

THE  
ASSURANCE OF GRACE

— AND —

SALVATION,

WHAT IT IS AND HOW BEST ATTAINED.

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*CAN BE OBTAINED FROM*

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The substance of this little treatise, on the subject of the Assurance of Grace, was delivered, by request, in one of the New York pulpits. Very many who heard it delivered have expressed to the writer an earnest desire to possess it in a form in which they could refer to it in private. Believing that such views, as are here presented, are in adaptation to the necessities of the spiritual world in the present day, it has been thrown into its present form, and given to the public. If it give clearer views to any of a most important subject, or be helpful to any of God's children on their way to heaven, our object will be reached.

# ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION.

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## IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT.

That there is such an attainment in grace as to be assured of our union to Christ, of the pardon of our sins, and of our being in a state of grace and salvation, is, we think, a fact which few will question or deny. The Council of Trent, it is true, declared that "for any one to claim that he had obtained assurance of the pardon of sin is a vain and ungodly confidence;" and Roman Catholic writers, like Cardinal Bellarmine, treat it as a "prime error of heretics;" but the recorded experience of saints under both dispensations, and the many commands, promises and encouragements in Scripture, tending to stimulate us in the direction of such an attainment, all indicate that it is something which God has placed within our reach, and that it ought to be sought with an earnestness, desire and diligence, proportioned to its unspeakable importance and worth.

Practically, however, this high attainment of the Christian life has been treated by professors of religion in the spirit of one of two extremes. First, by the great mass of professed Christians it is treated with extreme apathy and indifference, as something that does not usually come within the scope of daily religious life—a sort of transcendental experience, which only few may think of at all. And consequently when any one is found who is disposed to claim it, as some-

thing which he has reached, he is liable to be set down, either as an extraordinary phenomenon in the spiritual world, or viewed with suspicion as likely to be a pretender and hypocrite. Such apathy and indifference, however, towards a high gracious attainment indicate wherever they prevail, a low state of religion, and often arise from formalism taking the place of a true living earnest piety, and cannot be too strongly denounced as wholly inconsistent with the oft repeated injunctions, to be always pressing forward toward perfection.

But again there is the other extreme, namely, extreme readiness and forwardness to lay claim, on very slender grounds, to this, the most advanced attainment of a gracious state. This extreme often originates in ignorance of the true nature of assurance, combined with a rashness, often bordering on presumption, which would hastily snatch the fruit of the highest spiritual comfort and joy before it is ripe. And there are times and seasons in which a tendency to this extreme is more specially apt to make its appearance, and, as we think, occasion no little injury. In times of great religious excitement and revival a tendency in this direction has always been manifested, and seems to be born of the fervor and enthusiasm with which men's minds, for the time, are pervaded. Three practical evils, however, are liable to result from mistakes committed here. First, those temporarily awakened and impressed, on being prematurely hurried forward, on their supposed conversion, to an assurance of their being in a state of grace, are often either puffed up with spiritual pride, and content with present attainments, or falling away from their temporary fervor, they lose faith in the reality of all they have gone through, come to regard the whole thing as a delusion, and their last state is worse than their first. A second evil also results from this

extreme, namely, that thereby weak believers are greatly discouraged when they see those, only lately brought under religious impressions, all at once rejoicing apparently in the possession of what they themselves, after many years of "patient continuance in well-doing," have sighed for in vain. And still a third evil proceeds from the same source, namely, that some thereby come to adopt false views of the nature of assurance, and of the best means of attaining it, and come to embody in their creed the delusion that if we truly believe in Christ for salvation, we must necessarily know it, or in other words, that assurance of grace is necessarily an element of saving faith. This has become a dogma with some, and has been persistently inculcated by its advocates, especially in seasons of religious quickening, with an offensive superciliousness, as something alone worthy of those who would enter into all the fulness of the divine life.

Now as "that the soul be without knowledge is not good," so we think it will be found that all the practical evils, resulting from either of these extremes, are, in a great measure, due to the want of clear conceptions as to the true nature of assurance, and of the best means to reach it, as a spiritual attainment. And yet on both of these points there is not much obscurity in the word of God, when properly understood and applied, and if the following hints prove helpful to any of God's children to enable them more comfortably to "walk in the light," their object will be fully reached.

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#### TRUE NATURE OF THE ASSURANCE OF GRACE.

From not noticing distinctions, that are clearly made in Scripture, in regard to the different forms of assurance, different and very conflicting views as to its true

nature have prevailed. To show the confusion of idea that has arisen from this cause we only need to mention, what has been referred to before, that, on the one hand, we find men asserting and teaching that assurance is of the nature of saving faith and an essential element therein. Now, in a certain use and sense of the term they are right.

But on the other hand, we have others as strongly asserting that assurance is not an element in the faith that saves, or necessarily included in its exercise; and they also are right, in the sense in which the term is by them understood. The explanation of this seeming paradox is simply this. There is an assurance that is absolutely necessary to true faith, and without which it could not exist, and there is an assurance, which, instead of being of the essence of saving faith, or included in its exercise, believers are exhorted to seek as a high spiritual attainment. Some, however, are not accustomed to make nice metaphysical distinctions, and confound these different forms of assurance one with the other, and wherever they find the word, jumping at the conclusion that it always means the same thing, fall into divers and hurtful mistakes. Whilst, however, we will have to notice in passing all the forms of assurance referred to in Scripture, it is to be remembered that our present inquiry is in regard to the true nature of the assurance of grace and salvation, in what it consists, and how best attained.

Whilst there are many passages of Scripture which undoubtedly point to the exercise and enjoyment of this gracious attainment, and some of which will be noticed in the sequel, there are two in the New Testament which are regarded by all as more properly and fully referring to that state. The one of these—and we mention it first, because it is so frequently quoted in

reference to assurance, as to have become familiar to every one who has begun to think or speak on the subject at all—is in the words of Peter, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure,” (2 Pet. ii., 10). As this command is, we believe, almost unanimously understood by all to refer to the assurance of grace and salvation, it is important to note that, according to it, assurance must mean *making certain the fact of our having been effectually called*, and thereby the certainty of our election. Our calling, made sure, makes sure our election, for “whom he did predestinate them he also called.” Assurance of grace therefore, according to Peter, is the certainty that our religion has *begun* right, or, in other words, that our life of religion has really commenced by the Spirit of God leading us into saving relationship to Christ, or as the author of the “Pilgrim’s Progress” would express it, that we “have come in by the gate at the head of the way.” And as a means of reaching that certainty he inculcates “diligence,” and what that means is abundantly evident from the particulars in which we are commanded to be diligent (vv. 5-9), and from the fact that he adds to the command to seek assurance (v. 10), the strong assertion, “for if ye *do these things* ye shall never fall,”—words, which, with their connexion, we will have to consider in another part of our subject.

