

ARTICLE III.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

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[EDITOR'S PREFATORY NOTE — There has already appeared in a British Review a translation of this discourse. Yet we publish the following for various reasons. The importance of the Christian doctrine of perfection here set forth may be inferred from the fact that the discourse was prepared by Dr. Ritschl to embody for more popular use the substance of the final results of his work on "The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation." The doctrine of atonement must be the central one in Christianity, or the religion of reconciliation. It is not hard to see that an accurate statement of those means by which Christ sought to give a fatal blow to sin and sin's results, and an accurate statement of the results of Christ's work, must be of immense importance to a Christian preacher. The sense of the importance of this doctrine or statement will grow fast on a student as he finds that just by this doctrine Christianity is sharply distinguished from heathenism, or from its sister, modern polytheism, which believes that there can be a conflict between religion and so-called science, an essential conflict between one set of phenomena in the world and another set, and that a reconciliation is an absurdity. He will find that the line of distinction lies just here, too, from another sister of heathenism, namely, religious formalism, which declares that reconciliation exists only between God and a small group of his creatures; those namely, who perform certain mental, or even physical exercises, all being excluded whose business, as ordained for them by God, excludes the possibility of performing these exercises. For what else is the belief that the forms of religious observance and theological expression produced by any one age must be the standard for men in all circumstances? What else is this than holding that reconciliation with God can be had only by the holders of these forms? And what else is this than to say that men whose birth occurred after that standard age's philosophical apparatus had been superseded can have no reconciliation?

¹ Die christliche Vollkommenheit. Ein Vortrag von Albrecht Ritschl. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht's Verlag, 1874. Published in the Bibliotheca Sacra with special consent of Dr. Ritschl. Translated by E. Craigmile. Carefully revised, and at times explained, by Prof. Archibald Duff, Jr., Montreal.

Again, just on the doctrine of the atonement is Christianity sharply different from the theory of the Roman Catholic clergy.¹ For while the latter hold that only the clergy can approach God, and the laity must use the clergy as mediators in their intercourse with God, the former doctrine clearly declares that there is complete reconciliation ready for every man. Every man may have, every real Christian has, constant, immediate intercourse with his Father.

Just the doctrine of the atonement it is, also, which the worldling passes by, or tosses away. He will have all pleasure. Yes; but the Christian too, has perfect pleasure. The latter believes that he, after whose plan the world moves, loves him, and enjoys having him perfectly happy; that is, the Christian knows he will be, he is provided with perfect happiness; for are not he and God and God's plan for the world reconciled. But the worldling has no confidence in this, no confidence that a due regard to the needs of all things will allow a complete exercise of a plan, whose complete exercise is sure to bring full happiness to all concerned. He does not believe in a reconciliation between his wants and the plans of the great Manager. He thinks his own happiness will only be obtained by seizing on what gratifies him, even to the utter disregard of others' needs. Their needs and his needs are irreconcilable, to his mind. He and the Creator are not reconcilable.

It is thus the doctrine of the atonement that lays bare the common essence of worldliness, of standard Roman Catholicism, of formalism in religion, of modern polytheism in the claimants that science conflicts with religion, in heathenism past and contemporary.

What the atonement effects, what are the results of it in men is, however, the question where the oppositions above described become sharp. Christian theologians have somewhat neglected this question, while they have discussed largely the other question, how was the atonement effected. We have been too much like the mediaeval scholastics; too little attentive to studies of practical points in the care of souls.² The following discourse is wisely aimed. It is a summary of the author's treatise on Christian atonement, for practical use. It therefore sets forth what a man is who has been reconciled to God through Jesus. If there be men on whom God now looks with full pleasure (for what else does "reconciled" mean), if there be men whom God thus regards as perfect, let us know what are the characteristics of such men. What is Christian perfection?

¹ The doctrine of many of the people, and of much of the liturgy, is very different from the standard doctrine of the clergy, viz. that of the Council of Trent.

² Such as this, What is the nature of a reconciled man? Just what are the peculiar characteristics which he has gained? What is a man who is right with God, sufficient in his sight, perfect before Him, so far as he can be in the nature of things?

Let no one say the word "perfection" would be better reserved for a state of absolute perfection, when a soul could not in any possible way be further developed. For human souls would be human souls no longer had they got into such a position. Ritschl discusses this point well at the close of his discourse, pointing out that the desire and capability of increase are essential characteristics of the human soul. And a doctrine of Nirwana, of ultimate, complete cessation of our humanity is no part of Christianity. No; the use of "perfection" observed in this discourse is the only possible one. A soul is perfect when it is complete after its kind. Although, also, at different times that same soul may be said to have a different completeness to fulfil, yet it may be or become complete in each case. The faith of that soul that God and it are reconciled is faith that at that moment God is satisfied with its being what it is. First, then, he is satisfied with its doing what it can do, that is, with its faithful performance of the service of its vocation. It is confidence, too, that the feeling of joy, of satisfaction, which a man, honest to his various duties has as he performs them is no mere frivolous affection, but is something created by God to be the index to the soul that it is well pleasing to God. Again, confidence in reconciliation with God is confidence that the soul is a complete thing after its kind, and therefore fit to have a value set upon it. It has a value in comparison with the value of the whole complex of things and influences which are included together in one whole, and termed the world. And the confidence in reconciliation also means confidence that as a spirit the soul is of the same kind as God, and its value, when doing its own work, is far greater than that of the whole world. It is of more importance to God that that soul be preserved in its integrity than that the world, which at times seems opposed to the interests of that soul, should gain the day and overthrow the soul. And the soul believes that all things are in the control of that one great Creator Spirit, so that there is nowhere in the universe anything which can ultimately get the better of that reconciled soul. The sin which the soul had done, and for which it dreaded the Creator, has been covered up, put completely out of mind by God. He bids the soul believe in his love, in spite of the past sin.

