We cannot, as some of the Pragmatists suggest, believe in a God we know does not exist, because of the practical value of such “ faith.”

<sup>4</sup> It is not possible here to deal fully with the work of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sin. This touches only on one aspect of it.

<sup>5</sup> *Fellowship with Christ*, p. 2.

of truth. God's gift to us, speaking with the voice of authority. I deprecate the antithesis so often urged between the Church and the Bible. It is sometimes asserted that the Reformation was but a transfer from one tyranny to another, from an infallible Church to an infallible Book. Without doubt the infallibility of the Church was then denied, but its true authority was not forgotten. The doctrine of inspiration was not generally defined, but the Bible was re-established in the life of the Church and of the individual Christian as the standard of faith, as the revelation of God's purpose, and, to use St. Chrysostom's phrase, as "God's heart in God's words." Through the Bible, through the preaching<sup>1</sup> or the reading of its message, God brings us into living touch with Himself (1 Pet. i. 23). To the Bible we bring our experience of forgiveness as not only instrumental cause but also confirmatory authority. As the two disciples going to Emmaus were taken by their Unknown Companion to the Scriptures for the enlightenment and confirmation of their dawning faith, so led by the Holy Spirit we turn again and again to their sacred pages to find that God is fulfilling His promise also to us "according to the Scriptures," and is speaking to us with the authority of His Divine Word that "liveth and abideth" of the things that belong to our peace.

(iii) By the Church. For multitudes religion scarce passes beyond the stage of a creed accepted at the hand of an authoritative Church. They are born into a creed, live by it, die without questioning it, because it is the religion of their fathers. There is an immense power in such authority for the order and establishment of moral standards of living. It has its place in the spiritual life of the Christian and in the work and discipline of the Christian Fellowship. The penitent soul longs to hear the spoken word of absolution. Our Lord recognised this and clearly committed that power to His disciples (St. John xx. 22, 23) and so to His Church. It is an important part of the Commission given to the Priest in the Ordinal. We must not evacuate this deeply sacred trust of meaning. On the other hand, we dare not abuse it to make it either the instrument of a religious tyranny, or a source of weakness of the Christian character. A vast system of compulsory personal confessions, engaged in with mechanical regularity, has no support in our Lord's words; nor has that amazing spectacle (typical of many others) recently seen at Rome, of (it is estimated) 300,000 persons who had journeyed thither receiving the Papal Benediction and the plenary indulgence that accompanied it at the close of the so-called Holy Year. The history of the past is eloquent of the way in which the authority of the Church has been made the tool of human ambition and greed. "Authority," says a mediæval writer<sup>2</sup> of perception, "hath a waxen nose: that is, it may be twisted in different directions." The authority of the Church consists in its common witness

<sup>1</sup> It is significant to note in the New Testament that the normal means both of conversion and of edification was the "preaching" or "teaching" of "the Word." It was central in the Ministry of Reconciliation.

<sup>2</sup> Alanus of Lille.

to Christian truth, in the ordering and discipline of its family life, in its public declaration of God's forgiveness to all who are truly penitent, in its provision of the prayerful guidance of a devout and learned ministry for troubled souls, in its authentication of our own experience by the testimony of the Christian community of sixty generations of saints, in its unity as the Body of Christ. It has indeed an authority we deeply reverence and value; but it is not an infallible authority that can override our judgment as to truth, or our conscience of what is right or wrong. It cannot displace experience as the source of our assurance, though it can and does confirm it.

(c) *Assurance realised in Character and Action.*

Assurance is not a momentary or transitory phase of experience. It is a permanent influence entering into the character and giving it the calm and confidence necessary for its growth and for its expression in action. "Faith," writes Dean Inge, "can never come to its own except by being lived into—experienced in a life which should be as full and rich and as many-sided as possible."<sup>1</sup> Faith brings life. "He that believeth hath eternal life" (St. John vi. 47). It brings also a life to be lived. "We walk by faith" (2 Cor. v. 7). Faith brings knowledge. "I know Him Whom I have believed," cried St. Paul (2 Tim. i. 12). "I know Christ," said Browning, "by the direct glance of the soul's seeing, as the eye sees light." Faith also brings a life of deepening knowledge of that love of God that in St. Paul's paradox "passeth knowledge." Now we know only "in part" and "see in a mirror, darkly." Faith brings assurance of sins forgiven, and that assurance is at once the source of the gladness of the Christian's victorious life and the spring of his enthusiastic service.

When John Wesley went unwillingly to that little meeting-house in Aldersgate Street and heard one reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans, as he listened (he records) his heart was strangely warmed. "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation. And an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sin, even *mine*, and saved me from the law of sin and death."<sup>2</sup> Did not the mighty witness to the power of Christ proclaimed by the great evangelical leaders rest upon their experience of the certainty of their redemption, and was not the very fire of their missionary work at home and overseas kindled by the conviction that it was God's will that every man should come to rejoice in the same great truth? Was it not this same confidence that gave courage and buoyancy and undaunted daring to their enterprises and brought new light and hope into countless hearts? Here were the springs of a joy and a strength that came from on high and made the common path of life the road to Heaven. The truth had set them free from the trammels and tyranny of sin. Henceforward they must live to God, they must glorify Him in character. They

<sup>1</sup> *Faith and its Psychology*, p. 223; a most illuminating and learned study.

<sup>2</sup> *Wesley's Journal*, vol. i, p. 102.

must serve Him by word and by work. If we lose that sense of "assurance" we lose a distinctive part of the witness of the Evangelical faith, and with it goes the deep and unshakable conviction, the glowing fervour, the irresistible and irrepressible vigour of consecrated effort that have marked so much of the noblest adventures for Christ in the annals of His Church on earth. But we must not lose grip of so mighty a truth. It is powerful to-day as ever. For human need does not change. And God's mercy standeth sure.

#### PERSEVERANCE.

There is one thought that must keep us for ever humble even in the sense of our sharing in Christ's victory, and our confidence in the efficacy of His redemption. It is that there is a possibility of falling from grace. We are not left without warning, lest we should presume. We dare not remain content with that experience. Whilst we live here there is temptation. Assurance of forgiveness is not assurance of final salvation, unless we tread to the end the path to which it leads us. "If we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end" (Heb. iii. 14) is the condition. To have been illuminated with the gift of new life, to have shared in its power, and tasted the glory of its revelation and the spiritual joys of that Kingdom, and then to fall away, is described as to "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to open shame" (Heb. vi. 1-6). Into this sombre and difficult subject I cannot enter here.<sup>1</sup> Even St. Paul had to guard lest he himself should "become reprobate" (*ἀδόκιμος*).

"The grey-hair'd saint may fail at last,  
The surest guide a wanderer prove."

It is enough to know that even as we rejoice in our assurance of sin forgiven, "reconciled to God through the death of His Son," we shall be "saved by His life" (Rom. v. 10). There need be no fear of falling away, whilst Christ is our life. "Perfect love casteth out fear." It is this that will bring us with "boldness"<sup>2</sup> to the day of our judgment (1 John iv. 17).

<sup>1</sup> Augustine appears to have held two distinct predestinations, to regeneration, and to final salvation. William Law, reminding us that the greatest trials of Our Lord came towards the close of His earthly life, combats the view that we can be assured of our final salvation. See "The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration." The teaching of "Perfectionism" is condemned in Art. XVI. See also the Homily entitled "Of falling from God," the Catechism, and the Baptismal Service and the Burial Service.

<sup>2</sup> The word *παρρησία* (*Parrêsia*) means "frank and open speech," so, "free and fearless confidence, boldness, assurance" (Grimm-Thayer, *ad loc.*).