

ARTICLE V.

THE DECLINE OF THE RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT.

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RELIGION, as a human experience, involves three elements—the intellectual, the emotional, and the ethical. We must have, first, the rational apprehension of God—the great facts of his being and government; next, the emotions which these facts excite—the awe, the reverence, the fear, or hope which these great objects of religious thought inspire, often called religious sentiment; and lastly, the moral attitude and action which the facts require—the adjustment of character and life to the truths of religion as intellectually apprehended.

These elements of religious experience exist, in constantly varying proportions, both in the individual and in the community, the nation or the race. In some form or degree, they are all essential to the existence of religion as a genuine experience; but the same individual, in different stages of his progress, may exhibit different degrees and combinations of religious thought and feeling and ethical action. At one time he passes through a period of special intellectual activity, in which the thought is directed to the truths pertaining to God—his nature and government and providence—a period of earnest thinking, in which the foundations are laid in religious doctrine. Again, these facts act profoundly upon the feelings, and call forth the intense emotions which it is their nature to awaken; and then, again, the obligations and requirements of religion address themselves to the soul, and the character and the life are brought into harmony with the facts. The last result is, of course, the proper outcome of all thinking and feeling in connection with religion. Nothing that is ultimately salutary and

valuable has been accomplished until religion reaches and moulds the character and life. Where this is attained, religion is a success; where it is not, it is a failure. The thinking and feeling are, however, necessary steps in the process; because through these come all the motives to action, all the objects upon which the activity can terminate.

Similar fluctuations are exhibited in communities, as in individuals. We sometimes come upon a period of religious *thinking* — a theological era, when the general mind is turned in the direction of the objects of faith, traversing the field of religious thought, defining more accurately the old, and bringing out the new, and extending the limits of religious knowledge. Again, we may have a general awakening of religious *feeling*, a quickening of the religious sentiment — the result of progress in religious thinking, of the apprehension of some new and moving truth, or a freshening of the old, or the consequence of providential events that touch the hearts of men, or, at times, doubtless, the work of a special dispensation of the Divine Spirit, of which no outward occasion appears. At such times, the entire people seem susceptible to religious impressions; the emotional element is prevalent and pervading, and all religious movements present the feature of intensity. Then, again, the idea of *duty* becomes prominent, and religious activity takes the direction of bringing the life into harmony with the claims of morality. New light has brought out new duties, or old wrongs, and the entire people are aroused to the necessity of a higher standard of living, a more complete adjustment of character to perceived obligation. Towards one or another of these three modes of action there is a frequent tendency in every religious community. A general quickening of the religious sensibility is popularly called a revival of religion. A general movement in either of the other directions might properly bear the same name. It is not the sincerely and truly religious alone who are concerned in these movements. The religious tendencies of men are such that even those in whom religion is not the controlling

principle are drifted on with the tide of religious life, and share in the general thought and feeling and action.

The true ideal condition of the individual soul, and of the community at large, is a symmetrical blending of these three elements—a clear apprehension of the great facts of the spiritual world, an appreciation of these facts in the sensibility, and a life and action corresponding with them. Towards this ideal we must suppose that the entire movement tends, and the perfection of the life of heaven involves its complete attainment; but historically the experience of mankind has not exhibited this symmetrical combination.

Religious progress has often been partial, bringing first one, and then another, element into prominence, and concentrating upon it the energies of the community. Or, again, there has seemed to be a division of labor; the work of elaborating religious truth falling upon one portion of the community; another portion living and working in the line of feeling, furnishing the emotional impulse required; and still another giving itself to bring up the standard of the moral life. Doubtless such a distribution of labor has, to some extent, always existed, and perhaps a reasonable blending of these three operations is the best we can expect, in a world of imperfect religious development. But a marked deficiency or failure in either of these elements should awaken concern and counteracting effort.

From the nature of the case, there seems more reason to apprehend a failure of religious sentiment than of religious thought; doctrinal thought being naturally the more permanent of the two. Truth once attained is not easily lost; it takes permanent and, so to speak, tangible form in the symbols and literature of the church and the world. It may cease to attract attention, and may become in some sense inoperative; but let the emergency arise which calls for the truth, and it becomes at once available. Feeling, on the other hand, is more evanescent, although some degree of it is provided for in the permanent constitution of man. This

higher form of religious feeling may subside, and where it fails there is nothing to represent it. The thoughts and forms of action which once expressed it are utterly inadequate. Feeling alone is the test and measure of feeling; and all the signs, at first so significant and potential, become an unknown language when the sentiment has failed which they were designed to represent.

