

The Berran.

THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.—ACTS XVII. 11.

No. 2.]

QUEBEC, THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 1844.

[Vol. I.]

Poetry.

SORROWFUL NYCTANTHIES.

THE NIGHT-BLOOMING TREE.

Men call it sad—that fair and fragrant tree,
Because it wakens while the forest sleeps;
As false they deem of him who silently
Through the still night his prayerful vigil keeps.
A little do they know, even when he weeps,
How much of peace blends with his very tears,
Healing as dew, whose balmy nectar steep
The sum-smit flower; while hope, sweet hope, appears
An iris on the cloud, and smiles away his fears.

Silence and darkness! soon the hour will come,
When all must brave thee, for that all must die;
The night of death! the silence of the tomb!
These are realities which some may fly.
Thrice happy they, who, when that hour is nigh,
Do feel their faith secure, their sins forgiven;
Soon 'twill be past; and then to ear and eye
What sounds, what sights of rapture shall be given!
For darkness, endless day!—for silence, songs of
heaven!

(From "The Spirit of the Woods.")

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

A Discourse preached in Tavistock Chapel,
London,

BY THE REV. EDWARD BICKERSTETH.

ROMANS III. 28.

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by
faith without the deeds of the law.

(CONCLUDED.)

I have now to show that this scriptural doctrine is held by the Protestant Church. The general consent of Protestants, and the holy care with which they expressed and guarded this doctrine may be seen in the Harmony of the Confessions. I can now only extract a few sentences to show that they did really hold the doctrine.

The Helvetic Confession says, "We teach and believe with the Apostle, that sinful man is justified only by faith in Christ, not by the law or by any works.—We do not part the benefit of justification, giving part to the grace of God, or to Christ; and a part to ourselves, our charity, works, or merit; but we do attribute it wholly to the praise of God in Christ, and that through faith."

The French Confession says, "We do utterly reject all other means whereby men do think that they may be justified before God: and, casting away all opinion of virtues and merits, we do altogether rest in the only obedience of Jesus Christ; which is imputed to us both that all our sins may be covered, and also that we may obtain grace before God."

The Augsburg Confession says, "Men cannot be justified before God by their own power, merits, or works; but are justified for Christ's sake, through faith."

The Wittenberg Confession declares, "Man is made acceptable to God, and counted just before God, for the only Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, through faith."

The English Articles assert, "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own merits or deservings: wherefore that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort."

The Confessions of the Four Cities, the Confessions of Basil, of Belgia, of Saxony, and of Scotland agree here.—Thus, with one voice, the whole Protestant Church bears witness to this scriptural doctrine.

But are there no opposing passages of Scripture? CAN IT POSSIBLY BE TRUE that there is so great a blessing as free justification for sinners? Are there no arguments urged in reply to such statements?

My Brethren, there is nothing against which the heart of man more contends than against this truth. It is so humbling to our pride, so beyond our narrow and selfish conceptions, and so above our corrupt and fallen nature, that even the believer himself has continually to struggle against unbelief and self-righteousness.

Let us then consider some objections advanced against this doctrine.

The first and most plausible is founded on the STATEMENT OF ST. JAMES. (ii. 21—24.)

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? and the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.

You see, then, how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. The Romanists triumph here, and call the passage clear against justification by faith alone, and 'evident for the necessity, merit, and concurrence of good works. But a little examination of the passage will show that St. James does not contradict the other inspired writers, nor say one word against our justification before God by faith alone.

Observe, he uses the very same example of faith that St. Paul does, that of Abraham; and asserts, with Moses and St. Paul, that his faith was counted to him for righteousness.—But this act of Abraham's faith, by which he was thus justified on the very statement of St. James, took place forty years before his offering up of Isaac. St. James, therefore, could not possibly design to assert, that that fruit of his faith was the cause of his justification before God, though it was the end to which his faith tended, and the proof of its reality and power.

Good works are not, therefore, mentioned by

St. James as the cause of our justification, but as the effects invariably connected with it: they prove that we are justified. St. James' object is to show the nature of true faith, as producing works; and, by justified, he means being declared and manifested to be justified. This is perfectly consistent with our free justification by divine grace, without works as the preceding cause, and easily reconciles apparently contradictory, but really harmonious statements.

