

we can accomplish little moral good. The vital force will be restricted, and more outward forms will fail to supply the want. It is still true that Christ is the only source of pardon,—still true that the Holy Spirit is the efficient agent of the new birth,—still true that faith is the essential condition on which God has promised to work in us and by us,—and still true that all the outward ordinances of the Church are so many channels for the communication of Divine grace, or so many means for promoting vital union and communion with Christ, but which by themselves, unattended by the Spirit's power, are inoperative to salvation.

We are somewhat in danger of mystifying or ignoring these fundamental truths. There is a tendency amongst us to relapse into the superstition of the darker ages. The "revival of catholic doctrine," and of "primitive usage,"—of which so much has latterly been said, and in which I unfeignedly rejoice,—is too much allied with the dogmas and relics of a corrupt branch of the universal Church. It is foreign to my purpose to discuss any of the phases of the great ritualistic controversy which is now agitating the public mind. In many respects it is a controversy productive of untold mischief, in others of incalculable good.

But apart altogether from this, I do insist that faith in Christ, as a living, all-sufficient Saviour, and obedience to His law, as the outward evidence of faith, are the prime requisites of a holy heart and a useful life; and that in the absence of these no gorgeous decoration of churches, no punctilious observance of religious ceremonial, no mellifluous strains of music, no sacred veneration for the past, no self-denying zeal, and no disinterested effort, will ever avail either to our own salvation, or to the moral reformation of the world. There must be a divine life within us. That life can be realized and sustained only by faith in Christ, under the operation of His Spirit, and through the ordinances of His Word; and in these days of doubt, of conflict, of error, of change, we need as specially applicable to the world's necessities, not a religion of empty platitudes, or of incongruous dogmas, or of rigorous exactions, or of sickly sentimentality, but a religion of knowledge, of faith, of love, of power, which sympathises in every sorrow, and provides for every want, and which secures for every sinner a free, a full, an eternal salvation. Any other religion is untrue to the Gospel, and unsuited to the age; with this to nerve our courage and inspire our plans, we may revolutionize the Church, and turn the world upside down.

The struggle was now about to open for which the preparation had begun. There were as yet no outward symptoms of the gathering storm. A delusive calm was resting on the Church, as when to the casual observer Vesuvius is sleeping. It is characteristic of the Divine Government to prepare for great events by silent means. The Reformation in its ultimate issues resulted from various causes. Some of these were independent of Luther, and independent of each other,—were as much literary and political as ecclesiastical and religious; but in the process of their development, Luther became the agent in the hands of Heaven to influence and direct. His own preparation was imperceptible and slow. It affected first his personal experience; it related next to his public position. By the agency of the truth his mind had been enlightened and renewed; by startling expositions of that truth he was now to influence the minds of others. Having served his novitiate, he was admitted in due form to the full order of the priesthood. It was a