

HINDRANCES TO PERSONAL RELIGION.

Gaius must have been in a most desirable religious condition when the Apostle could throw his good wishes into this form, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Such a measure of outward and general progress as their souls are making in inward and spiritual things would be no great advancement to many. It would be more natural and true to the facts with many to express one's kindly desires in this form—"I wish thy soul may prosper even as thy body, or business, or family prospers."

And yet our personal religion ought to have at least three things—Growth, which distinguishes all living things that have not reached perfection; Comfort, which attends the healthy exercise of all our capacities; and Power, which we possess *in right* as a royal priesthood, but which, alas! *in fact*, we forfeit by indolence, and other forms of sinning.

And why is it so? What are the immediate and actual causes within our comprehension and within our reach, of this backward spiritual condition? We can estimate and discuss the causes of national decay, or personal failure in any line of effort. Let us, even so, look to the obstacles that prevent the growth, comfort, and power of our personal religion.

1. Some, perhaps all of us, suffer from having *too many occupations*. We attempt so many things we can do few or none of them well. Our time is frittered away on miscellaneous pursuits, and our strength is wasted over too wide a surface. We are not very good scholars, nor very good politicians, nor very good farmers, nor very good artists, nor very thorough worldlings, nor very good Christians, from trying to do a little in several of these characters; and some who confine themselves to, perhaps, one thing only, in addition to their spiritual condition, are so awfully in earnest about one thing, as to leave too little time and strength for religious advancement. For reading, or, as the Apostle represents it, feeding on the Word, there is little time. Hurried eating of the daily food, I have heard, is bad for the physical health. There is such a thing as swallowing the allowance of spiritual food so that it shall do no good. Thinking, or as it is called, "meditation," or reflection, is out of the question. To dress, pay and receive visits, keep abreast of the literature of the day, do common duties, and "be like other people," and, at the same time, "think," is out of the question with many. And what prospect is there of being much in prayer with hurried Scripture reading, and no thought? Look about, Christians, and consider what you can properly forgo, if you are to prosper in your souls. This is the first consideration; all else is secondary.

2. But this suggests another great hindrance—*The want of a single eye*. We are not content to stake all on the one thing. We are anxious to have many cisterns, out of which to draw the waters of happiness. We do not wish to crucify *self* altogether. We desire to stand fairly with the *world*. We look in many directions besides upwards. Our eyes are not to God like the faithful maid to her mistress. We cannot say our expectation is *only* from Him, for we expect a good deal from *self*, and so we please, indulge, and magnify *self*; a good deal from the *world*, and so we tolerate, and even conciliate and flatter it. Our eye is not single. And so when something is wrong about *self*, and we should crucify it, or something is very wrong about the *world*, and we should, for our part, resist it, we "cannot see it." We do not wish to see it. You may hand us the glass of the Word, we put it to the blind eye. So we are full of inconsistencies. Our road lies straight on; but there are coveted objects right and left which we wish to pick up by the way, and on which we are casting longing looks, and turning to which, ever and anon, our path is crooked and our progress slow. I lately saw two people walking on a fine strand. One was hurrying home and one was sauntering—ready to pick up a shell here, or linger to measure the advance of the tide there. Accordingly the track of the one was straight as an arrow—he had an object before him on which he was