These are a few of the points which are investigated in the following discourse. We think the treatment of the main question involved is so good, and withal of such prime importance to practical carers for souls, that it is well to republish the discourse. The previously published English translation was not enough. It was not in a periodical which would ensure for the essay a wide reading in America. Again, we feel modestly sure that the style of that previous translation was of that involved kind which prevents many translations being read. We believe that the following translation avoids that evil, and presents Ritschl's matter in a purely English dress; and more, presents it with thoroughly English features, as if it were a discourse by an English or American thinker.

A word concerning Dr. Ritschl himself is here in place. We must decidedly condemn the hero-worship which exalts this or that German as ultimate authority. For us, Germans are not and cannot be ultimate authorities. We must base our arguments, not on their names, nor on any names, but on rigid observation and deduction. Germans or other investigators must be consulted only for their opinions. The opinions of Ritschl deserve record and study because he himself follows this method; searching deeply and widely, reasoning rigidly. More, the fact that he does this is widely recognized in his own land. Ritschl differs sharply from the high Lutheran way of thinking, widely also from that of the negative school, to use a vague yet useful word, and he differs widely, also from the so-called mediating school. And yet his method is acknowledged by men of all parties to be the right one. We may call it the strictly scientific method. And this method of Ritschl's promises to lead in theological thought, and also to command for theological thinkers the respect of thinkers in all other departments of knowledge.

It is well to add a brief notice of Dr. Ritschl's work in general. Now Ordinary Professor in the Theological Faculty at Göttingen, he was formerly at Bonn. He has published a work on "The Rise of the Old Catholic Church," second edition, thoroughly newly constructed, 1857, discussing the first three centuries; smaller works in pamphlet form, "Concerning the Relation of Confessions to the Church, a vote against the New Lutheran Doctrines," 1854; "De Ira Dei," 1859; "On Schleiermacher's Reden 'über die Religion,'" discussing the effect of these as in some respects evil, 1874; "On Instruction of Children in Christian Religion," 1875, etc., besides his recent great work. Dr. Ritschl lectures now in Göttingen, on Christian Dogmatics, Theological Ethics, Comparative Investigation of the Doctrines of the different divisions of Christendom, Exegesis of New Testament books. His lectures, along with those of Lotze on Philosophy, and such teachers as De Lagarde in Semitic Philology, and Sauppe, Benfey, and others, have made Göttingen, during the few years past, perhaps, the most important university in the world.]

IN raising the question of Christian Perfection, I am quite conscious of striking a chord which will sound strangely in the ears of Protestants. In the Protestant churches we are taught to abstain, in modesty or humility, from all claim to any perfection of our performances in practical life. The public or commonly received doctrine teaches particularly that we never become so free from sinful impulses as to perform all the good works which it is our duty to do, that in this respect we always fall short of our duty, we very

defectively fulfil the task of loving our neighbor. If we compare our actually good works with the moral law, we shall always perceive, even in the best cases, missing links in the chain and flaws in our intentions, so that we can never affirm a perfection of our moral accomplishments.

But this, adds the common doctrine, has this advantage, that we are not ensnared in any sort of self-righteousness — more especially we do not become self-righteous toward God, and, instead, we look for our salvation to God alone, whose power and grace are more distinctly apparent when we bear in mind our weakness and imperfection. The plan of redemption through faith is also commonly declared to imply that perfection belongs to God's plan, but that the faith which we build thereupon often enough lacks the strength and assurance and joy which rightly belong to such faith. Who, then, can get beyond the cry of yon needy one: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Such is the Protestant hereditary doctrinal declaration of the imperfection of our fulfilment of the law, and the imperfection which is inherent in our saving faith. How strange, disturbing, and confusing must the title appear which I have chosen — "Christian Perfection." I cannot allow this appearance to remain, even until I show presently that it is a false appearance. In order to gain favor and attention for my proof that it is false, I ask whether we do not actually console ourselves with our confessions of imperfection, being conscious that by such confessions we are exercising a perfect humility?

The straightforward acknowledgment of these facts of our inner and outer life would amount to a declaration that we have, at all events, a *religious* perfection, which sort of perfection we must certainly include in our discussion, if we discuss Christian perfection completely.

