

SELF-DECEPTION.

It is not only a possible case, but one of frequent occurrence that men deceive themselves in the matter of salvation. Of course there will be no question as to the fatal delusion of the large class who are avowedly setting aside the truth as it is in Jesus, and cleaving to some system or some prejudice which dispenses with the necessity of faith in Christ, kindling a fire and walking in the light of it, they shall lie down in sorrow. But we speak at present of those who make a profession of faith in Christ, and lay claim to the hope of the gospel, and we venture to repeat that even amongst them there are many who deceive themselves, and many who are deceived by teachers, who say peace when there is no peace, and one buildeth a wall, and lo another daubeth it with untempered mortar. Yet there is no necessary uncertainty about the great question of existence, the way of salvation is not obscure, and the marks of a true faith, plainly described in the word of God, are all practical and easily discovered. The self-deceived are wilfully and willingly deceived. The god of this world blinds their minds. They love their sins and prejudices too well to look into the truth, or they are too indifferent to enquire for it, or to proud too how to it. Having once made a profession they love their ease too well to suffer themselves to be disturbed in their security. Like the foolish bird of the desert they bury their heads in the sand on the approach of danger and blindly wait to be destroyed.

We often here a few suggestions which are designed to be adapted to the prevailing delusions of the present day, which may assist honest enquirers amongst us to determine how far men may go in a profession of religion, and in an apparent religious experience, and yet come short of salvation. And in doing so, we may take it for granted that nothing which is common to us and devils can be any ground to hope for salvation. Our Lord said to the Jews "unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." And with still greater emphasis, we may say unless your faith and your experience exceed that of devils you must share their condemnation.—This being granted we suggest:—

I. That no extent of speculative knowledge of God and his truth, no orthodoxy of a professed creed, no intimacy nor accuracy of an acquaintance with Scripture can be any proof that a man is a Christian. The apostle James when exposing the worthlessness of a dead faith cites the case of devils: "Thou believest that there is one God! thou doest well: the devils also believe." The truth that there is one God is all that there is here mentioned, but a little reflection may satisfy any one that much precious truth is included in this summary of the creed of devils. The natural faculties of those angels who kept not their first estate are not obliterated by their fall. And the remembrance of truth learned amid previous advantages, though perverted, is not destroyed. Now originally they had a place amongst those who always beheld the face of God in heaven, and consequently enjoyed heaven and clearer views of the divine perfections than mortal frailty could bear. An old divine remarks, "The devil was educated in the best theological school in the universe, the heaven of heavens." He saw the divine wisdom and might at creation, when "He spake and it was done, commanded and all things stood fast." He saw the divine goodness, as it was enjoyed in Eden; he has seen the Divine holiness, as it shines from the eternal throne; he has seen, nay he has enjoyed the Divine love as it beams in heaven; he has felt the Divine justice around with terrible power in his own fatal overthrow. He knows, he believes it all, but it is neither sanctifying nor saving.

But this is not all, he knows God's revelation of grace to a perishing world. He was present when the first intimation of mercy was made to man.

With the keenness of insatiable malignity he has watched the whole course of God's dealings with the church and the world. He saw when the waters of the deluge rose around his shrieking victims; and when the bow of promise greeted the eyes of the few who were saved by water. He saw when fire came down from Heaven on the cities of the plain; and listened when God said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed." The whole truth regarding the person and work of Christ he knows. He heard joy to the earth proclaimed by the heavenly host, and the voice from heaven say, "This is my beloved son." He learned the power of him whom men despised, in the wilderness; and in many an after conflict, till the conqueror could say, "I beheld Satan fall as lightning from heaven;" nay, till he himself cried out as he quailed beneath the glance of holiness, "I know thee, who thou art, thou holy one of God." He was there in the heart of Judas, when he went out of the upper room, plotting the treachery—there in Gethsemane, seeking to sift the disciples when the Master's soul was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,"—there exulting when they nailed the Prince of Life to the tree—there, shivering beneath these words of doom, when Jesus said, "It is finished,"—there when the victor spoiled principalities and powers, making a shew of them openly. All this he knows and believes, but it is not sanctifying or saving. The after progress of the church of Christ he has watched, as only an enemy can watch. He has learned the wisdom and the power of God in the Gospel, as it was proclaimed by Apostles. He has heard the sweet Psalmist sing—Paul preach—and John plead. He has witnessed all miracles of power—all miracles of grace—knows all the awakenings of sinners—all the experience of saints, and all the testimony of martyrs. He knows the Scriptures by rote; and does not doubt the truth of a single fact there recorded, or doctrine inculcated. But all this, so far from being saving, only intimates how certainly he will meet a coming vengeance, and how terribly he has yet to learn the wrath of the Lamb. After this, what man shall build his hopes on the extent of his knowledge, the accuracy of his conceptions, or the barren orthodoxy of his creed. Our faith must exceed that of devils.

