

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE.

IV.

REGENERATION.

JOHN FOSTER, one of the most virile of religious thinkers, and one of the most suggestive of essayists, had a great aversion to certain forms of expression which were much in vogue amongst some pious people of his day, and declared that, if possible, he would expunge them from every book by Act of Parliament, and often said, "We want to put a new face upon things." Many would agree with Foster, for they believe that in our age the cause of faith would be much served if the hackneyed terms of religion were gathered together and cast into the depths of the sea. Religious phrases remind one of those banknotes which the traveller receives in Scotland, and which he handles with much reserve. No doubt they were once new, and then, it is to be presumed, they were clean and crisp, but after they have passed through many hands, some very greasy and unsavoury, the writing becomes illegible, and the notes themselves have an evil smell. Once a phrase was the symbol for a spiritual reality, and it was used in burning sincerity by good men. By-and-by the multitude got hold of it, and misapplied and vulgarized the noble words until they ceased to have force, and clever writers, anxious to point their gibe at the party of piety, found their opportunity. Lord Clarendon, the Royalist historian of the Civil War, makes himself merry about the Puritan phrase "seeking God," yet could anything be more worthy of a human being than to embark upon this quest and to agonize until heaven had been taken by storm? What, however, was in Clarendon's mind, and is ever in the minds of the satirists of religion, was the hypocrisy of men to whom God

was not the portion of their heart, but simply a catchword of common speech. When a phrase is new, it is certain to be real; when it grows old, it is apt to sink into cant. It is, however, to be remembered that although our banknote be worn so thin that it hardly holds together, and is so soiled that we hesitate to touch it, that bit of paper still retains a definite value, and, if you go into things, it still represents the same amount of gold. When one comes on a phrase in religious literature, and when one finds it largely in use amongst religious people, however abused that phrase may be, or however distasteful to our refinement, let us be sure that phrase stands for a fact. Human souls have, one day, seen this, felt this, wanted this, or else they had not coined this term, and it had not been freely circulated. In proportion to their commonness, the words of religion are an evidence of the facts of religion.

Take, for instance, the word "regeneration," or what is often considered its synonym, "conversion." We have heard people divided into converted and unconverted, and we have resented the arrogance of the preacher who dared to make this deep-cut distinction between a mass of human beings, some of whom might be very good, a few of whom might be very bad, but the most of whom, as we said, with a fine sense of insight, were half and between. We may have been asked ourselves whether we were converted, and we were angry because a frail and, perhaps, foolish brother man had sought to lift the veil from the holy of holies in our souls, and enter with obtrusive foot. This, however, does not touch the point, which is that there must be such an experience in religion, or else the word would not have come into existence, and that the experience is of elemental importance. As a matter of fact, this word describes with perfect accuracy one of the deepest and truest, one of the most lasting and fruitful events in the history of the soul. What one has to do is to exchange the worn-out paper for

the precious gold, or, to vary the illustration, to mark where the float is dancing on the surface of the water, and to search below in the depths for the hidden treasure.

When one speaks about regeneration, and speaks about it as if it were the same thing as conversion, it is necessary to make a distinction in the interests of theology, which is the ordered science of religion. Any one reading the Puritan divines of the seventeenth century, and their pupils of our own time, will be apt to discover that they used the two words as interchangeable, and, in so doing, they confused the two sides of one great event. Regeneration, and here I substantially quote from Aubrey Moore, who was too soon lost to theology and the Church on earth, is really God's act as much as is creation; conversion implies a conscious act of responsibility as we are enabled by God's grace. You cannot tell a man to be born again, you can tell him to turn round: being born again he is able to turn round. The man himself does not know when he is born again: he knows when the change in his life begins. Conversion proves regeneration: regeneration enables conversion. Regeneration is once, and never again: conversion may have a definite and marked beginning; it may also be repeated. Every great moment in sanctification may be called a conversion, and, therefore, Jesus said to Nicodemus that he must be born again, but commanded Peter that when he was converted he should strengthen the brethren. Conversion, therefore, is the human side of regeneration, and it is in the sense of conversion that we are now treating regeneration.