There is ground for the apprehension that the religious sentiment of the church and the world has suffered a marked decline; not merely a temporary or local ebb, but something like a permanent and world-wide subsidence; that, while religious science is well advanced and constantly advancing, and genuine morality is not, on the whole, losing ground, or the power of religion, as a whole, diminishing, there does still appear a deficiency in its affectional or emotional character. The hearts of men seem less moved by the great facts of religion than they were in remote ages, or even in times much less remote; and the result is that religion is not the power which, in view of its advantages of position, it ought to be.

Evidences of this change in prevalent religious experience will appear from a consideration of the facts in reference to the Jewish people, as gathered from sacred history. The Jews were a nation of worshippers. The history of religion among them is the history of the people. Their institutions were the institutions of religion; their entire life was moulded by their religion. To be a Jew was to believe in God and in the temple, in the altar and in the sacrifice. It was to stand at the gates of the temple with reverence and awe, to defend it with enthusiastic bravery from the profanation of the Gentile, and to worship towards it, with longing eyes, from the land of his exile. In prosperous times the people gathered from the remote parts of the land, three times a year, to worship about the temple, and spent days in these acts of devotion. It does not appear that careful arrangements were made to render the worship attractive, by the provision of orchestras, or of preachers and platform orators.

The service looked not towards the people, but heavenward. There was solemn music at times; and, in a quiet way, the doctors of the law discoursed of the doctrines and duties of religion to groups of listeners about the courts; but the great centre of interest was God in his own dwelling-place, and the solemn rite in which God was acknowledged and their own sin confessed. While the sacrifice was offered, the vast multitude were praying without; not under groined arches, with softened light, and in an atmosphere tempered to the most delicate sense; not sitting in luxurious seats that invited to repose; but standing under the open heaven, and waiting in silence while the mysterious ceremonial, hidden from their view, was in progress. When we remember, too, that these were not a special class of the people, religiously inclined, like those who gather at our daily prayer-meetings, but the entire people, in their normal experience, we have evidence of the permanent power of the religious sentiment among them—a power which shaped their thought and life, and which has kept them, down to our time, a peculiar people, with enough of the religious sentiment remaining to hold them to their burdensome worship against the aggressions of modern worldliness.

It is not probable that in genuine morality they were essentially in advance of the modern religious world; but they were sustained in a morality far above that of the nations by which they were surrounded. The strength of the religious sentiment among them is further shown by the fact that even in apostasy this sentiment still prevailed. They did not renounce religion when they forsook the true worship. They still had their divinities, and built their altars upon every high hill and under every green tree. The tendency to worship was so strong among them that the groves and high places, devoted to idolatry by the original inhabitants of the land, could not be suffered to remain. They proved a temptation.

The facts of our modern Christian civilization, in relation to the religious sentiment, are quite in contrast with all this.

The prominent fact strikes us at the outset, that we are not a community of worshippers. Large portions of the people never gather to a place of worship, and never share in any act of worship, or in any common exhibition of religious feeling. A single exception should perhaps be noted. The religious sentiment is aroused in the presence of death, and religious observances are always connected with the burial of the dead. The exception is so striking as to mark more distinctly the general fact. The religious sentiment is so low and inoperative as to leave large portions of every Protestant Christian people in a state of apparent indifferentism. Christian worship seems a matter in which they have no concern. A portion of these may afford pecuniary aid in erecting churches and in sustaining the institutions of religion, in the same spirit in which they would aid in the construction of a railroad, or in any other public enterprise. It tends to the general prosperity and advances the price of real estate. The impulse to worship they do not feel, they have no conscious want in that direction. No such class of people existed among the Jews. Even the Sadducees of the Saviour's day, a sect of materialistic philosophers who denied a spiritual existence, and immortality, had not emancipated themselves from the necessity of worship. They maintained the temple service as zealously as the Pharisees themselves.

The most advanced Christian sentiment of the modern world lacks this pervasive power. Large masses of men in close contact with the Christian church are not reached by the light and warmth of religious feeling. This is the more remarkable, as it stands in contrast with the fact that Christian doctrine and Christian morality are much more widely diffused. Modern Christianity controls, to a great extent, the external morality of the entire people, and gives direction to the popular thinking; but the feeling of worship, the sentiment of religion, does not keep pace with the thought or the morality.

