

which was won when He bowed His head and died. Christ's cross is God's throne of triumph.

Let us see that we have our own personal share in that victory. Holding to Christ, and drawing from Him by faith a share in His new life, we shall no longer be under the yoke of law, but enfranchised into the obedience of love, which is liberty. We shall no longer be slaves of evil, but sons and servants of our conquering God, who woos and wins us by showing us all His love in Christ, and by giving us His own Son on the Cross, our peace-offering. If we let Him overcome, His victory will be life, not death. He will strip us of nothing but rags, and clothe us in garments of purity; He will so breathe beauty into us that He will show us openly to the universe as examples of His transforming power, and He will bind us glad captives to His chariot wheels, partakers of His victory as well as trophies of His all-conquering love. "Now thanks be unto God, which always triumphs over us in Jesus Christ."

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THOUGHTS.

I. Shame on account of God's Displeasure with us.—The story told in the 12th chapter of Numbers, and especially the striking words ascribed to God in the 10th verse ("If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?") startle us out of the easy mind with which we accept the pardon of sin. We stand rebuked for having less shame at meriting the displeasure of the just and loving God, than at exciting the contempt or incurring the condemnation of men like ourselves. God demands that the shame we feel on account of sin shall have the same blush and burning in it that we should have, did some one on just cause show his reprobation of our conduct by spitting in our face. Shame before God must betray something of the poignancy and agitation, something of the heart-felt humiliation of our shame before men. It is not to be of a

sublimated fictitious kind. Seven days would have been all too little to ease Miriam's heart of the shock and anguish of shame had her father expressed his displeasure by spitting in her face; she would have felt that a brand well-nigh indelible had been fixed upon her. But God had more emphatically signified His displeasure and yet she is pursued by no such enduring and crushing shame. Something infinitely more expressive than a mere outward mark of disapprobation had been visible upon her; out from her very self there had grown a manifestation of her diseased nature; and yet no sooner is the outward appearance removed than she with an easy mind resumes her place and her usual ways.

What a theme for conscience. If in any minute point of conduct we have erred and injured a friend, if we have even been guilty of a mere awkwardness, we know how sensible a shame pursues us, and how hard we find it to wipe out the sense of inferiority and degradation that stains our self-complacency. But there is a very climax of ignominy in having excited in the unerringly just mind of God feelings of anger against us. One might have reasonably supposed that a man would die of shame were he conscious of having merited the displeasure and condemnation of such a Being as God is; but the coldness of a friend gives us more thought and the contempt of men as contemptible as ourselves affects us with a more genuine confusion.

2. Religion's Childhood and Maturity.—

Few of Paul's converts seem at once to have apprehended, as he himself did, what was meant by religion. Again and again, with a keen pang of disappointment, he exclaimed: "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain—lest after all my teaching you should suppose that the observance of days and months and times and years is the ultimate spiritual condition and highest felicity of the human soul." All the commandments and ordinances with which his converts were familiar were meant for the childhood-stage of religion. They were the pædagogic and school requisite for the child, unsuitable for the man. Their very function was to make the child a man, independent of them. There is no merit in any training except in so far as it raises us above it. It proves its own weakness by requiring prolonged attendance of the pupil. To suppose that by adhering to external observances we please God is to show that these observances have not effected their purpose. We cannot show our religion, our

love to God, by attendance on these, any more than a son who is now a grown man can show his love for his father by going back to the infant school to learn spelling, or by refusing to go along the street without a pædagogus to lead him.

How much are we to discard as an old school-book? The ceremonial washings, the sacrifices, the elaborate dresses of the priests, the scrupulously adhered-to ritual—these, no doubt—but what more? Perhaps the best rule for the individual is to see that he escapes the dangers of either extreme.

1st. Of leaving school too soon. A man says, Religion does not consist in going to Church, in reading the Bible, in being grave and quiet and sleepy all Sunday. Religion is union with God, life as it ought to be. I am tired of rules, of watching, of hedging my natural path with considerations; this is no life at all. I wish freedom, spontaneity, to live from inward impulse. But this man is really the foolish truant who rebels against the drudgery of school, or the boy who apes manhood and snatches at a liberty he has not yet grown up to. To be master of our life we must submit to authority and learn by obedience to rule. For all of us, first the law and then the spirit.

2nd. But there is an opposite danger, the danger of staying at school too long, of never growing past dependence on elaborate forms of worship, ritualistic service, the outward garnishings of religion. Many confound means and end, the ordinances which are meant to lead us to religion with religion itself. They read the Bible as an end in itself, not as a means; as a duty to be done for its own sake, not as valuable only for the effect it produces. It were ludicrous to see a man of forty going to school with his bag of books as if schooling were an excellent thing irrespective of age. Some Christians present the same spectacle.

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