It is always a recommendation of a Christian doctrine that it should not merely be a theory of the schools, but that it should embody a desire of the human heart and an experience of the human life, and, upon the face of it, regeneration is one of the most fascinating and fondest ideals that ever has presented itself to our minds. It is not

to be supposed that Nicodemus in his interview with Jesus was so utterly foolish as to confound the physical birth of a child with the spiritual birth of a soul. When he spoke of a man becoming a child and entering again into his mother's womb, he was stating in figurative terms the immense difficulty of spiritual regeneration. It was, to his mind, as incredible, this spiritual rebirth, as would be a physical rebirth, but in expressing his incredulity he revealed the longing of his heart. One is convinced, as he speaks, that in quiet hours this Jewish rabbi realized the weariness of his outworn faith, and rebelled against the bonds of Pharisaic custom. Beside Jesus, as he had seen the Master preaching in the Temple, he was condemned, because Jesus saw the things which he had not eyes to see, and heard the things which he had not ears to hear. Beside Jesus he was blind and deaf, he was decrepit and ready to die. If it were only possible that a man, tired of his creed and tired of his habits, could begin life again as a young child, full of wonder and full of love! This was the fond dream of Nicodemus's heart, but how could it ever come to pass that this *blasé* Hebrew scholar could become like one of the young children who sang in the Temple choir. Is not this a natural and pathetic desire which visits various kinds of men in their best hours, and which floats before them like a vision of the fairy world? When a young man holds in his arms a little child, and looks upon its smiling, innocent face, there come up before his mind the sins of the past and put him to secret confusion. If he only could be washed clean again, not only from the stain of sin but from its insidious power, not only from that, but also from its very recollection! if he only were a child again! When an old man lays his hand upon the head of his grandchild, and hears the child talk with simple faith of God and of heaven, then he bitterly regrets the worldliness and sordidness of his soul, and would give much to have that child's

fresh outlook upon this world, which is, and the world which is to come. With both, the young man and the old man, the desire is the same, to begin again a new, fresh, hopeful life. The action of degeneration we have too sadly learned in our own souls, our desire, whether we confess it or not, is for regeneration, and therefore the Christian doctrine of rebirth is one of the most spiritual aspirations of the human heart.

Nor is this word less acceptable because it is so thorough, since regeneration is never to be confounded with reformation. The former is used of the spiritual world, the latter of the moral. The former has to do with the soul, where are the springs of life, the latter has to do with conduct, which is only a form of life. In regeneration the old vessel is not repaired and repainted, it is rather remelted and remoulded, and the necessity for this entire and unflinching process lies in the constitution of human nature. No change is worth the name which begins from without and works inward; every change which is to accomplish a perfect result must begin within and work outward. Behind a man's speech lie his thoughts, and behind his thoughts lies his mind, which is the man himself. Each individual has his own mental shape by which his words and his actions are regulated, so that although he may school himself at times to speak a foreign tongue, it will ever be with his own accent; and although he may train himself to an alien course of action, he will ever revert to his natural habits. It is even doubtful whether a man of one mental fashion can ever understand a man of another; it is likely that they will be to each other an enigma for all time, perpetually misunderstanding and mistaking one another. To the ordinary Englishman, a Frenchman will always appear more or less a fribble, and his high spirit and fine taste will be hidden; while an Englishman will always appear to the ordinary Frenchman as little less than a barbarian, stolid and coarse, and the English sense of

justice and brave perseverance will also be hidden. Both men would have to be reborn, each within the country of the other, to be able to understand his neighbour. One who is the son of a rich man, and who has been accustomed to look at life from the standpoint of a capitalist, will never appreciate the grievances and ambitions of the proletariat, and a son of the people will, through no blame of his own, have wrong-headed ideas about those who dress in purple and fine linen. A thoughtful person can hardly express himself to one who is uneducated, and a Philistine rebels, as by instinct, against the manners and attitude of a cultured man. One class would have to be recast before it could enter into the mind of another; and if this be true with regard to nationality, social position, and education, it is ten times more true in the matter of religion. Religious and irreligious persons belong to different spheres which hardly have a common frontier, which have their own language and their own habits. Bunyan, in his autobiography, relates how he saw certain old women sitting in the sun in a street of Bedford, and heard them speaking together about the affairs of the soul. They spoke his English tongue, and they were people of his own condition, but after hearing them he concluded that he knew nothing whatever about religion, for their words sounded strange in his ears, and they were talking of a country where he had never been. When St. Paul stood at the bar of the Roman judge, and Felix looked at him from the judgment seat, it was altogether impossible for Felix to appreciate the position of St. Paul, although the eloquence of the Apostle touched the Roman's heart, and it is evident that St. Paul was not able to estimate the time-serving disposition of the Roman official. St. Paul was concerned about Felix' soul, and Felix hoped that St. Paul would have offered him a bribe. They were strangers one to another, the one a citizen of this world which is passing away, the other a