Leaving these outsiders, and coming to the professed

worshippers themselves, we find similar evidence of lack of power in the religious sentiment. We build houses of worship, often artistic and magnificent, not generally comparing in costliness with the temple of the Jews — but ours are many, and theirs was but one. In the aggregate, our houses of worship exceed in cost the greatest of their temples. But we build capitols and exchanges and public halls and school-houses and hotels at even greater cost, and much in the same spirit. The Jews erected their temple as a dwelling-place for God. It was God's house; and they covered its beams and doors and roof and turrets with gold, to make it meet for God's presence and glory. Nothing was too costly or magnificent to express their sense of God's excellence and majesty. For themselves they never ventured into the sacred place. In their worship their souls were directed to God. In his presence the sacrifice was consumed, and to him the incense ascended. To him the solemn chant and the prayer were directed. The great inquiry was "wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God"? We build our houses of worship to accommodate ourselves, with such adornment and furnishing as shall be pleasing to mortal eye, and add to human comfort. The preference of sittings in our temple we sell to the highest bidder, and thus save ourselves from the burden of a tithing to sustain our worship. We gather to our service and listen to music, attuned artistically to the cultivated ear, rather than adapted to be the vehicle of praise to God from the great congregation. One voice utters the prayer while the people sit; and it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the prayer is addressed more to God or to the worshippers. If in any part of the service the people stand, it is chiefly as a matter of bodily relief. But these forms of worship are only the preliminaries. The people have gathered for the sermon, and some give unequivocal proof of this by arriving just in season for this essential exercise. The preaching is the great feature of our modern Protestant worship. It is intellectually stimulating; it affords instruction in doctrine,

and incentive to right action; but it is not the natural channel of the sentiment of worship. In reference to the entire service, the effort is apparent to make it attractive to the hearers; for the congregation seems to be an assembly of hearers rather than of worshippers; and so we spend the brief hour, and retire to refresh exhausted nature at our homes.

We would not intimate that in these barren forms there is not genuine worship, or that these worshippers are not morally approved of God, as fully as those of ancient days, who stood in solemn awe around the temple. The great principle "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not," applies to worship, as to every other service. But what a poverty of soul do these cold forms betray — not a barrenness of religious thought, or ethical character, or outward activity, but of hearty, vital sentiment and feeling! Nor do we intend to intimate that these forms are not adapted to the condition and conscious want of the worshippers. Just here lies the difficulty. We seem to need nothing warmer or more expressive. There is a startling deficiency in the religious sentiment that makes us intolerant of anything more demonstrative, and any attempt to elevate the service above the prevalent tone of feeling produces a reaction, and chills the heart instead of kindling it. Indeed; from our modern point of view it is difficult for us to understand the propriety and power of the ancient worship. The symbolic movements and representations were addressed to feeling, and not to thought. They are not to be explained but felt; and when the feeling is wanting, the symbolical language is an unknown tongue. As an example, how little is the propriety or necessity of fasting, felt in modern experience! We have what we call, out of deference to tradition, our days of fasting and prayer; but the fasting is a matter of exceptional personal observance, rarely, if ever, attended to by the body of the people. So little is the need of this observance felt, that its very meaning and significance

are, to a great extent, lost from modern thought. The ascetic idea represents it as a solemn requirement, an act of self-denial, in itself pleasing to God; or a sort of penance which God imposes as an expression of his displeasure. The humanitarian view is that its value is physiological, that it operates to clear the mind and subdue the body, to give the spiritual nature predominance, and fit the soul for prayer and worship. Under the illumination of true and elevated religious feeling, we should probably see that both these views are out of place, and that fasting is merely the natural form in which intense emotions of penitence or sorrow express themselves, or the natural result of such emotions. "The children of the bridechamber fast when the Bridegroom is taken away."

If we leave these outward indications of religious feeling, as shown in the institutions and forms of worship, and come to the direct utterances of emotion in prayer and sacred song, we shall find the difference between the past and the present no less striking. The religious sentiment of the scriptures differs from that of modern experience, not only in degree, but in kind. The highest form, that which most exalts and inspires the soul, is its direct response to the great facts of God's being and attributes. In the contemplation of these, the soul is drawn out of itself, and lifted up in awe, reverence, adoration, and love, or is occupied with the correlative facts of its own weakness, dependence, want, and unworthiness. These views are the natural counterparts of each other. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." In its deepest emotional exercises the soul does not contemplate itself, or its own experiences, analyzing and dissecting them and holding them up to its own admiration, but is wholly absorbed in the grand object of the emotion. This is the most simple and natural form of religious sentiment, and is eminently characteristic of the religion of the Bible.

