

whole soul to its dominion ; and then we lay the whole blame on our nature as if all the while we had been quite passive and unconscious. We stifle convictions, despise warnings, sear the conscience, harden the heart, and then, when sin has acquired double, treble or tenfold power, we say, "Such is our nature : we were born thus ; we are such as God made us." Does not even common sense shew the folly of such allegations ? If there were a poisonous tree planted in our garden, should we not rather root it out than cultivate it ? How absurd to rejoice in sin, and then complain that we could not possibly avoid it ! How absurd to say, "I am sinful, and, therefore, I will make myself still more sinful ; I am in danger of hell, and, therefore, I will make no attempt to escape from it ; I am far from heaven, therefore, I will wander still farther ; I am guilty, and, therefore, I will not repent ; I am depraved, therefore, I will employ none of the means by which I may be made holy !" But they who employ this reasoning after having professed to embrace the Gospel, are guilty of a still higher degree of folly. For the Gospel professes to be able to overcome this natural corruption, to renew the soul, and make us partakers of a new and spiritual life. Why then did you embrace the profession of the Gospel, if you did not believe it to have the power which it claims—the power of giving you a new heart and a new nature ? If it has not the power to renew and sanctify those who embrace it, it must be a mere imposture ; for this is declared to be one of its most important purposes, to redeem us from unrighteousness, and to make us a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Another very common excuse is this, "We cannot repent nor forsake our sins without the assistance of Divine grace." This assertion is perfectly true ; but it is only a cause of deeper sorrow that this precious truth should be so grievously abused. It might be sufficient to tell such men that even if they had the power to repent, they would not employ that power ; for they love their sins, and will not let them go. The excuse, itself, may be answered in a few words. The same Bible which informs us that grace is indispensable, tells us also that grace must be sought in the way of duty ; that this precious gift must be desired with earnestness and embraced with fervent thankfulness ; and, that although the first motions must proceed from God, yet these must be responded to and cherished in our own souls. The Bible says, "ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find ; quench not the spirit ; work out your own salvation, for God worketh in you." But the perverter of Divine truth speaks thus : "The grace of God is indispensable to my salvation ; therefore, I will

not ask nor seek for it ; I will lie down in sin and stop my ears against all the calls of the Gospel ; I will quench the Spirit, resist his operations, and at last drive him from me ; and then I may justly charge God with all the sins of my life, because he would not exert all the power of his Almighty grace, nor save me without my knowledge or consent." If the case were the reverse—if we could command the aids of the Holy Spirit, and forsake our sins whenever we pleased, then we might with more safety delay repentance and indulge in sin. But is it not the utmost degree of madness to adopt such a resolution as this ; *because* God can confer or withdraw his care when he pleases, we will therefore be quite careless, whether we receive it or not ; and go on from day to day resisting and rejecting all the strivings of the Spirit, although we know not but that this may be the very last time that salvation will be offered to our acceptance.

The next excuse to which we shall advert is, that of ignorance. "We did not know that we had been guilty of any offence against the law of God ; we did not know that this was forbidden ; it was done through mere inadvertence, and, therefore, cannot deserve punishment." They assume an air of simplicity and innocence, and profess not to be able to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong. There is no delusion more fatal than this ; there is no mistake more fallacious in itself, or more artfully employed by Satan for the ruin of darkened souls. If ignorance be, as some suppose, a shield and refuge for the soul, then knowledge must be an evil and a curse, and every addition to our knowledge would only expose us to a new danger of condemnation. It would then be the duty of parents not to instruct their children in the great truths of revelation, but to leave them in the deepest possible darkness that they might then be able to plead the complete apology of total ignorance. Nay, the very means of grace which God has ordained, in place of being a blessing, would be the most grievous calamity that he ever inflicted on our race ; the volume of revelation, the preaching of his word, the promulgation of his law, would then demand not our thankful praise, but our grief and anger. It is plain, therefore, that ignorance is not the source of safety, but of misery and danger : else why is knowledge to be esteemed such a high blessing ; and why are we so often enjoined to impart knowledge to those who still remain in darkness ?

But if even the want of knowledge expose the soul to danger, what will be the fate of those who are *willfully* and *obstinately* ignorant ? who, amid the amplest means of information, not only con-