citizen of the world which remaineth for ever. The religious man has his own idea of God, and of right, and of humanity, but he has no means of making it plain to the irreligious man. The irreligious man wanders about outside the sphere of the religious man's ideas, as one travels round a cathedral seeing nothing but the confused scenes on the windows which he cannot recognise from the outside, and hearing the faint sound of praise which he does not understand. What is necessary for the man outside is to come inside, to be lifted out of his own sphere of thought into that of Christ, or, in other words, to be changed in the very centre of his being. This change is the rebirth of Jesus' teaching which caught the imagination and excited the hope of Nicodemus. It is a birth which cannot be from beneath, it can only be from above. It is a rebirth which changes a man's attitude for ever and is the beginning of a new life. It is, of course, mysterious, but it is real, and without it there is no possibility of true religion. "Blame not the word 'conversion,'" says Carlyle in his *Sartor Resartus*, "rejoice rather that such a word signifying such a thing has come to light in our modern era, though hidden from the wisest ancients. The old world knew nothing of conversion; instead of an *Ecce Homo* they had only some choice of *Hercules*. It was a new-attained progress in the moral development of man; hereby has the highest come home to the bosom of the most limited; what to Plato was but an hallucination, and to Socrates but a chimera, is now clear and certain to your Zinzendorfs, and the poorest of your Wesleys, and Pietists, and Methodists."

Regeneration must be understood in a generous sense, and on no account must its form be limited, for there will be as many kinds of conversion as there are kinds of men. Certainly there are at least four different types of conversion—four experiences by which men have passed from

darkness into light—and one of the most striking is *moral conversion*. Within the Gospels the classical illustration will ever be St. Mary Magdalene, from whose life the chains of sin fell in an instant, and who passed at once from nameless degradation into the holiness of Jesus' fellowship. Outside the Gospels there is no more convincing illustration than the experience of St. Augustine, who was held in the bonds of sensual sin long after he was convinced that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and that Christianity was the true faith. While he was bitterly lamenting his miserable condition, he heard a voice—and who shall say that it did not sound?—calling upon him to take up the Holy Scriptures and to read a passage that will ever be associated with his name; “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.” He adds: “I had neither desire nor need to read farther. As I finished the sentence, as though the light of peace had been poured into my heart, all the shadows of doubt dispersed. Thus hast Thou converted me to Thee, so as no longer to seek either for wife or other hope of the world, standing fast in that rule of faith in which Thou so many years before hadst revealed me to my mother.” From that time forward St. Augustine may have sinned, as the best of men fall from their perfection, but never after the fashion of former days. Against the sin which once enslaved him he never ceased to testify, and he passed to the opposite extreme of asceticism. His experience was that of one who had turned completely round, and for whom in a moment everything became new, so that the most dangerous and corrupting of habits, the habits of sensual sin, passed utterly away as though it had never been.

Another form of conversion is *intellectual*, where one

emerges from the darkness of error into the light of the truth. Nathanael had puzzled himself regarding the signs of the Messiah until he refused to believe that the Messiah had come, but suddenly, on his meeting with Jesus, all his former preconceptions passed away, and he saw, as by a flash, the character of the Messiah in the face of Jesus. One minute he was convinced that no good thing could come out of Nazareth, and the next thing he was confessing, with gladness of heart, "Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel." Martin Luther, burdened with the sense of his own sins and longing for the peace of holiness, made his pilgrimage to the city which was the capital of Christendom and the home of the Vicar of Christ. Anxious to use every means of grace, so that he might on no account miss salvation, he was ascending the steps of Pilate's staircase upon his knees with a crowd of pilgrims, when the word came to him, "The just shall live by faith." He rose without delay and left the place, and in that hour he was delivered from the superstition which had held his reason in bondage. The whole system of his theology crumbled into pieces, and a new system took its place, as when the darkness flees before the rising of the sun.