A lower and less wholesome type of feeling involves special

attention to the experiences themselves, a work of analytic introspection and self-consciousness; the soul noting each varying phase and movement of its own life and enveloping itself in a spiritual cocoon, spun from its own feeling and fancy, occupied with the changing phenomena of its own inner existence, rather than going out to the great fountain of life. It is significant that men have never thought of pursuing this method in other departments of experience, even where the emotions are most fully exercised, as in the social and domestic relations. No man pauses to entertain himself with his feelings towards his family or friends, or holds up, even to his own thought, any of these emotions as an object of contemplation. The natural emotion takes him out of himself to the objects of his affection, and he rejoices in the goodness and excellence which have won his heart. The moment any emotion becomes itself an object of thought and of culture it loses its transparency and something of its genuineness. It becomes rather the echo of the genuine, than the genuine itself. The grief that entertains itself with its own pain is little more than the remembrance of a grief that has passed away; and the love that dwells on its own strength and intensity awakens distrust of its vitality. The religious emotions come under the same law. They exist in their most satisfactory form, when transmitting directly to the soul the object which arouses them. Like a flame of fire, they cannot be separated from that on which they feed.

The Psalms of the Old Testament are an embodiment of the religious emotions of those times; and our modern sacred songs are an expression of modern sentiment. These lyrics are to be taken, not merely as an expression of the feelings of their immediate authors, but as representing the great body of the church which has adopted and consecrated them. In a careful comparison of these, one cannot but be struck with the contrast. Open the Psalms where you will, and the soul is instantly lifted up on the wings of adoration and out-going to God. Does the Psalmist long for God's

presence, how direct and childlike is his cry to him: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come to appear before God?" Here we are taken into the very heart of the emotion, instead of contemplating it as spectators, and are drawn into full sympathy with the longing after God.

When the Psalmist would express his love to God, he sets God before us in his loveliness: "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplication; because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." This is the simple and direct expression of the emotion. In our modern hymns, on the other hand, we are often made spectators of the emotion, and are set upon gauging its depth and intensity:

"Do not I love thee, O my Lord?

Behold my heart, and see;
And turn the dearest idol out
That dares to rival thee.

Is not thy name melodious still
To my attentive ear?
Doth not each pulse with pleasure bound
My Saviour's voice to hear?

Would not my heart pour forth its blood
In honor of thy name?
And challenge the cold hand of death
To damp the immortal flame?"

Here we have love introverted, and feeding on its own life — a very poor diet; but such hymns are the natural result of a direct observation and study of the religious emotions; a work in which the distinguished author of this hymn has been a prominent leader. Similar instances of the contemplation of the emotion, instead of the expression of the emotion, abound in our collections; and some of these are special favorites. Many hymns relating to prayer are of this class — a meditation upon the privilege of prayer, rather than the utterance of prayer:

"I love to steal awhile away
 From every cumbering care,
 And spend the hours of setting day
 In humble, grateful prayer.

I love in solitude to shed
 The penitential tear,
 And all his promises to plead
 When none but God is near."

or again —

"From every stormy wind that blows,
 From every swelling tide of woes,
 There is a calm, a sure retreat —
 'Tis found beneath the mercy-seat.

There is a place where Jesus sheds
 The oil of gladness on our heads;
 A place, than all besides more sweet —
 It is the blood-bought mercy-seat."

Again we have

"Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer!
 That calls me from a world of care,
 And bids me at my Father's throne
 Make all my wants and wishes known.
 In seasons of distress and grief
 My soul has often found relief,
 And oft escaped the tempter's snare
 By thy return, sweet hour of prayer."

The hymn continues in this artificial strain, until, in the last line, it reaches the preposterous climax

"Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer."

That such instances of false sentiment should appear among our hymns, would have no special significance; they appear in other departments of literature. But it is significant that the church should adopt these hymns to express devotional feeling. We have many noble hymns expressive of hearty and true emotion, bringing into direct view the objects of the emotions instead of the emotions themselves; and it is somewhat remarkable that we should have any of a different character, with such divine models in our hands

as the Psalms of David. The fact indicates a low state of religious feeling — a culture too subjective and introverted.

In attempting to give the thought and feeling an outward, objective direction, our hymns sometimes reach only the poetic and sentimental.

“Brightest and best of the sons of the morning!
Dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid;
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on his cradle the dew-drops are shining;” . . .