The other passage is from Paul, “And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end,” (Heb. vi. 11). This injunction is the practical application for the spiritual good of the Hebrew converts, most likely of those in Palestine, of what he had written in the foregoing verses about the hopeless condition of those, who notwithstanding splendid gifts and endowments, and a

place for a time among the followers of Christ, might "fall away" (perhaps go back to Judaism), and it be "impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." In reading the whole paragraph one could almost imagine that it was written to illustrate the remark that, "Reprobates may go half way to heaven, and saints half way to hell." It strikingly illustrates, at least, the first part of the remark, just as did the case of "Turnaway who dwelt in the town of Apostacy," and "Temporary who was a forward man in religion for a time," and the end of both of whom was in keeping with their real, not their assumed character. Whilst, however, as he points to such as these, he sounds an alarm in their ears, he expresses the hope that "better things, and things that accompany salvation," or things inseparably connected with a true work of saving grace were to be found in those to whom the epistle was addressed. And he points to the ground upon which his hopes concerning them rested, namely, their diligence hitherto in the "work and labor of love," and urges them not "to be slothful," but rather to double their diligence "to the full assurance of hope," that they might thus rise above all fear of coming to such a fearful end as had befallen others. When a goodly ship is broken and cast away on some sunken rock or coral reef, other vessels are sure to give the dangerous spot a wide berth, and that they may have assured hope of concluding their voyage and making port safely, those in charge are "not slothful," but show all diligence in shaping their course by chart, compass and sail, that they may attain their end. The like use the Hebrews are taught to make of the awful facts about apostates, referred to above, that they might be excited to increased watchfulness, diligence



and persevering effort in everything pertaining to holiness and new obedience, not only that the apostle's hopes and their own hopes about the safety of their state might not be disappointed, but that they might rise to such a confirmation and assurance of these hopes, as would be a safeguard and protection against falling away. And this he calls "the full assurance of hope to the end," the assurance that their hopes would not come to a disastrous conclusion, but be in the end triumphantly realized, to the joy of all, both his and theirs.

Now if we put these two views of assurance by Peter and Paul together, they just amount to this, that, according to the one, assurance of grace is making sure and certain something about our religion in the past, that we have begun aright, or in other words, that our calling has been real and genuine. According to the other it is rising to certainty about the future, "the assurance of hope," or that our hopes for the future are so well founded, and so confirmed by the whole tenor of our life, that there is no danger of our ultimately coming short. The difference simply is, that the one speaks of the root and trunk of assurance, the other of its top and foliage, but the plant is one and the same, and the same "diligence" is enjoined by both that it may be grown successfully. Certainty in regard to the genuineness of the past in our religion is the root of our hopes for the future, and, he who would rejoice in the full assurance of *hope*, must give diligence to "make his *calling* sure."

To express what he would have us attain, as to our calling, the word "sure," which Peter employs, is, in the original, one that is very strong, signifying what is firm, steadfast, and in the certainty and reliability of which we can have the fullest confidence. To show

what force, in this respect, it has, we have only to mention that it is the word descriptive of an anchor (Heb. vi. 19), of God's promise (Rom. iv. 16), of a Testament being "of force" (Heb. ix. 17), and of the absolute and unchangable certainty of God's word, "the more sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet. i, 19). Our calling, made sure, as any and all of these are sure, would be Peter's idea of the assurance of salvation.

Again, the expression, employed by Paul, "full assurance," whilst in the original it is only one word, yet is a word of such strong force and intensity of meaning that even the two words "full assurance," by which it is translated, scarcely perhaps convey all that it is designed to express. It has this peculiarity, moreover, that it is a word which Paul alone, of all writers in Greek, whether sacred or profane, is known to have employed, although the verb, from which it is formed, is often used, and once notably, by the same apostle, in a manner well fitted to illustrate another part of this subject. The word for "full assurance" expresses the idea of the mind having obtained *absolute certainty* as to any truth or fact; and yet strong as such a term is, it is a strange circumstance, that of such importance it is that we should strive to realize its fullest import, the apostle strengthens it on two occasions by auxiliary terms, the more to stimulate us in the direction in which it would lead us. Altogether he employs the word four times in his epistles, and in three distinct forms of application in relation to spiritual attainments; and there is no greater source of confusion than mistaking one of these for the other.

First.—We have the full assurance of understanding. "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the

mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ " (Col. ii. 2). This form of "full assurance" is evidently nothing more than a full, realizing, soul-satisfying, soul-assuring knowledge and understanding of revealed truth about God and the way of salvation, as it is set forth in the Gospel ; and to express very fully the idea that the most perfect measure and degree of knowledge we can possibly attain, should, in harmony with love and affectionate good-will, bind and knit together the minds of fellow members in Church relation, he strengthens the term "full assurance" by the auxiliary expression "unto *all riches* of the full assurance." In other words, we should not be content with meagre attainments in knowledge and understanding ; but aim, in this respect, at realizing the greatest wealth that we can possibly accumulate. Precisely the same idea is expressed by an auxiliary word in another epistle, in relation to the same form of assurance. "For our Gospel came not unto you in word -only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance " (1 Thess. i. 5). Though the term "assurance" here is without the "full," in our translation, yet it is the same as in the other passage, and is strengthened by the adjective "much," so that if the expression were rendered literally, it would be "in much full assurance." This also is designed to indicate what a large measure of the assured knowledge of divine things we should seek to realize by a proper reception of the Gospel. Now it will be evident, on a moment's reflection, that this is a form of assurance which is absolutely necessary to the exercise of saving faith, inasmuch as we cannot believe what we do not know, faith being in part an act of the understanding. Therefore, "This is life eternal that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent." Such assurance of un-

derstanding is necessary to a gracious state, enters into all gracious experience, grows with our growth in grace, and will only come to maturity when "we know as we are known."

Secondly.—We have the full assurance of faith. "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. x. 22). Faith is an act of the understanding, of the will, and also of the heart—of the understanding knowing, of the will consenting to and choosing, and of the heart trusting in whatever is believed, whether person or thing. It therefore comprehends not only a definite and assured knowledge, to some extent, of God and revealed truth, but also assured trust in and reliance upon Him. It apprehends the character, perfections, and truth of God as grounds of assured confidence, and in that spirit "draws near." We see therefore why "full assurance of faith" is connected with a "true heart," because it is the heart that relies, confides and leans on the object of faith for support. We see also from this view of faith how that "without faith it is impossible to please God." To approach and address God with doubt, suspicion and distrust, would be to insult Him, and the more perfect and confiding the full assurance of faith is when we "draw near," the more acceptable will be our approach, and the more successful our prayers. "Be it unto you according to your faith." Of course this form of assurance also necessarily enters into saving faith, and the more assurance of this kind the stronger our faith will be.

Thirdly.—There is also the full assurance of hope. "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end" (Heb. vi. 11). This is a form of assurance, which, from the very terms in which it is expressed, must be very

different from the other two. In the assurance of understanding and in the assurance of faith, it is very obvious that our minds must be exercised Godward in knowledge and trust, and the subject matter of both is God and revealed truth. But this third kind of assurance is the assurance of *hope*. Now when we speak of hope we always mean something in which we ourselves and our own future good are the subject matter of our act of mind. And that this is the sense, in which the "assurance of hope" in the passage is to be understood, will be plain from a moment's reflection on the connexion. He had been pointing out to them the awful condition of those who after high profession and apparent attainments in religion, might "fall away," and declares that of the persons to whom he addressed this epistle he had better hopes; and after stating the grounds on which these hopes rested, he exhorts them to show all diligence to make these hopes about their spiritual state absolutely certain, or in other words, to strive to attain "full assurance of hope." It is plain that it is not to a further or more enlarged assurance of anything by way of knowledge or belief about God or revealed truth, to which he is urging them forward, but to an assurance, amounting to absolute certainty, that his hopes about them, and their own hopes about themselves, would not be disappointed, or their religious profession prove a failure. And he adds "to the end," to indicate that even after this assurance of hope had been more or less fully realized, diligence, watchfulness, and care were required to keep and retain it, and that for want of these its comfort and joy might be, at least for a time, interrupted and lost.