The third form of conversion is not so much moral nor intellectual as it is *practical*. As Jesus walked upon the shore of the Galilean Lake He called Peter and John and commanded them to follow Him. They left their nets and followed Him upon the promise that instead of being fishermen on the Lake of Galilee they should become fishers of men the world over. This was the great event in their lives, and from it sprang that spiritual character and magnificent service by which they have laid all generations under a debt of gratitude, and by which they now sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It would be only a matter of a few seconds—"Follow Me," and they followed Him—but centuries have not exhausted

the content of that word. A young man of Assisi is banqueting with certain companions, and is visited with such strange thoughts that he withdraws himself from their fellowship and goes into the open air. As he stands beneath the clear Umbrian sky, with the stars looking down upon him, he is moved for the first time in his life by love, and surrenders himself to her service. He goes along the road with his companions, and they charge him with being a lover, and he confesses that he has found his bride. They do not understand, but in after years it appears that his bride was Poverty, whom none had wooed since Jesus lived, and to whom St. Francis was to give his life. Can any one doubt that the decision of that evening was St. Francis' conversion, from which, as from a spring that had arisen at the touch of Christ's crucified hands, there flowed a stream of charity which has made beautiful the history of the Church, and surely has come from the very heart of Jesus Himself?

There is one other type of conversion, which may be called *spiritual*, when all the truth which a person possesses is changed into life, and one passes from forms to reality. This was the experience of that chief Pharisee whom Jesus met on the way to Damascus; and this was the experience of the greatest of Scottish divines—when Dr. Chalmers, who had been an orthodox theologian and a clean-living man, but formal and cold-hearted, realized for the first time the meaning of two magnitudes, the shortness of time and the greatness of eternity. In this conversion the beautifully-shaped marble of a correct and traditional religion suddenly glows, and is touched with life as when the statue turned into a living being. It matters little through what avenue the Spirit of God enters into a man's nature if only the Spirit has free access and accomplishes His great work, and the man is born again of the Holy Ghost, and remade by the very power of God.

Various interesting questions may be raised regarding the time of regeneration, and, again, we ought to allow a great latitude in experience. There are doubtless some, and they are highly favoured, who have hardly been born into this world according to the flesh, but they are born again according to the Spirit, who from their first years have their faces turned towards God and who always bear the likeness of His beloved Son. For them there is no double life, and for them, therefore, there is no marked change, but all their life flows in one direction, from earth to heaven. With others there has been no agony of doubt, and no crisis of faith, for they have passed so imperceptibly into light that they cannot tell the day when they were born again. Doubtless there was such a day, for they are evidently regenerated; but when they awoke, the sun had long risen, and their chamber was flooded with light. Others there are, and not a few, who can tell with certainty before God and man the day when they experienced the great change, and their souls were born again of the Holy Ghost. It is not for one moment to be supposed that their account of the beginning of the spiritual life is only an illusion of fanaticism. There is nothing incredible in the direction of a life being changed within the space of an hour, and, indeed, the great events of life are instantaneous. Many things have gone before this sudden conversion, so that a person has been prepared for that moment during years of doubt and trial and discipline. Many things will follow after, before the tiny spark of life comes to its full height and perfect shape, but the actual conversion may be as rapid as the opening of a flower in the morning, as a breath of wind upon the surface of the sea. Nor is this experience contrary to human nature or without its parallels in other provinces of life. A son has played the prodigal and broken his mother's heart; he returns on the news of her illness and

enters her chamber to find her dead. By her bedside he kneels, and in that hour the power of past sin is broken, and he leaves the room invulnerable against the sins of past years. A lad, unconscious of his talents and feeling about for his lifework, picks up a book of science, and ere he has read a page he understands his calling. A man with disengaged heart and careless of social ties sees a woman's face, and the current of his life sets in a new direction. No one can explain how the change is effected, no one can describe his own experience. The wind blew where it listed, and it was viewless, but the sound was in the heart, and the power was in the life. Savonarola was checked in love, and turned aside from the world: he gave himself to the service of God, and in the end sealed his testimony with his life. Once and again, in the Duomo of Florence, he referred to his conversion, and he used to say with emphasis, "A word did it," but he never told the word, and that word must always be a secret between a man and God.

JOHN WATSON.

HOLY HATRED.

THERE is perhaps no characteristic of holiness more definite and strong than hatred. Holiness is an implacable hater. But its hate is of a peculiar kind; it is hatred born of love. Hence its intensity and its passionateness; for there is no hatred so intense and keen as the hatred of which the parent is affection.

Some persons appear to think that all kinds of hatred are wrong; that hatred itself partakes of the nature of sin. Nothing could be more untrue. There is, of course, bad hatred, just as there is bad love. If we love bad things, our love is bad; our love is only good when its purpose