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## Poetry.

### THERE LIVED A MAN.

Once in the flight of ages past,  
There lived a man—and who was he?  
Mortal! howe'er thy lot be cast,  
That man resembled thee.

And joy and grief, and hope and fear,  
Alternate triumphed in his breast:  
His bliss and wo—a smile, a tear!  
Oblivion hides the rest.

The bounding pulse, the languid limb,  
The changing spirit's rise and fall,  
We know that these were felt by him,  
For these are felt by all.

The annals of the human race—  
Their ruins since the world began,  
Of him afford no other trace  
Than this—THERE LIVED A MAN.

## Doctrine and Duty.

### MISTAKES ON CONVERSION.

BY THE REV. JAMES LISTER.

A Christian church is a society of Christians; and as we cannot search the heart, and have no right to search it, we are to believe them to be Christians, who give evidence of being renewed in heart. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; all things are become new." If churches receive into their number persons who do not show by their experience and conduct that they are "born again," the glory is departed, and a door opened for declension in doctrine, in order, and moral conduct. But what is conversion? Let me advert to some common errors and mistakes on the subject. I shall state them as briefly, yet as perspicuously, as I can.

1. An infidel may be led to renounce his unbelief and embrace the truth of christianity. This is a great and most beneficial change, and may be eventually a step to his eternal welfare. But a belief of the truth of christianity does not involve either a knowledge of wherein vital godliness lies, nor a cordial submission to evangelical truth.

Some superior defences of revelation have been made by writers who have given no proof of personal religion.

2. A man may change his religious views, and remain unconverted. He may quit one department of the visible church and join another. The Churchman may become a Dissenter; the Wesleyan become a Calvinist; the Independent become a Baptist, the Papist become a Protestant: such changes, in perfect sincerity, are not unfrequent, and are beneficial as far as they go, but they do not, in themselves, involve a change of heart, and may be experienced by such as afford no proof of godly fear or love to Jesus Christ.

3. Terrors of conscience are not conversion. They often, indeed generally, more or less attend it. No man can be changed savingly who does not repent of sin, and no repentance can exist without some degree of distress from an awakened conscience. But terrors with great alarm and overwhelming fears often spring only from a clear view of the results of sin and its true wages in the eternal world. Many have been occasionally alarmed by dangerous sickness, or a rousing sermon, or an imminent danger, or a faithful reproof, who have never entered the narrow gate of sincere application to the Saviour.

4. Reform in conduct is not conversion. Conversion does necessarily produce morality, but morality may be found in much loveliness where religion is wanting, nay, where it is neglected, or even rejected. Experimental christians would not readily admit the personal godliness of decided Socinians, while it cannot be questioned that among them, and among those Quakers who are anti-evangelical, fine specimens of correct and high-toned morality abound. Nor is it uncommon (and let us rejoice in the fact) that Temperance Societies have operated in many instances to reform the life, though they have not renovated the inward man.

5. Delusive experiences have been taken for conversion. One or two specimens may suffice. A person may be deeply impressed with the danger of his state as a sinner, and may be much employed in the use of the means for obtaining relief, he reads, prays, attends sermons, meets with serious persons, and devotes time to self-examination and reflection. On some oc-

casions, when alone and depressed in spirits, and fearing his unfitness to stand before God's bar, he is anxiously looking round for some gleam of hope. In this state he hears or thinks he hears, a voice saying to him, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven." His distress vanishes, and he concludes that he is now in safety with God.

Another obtains relief from doubts by a dream. If scripture authority be admitted, dreams have been employed by Him who knows best how to work on the human heart, to alarm and teach, "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man" (Job xxxiii 15, 17). The lives of some most eminent servants of the Lord bear ample testimony to the fact, that dreams have been sent to promote their highest interests. John Bunyan and Colonel Gardner are instances. But the abuse to which I refer arises from ignorance or presumption. A man who knows not the method of a sinner's justification before God, a stranger to the wickedness and deceitfulness of his own heart, is concerned for his salvation, and looking after some prop of confidence. He dreams that he has been in heaven and seen its beauty and grandeur; or that he has beheld the Lord on a cross, looking at him affectionately; he awakes, and concludes that the dream is a message from above to assure him of his safe condition.

Another obtains peace by the application of some part of the Holy Scripture to his own circumstances. He opens the sacred volume and his eye fixes on the words "I am he who bloteth out your sins," or "Come, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool." It is not the view here given of the character of the God of salvation, or any impulse by the words whereby the reader is led to Jesus, which becomes the spring of eventual comfort. No, it is the fact that the words have presented themselves to the mind and laid hold of it. This is the ground of hope.

6. Excited feelings may be put for a saving change. A revival has taken place. The gospel is preached faithfully and earnestly, providences are sanctified, the chapel or church is crowded, many are constantly affected, and sinners are drawn