Besides, these confessions of our imperfections are exactly what is meant by the common doctrine when that speaks of *perfect* humility and the *complete* renunciation of all self-righteousness. We not only feel, but we teach this. In no

other sense are our teachings to be understood. Were it otherwise, there would be united with the recognition of the constant imperfection of our moral action the danger of terrifying men from attempting any duty. It is an inevitable condition of the will that its power is crippled, its exertion ceases, and its zeal is relaxed when the possibility of accomplishing an act perfect in its kind is denied beforehand, or if there is the conviction that the nearest possible approach to the goal is worth exactly as much or as little as remaining at the greatest possible distance from it. If we had to judge the effects and consequences of our moral action only as the possible degrees of imperfection,—if we could not set a value on them proportioned to our laxness or energy, indifference or zeal, laziness or diligence, our approach to the goal or our remaining at a distance from it,—then would no man set hand or purpose to work. The idea of moral perfection as possible is necessary to us in action and in the formation of character, not only in order to prove our imperfection, but the real value to us of perfection lies in our belief in our destiny to reach it.

The condition of activity of the will which we have described is not merely a general or, so to speak, a natural truth. It was recognized by the Founder and by the earliest witnesses of our religion. Jesus designates the love which he prescribes towards our enemies as the perfection which is like to the perfection of God. James says: "Let there be a perfect work united with patience in suffering." And Paul writes to Corinth that he knows such perfect Christians, in whose fellowship he speaks the words of wisdom. But he declares more significantly, in his letter to the Philippians: "I have not yet reached the mark, and am in this respect not yet perfect; but I follow after it, forgetting those things which are behind." "And indeed," says he, "all we who are perfect are thus minded, that we press toward the mark for the prize of the calling in Christ." Certainly, the task of perfection is variously viewed in these expressions. In so far as refers to loving our enemies, *perfection is required of*

the disciples of Jesus, in opposition to the rule which prevails among other men — those who stand outside the church. But as James and Paul use the term there is a distinction made between different degrees of acquirements within the church itself. The word “perfection” is used by these two writers even of those who are striving toward the mark. Whereby we are to understand that the perfection meant is not that which is reached with the last goal of life, and the completion of redemption. Thus these witnesses confirm the position assumed above, that the perfection of moral purpose and performance must be represented as attainable, even if only an earnest and unremitting effort of the will is to be excited. But Paul’s declaration comes unexpectedly upon us, that those who are engaged in the endeavor to attain to the blessed goal of divine holiness are already worthy to be called perfect. Here is a really surprising idea for us Protestants. The surprise cannot at first be counterbalanced even by our confidence in the apostle. And the reason for this is to be found in the use, or misuse, which has been made through many centuries of the distinction between perfect and imperfect Christians.

By means of this distinction it was that monasticism appeared to be justified, and rose into high estimation. But the rejection of that form of Christianity is so closely interwoven with the Reformation that abhorrence of everything connected with the monastic sort of Christian perfection, that would-be sort, runs, so to speak, in our blood. What wonder is it that we extend this aversion even to the expression which the apostle uses. Perfection and monastic life had become synonymous. But Paul certainly did not use the word in reference to the characteristics of the monastic life.

Monasticism had its root in pre-Christian religions; and the expression “Christian perfection” was not appropriated by monasticism without a change in the meaning of the term, so that it might agree with non-Christian customs. To follow this out here would be too long a digression. For the better understanding of monasticism, I shall men-

tion just one regulation which it has appropriated from Christian ethics. James expresses this in the rule he lays down, that we should keep ourselves unspotted from the world. This might be understood to mean that we should withdraw ourselves as much as possible from intercourse with mankind, and that we should especially avoid those conditions of society which give rise to the most manifest temptations, such as the intercourse between the sexes, the struggle for riches and for personal honor. In accordance with this the three monastic duties were imposed, viz. the rules to abstain from marriage and family life, from personal possession of property, and from all that self guidance and independence which belong by nature to every man; moreover, to practise instead of this such whole-hearted obedience towards superiors as to regard any transgression of their injunctions as a deadly sin. In these duties of chastity, poverty, and obedience was held to consist that heavenly, angel-like life which was the aim of Christianity. But it had to be admitted that the whole of Christendom could not be taken into cloisters. There was no help for it but that the great majority of Christians, who had to live in a state of imperfection, should try to counterbalance the imperfection of their life in the world by means of periodical church sacraments. The whole structure of the Roman Catholic church is founded on this gradation of perfect and imperfect Christians; so that the former can be easily distinguished from the latter by dress and abode. And yet, however much monasticism may differ from worldly life in appearance, the world and its temptations cannot be shut out by cloister walls and exercises of church service. History proves that, invariably, after a short time the discipline of monastic life relaxes, and that withdrawal from regular intercourse with society and flight from its seducing influences lead to ruin of the mind and paralysis of the mental character. For, family life, the effort to obtain private property, the full enjoyment of personal honor are not merely — are not even necessarily — occasions to sin; they are

rather the inevitable conditions of morality and the incitements to it. For the family is the school of public spirit, property and honor are the supports of independence, without which nothing can be contributed to the general good. Those men must be very peculiarly constituted who without these conditions of life, and under the restrictions of monastic discipline, remain at heart true and kindly. As a general rule, men inside monastery walls do not become more perfect than they would be in the world, but less perfect.

