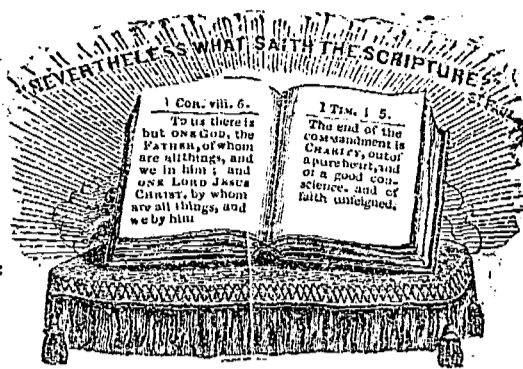


# THE BIBLE

TRUTH, HOLINESS,



# CHRISTIAN.

LIBERTY, LOVE.

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## THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF GOOD WORKS.

1. *Regeneration* is a primary doctrine of Christianity. It is the being born to a new life by the power of a new religion—ushered into a new world of thoughts, affections, relations and obligations. Now all these are comprised by an apostle, in that very phrase whose import we are considering; as a single passage will sufficiently show—Eph. ii. 10.—“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” The ordaining purpose of God, the regenerating power of Christ, and the character of the new workmanship, or the Christian himself, are here expressed by that one term—“good works.”

2. *Faith* is a primary doctrine, a vital principle of Christianity. Observe the connexion in which it stands, and what is declared essential to make it a ground of hope. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?” “Yea, a man may say, thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works and I will show thee my faith by my works.” “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” These are remarkable declarations, though very familiar. They leave no room for doubt. They give no permission to exalt faith above works. They make the latter quite as important, to say the least, as the former. Or, what is nearer the truth and more to our purpose, they make faith and works inseparable, identical. The apostle represents even the principle that actuated Abraham, as of works, and declares that his faith was made perfect by works, and that he himself was “justified by works.”

3. *Justification*. This, though a Scriptural term, has been so darkened by words without knowledge, that it may be better here to use a more common and intelligible term; as pardon or acceptance. And here we might adduce some striking passages from the Old Testament. All those which express this sentiment of Isaiah, are to the point:—“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.” Ezekiel tells us that the man who turneth from his sins, “and doeth that which is lawful and right,” shall surely live. Why, or how shall he live? “In his righteousness that he hath done he shall live;” yea, “if he doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive;”—a most pointed and emphatic assurance. Passing to the New Testament, we find Paul declaring, that there is “glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh good.” We find him appealing exultingly to his own past life, mentioning his good works as if they had something to do with his hopes and his reward. “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown;” &c. We find Cornelius, a heathen not then converted, called a devout man, on account of his past deeds, and miraculously assured that his good works had been marked and accepted; “thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.” From this fact we find Peter drawing the same inference that we draw, and in the same language—“in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.” We find numerous declarations, like one already cited, which show that the final reward will turn upon the works done. “God will render to every man according to his deeds.”—“Every man shall receive his own reward according to his labor.”—“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

## MYSTERY.

The world is full of mysteries. The chamber in which the infant opens its eyes, is a universe of mysteries. The father's voice, the mother's smile, reveal to it slowly the mysterious world of the affections. The child solves many of these mysteries; but as the circle of knowledge is enlarged, its vision is always bounded by a wall of mystery. The sun that wakens it at morning and again at night, looks into its window to bid it farewell; the tree that shades its home, and into whose branches the birds come and sing before the dews are dry; the cloud with shining edges that moves across the sky, calm and stately like the chariot of an angel;—all are mysteries. Nay, to the grown-up man there is not a thing which the hand touches, or on which the eye rests, which is not enveloped in mystery. The flower that springs at my foot, who has revealed the wonderful secret of its organization? Its roots shoot down, and leaf and flower rise up and expand into the infinite abyss of mystery. We are like emigrants travelling through an unknown wilderness. They stop at night by a stream of water, they tether their horses and set up their tent and build a fire. And as the flames rise up, all within the circle of a few rods around is distinct and clear in its light. But beyond and bounding this, rocks dimly seen, and trees with vague outline stoop forward to the blaze; and beyond, the branches creak, and the waters murmur over their bed, and wild and unknown animals howl in the dark realm of night and silence. Such is the light of man's knowledge, and so is it bounded by the infinite realm of mystery.