II. We suggest that no vividness of our impressions of divine things, no desires of salvation, no distress of mind in view of coming wrath, no pungent convictions of sin, and no deep sense of condemnation, can be any proof to a man that he is a child of God. Devils are not insensible to the truth they believe—blinded men alone are indifferent. Devils have a lively sense of heaven lost, and hell to be endured. They can weigh the realities of the invisible world against the trifles of time; they believe and tremble. With what earnestness they languish for some ray of hope of deliverance, their trembling apprehension may testify. Convinced of their folly, convicted of guilt, in view of a righteous retribution, they tremble. But yet multitudes amongst us have no better reason to give for the hope that is in them. The grand delusion of Satan, in our day, is, that this awakening of the law, this conviction to sin, this desire of salvation, is a Christian experience. The need for a full exposure of the cheat, is the more urgent, from the fact that churches, calling themselves evangelical, and preachers, boasting of superior zeal and sanctity; and especially such churches and preachers at times when they profess to be under the immediate guidance of the Spirit of God—set their seal to this delusion. Terror, remorse, convictions of the law; with the desires and resolutions they inspire, are recognised as evidence that men are born of God. It is awful to think of, when we turn to the book of God, and find that what is sufficient to secure a place in a professing church, may yet come far short in degree of the experience of devils. The terrors of such young converts are often nothing more than frightful impressions of their own imaginations, or produced by revolting pictures of other men's fancies, which have no foundation in

the Word of God. But were they real awakenings, produced by a view of things as they really are; by correct views of the ways of sin, and the awfulness of falling into the hands of the living God, it would be no more than devils constantly experience; it would be no more than all the lost will one day experience, when they shall say to the rocks, "Fall on us, and to the mountains, cover us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." The remorse and conviction of such young converts, is often superficial and transient; but, however deep that remorse may be, it will be exceeded in that place "where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth;" however thorough that conviction, it is but anticipating, by a little, the work of that day, when every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. It is passing strange that men should be so deluded as to take that as evidence of adoption into the family of God, which will be the most sensible experience of those who shall be forever cast out from his presence. They may be convinced of sin, of the utter insufficiency of their own righteousness, and of the justice of God in their condemnation; they may shed floods of tears, and cherish daily desires of salvation, and utter daily promises and vows. But are not devils convinced of as much? Those will be convinced of it all, most thoroughly, to whom the Lord shall say "Depart from me, ye cursed." There will be as earnest desires amongst those who knock at the closed gate, crying "Lord, Lord, open unto us." There will be as loud professions amongst those who shall say unto him on that day, "Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils, and in thy name have done many wonderful works?" It is true that the true Christian, also, has had his awakenings, convictions, and desires; but he has more. And surely it cannot be necessary to argue further, that unless our experience, as well as our faith, exceed that of devils, we cannot be saved.

These suggestions may reach the eye of some who have been flattered into the belief that such an experience as we have described, was their conversion. We would caution them against escaping the salutary conclusion to which we would lead them, by falling back upon their sincerity. We do not charge them with deliberate hypocrisy; but if they are as sincere as Saul of Tarsus, when he persecuted the church, thinking that he did God service, they are deceiving themselves. We would caution them against falling back upon a certain satisfaction in the truth, "those who receive the seed in stony ground, are they who hear the word, and anon with joy receive it;" but they are deceiving themselves. We would caution them, also, against falling back upon their alleged zeal and activity; they may be as earnest as those blinded Jews of whom Paul testifies, "that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge;" and as active as those pretenders, who shall say, "have we not prophesied, and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in thy name;" but they are deceiving themselves. We press them to be honest and unsparing with themselves; for it is not yet too late to change from the sandy foundation, and build upon the rock.

And what shall we say to those hardened, blinded churches, which, by such delusions, are swelling their numbers? and to those daring, godless men, who, by such delusions, are multiplying their triumphs, and swelling their lousesome reputations? "Thus saith the Lord, I will break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation of it shall be discovered, and it shall fall; and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that daubed it with untempered mortar." If they will not abandon their delusions for pity of beguiled souls, let them think of the fury they are provoking—the stormy wind—the overflowing shower—and the great hailstones of the Avenger.