Now from all this we think it obvious that there is an assurance of our hopes concerning our own spiritual

state, condition and prospects, which, in its very nature, is distinct and different from the assurance of either understanding or of faith ; that this assurance, amounting to a high degree of certainty, may by diligence be attained by believers in this life ; that it is the duty of all who profess Christianity, by all suitable means, to seek it ; and that, even after its attainment, it must be guarded with care to the end, lest its comfort and joy be withdrawn. And this is what we mean by the assurance of grace and salvation, or, as our old writers were wont to call it, the "Faith of assurance," or the "assurance of sense," and it is of much importance to notice and mark the three following points concerning it :

First.—That it is only the highest degree and development of hope reaching certainty. That hope is an element in our gracious state is obvious from the fact that now "abideth faith, hope, charity," and that "we are saved by hope." To suppose, however, that it always exists in the same measure and degree in the regenerated would be a gross mistake, and out of keeping with any of the analogies by which its working is explained. For example, Paul writes of the husbandman, "That he that plougheth should plough in hope." From the time that he breaks up his fallow ground, even in the preparation of the soil to receive the seed, the husbandman has hope, and his hopes of a harvest to reward his toil are usually developed into greater strength as the work of the season advances. When he casts his seed into the furrow he has higher hopes than when he merely ploughed, because he has now planted living germs, which he has good reason to expect will be quickened into growth by the moisture and sunshine to which he commits them. Many things, however, still tend to keep his hopes low. Excessive

moisture may swell and burst the seed under the clod, or excessive drought may parch it and keep it from germinating at all, or the worm may devour it, or some other casualty befall it. But now it has pierced the soil with a green blade, and shoots up into a leafy plant, and his hopes brighten and he becomes more assured. Still a late frost may nip it, or the caterpillar may devour it, and his assurance is not full. As, however, it grows and expands and makes progress toward perfection, his hopes are proportionably enlarged, until, when it blooms and forms, first incipient seeds, and then the full "grain in the ear," he knows and is sure that a harvest is his, though he may not for weeks put in the sickle. And thus his hope culminates in the assurance of certainty. Of course even such a figure is not perfectly, in all respects, adapted fully to set forth divine things, for although it may give us the idea of hope progressing from stage to stage, till it reaches assurance, yet it fails in this that in earthly things, such is the uncertainty, that even when the grain is ripe it may never be gathered. Not so in grace, the hope that is genuine, the sister of faith and charity, though even yet in the lowest stage, is from its nature imperishable. It is a hope that "maketh not ashamed," being grown from "the incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth for ever." But the figure exhibits the stages of progress through which our hope may pass, and the language of Scripture, as to the place and power of hope in the experience of the saints, is often predicated on this idea. Thus we have "hope abiding," "a lively hope," "rejoicing in hope" "that ye may abound in hope," "the assurance of hope," "the full assurance of hope," and "the full assurance of hope to the end," all of which indicate how hope grows up, from

stage to stage, till doubt and uncertainty give place to full assurance.

Secondly.—That this assurance of hope in none of its developments is necessarily implied in the exercise of faith. Some, as already noticed, make a point of teaching that, if believers, we must necessarily know it, and be assured of being in Christ Jesus. Such an opinion, however, is consistent, neither with the Word of God, nor with the experience of the saints, as various considerations go to prove, as, 1. In that case there would be no need or room for diligence in seeking it on the part of believers. 2. Paul represents faith as the foundation on which hope is built. "Now faith is the substance (foundation) of things hoped for." But the foundation is not laid and the superstructure raised simultaneously, nor are they, properly speaking, the same thing. 3. Paul teaches the Romans that hope in all its stages is the fruit of experience, "And experience (worketh) hope." But Christian experience, in its very nature, must be a matter of time, and faith must go before it, whereas hope comes after experience, as the fruit which it brings forth, and therefore cannot necessarily be included in the exercise of faith. 4. Peter in his second epistle addresses those "who have obtained like precious faith with us," and yet exhorts them to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure," which evidently implies that making the calling sure is something in addition to the possession of precious faith. These and similar considerations completely establish the position that the assurance of grace and salvation is the offspring of continuous diligence in prosecuting the great ends of the Christian life, and not an essential element in the exercise of saving faith.

Thirdly.—That this assurance of hope, though in its



nature distinct from the other forms of assurance, is, nevertheless, closely related to them, being their outgrowth and natural consequence. Perhaps we can best make this point plain by an illustration. Suppose, as often happens, that a property is, by the death of the proprietor, without occupants, and those in charge set about finding the heirs-at-law and putting them in possession, we will have in what is likely to take place, a lively figure of the nature and relation of the different kinds of assurance. First, proclamation by advertisement is made for the heirs, setting forth the nature of the property, the relation to the late proprietor which claimants must sustain in order to inherit, in what form claimants must apply, and by what proofs their claims must be supported. Next, suppose that this proclamation falls into the hands of the heirs-at-law, and what will they do first? Why they would first try to understand it. They will consider the nature and value of the property, the terms and conditions on which possession may be attained, whether they themselves have rights in the matter, and whether possession would repay the trouble and expense of making good their claims. All these would come to be considered and weighed, and a judgment deliberately formed in relation to each. The result of such a process would be the *assurance of understanding*. If satisfied in such particulars the heirs would next put in a claim, and perhaps take legal steps to urge it, and with whatever confidence they had in the righteousness of their claim, with a corresponding boldness would they seek and demand possession. That would be the *assurance of faith*. But it is obvious that as their faith in the justice and validity of their claim, and their power to prove the same, was weak or strong so would be their hope of success. If their faith, in this respect, was weak

their hope would be weak also, but if they had strong confidence that their claim was righteous, and that they could prove it to be so, their hope would be strong in proportion. And if they were every day accumulating proofs and evidences that strengthened their claim more and more, and rendered it undeniable, their hope would be continually rising higher and higher, until it could scarcely be called hope but assurance, as scarcely a vestige of doubt as to the result would remain. That would be the *assurance of hope*. Now just so it is in becoming assured of our interest in the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Proclamation has been made in the Gospel for heirs to eternal life. When moved by the Holy Spirit to seek salvation, we are first led to an understanding of the meaning and terms of the Gospel, and its bearing upon our own state, and thus we reach the assurance of understanding. As the Gospel is understood it is next embraced, and a claim made, under its gracious provisions, upon all that God has offered and promised in Christ to bestow, and thus we realize the assurance of faith. And as faith waxes strong it becomes "the foundation of things hoped for," and as it reaches more comfortable and convincing evidence of our relation to Christ, through its effects on our life and experience, hope rises triumphant over fear, and darkness and doubt yield to hope's full assurance. In some one of these stages hope dwells in the heart of every believer. Even the humblest may have "a good hope through grace," and were our diligence in proportion to the value of the attainment, the full assurance of hope is a blessing in which we might all continually rejoice.

## HOW THIS ASSURANCE MAY BEST BE ATTAINED.

That it is the imperative duty as well as the happy privilege of all who are truly the disciples of Christ to seek, and by all legitimate means, endeavor to realize this assurance of grace and salvation, is abundantly evident from the commands, promises and examples in the word relative to this Christian attainment. But granting that men were really in earnest in this matter, and sincerely solicitous and anxious to reach this most joyous degree of Christian progress, we are met by the question, what are we to do? What are the best means to employ to accomplish so desirable an object? Well, both of the apostles, Peter and Paul, representing two sides of Christianity in early times, comprehend and sum up the means necessary to be employed in one word, "diligence;" and could we only get fully hold of the import of that word in their understanding and use of it, and all that it implies by way of Christian effort, we could have some clear notions of how we should proceed in seeking assurance. And

First.—That term, defining the best means to attain assurance, cuts off, at once, the idea that assurance of grace and salvation is of the essence of faith, and that if we believe we must necessarily know it. Such a theory leaves no place for diligence, which, as we shall afterwards see, as enjoined both by the apostle of the Circumcision and by the apostle of the Gentiles, means a continuous, persevering, long-sustained course of action to attain an end.