Now, how were the Reformers to overthrow the claims of this sort of Christian perfection? Does any one suppose that the mere assertion would suffice, that Christians can never get beyond imperfection? Such a mere denial, even if it contain the greatest truth, is never enough to annul a positive preconceived judgment. A controversy can never be carried on by a simple denial; victory over an error can only be gained by maintaining the truth which is opposed to the error. The Reformers were induced, in consideration of this, to recognize a doctrine of Christian perfection; but they had to give to the term a different signification, so that they might annul that false classification of Christians above described. They had to freight the expression "Christian perfection" with such a meaning that it could be applied to the every-day performances of all Christians. Thus it was brought back from the monastic misapplication of Paul's definition to the sense implied in our Lord's expression. Agreeably with this, we read in the Augsburg Confession: "Christian perfection consists in the fear of God, and in faith grounded on Christ that God is gracious to us, in prayer to God in the sure expectation of his help in all our undertakings in our calling, as well as in diligence in good works in the service of our calling. In these things consists true perfection and true service of God, not in celibacy, in begging, or in dirty clothes." To supplement this I shall take a sentence from Luther's work on Monastic Vows: "The condition of perfection consists herein, that a man should in strong faith despise death and life, fame, and the

whole world, and that he should be serviceable to all in ardent love. But scarcely can men be found who cling more to life and fame, who are more devoid of faith, who shun death with greater vehemence, than those who are most monkish." Let me now ask you to group these thoughts a little more systematically in your minds, and to combine 'reverence for God' and 'trust in him' into the one idea of 'humility.' Substitute also 'faith in God and submission to his providence' for 'the expectation of God's help and the contempt of death and the world.' Add to these supplication and thanks to God in prayer; and lastly, faithfulness to the public demands of morality. Christian perfection consists in these performances, which are the duty of every man. If gradations in the amount of performance by different men be perceived, we must not for that reason form classes of men, some perfect, some imperfect. These differences only correspond to the law of growth, that one is nearer to the end than another.

But consider, now, what we may legitimately and usefully designate as perfection — legitimately, i.e. in strict accordance with Christian usage as that usage is exhibited in the evidence above cited. Certainly, in any case, it must be something which is compatible with the essential nature of man; that is to say, it must be compatible with a nature which is created, limited, continually developing or growing, which is never done working, which never comes to be equal to God. But it must be something which can be compared with that perfection in God which is manifested in goodness towards the just and the unjust. Perfection such as our Lord Jesus, the apostles Paul and James prescribe and declare to be possible means that a Christian — each Christian — be or become a complete thing, after his peculiar kind, in the sphere of religious faith and moral action. This destination of each soul to a completeness in his kind is so necessarily bound up with the fundamental peculiarity of Christianity, that Christianity cannot be fully understood and propagated if the doctrine of Christian perfection be put under a bushel. For this

doctrine brings the answer to the question which has been put in all previous religions; it lifts from the heart the weight which is felt in all religions, solves the contradiction in which man by nature finds himself; namely, that he is but a little fragment of the world, and yet is also as a spirit an image of God, that as this latter he has a value quite different from that of all nature — with which nature, however, he shares the fate of belonging to the world. For what else do men strive after in heathen religions but to fill up what is lacking in themselves by a fellowship with the divine life, seeking to have fellowship which shall be effectual for themselves by means of the acts of divine worship? [Note, also, the Roman Catholic mass as illustration of this].

This striving after completion through God is the universal expression of the need of having in one's self such value as only a complete thing can have; and a man wants to be sure he has such value, in order to counterbalance the knowledge that naturally he occupies a pitiful place, being only a fragment of the world. The spirit of man seeks an assurance that what is wanting in him will be made up; he seeks it in his conception of God, in subjection to God, in service of God, in the feeling that God is near. In this sense religion is a law of the human spirit. But heathen religions, of whatsoever form, do not reach what is desired. For, since in all of these religions the idea of God is not clearly distinguished from that of the world and its parts; since the belief in different gods is intimately interwoven with a conception of nature as not essentially one (but rather a complex of essentially different parts, perhaps discordant parts, perhaps elements controlled and moved by entirely independent principles),—since these things are so, therefore, the heathen idea of God is itself too devoid of the character of one single whole, for humanity's yearning after a completion from above to be satisfied by that idea. But in Christianity this completion is guaranteed to us; and thus Christianity is not merely the perfect kind of religion as distinguished from some other things which are imperfect kinds of religion, and

yet are really religions ; but Christianity is itself the real religion. Ordinarily men seldom make clear to themselves the fact that their idea of what the world is, what the world as a whole is, has a solely religious origin. That the multitude of phenomena in the universe, which we can never count or completely investigate, forms one whole ; forms such a unity that the law-abiding interdependence of all the parts is controlled by one purpose, — this thought we obtain neither by ordinary experience nor by scientific investigation. We *believe* that the world is a whole in this sense. And this belief is not a mere opinion adopted at arbitrary pleasure, which it is possible to change ; but we have full confidence that the world is one whole, and in the most important affairs, as well as in the most insignificant things of our life we regulate everything by this belief.