This must pass for poetry, but we cannot accept it as an expression of devotion. In a similar strain we have the less familiar hymn

“Thou art, O God, the life and light
Of all this wondrous world we see:
Its glow by day, its smile by night,
Are but reflections caught from thee;
Where'er we turn thy glories shine,
And all things fair and bright are thine.

When day, with farewell beam, delays
Among the opening clouds of even,
And we can almost think we gaze
Through golden vistas into heaven,—
Those hues that mark the sun's decline,
So soft, so radiant, Lord, are thine.”

It is not strange that the author of these lines should have confounded poetic sentiment and fancy, with religious feeling; but that the people of God, with a lofty utterance like the nineteenth Psalm before them, should have shared in that mistake, is passing strange. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.” etc. There are, doubtless, passages of a subjective character in the Psalms, but the general contrast can scarcely be questioned.

But the Old Testament is not peculiar in bringing men face to face with the great facts of religion. The New Testament deals in the same manner with the religious emotions. In the incarnation we have the objective personality of God

brought almost within the reach of our senses. We have the Immanuel living and walking with men, and at last taken bodily from mortal sight through the opening cloud, leaving his followers gazing steadfastly into heaven, his own words of grace still lingering in their ears: "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." The gospel system differs from the older revelation in bringing the worshipper, if possible, more directly to God, rending the veil which exeludes him from the holy of holies, removing the priest who was the medium of the worship and inviting him to "come boldly to the throne of grace."

Paul cannot be supposed to have been deficient in religious experience. Converted suddenly, in an overwhelming vision, from a proud persecutor to a humble believer, receiving his gospel, not in conference with man, but taught it by the Spirit of God, caught up to the third heavens, where he heard unspeakable words, not lawful for man to utter, why should he not have left us an epistle on the "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," or a discriminating treatise on "The Religious Affections?" He deems it enough to say of himself: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

John was a man the natural current of whose life was pure and transparent, but profound. His opportunities were rare. He had stood with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, had reclined in his bosom at the last supper — "the disciple whom Jesus loved," had followed him to the judgment hall when all others fled, had received his last words addressed to human ear upon the cross, had looked first into the open sepulchre, and seen with spiritual insight the resurrection. Why did he not, when in the Spirit on the Lord's day, give us, instead of the outward conflict of the powers of good and evil, an apocalypse of the interior life? If any man has known the meaning of that life, John was that man. He contents

himself with saying: "Little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and truth. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The New Testament abounds in expressions of emotion; but it is always in contemplation of the outward facts of God and his grace, of man's sin and salvation: "Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Of that painful handling of the religious emotions, so common in later days, marking their varying shades and intensities, and labelling each as in a cabinet of dried specimens, we find nothing. The introverted, dreamy, and mystical type of religious experience does not appear in the pages of the New Testament. It sprang up at a later day, in connection with the monastic tendency, which encouraged religious contemplation and separation from worldly relations and active life. It is the natural product of the monastic idea. The soul shut out from the natural channels of action must occupy itself with an unwholesome self-consciousness, and entertain itself with its own movements and fancies. Thus, the habit, coming down through the perversions of Romanism, has invaded every branch of the Protestant church, sometimes, even, in our day, claiming attention as "the higher Christian life."

This misdirection of the religious sentiment must be regarded as a cause, as well as a consequence, of a decline in its power. Religious feeling, as well as every other emotion, vanishes under a direct examination of its nature and strength. It is an element of power only when it fastens on God, and makes his personality and presence more real to men. The man who walks with God, and whose presence suggests the thought of God, is the one who takes hold of the hearts of men; not he who dwells with himself, and

whose experiences become to himself a matter of absorbing interest. While the church has given so much attention to the nature of religious emotions, and has made the direct contemplation of them so prominent in public worship and instruction and in didactic literature, it is not surprising that religious experience should have lost its vigor, and that the sense of worship should have vanished, in a degree, from the hearts of men. The mass of men can never be interested in the study of religious feeling, and, even if they could, it would not be an exercise of that feeling; but they can and must be drawn towards the natural and proper objects of religious contemplation. The great themes of religion have in their very nature a charm beyond any others. No other interests could gather men from week to week, as do those of worship and religious instruction. The church and the pulpit, even indifferently sustained, will continue to attract congregations of the people when the secular lecture shall have been forgotten. But the power of religious worship and thought is greatly diminished when turned in any degree from God and from man's relation to him.

There are, doubtless, other causes which have operated in diminishing the tendency to worship. Among these stands prominent the fact that we have receded from those great manifestations of God which impressed the minds of men in the earlier ages. Such events as the creation, the flood, the destruction of the cities of the plain, the deliverance from Egypt, and the whole course of God's providence with the Jews and with surrounding nations, acted powerfully upon the thoughts and feelings of men; so that to question his personality or his power was an impossibility.