Secondly.—It also cuts off another very fallacious theory as to the means of attaining assurance, strongly advocated, and largely recommended by many, namely, that all that is necessary to reach assurance of being in the exercise of saving grace is an appeal to our own

consciousness. This is a theory which requires more lengthened notice, because, in one form or other, it always makes its appearance in times of revival and religious excitement, and has with many practically come to be accepted as a part of revival theology. This proposed way of reaching assurance has not, perhaps, been so fully set forth by any writer as by a respected minister of the Gospel in Scotland, who, at an advanced stage of the spiritual awakening in Ireland and Scotland, in 1859-60, published a small work on the subject, entitled, "What gives Assurance," with the view of helping converts to reach this high attainment. In discussing this subject, he informs his readers that two ways have been tried to attain this object. The first he calls "the *indirect* or *long* way." This he explains by saying of those who adopt it, "They seek to make sure that they have the marks and evidences of being new creatures in Christ, or at least the marks and evidences of having, beyond a doubt, believed in Him. Divines have been wont to call this mode of assurance "the assurance of sense," because in it the person points to sensible proofs of his new nature, and thinks to be able to show such experience of divine things as puts it beyond doubt that he has believed, and has found Christ." Now as to the correctness of this statement, as to what he represents as the old way of attaining assurance, we have nothing to say, but when he immediately adds, "It is quite wrong to apply the scriptural term, 'assurance of hope,' to this *experimental* sort of certainty," we think he must surely have forgotten Paul's statement that "experience (worketh) hope," and that even in ordinary life the highest certainty, which hope can attain, is from the experimental.

After, however, showing in a variety of particulars

what he regards as objectionable in this "indirect and long way," he asks us to turn to "the *direct* and *short* way;" and adds, "They who take this way first set themselves to ascertain what Christ is." Now in this first particular it is obvious is meant nothing more than the "assurance of understanding," which we have already explained. Next. "What we call the direct or short way, is that in which the Spirit enables us at once to look up to Christ, the Brazen Serpent, and to be satisfied in looking on Him." Now that is nothing more than the "assurance of faith," and did already exist in the minds of those, whom Peter addressed, as having obtained "like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," and whom, notwithstanding, he urges, in addition to "make their calling and election sure." In further explaining this direct and short way, he adds, "I have the assurance that God accepts me the moment I see the fulness and freeness of Christ's work." And again, "The believer's own consciousness (quickened of course by the Spirit), is sufficient, in presence of the Cross, to assure him that he, a sinner, is most certainly welcome to the bosom of the Holy One"—which is nothing but the assurance of faith again—and then sums up thus, "Thus faith as it gazes on its object, passes on to full assurance, and now if any one again seeks to disturb your calm rest by asking, Are you quite sure that you really believe what is giving you such rest? What other reply could you give but this: As well ask me when I am enjoying and reveling in the glories of the setting sun, Are you sure your eye really sees that sun, which you so admire?" Now what he intends all this to mean, practically in its application, will be best understood by a little narrative in his preface of an incident, which he says, "falls in with the strain of his

discourse." We give it in his own words: "One day in a fisherman's house we found two females sitting together, with the Assembly's Shorter Catechism in their hands. They were talking over the questions on 'justification' and 'adoption,' and were comparing these with 'some of the benefits which, in this life, accompany and flow from them,' such as "assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, and joy with the Holy Ghost." They were themselves happy in the calm assurance of the love of God, but a neighbor had somewhat perplexed them by insisting that they had no right to assurance until they could point to *sanctification* showing itself in their after lives. On the other hand those two souls could not see why they should wait till then; for if they had been 'justified' and had 'a right to all the privileges of the son's of God,' they might at once have assurance of God's love.'" We have been particular in presenting this view precisely in the author's own words (including his italics), not only because of the consideration due to anything from a person whose name is so well known in the churches, but because something similar has always been put forward, and practically acted on, in all such seasons of spiritual quickening, and because even in systems of Theology of late something, resembling this theory, has been endorsed by very prominent divines.

Now when all this is analysed, and reduced to its elements, it appears to us just to amount to this, that there is, first, a want of clearness and distinctness in speaking on what is meant by assurance, and a confounding of the different kinds of assurance with one another; and, secondly, the opinion that all assurance of our being in a state of grace should be sought in objective views of God in Christ, and that subjective

religion, or the power of divine things in ourselves and over our lives, has little to do with this assurance being realized ; and, thirdly, that all that is necessary to prove that I really have these true gracious objective views of Christ is my own consciousness, just as I know that my eye really sees the sun.

Now in respect to these views, we have to say of the first, that it is no uncommon thing for persons, when writing or speaking of assurance, to confound one kind of assurance with another, and point out as Scripture grounds of assurance, in one aspect, what are really only grounds for it in another. Thus we are surprised to find in a recent well known, and, in many respects, valuable treatise on "Systematic Theology," by an American divine, such statements as the following, when speaking of "the assurance of personal salvation." "Many true believers are too introspective. They look too exclusively within, so that their hope is graduated by the degree of evidence of regeneration which they find in their own experience. This, except in rare cases, can never lead to the assurance of hope." And again, "The grounds of assurance are not so much within as without us. They are, according to Scripture: 1. The universal unconditional promise of God, that those who come to Him in Christ He will in no wise cast out ; that whosoever will may take of the water of life without money and without price. 2. The infinite, immutable and gratuitous love of God. 3. The infinite merit of the satisfaction of Christ, and the prevalence of His continued intercession. 4. The covenant of redemption, in which it is promised, that all given by the Father to the Son shall come to Him and "none of them shall be lost." Now it does seem strange to us that it did not occur to the author of these statements, that these four

grounds of assurance are simply what the Westminster Assembly, in the "Practical use of saving knowledge," designates, "warrants and special motives to believe." They are always presented so as give us encouragement to believe, and assure us of the security and comfort that are to those who believe, and are therefore all-sufficient grounds for the "assurance of faith," which can rest most securely on them and never be disappointed. But no man ever had the assurance of his own personal salvation from any promise, apart from that promise being *accepted by himself*, or from any aspect of the love of God, except that love was "shed abroad *in his own heart*," and the love of Christ was felt "*constraining him* to live to Him who died for him." In fact objective views of God and of Christ, and of the covenant of grace, can give no comfort but as they are realized in their *bearing upon and application to ourselves personally*. However great and all-sufficient God may be, He brings me no comfort or assurance, but as I can view Him as *my* God, otherwise He may only be an object of terror. It is therefore a mistake to suppose that anything *without* can be the ground of any comfortable assurance, till it becomes something *within*. To use the figure referred to above, when we speak of "reveling in the glories of the setting sun," there could be no such enjoyment, if besides the fact of there being a sun in the heavens without, there was not also vision within. It is the subjective image in the eye, the experimental, that thrills me with enjoyment. When, however, the same writer goes on to specify a fifth ground of assurance, belonging to same category, and give it thus: 5. "The witness of the spirit," he surely could not mean that it also was *without* us. If the spirit bears witness *with our spirits*, "then it must certainly be something within, as John declares, that



“he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness *in himself.*”