This conception of the world and this belief that the world is essentially one whole has its origin always in a religious tendency and a religious need, as well when itself and its origin are to be used in scientific discussion of the subject, as at any other time. This is the case, even although we be unconscious of it, and so seek an explanation of cosmogony without the thought of God.¹ But the clear and distinct conception of the world as one is to be found only in the Christian theory of the world. This clear and distinct conception is not the result of the one factor only, viz. of the belief in a God spiritual, free as respects nature, and almighty ; but along with this works, as another factor, the estimate which Jesus gave of a human being, his rule, namely, of self-estimation, that the life of a single man has a higher value than the whole world, and that this is seen to be true when we consider a life which is regulated according to the Christian standard. It profiteth a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose his own life ; for nothing, not even the whole world, is a compensation, an equivalent for it. But it is to

¹ The physicist's belief that the same laws of gravitation, of chemical combination, of the action of light, etc., hold good at all points of the universe, no matter whether he point his telescope and spectrum, is a case of this kind. How does he know they hold good ? He believes it. That belief has a religious origin, strictly so-called.

be borne carefully in mind that this assertion must be tested by a case of life within the moral kingdom of God, in the service of Jesus. The place to see that the whole world is of less value than a soul is the development of that soul in character while it fulfils the almost more than natural task of religious faith and moral dealing. It is here, too, that the saying of Jesus is seen to be true, that whosoever will preserve his life, — as a member of the world, — shall lose it; and whosoever, — in his service, — even loseth his life shall, by that very means, save it.¹

Thus the conception of the world as one is established on two foundations. One is belief in the one divine Creator. The other is the estimate of the spiritual object of our life as something of more value than that great complex unit, the whole world; of more value than this combination of manifold natural agencies acting and reacting on one another, in the midst of which we stand, but whose extent we cannot know, and whose innumerable, yet regular, modes of interconnection we can never fully comprehend. This is the only complete view of the matter, and it is furnished by Christianity. I must add that those who think of the world as a whole, without taking God into consideration at all, do not for all that get free of Christianity. For in their case the belief in the law-abiding arrangement of the world rests on an actual valuation of their own spiritual life as something better than all the world together.² Those, then, who scorn

¹ Considering the mere physical possessions, for example, as of first importance he will lose his life. For these are not of more value than other physical things in the world, and so shall not by any means be preserved. Only the spirit is of more value. But the worldly man does not care for that. On the other hand, he who lives in the spirit, like Christ, may lose his body, but never loses real life.

² This is the case with the physicist above cited. His belief that the world is one rests partly on *belief* that there is *one* first cause, and partly on a belief that he is of more value than all nature. His reason and its judgments are not to be set aside for anything in all nature. More, he cannot believe that perhaps there is in the universe some cause altogether and essentially unlike all that he yet knows, which may run counter to all his calculations and overwhelm him forever. No, he is sure his calculations are correct, and he acts on them. This even the fanatical physiologist did, who professed that he and an oyster were alike worth-

to sail through life on the bark of Christian philosophy and Christian self-estimation, nevertheless ride on a plank which has been borrowed from that bark. Their self-consciousness implied in their cognition, their action, their claim to any peculiar honor regulates itself, silently, and without their noticing the fact, according to the knowledge which no one used or possessed before Christ came, viz. that the whole world is no equivalent for the spiritual life of a man.

Therefore, since we who are Christians each distinguish our personal worth from that of the whole world, it is our task as Christians to become each in his own kind a complete whole. And this task is possible, because, and only because, by that belief which we have in God we are made able to comprehend the world as a whole, even while we cannot know or imagine to ourselves all its parts. Therefore it is necessary to Christianity that it lay on us the task of perfection in religious and moral life; perfection, namely, in the sense which we have justified. Without this practical culmination of the system Christianity would be incomplete.

But why does the task of Christian perfection lie just in those sorts of religious faith and moral action which have been described above (p. 665)? Let us test them. The simplest to understand is, we may say, faithfulness to the particular proper calling in which each man finds himself placed. We overlook entirely the necessary condition of a calling, if the imperfection of our good works in comparison with what seems required by the general moral law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," is always to be reckoned as guilt, as a result of sin. And yet that *general* law, as it is often understood, does necessarily count on our being imperfect, whether we acknowledge ourselves to be sinners or not. For the *general* moral law includes, that is, it lays on us obligation to perform, good works in every one of all the possible directions in which there is good work to be performed. It less parts of a great machine which might utterly crush out both. For he never sat down to listen to the lectures of an oyster, but he valued his own opinions, so highly as to print them and deliver them, and to call himself a teacher of wisdom.

follows that the good works binding on a man are an infinite series ; and not only so, but are in each moment so numerous, rather so innumerable, that they reach beyond the bounds of space. The actual meaning of that *general* moral law is, apparently, that every man ought in every moment of life to accomplish good in every relation of life which can be counted. But in the attempt to do this a man would be torn asunder, separated into countless fragments, ruined. Therefore the imperfection with which we charge ourselves in view of this law, may have nothing in common with sin. The imperfection we fancy we have is rather to be justly charged to the faulty conception of our duty. The task is an impossible one. If this fact is not generally taken into account, the reason is that the true limits are tacitly drawn. These limits ought to be publicly set forth. The matter must be set right. We do tacitly limit the obligation laid on us by the general moral law to particular fields of action, namely, to the particular callings in which we are to perform, not good works, but a connected, harmonious life-work ; and we regard that life-work as a whole, having its particular value as such, even although we do say that we ought to perform more in our calling than we ever do accomplish. That is the way in which every sensible man tacitly limits and adjusts the infinite and impractical obligation to all good works to which we have alluded. But this limitation ought to be pointed out in our public statements of Christian doctrine, so that we may also limit our confession of imperfection. Otherwise, the idea of imperfection tends to frighten men from working out, each in his special calling, a connected result, or life-work having its own peculiar worth, and from becoming a being complete after his own kind. But is this limitation at all authorized by the principles of Christianity? Has it anything in common therewith? I might point to the fact that the apostle Paul has in a sense sanctified our civil callings, by saying that we are to abide in those callings in which the Christian call has found us. Further, he says no one in the Christian community shall claim support who does

