

strength, man has no power to do this; without the preventing grace of God he has no capacity by which to exercise faith or to call upon God. But this lost and hopeless condition is the involuntary result of our inherited woe, and it is the primary result of the redeeming work of Christ that without any volition on the part of the sinner these results should be complemented by the saving results of the work of the Gospel, thus putting man on his trial again. And this free grace of God comes to every man without his seeking it. "When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly"; and it is thus that God commendeth His love toward us, "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And in the second Epistle to the Corinthians (v: 19), it is written that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses; and it is upon the broad basis of this principle that St. Paul so earnestly beseeches the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Now, this first effect of God's grace is expressed by the word *justification*, and other kindred forms of speech. It is called sometimes our "first justification," and also our "initial justification"—the starting point of a religious life. It is the justification by which children dying in infancy are saved, because, while thus redeemed by the blood of Christ, they have never forfeited that initial justification by any voluntary act of sin. It is the justification which authorizes these unconscious lambs of Christ's fold to be brought to the font of holy baptism, and then to be recognized thereby as being regenerate and born again of water and of the Holy Ghost. The seeds of sin are there by nature, but there is no human heart in which the seeds of sin are found where there is not found also the seed of grace by the presence of God's Spirit; and the outward sacrament but recognizes the inward fact, and thus fulfills the requisition of Christ.

If it be objected to this estimate of the abundance of God's grace (and there are popular theologies which do object

to it) that no one can be born again until he becomes a conscious and voluntary recipient of that grace, it is a sufficient reply to say that such an objection confounds two entirely different things, and inexplicably confuses two entirely different classes of persons. An adult, who has sinned and needs repentance, must become a voluntary agent in his repentance and faith; but in the case of an unconscious babe, who wakes to being under the shadow of the cross, the case is quite different. This analogy of being born again contains its own argument. There is no act of our life with which we have so little to do and in which we are so supremely involuntary, as the act of our own birth; and if this be so emphatically true of our natural birth, how does it become impossible when we are born again of water and of the Spirit?

There is much confusion in the popular mind on this subject. Men speak of the second birth as if it implied a sudden and complete maturity of Christian life. They seem to think that if this second birth mean anything it means that the individual rises from the waters of baptism a complete and holy Christian, full-fledged and full-grown, as Minerva sprang from the brain of Jove. And yet is there anything in the analogy which would justify such a thought as this? Is not the hour of the natural birth the most immature and incomplete form of life possible? And shall we therefore take this word of Christ which He put into His conversation with Nicodemus as His own divine and prophetic teaching for the Church of all ages; shall we take this word, familiar everywhere, and put a new and false meaning upon it, and then deny the possibility of what Christ has required?

It is sometimes objected to this great doctrine of the new birth of water and of the Spirit, that no such new birth could have taken place, because the subsequent life is ungodly, and it is asserted therefore that there could have been no such change. But if this objection proves anything, it proves too much. We turn to the analogy again,