But, again, as to the whole theory that we are chiefly to look to objective religion, and to consciousness, as being able to take cognizance of acts of a gracious nature, except as we have their truth proved by results, we have the three following objections. First. When both Paul and Peter inculcate diligence to the attaining assurance of salvation, they both define the field in which this diligence is to be put forth, and, in both cases, it is in the sphere of subjective practical religion. Thus Paul says, that the ground upon which he rested his hopes about the Hebrews, that there were “better things in them, and things which accompany salvation,” was their “work and labor of love,” in which they had shown a good degree of diligence in the past. And he adds, “we desire that every one of you do show the *same* diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end.” In the same way, in the passage in which Peter inculcates diligence to the same end (2 Pet. i., 5-10), he defines the sphere in which that diligence was to be put forth, as consisting in faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity, and assures us, “*If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off. Wherefore the rather brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if these things be in you ye shall never fall.*” Diligence here again is in all the practical graces and duties of Christianity ; not merely gazing on the cross, but drawing from our sight of the cross motives to active work for God ; not reveling in the glories of sunshine, but working by its light ; not sitting with the Catechism in

our hands, dreaming of the joy of justification and adoption, without sanctification—a gross delusion, that never had an existence—but a holy active consecrated life in all the details of true godliness. And we think it would be impossible to cite almost any example of mere objective views of God and of Christ, and of the covenant of grace, being brought forward to assure and console us, apart from practical proof of the work and power of religion in our heart and life. Take two examples from that very chapter in which it is claimed by the divine from whom we have quoted above, that there is so full and frequent use made of that *without us*—the Eighth Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. At the beginning we have a most delightful and assuring statement made, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” How may we know if we can take the comfort of such assurance? We have to look for the grounds of that assurance from a holy life, “Who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.” Again, “We know all things work together for good,” but it is “to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” We cannot place too much value on the objective in religion, and the views furnished for our comfort of God and of the fulness and security of the covenant of grace are perfect treasures of happiness and enjoyment, so that we cannot look too frequently nor too long upon Christ in every part of His work; but when we come to the question, how *can I be assured of my own personal interest therein*, we have just to fall back on the principle laid down by the apostle, “But we all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, *are changed into the same image*, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Objective views of God, that do not subjectively change us, are

not gracious at all, but only the experience of Balaam, who boasted of himself, "Who heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open," and yet perished miserably, a stranger to God and to the power of divine things.

A second objection to the above theory is, that human consciousness is no trustworthy rule of judging whether we really believe, because it has often deceived those who were supposed, on its testimony, to be in a state of grace. Alas when we look on the results of times of religious awakening and revival, and mark the sad fact that there have been many, who have been most forward in asserting, on this ground, that they knew that they were believers, and often apparently rose to the sublimest heights of assurance, and yet their after life gave the lie to the reality of the work in them, have we not reason to receive with great caution the testimony of a witness, that has often erred in the past.

A third objection to this theory is that consciousness is utterly incompetent to determine or pronounce on the question, Do I believe on the Son of God? The reference, by figure, to a person looking at the sun and being sure, by consciousness, that he beholds him, has no proper parallelism. The rationale of the consciousness theory is simply this: Consciousness is that power of the mind by which it knows, and takes cognizance of, its own states; and as faith, it is argued, is a state of mind, consciousness must be capable of taking knowledge of its presence, wherever it exists, and consequently, as soon as we exercise faith, and become believers, we must know the fact. Now whatever else may be said of this theory, it certainly has the merit of being "direct and short," just as direct

and short as that of Ignorance in the "Pilgrim's Progress," who, when asked how he knew the reality of some things about his religion was wont to reply, "My heart tells me so." The fallacy, however, lies in this, that it invests human consciousness with a power that it does not possess, the power of taking cognizance of the divine act and element in faith. Faith, whilst it is an act of the human mind, is also the "gift of God," and the "operation of God." Now consciousness may reach certainty as to the human element, and may pronounce on the fact that we have attempted the human part of the act and exercise of faith. But whether that act included the divine element, consciousness is no judge. That must be decided by other evidence. Faith must fruit, and then we will know by divine fruit whether we have believed with a divine faith. An illustration will help to make this plain. In the early days of modern spiritualism a young friend was asked to attend a select meeting, where the spirits were to give manifestations of their presence and power. Having attended, sure enough he did witness some strange things; he saw most wonderful movements on the part of sundry tables and chairs, and heard rappings and other mysterious noises, till at last an accordeon in a corner of the room was apparently played on by a power altogether invisible. At the close of the seance the young man was asked, if he were not convinced now of the truth of spiritualism? He replied, No. Why, it was asked, do you not believe your own eyes and ears? Yes, was the reply, as far as they are reliable evidence. I am sure my eyes saw tables and chairs move about the room, and my ears heard rappings and the sound of an accordeon; but that these things were the effect of spirits being in the room, and communicating with us, my eyes and ears

had no evidence, could have none, and therefore could be no proper proof that spiritualism is true. Now just so with consciousness. It is good evidence in its own province, but beyond that it is altogether unreliable; and to urge persons, as is often done, to appeal to it as a judge to decide upon the fact of their being converted is to run the risk of a dangerous delusion.

The diligence enjoined to reach this assurance implies, among other things,

1. The very diligent and abounding use of *prayer*.

The assurance of grace and salvation is a very high attainment, and various equivalent expressions are used substantially to express the same thing, as it proves a rich blessing in the soul's sweet experience. Such expressions as, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." "To comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ," "We know that we are passed from death unto life," "Keep yourselves in the love of God," are evidently equivalent to the assurance of hope with all its happiness and joy. Now in almost every case of such equivalent expressions, they are combined with prayer. It is "in every thing by prayer and supplication making our requests known unto God," that "the peace of God that passeth all understanding is promised to keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Paul referring twice to this attainment in the Epistle to the Ephesians, one of which references we have quoted above, in both cases prays that it may be conferred. And Jude prescribes as the best way of "keeping ourselves in the love of God," "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." We are thus taught of this, as well as of every other attainment in the divine life, that we must climb up to it by the ladder of prayer. And what an

example of the place and power of prayer, in being made perfect, we have in the Lord Jesus Himself. As He "finished the work given Him to do," every thing was achieved by the instrumentality of prayer. "Being baptized, and praying the heaven was opened and the Holy Ghost descended." After forty days fasting and prayer He entered the scene of temptation, "And as He prayed the fashion of his countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening," is spoken of His transfiguration. After early mornings and whole nights of prayer, He closed the scene of the First Supper, and secured the safety of His followers in all time to come by the most unique and marvelous prayer ever uttered, "Being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly," and of the seven utterances on the Cross, three at least were prayers. Therefore the apostle sums up the whole story of His obedience, thus, "Who in the days of His flesh when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared." Thus for our sakes He exemplified the law of the kingdom, "ask and ye shall receive," and showed us how we are to reach the loftiest heights of gracious attainment by straining on this rope of prayer. And how abounding, sustained, earnest prayer will help us to the assurance of hope is very manifest. To use the language of an old writer, "As we get into close grips with God," and wrestle with Him by a hold of some relationship we sustain to Him, or promise of His we have embraced, and hold on and will take no denial, and refuse to let him go, we pray ourselves up into such a knowledge and sense of His being our God, that the freedom, boldness, familiarity, and success we have enjoyed, leave no doubt of our state, and we go away for the