not work. Lastly, he not only charges every man to think of himself according as he brings some work to completion, but he also judges himself, estimates himself, by the fact that by the prosecution of his calling he has accomplished a work which will stand the test of the judgment-seat of God, and which is the pledge of his salvation. Of course the apostle might have obtained these thoughts in some source outside of Christianity, and then merely have incorporated them therewith to secure an interest in them. But the fact is, that they spring directly out of the Christian view of men's moral relations to one another. All those moral arrangements, which Christianity finds already existing among men when it comes to them, viz. family, position, nationality, concern only certain parts of our spiritual relationship to one another, parts, namely, which are based on natural relationship. And so in these parts of our spiritual relationship we are connected only with portions of the human race, not with every individual. For these two reasons, moreover, the natural basis of relationship, and the limited range of the same, the most self-sacrificing devotion to one's own family, one's own rank, one's own people may be threaded through and through with egoistic motives. But the great task set for accomplishment by the kingdom of God, and the law of universal charity enjoin on us an all-comprehending union of men, something above mere natural union. And yet this does not mean that we must of necessity give up our family, our rank, and our people, in order to serve men simply as such—our neighbors, forsooth, in Asia or Africa. We have rather as Christians to serve our relations, our fellows in rank, our fellow-citizens, just as before, but not now merely because they are united to us by that particular tie, but because they are the *men* in the special mutual relationship with us; standing in the natural and particular relation to us, we prize and love them as men. We prize the whole of mankind, we prize each part of mankind for the special place in mankind which it is fitted to fill, therefore we prize these particular members, these men our relations, as the men

who in these places help to make mankind complete. We love them as such. Then, too, when we do this, shall we overcome the danger connected with family spirit, with class interest, and with patriotism. Then shall we be able in all cases to feel an interest in every man as such, however distant, and to render him our service. The general can be realized only in the particular; every genus in nature has existence only in its species. Thus the Christian rule of morally right action is this: that we ennoble all specific relationships of natural attachment by our generic readiness to love all men as such, and that we thus elevate these relationships above nature into the rule of the spirit. Therefore as a natural consequence of the Christian law proclaimed for the kingdom of God, there arises directly the obligation to have a proper calling, and to esteem the same as the regular sphere of the efforts we are to put forth for the general good. So the obligation to work and to persevere in a regular calling which Paul preaches is explained at once by the final aim of Christianity, the all-comprehending brotherhood of men; for in the special field of his regular occupation, every man is to work not merely for his own interest, but also in the widest sense for the interest of all.

Finally, the Christian law requires that, in addition, we seek in faithful devotion to our individual proper callings, whether these seem grand or small, to make our lifework a perfect, a complete one. Now, that is a whole, which having many parts, has these parts all subordinated to one common aim, and connected together as members of that whole in a way peculiar to the particular assemblage of parts. A man's lifework may be regarded as a whole if his labor in his particular calling is directed to the common weal of the human race; and it will be proved to be a whole if he possess that perfectly justifiable feeling of self-satisfaction which, as Paul testifies, comes with the accomplishment of the life-work. It is a universal experience that whoever undertakes no vocation, not only does nothing for the general good of the community, but also suffers damage in his moral character. It

is an equally common experience that he who does not confine himself to his own vocation, but expects he will accomplish more by dabbling also in many other sorts of work, becomes just so much the more incapable of fulfilling his own calling. Of course, in the various relations of life we are obliged, times without number, to step beyond the bounds of our own callings, but in these cases we follow the path of strict duty, judging that it is our calling to follow in these cases the principle of general willingness to serve. But public opinion condemns quite rightly a man's interference in other people's affairs when the man, judged by his performances in his own calling, has evidently not yet acquired the ability to give counsel in another province. Therefore, the Augsburg Confession states a valuable truth when it says that one part of Christian perfection is the sure expectation of God's help in all undertakings *in our own calling*.

And so our attention is turned to a consideration of the other group of manifestations of Christian perfection, namely, humility, trust in God's providence, patience under all the hinderances and sufferings of life, and finally, prayer. These things represent the possible religious perfection, as distinguished from the perfection possible in work in a calling. They are so constituted that no one can appear without the others. They are the different manifestations of religious assurance of reconciliation with God through Christ. The Augsburg Confession, as it helped us above, gives also an intimation of this connection in the words, "He who knows that the Father is gracious to him through Christ recognizes God aright, and knows that God cares for him, and he prays to God." The thought has been worked out in exhaustive detail in Luther's treatise on Christian freedom. The members of that sentence just quoted stand in such relation to one another that their order may be inverted. Thus we may say, that whosoever trusts, in all situations of life, that God cares for him, and therefore cries to God for help, gives thereby evidence that he is in a state of grace, that he is reconciled to God through Christ. Belief in God's provi-