Another passage objected is, *Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.* Rom. ii. 13. Unquestionably. What Protestant denies that we shall be justified by the law, if we fulfil the law? A man, who obeys the law, cannot be dealt with as a transgressor. But what human being dare rest for a moment there? If in one tittle he has failed, his justification is lost, for ever lost, while depending on his obedience. *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* James ii. 10. This answer fully meets many similar objections: no precepts, or directions, or exhortations with a promise show that we have fulfilled, or can fulfil them. They have important uses: under divine teaching, they may discover our sins and weakness, they may guide to duty, they may stir up to prayer, they may point us to Christ, and, when justified by faith in him, the believer may by his grace so obey the precept as to do good works which shall be acceptable in Christ Jesus, and thus obtain every promise; but all this, though of immense importance in the economy of God's grace, proves not that sinners can be justified before God by their obedience. The law tells us, not what we can do, but what we ought to do; and, as Luther justly observes, we must not confound the imperative and indicative moods.

Others maintain that by the DEEDS OF THE LAW ARE ONLY MEANT THE CEREMONIAL LAW. On this system the Apostle could merely have mentioned neglected rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices, as excluding us from justification, and proving his conclusion, that *by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight.* Romans iii. 20. But what are the transgressions which the Apostle does mention, as thus precluding justification by works? He does not notice one violation of the ceremonial law, but brings forward *theft and adultery*, (Rom. ii. 21, 22,) *lying, deceit, and cruelty*; (Rom. iii. 13—16.) these are obviously transgressions not of the ceremonial but of the moral law. It is manifest then that he includes that law in his meaning. He says, Rom. vii. 7. *I had not known sin but by the law. I had not known lust except the law had said, thou shalt not covet.* I need not say that this is the last and most spiritual of the ten commands. The Apostle also frequently excludes not merely *deeds of the law, and works of the law*, but *works* simply, works in general, from the office of justification. (Rom. iv. 5, 6. xi. 6. Ephes. ii. 9.)

The most acute and subtle Defender of Romanism, Bellarmine, urges that THE APOSTLE ONLY EXCLUDES JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS DONE BY THE STRENGTH OF NATURE, AND NOT WORKS DONE IN FAITH AND BY GRACE. When after faith and by grace we obey the law, this he says, is the righteousness of God and the righteousness by faith. But how strained this interpretation is—may how false it is, will be evident by a close inspection of the Apostle's words. St. Paul opposes all obedience, and all doing, to the righteousness of faith. He says, as if he foresaw the subtle objection, *the righteousness of God without the law is manifested; but righteousness consisting in our obedience to the Law, even by grace, is a righteousness with the Law.* Again in the 10th chapter, he names the righteousness of the law, and the righteousness of faith, as two things quite opposite; and then establishes the glorious doctrine that *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.*

Others imagine that the Apostle only meant to exclude THE MERIT OF WORKS, from our justification, and not works. This is deserting the Roman ground of deserving the grace of congruity. But I reply shortly and decisively that St. Paul does not once mention the merit of works, as what he excludes, but excludes works altogether; and we may be quite sure that even the foolishness of God is wiser than men.

Again, many insist that FAITH IS A VIRTUE AND WORK AND INCLUDES EVERY OTHER GRACE, and therefore justifies. We allow that faith is a Christian grace, the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Though we deny that it includes other graces, we allow, that as connecting us with Christ, the fountain of all life and grace, it produces every other grace, just as the branch abiding in the good tree produces fruit.—*He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing.* But faith in Christ, in its very nature, as it justifies, renounces and annihilates all our own righteousness and goodness, and every thing else but Christ Jesus—it forsakes every thing to trust in him, to depend wholly on him and to lay hold simply on his salvation. Its efficacy in justification arises from its reference to the Saviour. It does not justify before God, either as including or producing every other grace, or as a part of our moral goodness or excellence: that were to bring in justification by works; but it is of faith, that it may be by grace. No other act of the mind, or will, or affection, would justify us without our being justified by works; but, in being justified by faith, we are justified before God by grace, and not by works—for these two are quite inconsistent. Rom. xi. 6. *If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.* The Roman Catholics urge once more against our statement of justification by faith only, that THE WORD ONLY IS NOT FOUND IN

THE SCRIPTURES IN THIS CONNECTION, and that St. James says, *not by faith only*: and they highly object to Luther's rendering the words of our text, "only through faith." The Roman Catholic Advocate, in a recent discussion, says he would agree fully with the doctrine, if the word *only* were removed. We have already noticed the objection from St. James. Every sound Protestant admits works as the evidence of justification; and, IN THIS RESPECT, maintains strenuously, that we are justified by works, and not by faith alone: but we utterly and altogether exclude them as a preceding cause or part of justification; and IN THAT RESPECT, we as strenuously maintain, that we are justified by faith alone; by that faith which alone can unite us to Him, who is our righteousness before God. As early heretics compelled the primitive Church to use the words Substance, and Person, and Trinity, so have we been compelled by Roman corruptions to use the word *only*, as a short and explicit way of showing our exact meaning, and distinguishing between their doctrine and ours. The use of this word is abundantly authorized by the repeated scriptural exclusion of every thing else as a ground of justification. It is a brief way of expressing that which St. Paul more fully states, when he says, *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.* Gal. ii. 16.