The world then is full of mysteries. But so far as religion is concerned, it has changed most unhappily that men have made articles of faith out of mysteries, made them the most important articles, and looked on religion as if its main purpose were to introduce mysteries into the world. From these things have arisen much of the idle theology and many of the miserable disputes that have disgraced Christendom. That which is the most important fact practically in this subject is this, viz., that there are less mysteries in the world now than there were before Christianity. Christianity has not added to the number of mysteries, but has lessened their number. And not only this: those which it has done away were of the most important character to man. We would repeat, that the number of mysteries in the world now, is not so great as before the coming of Christ; that Nature has more mysteries than Revelation.

Before that time, death and a future life were enveloped in mystery. Where are the dead? Do they yet live? and do they love? Parents and children, with breaking hearts, asked these questions; but neither priest nor oracle could give an answer; the tombs were silent, and from the heavens came no voice of reply.

But this mystery no longer exists: Christianity has done it away. The dead live and they love. So far as the great truth of a future life is concerned, it is revealed, and stands as clear before us as the mountain, from whose wooded sides the mists are rolled away by the rising sun.

The character of God, before the coming of Christ, was unknown. What is the character of this power, or of these powers, above me? It is the most important question that a human being can ask, for on it his destiny turns. But all before Christ's time was uncertain. From the ferocious religions of the North, to the sensual and luxurious religions of the South, a thousand answers were given. The wisest sage, when he approached this subject, was lost in doubt.

All was mystery: but Christianity has removed the mystery that surrounded the character of Deity. It has disclosed that He is a Father. And by the light of his divine word, we read history and experience and our own hearts and the world around us, and we know that He is a Father. The mist, the mystery has sunk to the earth, and the sun, full-orbed, shines clear in the heavens.—E. Peabody.

## RELIGIOUS REFORM.

This anticipated improvement of Christianity must consist, I apprehend, in its simplification; in leaving out of the Christian faith what does not belong to it; in separating from its true principles the human additions that have grown upon them; in making it, in short, more intelligible, more reasonable, and more agreeable to the universal natural feelings of mankind. The great end will be accomplished when the Supreme Being is looked up to as a Father, equal in his regards, and eternally and unchangeably benignant; when Jesus Christ is believed in as the messenger of the Divine love and the example of human goodness; when men shall esteem and treat one another as brethren, having the same rights and expectations; and when the world to come shall be contemplated as a scene of perfect justice, but a scene also of triumphant mercy. These are the great principles of the Gospel. To these all reformation tends. One after another they are conceded in controversy. They are more or less promoted by all discoveries in Biblical literature. They are shadowed forth in all schemes of philanthropy, all improvements in judicial science, and all the advances of legislation. They form that general religion which all men of all nations and ages, whose minds are awake and active, may receive, and in which they may be united; and the union of mankind, not in an entire creed, but in an undivided heart,—not in ceremonies, but in charity,—is both the drift of all social improvement and the design of Christianity, which was characterized by an unwilling prophet as having for its end to join “in one the children of God scattered abroad.” Ignorance and prejudice and bigotry divide mankind; knowledge and reason, and good nature bring them together, and for mutual benefit. The late increased acquaintance with the powers of nature, and the successful application of them to purposes of utility, tend to form the human race into one grand community, one happy family,—to make the bounties of nature, the products of industry, and the acquisitions of the mind common, and, by consequence, to dissolve anti-social confederacies, whether for gain or power, to render tyranny less tolerable and less practicable, and to diminish the motives and to augment the difficulties of war. These discoveries and inventions, so many of them coincident, seem, like the nearly contemporaneous invention of the mariner's compass, the discovery of the new world, and the acquisition of the art of printing, to form a new era in the history of mankind; and as the former era was the commencement, may not this be the revival, of the reformation of the Christian religion? For it is not by accident that philosophical discoveries and literary improvements are united, in point of time, with ecclesiastical reforms; they all spring from the same source, the natural vigour of the human mind setting strongly in one direction; as they all flow to the same end, the glory of God and the happiness of man, and the glory of God in the happiness of man. There is not in reality a sound maxim in reasoning or science, or a just conclusion from history, or a truth built upon human nature, which does not agree with the grand moral principles of the Gospel, as before described, and which does not directly or indirectly point to them. They have been spoken of, indeed, by those that make and those that bow down to and worship creeds, the worst idols that have come out of human hands, as *generalized Christianity*, as if all essential truth were not a generalization or induction from particulars. Did not one apostle generalize religion when he resolved it all into the royal law of equity?—did not another generalize it when he declared the end of the law and the beginning of the Gospel commandment to be charity out of a pure heart?—and did not our Lord himself generalize it when he declared all the law and prophets to be summed up and fulfilled in the love of God and the love of man? Here is divine authority for setting up great principles above forms and details,—for nug-