dence, that is, that all evil, as well as all good, is ordained with a well-arranged design for our education, is certainly not an outgrowth of observation of the world, certainly not a product of science of any kind, certainly not a fruit of the so-called natural religion. But belief in that providence is certainly produced by the religion of reconciliation. If a soul accept and cleave to that religion, then that soul will certainly believe in that providence. Whoever preaches the reconciliation will of necessity preach belief in the providence. That belief is the distinctively peculiar test of that religion. Ordinary observation shows us only that in the world and in our lot there appears at one time what has a good purpose, but at another what has no good purpose, or a bad one. Scientific knowledge of the world does not bring us any farther. The so-called natural religion is a mere fancy. There is only positive religion; and that which theologians tell us is natural religion consists always of convictions of thoroughly positive origin.¹ We have become accustomed to them, and have forgotten their source. The Reformers knew better. It is from the special promise of grace that Luther infers there will be a readiness in the believer to submit to God's will in all things, to hallow his name, and to follow God's guidance in whatever way God pleases. These are Luther's words: "Trusting in his promises we do not doubt that the true, just, and wise God will guide and care for all things in the very best way." Calvin says: "Whoever is firmly convinced that God is the gracious and kind Father expects everything from his good pleasure; and, in assurance of salvation, rises up manfully against death and the devil." And this is only the echo of

¹ For example, the doctrine that God is love is not a product of natural religion. It cannot be called a fruit of observation or of reasoning. Pray who has observed all the possible cases of God's work which would have to be observed, if observation were to be the method of proof? Were I to claim I had observed all cases would you, could you, test all my observations? No. I may propose the doctrine, and you may trust it, and be satisfied with the result so far as you go, and thus the doctrine is merely a posited one. It has only positive origin.

the grand assurance which Paul speaks out, when he is opposing the attempts to make the community of Christians split over the question of the authority of different teachers, and when he seeks to save them from entanglement in belief in an essentially plural origin of the world. Says he, "Let no man glory in men." Let no one make men the ground of his confidence or the source of his spiritual life. "For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." "Even so nothing can separate us from the love of God which is manifest in Christ, neither life nor death, neither things present nor things to come, neither high nor low." The poet of the old covenant knew this also in his measure: "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I question after besides thee. Should both my flesh and my heart fail, yet God is ever the strength of my heart and my portion. Near to God do I find my best good. I have put my trust in the Lord, that I may declare all thy deeds."

It is certain that we are as far removed as possible from independence, if we consider only our natural existence as parts of the world in the midst of the action and reaction of all the parts thereof. We are exposed to all possible restrictions of our freedom, endangered by all possible evils of nature and of human society. These evils are innumerable; and in their pressure against us is seen the pressure of the whole world against us. Where, then, shall we rest our self-assurance, that nevertheless we are not as a worm that writhes? Not on our mental gifts, for they may deteriorate; nor on our good intentions, for they may become corrupt; nor yet on knowledge that if we are crushed by the machine of the world, that cannot be helped, the crushing is absolutely necessary; for to accept that is to renounce our self-assurance itself and our nobility. There is no other way out of the difficulty for the man who feels that he is exalted above the world by his likeness to God, than to take that likeness

to God in thorough earnest. We must give ourselves up to entire dependence on God, take refuge therein, in order to counterbalance the constant dependence of our natural existence, in order to make ourselves sure of attaining our high destiny, sure that the whole world is no equivalent for our life; that as spirits which are persons each one of us is a complete whole, and ranks in value above the world. The revelation of himself which God makes to us in his Son offers us the assurance of this herein, that that Son reconciles us his followers with God. That is, the revelation impresses us with the certainty that our weakness does not make us too contemptible, our dependence on the world, which we feel when we sin, does not make us too despicable, to trust God as our Father, to come near to him, to lean on him humbly, and so experience that to those who love God all things work together for good.

Having then this certainty, we find we have arising out of it a religious perfection; that is, each is able to lift himself up conscious that he is a complete individual; yes, complete and indestructible, and set higher than the world. The world is beneath him. We trust in God's help, protection, and education, although we do not distinctly see how and whither our life is being guided. "Unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out." Even when men come to see how events in their lives have fitted together, as they look back on these events in the past, they can least of all boast that they know exactly what part of their way was the result of God's will, and what the consequences of other men's sin. But neither this limitation of our knowledge respecting the past, nor the narrow bounds of our knowledge of the future will lessen our confidence in God. Neither will contradict our consciousness of our own worth, which comes to us simultaneously with our confidence in God; for it is not the clear and exhaustive perceptions which exert the greatest influence on human conduct. It is rather the indefinite ideas, those which insinuate themselves into the feelings and the will, which excite the emotions, and which work

in us alongside of our definitely calculated purposes, moving us indeed mightily, while they seem to play about the definite threads of our thought as an expression of that secret relationship of part to part in our spiritual existence which we ourselves cannot penetrate. We need not expect to alter this fact by the steady exercise of our powers of comprehension. Indeed, the scientific thinker needs above all others support from his disposition, his spiritual temper, and the state of that disposition is always nothing more nor less than the effect of these indefinite ideas on the feelings and will. The scientific thinker needs this help, and can never reach a point in his culture where he can do without it, or supply its place by something else. The spiritual temper is quite indifferent to clear perceptions ; being thus indifferent it nevertheless claims a control over the feelings and the will, puts them in connection the one with the other, and manifests itself peculiarly in the emotions. The disposition, the temper of mind is thus the home where trust in God may rule, where humility may govern.