time as assured as Jacob when he left that night scene at Peniel, limping, it is true, as the result of human weakness, but a prince in prayer, a prince with God. And there is nothing that more mournfully attests the sinful and shameful apathy of many professors of religion, as to the value of assurance, than the fact that only a small number stately and specifically seek at a throne of grace, this, as one of God's choicest blessings. Nor is there perhaps a stranger phenomenon in the spiritual world, in the present day, than the fact that men are to be found, making high pretensions to spiritual gifts and full assurance of hope, who have reached the conclusion that, as far at least as they themselves are concerned, there is no need of prayer at all. Because, as they imagine, that they have gotten the Spirit, are sure of being pardoned, and already possess all things, therefore for themselves they have nothing but thanksgiving to offer. One cannot help exclaiming what a surprising illustration of the fact that "extremes meet." That infidelity in science and transcendentalism in religion should meet in the common ground of no prayer, is not a little strange. But, seriously, the men who teach that they should pray for others, and preach the Gospel to others, but have need of neither for themselves, must surely be either perfectionists or antinomians. Either there must be, in their estimation, no sin, no temptation, no want, no weakness, or they must cast loose from the obligation of the moral law, and ignore the necessity of daily supplies of grace to lead a life of new obedience. Not so Paul. He asked the churches to pray for him for more grace to preach and suffer, and attain perfection ; and of Peter when he was in prison, it is said that "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." Nor is it to be supposed that these

apostles would ask, and encourage others to do what would be unseemly or wrong for them to do for themselves. We know, however, that Paul made the possession of this very blessing of assurance the subject of prayer continually on behalf of the brethren in Ephesus (Eph. iii., 4-19), thus demonstrating, in his own example, that prayer is one of the most effective means to Christian attainments, and that there is no believer, so far advanced in religion, but that he may profitably use prayer to reach still higher degrees of Christian experience.

2. In seeking assurance we are taught to use *proof* as well as prayer.

“For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself, and not in another” (Gal. vi., 3, 4). The remedy here prescribed against the danger of self-deception is to “prove our own work,” and the word employed is one used for assaying metals, or applying any kind of experimental test to determine the true character of anything, physical or moral. And if this proof, duly conducted, issue satisfactorily, we are assured that we will have “rejoicing in ourselves,” namely, in our clearly ascertained gracious state, “and not in another,” or in the opinions or praise of others about our piety. This we think surely indicates that proof is one means of attaining assurance of grace. To the same effect is the well-known passage (2 Cor. xiii., 5), “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves, know ye not your own selves, how that Christ is in you except ye be reprobates.” This is a passage which has sorely exercised those who think that assurance of a gracious state is of the essence of faith, and who think self-examin-



ation and personal proof unnecessary to determine their own spiritual condition ; and they have hit upon a plan of neutralizing its force, and turning it away from the object for which it has been usually quoted. We are told that it was not their own gracious condition at all, which was the matter to be examined and decided, but the truth of Paul's apostleship, whether he was really what he pretended to be. Now even so, was not the inquiry to be, in the first case, about themselves? They could not sit as jurors on Paul's claims without examining into the reality of their own religion. Suppose, for example, you wish to decide whether Rembrandt was a genuine painter, and for this purpose you collect a number of his works, and by the help of experts in such things, and of critical connoisseurs, you attempt to form a judgment. Will not dealing with the character and claims of the artist necessitate a thorough examination of, and judgment upon the merits of his works? So Paul could not be reached in judgment until the character of the faith and whole spiritual condition of the Corinthians had been first ascertained. From the work learn the workman. Thus the attempt to set aside this passage really strengthens its force, because it shows us that to determine whether this be "the true faith wherein we stand," and whether we be "built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets," self-examination and impartial judgment as to our own state, is the surest means we can employ. Now that in such a process the Corinthians should be wholly, or even chiefly, absorbed in Paul's claims, and nothing concerned about their own condition, is too much to ask us to believe. Besides what application could the passage, thus limited, have to us now, with whom the claims of Paul are undisputed.

But in truth the whole spirit of the Bible is in line with this idea of proof in order to make sure our calling. The Psalms are full of this idea on the part of Old Testament saints, and the whole spirit of the New Testament is in that direction. For example, why does our Lord declare, "by their fruits ye shall know them," and insist so much upon the necessity of bringing forth "much fruit" to make it clear that we are His disciples, and are really in Him as the true vine, if no patient lengthened proof like the yearly fruiting of a tree were necessary?" Why, also, it may be asked, are the fruits and effects of a true faith so minutely described, as, that it "purifies the heart," sanctifies, "sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts xxvi., 18), "worketh by love," is shown "by works," makes sacrifices, endures suffering, obtains victories, is thrown into a furnace and the "*trial*" of it there is "much more precious than that of gold and silver," so that after such trial it is "found unto praise and glory in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ?" Why all these particulars about the fruits and effects of a true living genuine faith in Christ? Why just that by proof we may be able to sit in judgment on our own. If assurance of salvation were of the essence of faith, or attained by a mere act of consciousness, how mistaken James was when he said, "I will show thee my faith by my works." Too long and indirect that way! We move faster now! But let us not be too hasty. The whole Christian life is one great process of proof. God proves, Satan tests, the world tries, and we must prove our own work if we would have rejoicing in ourselves. There is no man nor any attainment above the need of such proof. Even Timothy was enjoined, "make full proof of thy ministry." The word here for "full proof" is simply the verb form of the word

for "full assurance," and might be rendered, make full assurance of thy ministry, or make it absolutely certain that you are really a minister of Jesus Christ. What a strange command to Timothy! Why sure, Paul himself had called him "his son in the Gospel," and adressed him "Thou man of God." He had received the gift of the Spirit by the laying on of the apostle's hands, and the gift of office "by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." Yes, all that is true enough, but then there had been a man in a higher office than that of Timothy, a man ordained by the Lord Himself to the apostleship, and because he did not make full proof of his ministry, he "by transgression fell," and became "the son of perdition." Let no man therefore be over-confident or disparage the need of making full proof, or boast when he is putting on the harness of Christianity, but wait till the time comes for putting it off, as Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

3. Another Scriptural means of reaching this assurance is *experience*.

"And experience (worketh) hope." The word experience has a beautiful significance when taken literally, according to the meaning of its Latin root, which is simply, I try. My experience is just what I have tried. And to this closely corresponds in meaning the word of the original of the passage quoted. As Alford has well expressed it, it means "the result of proof." Now as assurance, as already explained, is only the highest form of hope, or hope reaching positive certainty, it is easy to see how experience, or what I have tried, or the result of my proof of things, is calculated to work hope in its highest form. As

under the influence of religion we learn "to glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience"; so this experience makes trial of many things which we would not otherwise have known, and thereby works hope in its highest development. For example :

It tries, in different ways, and puts to proof *God Himself*. Just as by long acquaintance and intimate fellowship for many years, we try our fellow-men, and therefore speak of tried friendship, tried kindness, or tried worth, so by much intimate and long-sustained fellowship with God we learn and get assured, by trial, of many things about Him, which we would not otherwise have known. And after thus walking with God, like Enoch ; speaking familiarly to Him, and reasoning with Him in all the boldness of intimate friendship, like Abraham ; having his secrets revealed to us, and making our's known to Him, it would be strange if we did not know something of our saving relationship to Him, and find out that our names were in His Book of Life. Moreover, when God hears and *answers our prayers*, we try and have experience of Him in many respects, as of His Omniscience, Fatherly pity, willingness and ability to help us, and have hopeful evidence that we are in possession of the Holy Spirit, as it is only by His intercession within us, that we can utter any prayer which God will regard. Also when God *fulfills His promises* in our experience, especially if in answer to prayer, we try Him so as to have higher degrees of assurance. Therefore in relation to the fulfillment of promise, God says, "prove Me now herewith." Promises fulfilled prove His faithfulness and truth pledged to His children, and assure us of our interest in God's covenant, the blessings of which are "the sure mercies of David." Even *His ways of dealing with our sin, ingrat-*

*itude and instability* prove Him. They try His long suffering and patience, and delightfully prove how much we are indebted to these for our continued safety. And as He hides His face from us when we sin, and makes us realize, that if we "regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear," it proves to us practically the holiness and righteousness of His character and government, and that He is dealing with us as His own children. Now we think that it is impossible to make such trial, and have such experience of God through many years, it may be, of daily communion with Him, and not grow up thereby into the assurance that He is our God. Just as when the eye catches a glimpse of the sun, it carries away a dazzling impression which remains with it for some time, even when it is shut, or in the dark, so the soul that has such experience of God will not fail to possess many assuring evidences, from the fruits of communion, that God has been there.