We are separated from the old theophanies by a hundred generations. The apprehension of God has lost something of its vividness. We may hold to the dogmatic statement of his existence; but our hearts are not moved by it as the hearts of men were moved of old. We can prove to men that these manifestations must have been made; they have lost nothing of their value as evidence to the understanding;

but they are too remote to stir the feeling of the careless and unbelieving, and men say in their hearts: "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

It is a weakness of human nature thus to lose the apprehension of the past; but the practical fact must be accepted. The effect of the lapse of ages since these grand events of God's providence appeared is shown in the condition even of the pagan nations. The sentiment of worship is losing its power among them. The grim and fierce superstitions which led to human sacrifice the world over, from the plains of India to the heights of the Cordilleras and to the islands of the sea, have lost their hold upon the minds of men.

Much of this may be ascribed to the indirect influence of Christianity in the world, but more, probably, to the failure of the intense sentiment of fear and apprehension which God's early judgments produced in the minds of sinners. The earliest missionaries of the Sandwich islands found that the false deities had fallen into dishonor, and the old religion had lost its hold. The case is not a solitary one. There are many indications of the waning power of heathen superstitions. Mohammedanism shows a similar decay. The terrible earnestness and energy of its early years have failed, because of the failure in the human soul of the principle upon which it acted. Religion, except as it is sustained by Christianity, seems likely to perish from the earth, as it has already perished, in effect, from the great empire of China.

Again, the progress of physical science has doubtless had something to do with this result. When all the movements of nature were referred at once to God, — when the thunder was his voice, and the winds were the breath of the Almighty, — the thought of God was ever present. But as science connects these movements with the well-known forces of nature, and almost constructs the world without the intervention of creative power, the thought of God vanishes from the hearts of men; not logically, for, however far back

science may trace this series of dependent causes, we must at length find God standing at the source of all power and life, not dethroned, but only the more exalted, by these revelations of physical science. But human thought is superficial, and human imagination weak. Men grow bewildered in this search after God, and, when he disappears from the secret places where they thought was his abode, weakly or willingly they cease to follow him. The vast machinery of the universe comes in between the soul and God, and shuts him from their hearts. The reign of law, rather than of God, becomes the omnipresent fact to human thought, and checks the outgoing of the soul to him. He seems too remote to be reached by our prayer, and even the Christian heart is sometimes chilled by this overpowering sense of distance:

"Hosannas languish on our tongues,
And our devotion dies."

We seem to need again the manifest Jehovah, in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. "Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?"

Through this superincumbent mass religious feeling must find its way; and in the midst of these difficulties we are almost tempted, at times, to accept the stupid proverb that "Ignorance is the mother of devotion," or the more pretentious doctrine of Positivism, that religion can flourish only in the dawning of civilization. But "Jehovah lives, and blessed be our rock."

It is possible, again, that an imperfect conception of the love of God, as presented in the gospel scheme, has tended to diminish the power of religious feeling. *Reverence* must lie at the foundation of all worship, because this is the proper response of the soul to God's greatness and excellence. That love expresses the substance of God's moral excellence, is the doctrine of revelation, fully sustained by reason; but a shallow interpretation of that love sometimes eliminates from the character of God all justice and sternness and

fidelity to the interests of his universe, and leaves a mere good-nature, an easy and inoffensive impulse to relieve mankind from every hardship, and to secure to them every pleasure. Before this perverted conception of God, true reverence and worship fail. He comes to be regarded, not as a moral Governor, with rights of his own, which his creatures are bound to respect, but as a great convenience, a servant of his creatures, as, in our ultra democratic language, we often speak of the ruler as the servant of the people. Such a thought may not be distinctly accepted; but the vague notion reacts upon the religious sentiment. A Scotch writer, who has recently visited this country to study our institutions, in hearty sympathy with much that he saw, relates the story of a little Massachusetts boy, who had offended his mother, and obtained her forgiveness. She suggested to him the importance of seeking the forgiveness of God. "Oh, no matter about that," says the little fellow. "Of course God will forgive me; *that's what God is for*. He loves to forgive little boys." The incident may seem too slight for notice; but it indicates a grave fact, and there is serious mischief in such a misconception of God's compassion finding its way down into the infant heart. It may be that we need to recast our idea of God's love, and to re-enthroned him in our hearts. There is no danger of over-estimating the love of God, or of expecting too much of that love in beneficent action towards our race; but there *is* danger that our view of God's love be partial and inadequate, lacking the strength and majesty of true goodness controlled by wisdom. Closely allied to this inadequate view of God is the growing sense of the importance of the individual man. The idea is in itself of prime value, and has its place in a true system of morals. It lies at the foundation of the gospel itself, and distinguishes Christianity from every system of false religion. But it is often the case that in the development of a new idea the truth becomes distorted, and yields a result which amounts at last to error.