This religious virtue, humility, may be directly termed the disposition to depend on God. There are, indeed, expressed by it both a distinct purpose of submission to God and also a feeling of pleasure and bliss ; but, although it thus consists in part of a purpose, yet the texture of humility is so delicate that the garment threatens to be torn if we make a stern resolve to have it, or try to prove its existence by a process of reflection. "Humility," says Christian Scriver, "is like the eye, which sees everything except itself."

Side by side with humility, and like it, stands the other religious virtue, patience. Patience is exercised towards the world, as humility is towards God. But they must go hand in hand ; for every religion produces a relation to the world corresponding to the doctrine of that particular religion concerning relationship to God. Thus patience means that, in humble submission to God's guidance, we obtain freedom from the mastery of the world — of its aids, as well as its hinderances. True, this is the meaning of patience in all

cases, even where it occurs quite unconnected with a religious cause ; but its significance in the Christian religion is that in the Christian's view of the world patience is the necessary, the consistent behavior — consistent with the very central essence of Christianity, flowing out of the peculiar principle thereof. There is no reason why patience should be held to be more severely tested by the hinderances and troubles of life than by life's good fortunes. In times of happiness it is necessary to show forth our freedom by patience, so that on a change of fortune we may not be suddenly overtaken by an outbreak of our own impatience. Such patience — that bearing of the soul which stands even this severe test — proves its connection with humility hereby, that it also is not to be obtained perforce by a single decision of the will. It is a virtue that must be gradually gained, and thus, like humility, it belongs to the disposition. Do we wish to acquire patience? Then we must exercise perfection in every kind thereof, especially in the faithful fulfilling of our calling. To this end prayer, too, must be exercised. Melancthon and Calvin define prayer as a direct consequence of reconciliation with God, consisting in the recognition of his providence, that is, that he guides in general and in particular the affairs of every man. Therefore are its contents, under all circumstances, thanks to God, praise, and acknowledgment of his favor. Prayer is simply a definite expression of these three things, spoken aloud in order that we may set its contents distinctly before our minds, and in order that we may join with others therein. The request for bestowal of good things and for fulfilment of wishes is a merely subordinate part of thanks. Were it not so, we could easily fall into the danger of making unrighteous and selfish requests. "In every prayer," says Paul, "let your request be made known before God with thanksgiving. Rejoice evermore ; pray without ceasing ; in everything give thanks, for that is the will of God revealed in Christ Jesus." By this means that prevailing spirit of joy is proved to be present and is maintained which we are exhorted by the men of the New

Testament to possess in all circumstances, even amid the sufferings and distresses of life. Yes, they demand this of us. But joy is the feeling of completeness. Joy could not be commended as the steady companion of Christian life, unless the Christian religion brought men to have the value of complete spiritual beings, brought them to be each one in his spiritual existence a complete, a perfect whole, each one worth more than the whole world.

And now we can see how this truth is reconciled with that confession which comes so readily to our lips, so much more readily than does the doctrine we have traced. We do not hesitate to confess that in our work we always leave something undone; we never reach the limit of our work — the point where it would be complete in the sense that we might then fold our hands in our bosom. No, in this sense we are certainly never done, not even when we have a justifiable feeling of possessing a completeness in our soul, of having gained a character, of being able to contribute a calling and the work thereof to the service of mankind. But a thing that is complete remains complete after its kind, whether it be something large or something small. There is within us, necessarily, an impulse to go on obtaining a wider and ever wider sphere for our influence. Whoever prematurely gives up the effort to obtain this will find that he cannot remain sure of the healthiness, the value of his own peculiar influence. This impulse to an increase of sphere is necessary in us, as well as is the possibility of rendering complete service in any one sphere. With the yearning and labor for the attainment of that worth as a complete soul must be also united the impulse to make wider and greater that life-service which is our perfect work. In this respect, anxiety over the incompleteness of our fulfilment of duty is justified. But in such circumstances the anxiety affords exactly the necessary moral impulse, and does not tend to frighten us and lame our zeal. Even so shall our confidence in God, our submission to his arrangements, our patience never be complete in the sense that we

do not need ever to quicken them, to strengthen them, to root them more deeply. And yet here, again, we are only considering difference in quantity, as it were, between weaker and stronger confidence at a particular moment, between the more or less patience with which we can meet a particular evil which is attacking us. The true quality is present; there may be more or less quantity at different times. Although these religious virtues are exercised only in a limited measure, yet they are in their kind the tokens of reconciliation with God and the expression of an endeavor to claim for one's self value as a complete spirit by rising above the merely natural and subordinate powers of the world. And then, moreover, confidence in God's help, humble submission to his government, patience towards all the hinderances of life, will include, will bring in themselves, the possibility of the increase and strengthening of these virtues and the impulse thereto. Even the weaker measure of trust in God, even the momentary wavering in the resolution to submit and be patient, does not lack the stamp of Christian perfection, if in kind it can be regarded as consistent with religious reconciliation; that is, if the soul where it exist do still live trusting for reconciliation with God according to the message of Christ, and if it be aiming to raise itself above the ends and control of the world. Constant readiness to go forward and grow richer in these signs of Christian perfection is, indeed, necessary in order that one may not go backward and grow poorer. But only a religious faith which is in itself perfect will break out in life's great need into the prayer: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."