In the same way trial and experience of *living on Christ*, works assurance. Making daily use of His blood, putting on Christ daily in His righteousness and holy example, receiving daily from His fulness, and so being "filled with all the fulness of God," fleeing daily to Him as "the hope set before us," and "the strong tower into which the righteous runneth and is safe," nestling in His bosom, feeling the everlasting arms around us, and enjoying the warm kisses of His love, realizing the experience of Paul, "The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God;" all this cannot fail to him who has tried it, to be "Christ in you the hope of glory."

And, moreover, there is the experience of the *power of divine things* in us and over us. When the word is felt in its power to discern, judge, reprove, and correct,

enlighten, support, and console ; when we feel and admire the wondrous character and adaptation of the great salvation ; when the love of Christ is felt constraining us, and the "power of the world to come," influencing us daily so as to raise us up to have "our conversation in heaven," such experience cannot fail to "work hope."

And there is besides the experience of the *spiritual conflict*. That practical religion is not only a race, straining every muscle, but a fight in which we require "to take unto us the whole armor of God," is part of the experience of every subject of grace, and there are many things in regard to the conflict which none but a true believer knows or can understand, and as he understands them, grows up thereby into a full assurance of his spiritual state. For example, the natural deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart, and how fearfully it is "enmity against God ;" how fiercely indwelling sin resists the work of grace, and how hard it dies, no matter how diligent we are in the work of mortification ; how with hell's fire the darts of Satan, at times, are tipped, whilst at other times they are like sugar-coated pills, luscious and sweet to the fleshly appetite ; how many and diversified his devices, and how plausible his suggestions ; how fully his servants in the world sympathize with their master and hate and loathe Christ and His people, in proportion as they are Christ-like ; how hard it is to do any work for Christ in the world without raising opposition, and how the worst foes of religion are those of her own house, in our hearts and churches—these, and many such as these, are facts about the spiritual conflict which none who are strangers to God and true religion can ever understand, but in the knowledge of which every child of God grows as he learns how to

“fight the good fight of faith.” We are aware that there may be perfectionists and antinomians, to whom all this may be silly jargon, and who are ready to smile contemptuously at this whole phase of practical godliness, and say, Oh, that may do for the “Pilgrim’s Progress,” but we have got above all that, so as to be able to keep ourselves in the love of God and “that wicked one toucheth us not.” But to the earnest Christian it is all stern reality, an experience none can shun who would “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” Now as we rise to the knowledge and belief that we are really fighting on the Lord’s side, that in the very conflict we have proof of our relation to Him, and that our wounds, tears, groans, agony and blood are so many witnesses that our service is sincere, we become assured that we are one with Christ. Fighting on His side, working with Him, sympathising with Him in the whole interests of His kingdom, and in the success of the struggle going on within ourselves, and without us in the world, so identify us with Christ, that in this respect also experience will work hope.

4. Another most important means of reaching assurance is earnestly seeking and diligently cherishing *the witness of the spirit*.

“It is the spirit that beareth witness.” For “the spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.” We do not know any point on which men have written so vaguely, or that has been so unnecessarily surrounded with mystery, as the witness of the spirit in believers. To understand what it is, it is only necessary to remember that this witness is, “*with our spirit*,” and that Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians

prays that they may be preserved blameless in "spirit, soul, and body," distinguishing these three elements in them, as forming one complete person. In the same way he speaks to the Hebrews of the word of God "piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit," clearly showing that soul and spirit are something distinct the one from the other, when they can be divided. Now the witness of the spirit is with the element in us called "spirit;" for although both body and soul are under the influence of true religion in a believer, yet it is no proof that a man is a child of God because he has a body, or that he has a soul, it may be, in a state of the highest intellectual culture and activity. Therefore Paul assures us that the "natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, neither can he know them." The word in this passage, and in 1 Cor. xv., 44, translated "natural," and in Jam. iii., 15, rendered "sensual," as translated by Dr. Candlish, on 1 Cor. xv., properly signifies "soulish," and when used as descriptive of an individual, merely indicates the man whose highest element of character is a highly cultured intellect, like the Greek Philosophers, who "by wisdom knew not God." Distinguished from such men is "the spiritual man," who in addition to the intellect, has the element called "spirit." By this term is meant nothing more than just the entity of regeneration, for "that which is born of the spirit is spirit," and this is the only element with which the spirit can properly witness, for, however "soulish" a man be, polished, educated and of high attainments intellectually, until he becomes "the new man, created in knowledge and true holiness," there is no spiritual discernment, or spiritual receptivity, to and with which to bear witness.



Now with this spiritual element, this "new man," the spirit bears witness in three ways :

First. He so shines on the active phases of his own work in us as to make it visible, and thus demonstrates its existence. It is in the new creation, in this respect, just as it was in the first, that in its initial stage darkness rests upon it, and it is invisible. But soon the command goes forth, "Let there be light," and God's work becomes visible. And just as the light at first, in making visible, quickened into wondrous activity all these laws of life and productiveness with which, by creative act, our planet had been impregnated, so the spirit in making the work of grace visible, quickens and brings into activity all the laws of the new creation, and thus demonstrates that the work is real. Just as the sun imparts the brilliant colors to the flower, and these colors can only be fully seen and properly distinguished by the light that imparted them, so is it in the work of grace. Sunlight is necessary to appreciate sun work. If you examine the most beautiful flower under candle or gas light, how pale and indistinct its colors, and its finest shades and tints cannot be seen at all. But put the eye of a pansy into the focus of a microscope, with all the concentrated sunlight which the reflectors cast upon it there, and how beautiful, brilliant and even dazzling it seems. So the Spirit of God, as He greatly quickens our graces into activity, especially in the direction of growth and new obedience, puts such light upon their exercise that their true character stands revealed. Or grace in us may, in this respect, be compared to a diamond which has a wondrous power to sparkle and shine, but must be filled, flooded and saturated with light to become very luminous. Now, the witness of the spirit is the light in the diamond, and, when thus under his power, our

spirits attain, more or less, the certainty and assurance that we are the children of God.

Secondly. He "witnesses with our spirit," as He works a high measure and degree of spirituality of mind. In the natural man the flesh dominates and he is "carnally minded," and being "after the flesh minds the things of the flesh," and "walks after the flesh." But when made a subject of grace, he becomes a "spiritual man," is "spiritually-minded," being "after the spirit he minds spiritual things," and not only "walks in the spirit," but, "through the spirit mortifies the deeds of the body." Thus habitual, prevailing spirituality of mind becomes the controlling, ruling power to direct his affections and his will, give character to his whole life and pursuits, moulding him into the likeness of God, and giving divine things such a preponderance in every thought, plan and purpose for the future as to testify to himself and to others, that he has passed from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life.