The intense individualism of modern thought involves the impression that all institutions and ordinances and arrangements exist for the good of the individual man. Worship is appropriate, because man is a religious being, and needs the opportunity. Prayer is beneficial, because of its reaction upon the soul itself. Effort to extend religion in the world is a duty, not because God has rights and interests in the world which his children must sustain, but because men are perishing, and need salvation. This extreme humanitarianism puts man foremost, and God in the background, thus essentially corrupting the idea of worship, and rendering it, in fact, impossible. True religious sentiment humbles man, and exalts God. It elevates man, indeed, by bringing him up into communion with the Father of spirits, uniting God and angels and men in one great family interest; but it places God at the head of this great family, and gathers his creatures around to look up in reverence and dependence to him "who opens his hand to satisfy the wants of every living thing."

Another obvious and popular occasion of the depression of the religious sentiment may be found in the general good order and material prosperity to which modern Christian society has attained. Men call upon God in the day of trouble. In the midst of convulsions they need a rock on which to plant their feet. The interruption of the ordinary course of life brings apprehension, a sense of dependence and a want of God. Sickness and death have this effect in personal relations, and wide-spread social calamities arouse the religious sentiment in the community at large. This principle was often illustrated in the course of the great national struggle through which we have passed. Under the pressure of the trial, the religious sentiment reached individuals and classes scarcely ever moved with the thought of God. Even the money-changers of Wall Street, upon news of a victory, uncovered their heads and lifted up their voices in the triumphant doxology :

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow,"

and when at length the final victory came, in spite of the fact that God and his providence are not recognized in the National Constitution, even the dome of the Capitol responded to the popular feeling in the illuminated transparency: "It is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes."

It was often remarked in our armies during the war, that while immorality prevailed in every form and degree, speculative infidelity was almost unknown. Young men who had thought themselves in doubt as to the realities of religion found, when standing face to face with death, that their doubts vanished.

The religious tendency, so prominent in its emotional form among the slaves of the South, was the product of their hard and hopeless earthly life. With the attainment of freedom and security, their religious fervor will subside, and we shall find among them the ordinary experience of civilized life. This does not prove that insecurity and danger are, on the whole, more favorable to religion than quiet and prosperity. It is only an instance of the many compensations which spring out of unfavorable conditions.

But whatever may be regarded as the occasion, the unquestionable fact remains, that the religious sentiment of the present age is deficient in power as compared with that of the olden times. There are doubtless both individuals and communities that must be counted exceptions to this statement, but these only set forth the more distinctly the great fact with regard to the general condition of religion in the world.

The result of this deficiency is a want of power on the part of Christianity as a whole. Christianity, as a system, stands to-day historically and rationally established. Its morality is the only morality, its essential doctrines have survived all criticism, and its history is the history of civilization. Its weakness is shown by the fact that even in Christian countries it does not practically command the hearts of men. They assent to its truth, acknowledge its claims, but are not moved to embrace it. It is true that this illustrates the

perversity of human nature and the exceeding sinfulness of sin; but if religion as practically set forth, moved more profoundly the hearts of men, a different result would follow. This is the one element that is wanting to the complete triumph of Christianity. The truth oftener takes possession of men through their hearts than through their heads. It has already won its place in the convictions of mankind; with greater warmth and vitality it will find a place in their hearts.

Has the human soul permanently lost its susceptibility to religious impressions? if not, how can it be restored? Is this depressed, subjective experience a necessary step in the religious progress of the world, determined by forces above our control, or has the Christian church some responsibility in regard to it? Can anything be done to arrest the tendency? These questions call for thorough inquiry, but only a few hints can be here suggested. The first step in the work must be to become aware of the facts. The sense of want itself, may prove the most potent force in lifting us out of our depression. It may be that the only condition lacking is an outgoing of soul to the great source of spiritual life, and thus "the Lord whom we seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." The sense of a present God and Saviour is all that is required. Let the people of God but lift up the prayer for the more complete fulfilment of the promise of the latter days: "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams," and we shall find that God still fills the world and can reveal himself to men.