nifying the “weighty matters of the law” above “the titling of herbs, the anise and the cummin” of creeds and ceremonies. These essential doctrines—rational and therefore Christian, moral and therefore powerful—are the spirit of truth, the spirit of God. All the vitality and power of every scheme of faith is owing to them, though they may be overlooked, and even for a time buried, in the huge mass of popular belief. When decomposed and disembodied, they will act with greater energy and produce purer and wider social happiness. Christianity will then, in and by them, be glorified, and it will be acknowledged by wise and candid men that a scheme of doctrine which will bear this reduction to the simplicity and purity of reason, which will be more like the original Gospel as it is thus reformed, and which, in its simplest and purest state, will be most efficacious in promoting love to God and good service to man, has within itself a witness of its truth, a witness strengthening with the succession of ages—for Time sweeps away error and delusion—and growing with the vigour and activity of the human mind, before which all lolly and falsehood are doomed finally to perish.—Aspland.

‘CONTENTMENT is the sweetest spice,’ the proverb says. So it is, and the rarest. It is not to be had at any of the shops—not but that the keepers may have it for home consumption; but it is not saleable, though a primo article. We know a good woman who said she tried and tried to get contented with things but in vain, till one day all at once, she determined not to try any more, and be satisfied without it—and the very image of content she has been ever since. Now there is the secret—you will never get contentment for the hunting of it. It is the reflection of the peaceful heavens in the calm waters of the soul, and one might row his fishboat from all the coves of Thought and Endeavour to the remotest shores of Accomplishment, and not find the image he sought, in all the way. But let him slip his oars of anxiety, and float serenely on the tide of Heaven's Will, and the sky-broad beauty of a deep content will be universal in his soul. That is it; to be willing to get along without it. But for a man to be contented, is not to be so at peace with things as not to bring the crooked into shape, but to be so satisfied with himself as not to quarrel with the work after he has done all he can; to be satisfied, even, that he has got something to do; for if anything was perfectly satisfactory to begin with we should find a dull world of it when the novelty wore off. The best recipe for content is to be doing something that will make the world better, not trying to get contented—but making men happy.—*Charter Oak.*

A STORY WITH A MORAL.—When Charles the Second chartered the Royal Society, it is narrated of him, that he was disposed to give the philosophers a royal, but at the same time a wholesome lecture.

“Why is it, my lords and gentlemen,” said he, “that if you fill a vessel with water to the very brim, so that it will not hold a single drop more, yet putting a turbot into the water it will not overflow the vessel?” Many were the sage conjectures; that the fish would drink as much water as compensated for his own bulk—that he condensed the water to that amount—that the air bladder had something to do with the phenomena—and a hundred others which were propounded and abandoned in their turn, much to the amusement of the merry monarch. At length, Mr. Wren, (afterwards Sir Christopher) modestly asked, “But is your Majesty sure that such would be the case?” “Aye, there,” exclaimed his Majesty laughing, “you have it; always, gentlemen, find out if a thing be true, before you proceed to account for it; then I shall not be ashamed of the Charter I have given you.”

“No Church has, nor have all churches together, any authority to make articles of faith. Jesus Christ was the author and finisher of the faith, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken.”—*Bishop Sherlock.*