Thirdly. The spirit bears witness with our spirit by imparting a large measure of the spirit of adoption. This seems to be the idea principally intended by the apostle in the passage as the connexion evidently shows. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father. The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." As the spirit in us gives us freedom, liberty and boldness in dealing with God, and fills our hearts and mouths with such appellations and names, as "Abba Father," this spirit is the very essence of our relation to God, and His seal on us, as His own children. It is the filial spirit, the proof of filial relationship, and when under its influence we get very

near God, and like the bold confident child, who will approach a parent as none other would, and even tease him into complying with its wishes, we are by this spirit led to "give Him no rest" till He accomplish our desires, it is indubitable evidence of our relation, and a great help to the assurance of hope.

5. Another most important means of attaining assurance is the diligent study of *Gospel holiness*. "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His Commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His Commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in Him" (1 John ii., 3-5). "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (1 John iii., 18, 19). We think that these and similar passages make it very plain that the apostle John did not know of any way of attaining assurance and its joy, that left out *sanctification*. That is entirely a modern idea, a kind of labor-saving invention, that came in with similar contrivances in our day. And as John did not know of it, so neither did Paul, as we have shown in explaining the nature of the diligence, in relation to this matter, which he inculcates. The same has also been shown of Peter, and the evangelical prophet of the Old Testament is at one with the apostles of the New on this subject. He tells us that, "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever" (Is. 32, 17); and, he declares of those alone, who are on "the highway," and the way, called "the way of holiness," that "they shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads"

(35, 8-10). He expresses, moreover, on the part of God, His desires for His people thus, "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to My Commandments, then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (xlviii., 18, 22). There is, therefore, much truth and good sense in the saying ascribed to John Newton, "I would not give one straw for that assurance that sin would not damp. If David had come to me in his adultery, and had talked to me of his assurance, I would have despised him." So also the spiritually-minded John A. James, "The man who comes to assurance, and maintains it, while his conscience testifies of him, that he is habitually declining in religious affections, living in the neglect of known duty, or in the indulgence of actual sin, is one of the most fearful instances of self-deception in our world." The union which faith forms with Christ is a vital union, by which His fullness flows into us, and makes us fruitful, and "fruit unto holiness," therefore, alone proves our relation to be real. By such fruit we, ourselves, and all men may "know that we are His disciples," and therefore in seeking assurance of salvation, to leave sanctification out of the account seems not only to mistake the teaching of the word of God, but to be dangerous in the extreme, and to savor more of presumption than of scriptural assurance. "Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father, who is in heaven."

## CONCLUSION.

If we have apprehended aright, in the above views, as to the nature of the assurance of grace and salvation, the teaching of scripture on the subject, we surely cannot but feel the force of the following practical thoughts in their bearing on professors of religion in general, and on our own selves in particular.

First.—How utterly unjustifiable and inexcusable the neglect exhibited on such a subject, by the great mass of professing Christians. To our shame, be it spoken, there are found those in the Christian Church, who would rather frown on those who are earnest in their efforts to reach such assurance, rather treat them with suspicion, and perhaps are ready to express themselves very uncharitably concerning them. There are two reasons for this. First, some attach a sort of merit to doubting about themselves. They think it, in some sort, necessary to the cultivation of a due degree of humility, and to keep in check our tendency to spiritual pride. They prefer, therefore, to walk with feelings of great spiritual depression, rather than run the risk of being puffed up with pride and of so “falling into the condemnation of the devil,” like those lowly humble plants that spreading low on the surface of the ground are less tossed and torn by the storm, than those which in the pride of strength raise themselves high toward heaven. It would be well, however, for such to remember that humiliation is only a means to exaltation, and that if we would study humility and use our own weakness and meanness to the best advantage, it would be to lead us the more to “lay hold on His strength,” and thereby to get higher up, and be able to “walk in the light, as the children of the light.” But, again, others act thus toward assurance,

because they have no true idea of the value and importance of this attainment. The very men who talk and act thus would be the very last to feel indifferent to the value of certainty in any earthly thing. If it were the title to a piece of real estate or other property, success in a lawsuit, or the life and health of themselves or theirs, how would they feel if the darkness of uncertainty hung over it. Oh, it would be misery. And yet they profess to say that their eternal interests are of infinitely more importance than all earthly good, whilst they are content to go on from day to day with no manner of certainty about their future! What madness and infatuation! Is there any thing of such importance as that which will last forever? Is there any joy like the joy of God's salvation, those rays of light and glory which the rising of the heavenly state upon us, like the morning beams of the sun on the eastern clouds, sometimes sends before to gild even now the horizon of our hopes? Knowing how soon all opportunity of spiritual attainments shall be over, how can we trifle away our day of grace when eternal interests are at stake, and we uncertain still. "Awake thou that sleepest and Christ shall give thee light."

Again, if such be the teaching of scripture on the subject of assurance, should we not earnestly desire to see men more harrassed and tormented by their doubts? As Andrew Fuller has well discriminated, doubts about our own state are not unbelief, as doubts about God and divine truths are. They are not, therefore, necessarily sinful, and we could often wish that with some they were more intense and pungent. With many they are only a sort of chronic affection, like some bodily affliction, which, whilst a weakness, gives little pain. If they were more in the acute

form there would be more hope of their being removed altogether. The most hopeless form of disease is the chronic. Let us, therefore, if we have doubts about our state, pray that they may be pungent and tormenting, and have a good deal of the "pains of hell in them," that we may be driven the more earnestly to give all diligence to make our calling sure.

But, moreover, what incentives to holiness are to be found in these views of assurance. If we feel that every known sin indulged, every duty neglected, every evil passion fostered, every bad habit practiced, is an axe hewing down the tree of our hopes; what a constant monitor will it be to warn us of the need of watchfulness and mortification. If, on the other hand, we know that living very near God, habitual spirituality of mind and pursuit, active consecration of ourselves to Christ, holy work and warfare in his service, and an earnest endeavor constantly to keep on "the way of holiness," are intimately connected with, and absolutely necessary to the full assurance of hope, what an inducement it will daily be to endeavor to abound more and more in everything, which we know to be well-pleasing to God.

And should we not feel that the influence of this whole subject should be to stimulate us to hold fast whatever we have attained, and to be pressing on continually to higher degrees of perfection. Blessed be God that there are to be found on our way to heaven, "delectable mountains," whence we sometimes get a glimpse of the gate, and behold "the land that is very far off." There are times, especially about communion seasons, when spiritually we realize something like what we have witnessed, with admiration, in looking upon the ocean, when the setting sun

dipped low, and seemed almost to touch the surface of the water. At such a time we have seen all around the horizon lit up with a glow of glory; the curling crest of the wave, the pendent clouds, the azure sky, all above, below, and around so illumined, and bathed in brightness, that heaven and earth seemed blended and mingled for the time, and the boundary-line betwixt them obliterated and lost; and they seemed to have passed into one another, under the wondrous alchemy that transformed them for a time. So we have no doubt it may be, at times, with the man who earnestly seeks God. Sometimes to such a man God may so look, and stoop so low, and so "shine into his heart to give him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," that his hopes, like the face of Moses, may catch the glow, and shine in so enlarged comfort and joy as to resemble heaven, mingling the experiences of grace with the dawn of glory. And oh, if we could only bind the fugitive frame, and keep it with us forever, if we could only have the light of such a moment on all the dark spots of earth, like a bow of mingled brightness on all the dark clouds of trial and adverse providence, we would walk continually in the light of the Lord, and continually "go out with joy, and be led forth with peace." And this we will realize, as we press on to perfection, know more and more by experience what God is to us, how inexhaustible the love and fulness of Christ are, how comfortable the presence, earnest and witness of the spirit, and, as we jealously guard our treasures of joy and peace from the assaults of temptation and sin, are enabled more and more to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God."