We cannot essentially change the outward conditions of our modern religious life. We cannot bring back the old dispensation of divine manifestations; nor can we bridge over the chasm of ages which separates us from those grand events. We must find in our present conditions, in the uniform movement of God's providence as it passes before our eyes, and in the indwelling Spirit of God, the permanent

support of the religious emotions. We must find God in our quiet life and in our daily duties, as Abraham and Moses and Daniel found him in his more startling manifestations.

Still less, if possible, can we set aside the results of science, or escape the reign of law in the natural world. A religious faith that shivers with apprehension at every new disclosure of the processes by which the work of creation has been conducted, is too effeminate to serve its purpose. A vigorous religious sentiment will gather up all these demonstrations of unknown laws and occult forces, as so many disclosures of the wisdom and power of God. While the materialist fancies that he is constructing a world without God, the truly reverent and worshipful soul will be able to see that he is only enlarging and adorning the temple which is made luminous with God's glory. The depression which seems to come with the revelation of law in nature is but a superficial and temporary result. Christianity should be able to take possession of this vast system which science is constructing, and sing with the Psalmist of old: "O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all." Nor are we to account our material prosperity a disadvantage. If the religious emotions cannot flourish in the constant experience and expectation of good, then what are we to do in heaven? Until the earth is a paradise we must do what we can to improve it, and we need a religious sentiment, a sense of God and his love that will rise and expand with all this improvement. Only thus can heaven at last be safe to us.

Nor can we set aside the great fact of God's love, and man's importance in his regard. These things constitute the very essence of the gospel. In accepting these facts we are only learning the great lesson which God himself has been teaching men ever since they first began to distrust him. To displace in the hearts of men the love of God by the feeling of terror, is to relinquish the gospel and accept paganism. The religious sentiment of the future must exhibit more, not less, of the filial confidence of the child of God — the perfect

love which casts out fear. It is not a fault of the prevalent type of feeling that it is too cheerful and hopeful, or that it reflects too much of the light of heaven. Awe and reverence, love and hope, are not antagonistic to each other, and must all spring from a symmetrical apprehension of the character of God.

Any attempt to heighten devotional feeling by an immediate action upon the emotions themselves, must of course, prove a failure. This would be but a reproduction of the condition of things which in part constitutes the difficulty. The thing needed is to get out of ourselves, away from this self-conscious habit of watching and shaping religious feeling. The feeling must come from a contemplation of the objects adapted; to move the hearts of men if this is not effective, there is no remedy. A resort to elaborate and imposing forms of worship cannot afford relief. Even if such forms might possibly be the natural expression of feeling, yet when the feeling is wanting, they are an impertinence and an offence. The rattling skeleton of worship, when life and soul are wanting, cannot be pleasing to God or helpful to man. It seems probable, indeed, that the complicated movements of ritualism, the earlier and the recent, did not originate in the simple sentiment of worship, but in the grave misapprehension that the movements themselves were in some way pleasing to God. It is inconceivable that religious feeling itself should take on such forms.

Neither can outward activity in works of charity and religious labor be made to take the place of the activity and outgoing of soul which constitute true worship. Not that outward activity is in any sense opposed to the earnestness of soul which belongs to the true spiritual life. There is efficiency in the outward labor, when it is an expression of the feelings and affections which should prompt it. But religious labor prosecuted as a work required by God or due to man, will no more add power to our religion than the internal, subjective struggles which spring from a bewildered,

introverted experience. They both fall below the plane of a true Christian life.

The great want of man, now, as in all time, is the direct apprehension of God, the acceptance of the simple facts of religion. There is enough in these facts to constitute a perennial fountain of religious feeling. The problem is, to give these facts such a place in the hearts of men that they shall do their natural work.

Is there not opportunity and occasion to recall the simplicity and directness of the Christian faith? to secure to Christian experience more of the naturalness and reasonableness which characterize the relation of the soul to God? to infuse into our religious instruction and literature more of God and less of man, or to place these in more direct relations to each other, so that our religious system shall be religion, rather than philosophy; a living power, rather than a lifeless thought? Thus the religious affections shall be as simple and direct as the social, and worship as obvious a want as the communion of man with his fellow man.

Towards the establishment of such relations we cannot suppose that God himself will be indifferent. Such a lifting up of the soul to him on the part of his people will find a response in a divine baptism of love and power; and thus the promised glory of the latter days shall be realized, when "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the tops of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it."