

struck him that if he could only by some means acquire similar power to that exercised by the apostles, he might speedily rise to fame and riches. As their acts of power far surpassed his counterfeiting arts, he was irresistibly drawn, by that acuteness in turning everything to material advantage that characterizes some men, towards the new religion which endowed its priests with these remarkable powers; and he naturally desired to be initiated into its mysteries, if so be that he too might become possessor of similar powers, which might be turned to excellent account. To him the one feature in Christianity that was attractive was the wonderful gifts it imparted to its professors and apostles. He contemplated it as a science or an art, and freely acknowledged its superiority in this respect to his own attainments and powers. He thus made the mighty mistake of reckoning it in the same order as his own sorcery. It was to rank him something of the same though superior to it as natural magic. Herein lay all his error, and from this mistaken estimate of the religion of Jesus sprung his subsequent sin. It was spiritual, but he was carnal; but the carnal mind cannot form any idea of things spiritual, because they are spiritually discerned, any more than we can conceive of a sheep or an ox understanding questions that belong to the intellect of man to apprehend. Christianity was indeed attested by miracle, but the miracle did not constitute the Christianity, as he from his standpoint was prone to suppose; for Jesus cautioned His disciples not to rest too much on the supernatural powers with which He had just invested them: "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." The most exalted feature in the religion of Jesus is not that it was first spread abroad by means of supernatural agency, but because it spiritualizes carnal men, making them holy and happy. Of this element in true religion, Simon was apparently in perfect ignorance. He knew nothing and cared less for effects of this kind. What he desired was something striking and marvel-

lous, and which accomplished results not by slow and imperceptible degrees, but by great and sudden leaps. The spirit and life, in which true religion really consists, was something for which he had no desire or sympathy. He wished for that which would enlighten and transform men without any agency or painful moral discipline on their own part. In short, he thought Christianity was a kind of spiritual magic. This is manifest from his offer of money for it. He fancied that it was something in the power of the Apostles to bestow on any one they chose, whatever his character might be. And the same estimate appears in his desire that the Apostles should pray for him. Their praying would be a sort of miracle wrought in his behalf; and he thought this would be more efficacious than any suit he could make to God in his own behalf. He could not perceive that power with God lies in a sinner's humbling himself, confessing his unworthiness and seeking forgiveness and grace from heaven, a power more prevailing and efficient than the intercessions of priests, popes or apostles.

But he was not singular in the estimate he made of true religion, or of the means by which its blessings are to be procured. The same spirit animated Naaman the Syrian, who thought to influence the prophet of God, and to awe him into granting his request by coming to him in great state and magnificence, having his hands full of gold and gifts, and whose pride spurned the prescription of Elisha, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times." Not unlike this is the spirit of all those in the Christian Church who think that their wealth should procure them consideration and distinction—a principle abhorrent to the spirit of Christianity as taught by both Jesus and His Apostles. The Saviour was of opinion, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven"—whereas the feeling some entertain, it is to be feared, is that their money merits all the spiritual offices that either man or God can render them. And the Apostle James forbids any extraordinary attention being paid to men in the Church on account of their wealth.