

theory so easily and naturally, and the idea of it was so completely incorporated into current Jewish thought, that the Jewish converts to Christianity were strongly disposed to carry it over bodily into the Church, and insist that there too the Gentiles should be born again as children of Abraham, in order to enjoy its privileges. The thought was familiar enough therefore to them all. And as this national new birth always had with them a distinctly religious idea attached to it, Jesus could the more naturally use it in a more spiritual sense as indicating the necessary condition of entrance to His kingdom.

The Jewish custom may still further explain the language of Jesus here. When such a proselyte was admitted to the synagogue, he was baptized with water, in token that his past life was washed away and henceforth he was to regard himself as a new man. At least that custom obtained at a later time, and probably had come into use before the Christian era. Their antagonism to Christianity would hardly have allowed them to adopt it at any later period. In fact, it ultimately led to their discontinuance of the practice. In a very natural way, both John the Baptist and Jesus had already appropriated it as the outward sign of discipleship. It is not strange, therefore, that He should speak of this new birth as being "by water." Not of course that there was any virtue in the water of baptism to qualify a man for admission into the Kingdom. It only expressed and symbolized the change that was supposed already to have taken place. The real agent in that change is the Spirit, that is, the Spirit of God.

Taking this as the origin of the figure, we get at once some very obvious suggestions as to the nature of the change expressed by it, and as to the necessity for the change.

1. Negatively, it is not one which makes a man a new personality distinct from what he was before. Change

nationality does not destroy identity; neither does regeneration.

2. Nor is it a change which affects the constitution of his nature. It adds no new faculty or power of mind over and above those he had before. His faculties may be used in a different way and for different objects, but they themselves remain the same.

3. Nor on the other hand does it consist in any mere change of outward association. A foreigner may be almost a lifetime in a country and continue an alien to the end, though enjoying many of its advantages and the protection of its laws. It is a good thing to be connected with the Church in association with its membership. It may lead to the deeper change, but it is not to be confounded with it.

4. To turn to the positive aspect of it: like naturalization it consists mainly in a change of allegiance. It is a necessity of human nature that every man should serve somebody or something. There must be some dominant interest or motive that controls and gives shape to character. Not that one can always easily discover what it is. Men have a most persistent tendency to conceal the secret of their lives—sometimes apparently from a desire to get credit for more than they deserve, sometimes apparently that they may seem to be content with less than their due, and often for no conscious reason at all. Nor do they only mislead others; they deceive themselves. But they do not change the fact thereby or render it the less certain that they are under the control of one ruling thought. One man lives that he may gratify his appetites. He knows no higher aim or end in life. The motive of all his plans and of all his work is that he may get the wherewithal to satisfy the flesh. Whether he does right or wrong, whether he indulges himself or restrains himself, the reason is still the same—that appetite may have more to enjoy, or that it may enjoy the