The grand objection, however, to this doctrine among pious Romanists, (for blessed be God there are many such) as well as among others who object, is, FEAR OF THE MORAL CONSEQUENCES: it is apprehended, that it tends to loosen the obligations of morality, and to weaken the restraints of iniquity. If it be proved to be scriptural truth, we might well leave to God the consequences of his own doctrine. But we allow that at first sight, and to the natural man, the doctrine may have this appearance. We allow, that where only held as a theory, or only held partially, this doctrine may even be thus abused as every other doctrine may; but we maintain, that when really embraced as a vital principle of action, and held in its just connexion with other truths, in proportion as it is thus embraced and thus held, it multiplies moral obligations, it increases and strengthens every restraint upon iniquity. We might, on close inspection, rebut the objection, and assert that every opposing doctrine really lowers the moral standard, allows not the just extend of the Law, and renders it impossible for man to do works pleasing to God; but the very objection tends to prove that our view of the doctrine is scriptural; for it is the very objection which the Holy Apostle supposes will be made to it, and the contrary doctrines raise not the same objection. *What shall we say then, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?* He repels the inference, not by denying the doctrine, but by proving its holy tendency. Let facts also speak. Are Papal Countries more moral, do they observe the Sabbath more strictly, are they more alive to the religious instruction of the poor, are they more benevolent than Protestant Countries? Or are such Protestants as hold this doctrine distinctly and prominently, on the whole and as a body, less holy, less chaste, less attentive to family instruction, less upright, less strict and religious than those Protestants who deny it: for, alas, it must not be concealed that there are professing Protestants who have departed from the main principles of the Reformation. We appeal to facts and to history with the utmost confidence, and fearlessly assert that in every view, so far from making void the law through faith—we establish the law.

Let no Romanist, therefore, imagine because Protestants hold free justification, that therefore, they give encouragement to sin. We still distinctly hold that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* We still maintain, and against Antinomianism, we vehemently insist on the all-important truth, that sanctification is an essential part of salvation, and invariably follows justification. Justification is but one portion of our blessedness by Christ. We agree with Rutherford,—"I have made a new question, whether Christ be more to be loved for giving sanctification or for free justification, and I hold that he is more and most to be loved for sanctification. It is, in some respects, greater love in him to sanctify that to justify, for he makes us most like himself in his own essential portraiture and image in sanctifying us."

THE DOCTRINE IS THEN TRUE, IT IS SCRIPTURAL, IT IS DIVINE. We conclude, therefore, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law. O blessed tidings! O good news of great joy! It opens to us wretched sinners the very gates of heaven, it discloses to us fallen creatures the very glory of the temple above. Weary and heavy-laden sinners, go to Christ, and you shall find rest; burdened and afflicted consciences, let the sprinkling of the blood of Christ speak peace; fainting and despairing souls, look unto Jesus and you shall be saved.

Imagine the secret workings of the inner man in the retired hour, when we enter into solemn judgment of ourselves, our state before God, and our final prospects. Imagine the inward suit going on in the court of conscience—the Law of God, seen to be reasonable and good, laying open our sin—the memory awake to its commission and its many aggravations—the charge proved—our guilt clear—a burden of sin that is intolerable weighing us down—the conscience itself accusing and condemning—the judgements of God impending—and the tremendous condemnation, nothing less than the wrath of God and eternal death. THEN, suppose that to such a soul is made, from the divine records, the first discovery of this blessed justification—this

mediation of Christ, this redemption through his blood—this love of God in devising before time began, and giving his Son to accomplish this great salvation; and all this ours, ours for ever, simply on receiving it by faith in Jesus. Imagine this—it is no fancied picture—many a heart before me, I doubt not, has gone through this experience. . . . and then with what rapture does the soul join in the words of the Apostle, and exclaim: *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Shall God (for it is better rendered by continued interrogatories) Shall God, that justifieth? Who is he that condemneth? Shall Christ that died? you rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?*

But I am anticipating my third division.

III. THE VAST IMPORTANCE OF THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE.

The difference between the Romanists and us here is not a strife of words; it is not a question of vain curiosity, or of little moment.

We differ so essentially that their system, we maintain, subverts the whole scheme of the Gospel; and, making sanctification the very nature of its justification instead of its evidence, brings in self-righteousness, boasting, distress of conscience, and despair. It obscures God's glory, lowers his holy law, and tends to destroy innumerable precious and immortal souls.

It is not of little moment, for the Scriptures are full of the subject. It is the main principle of the holy lives of Abraham, the father of the faithful, and David, the man after God's own heart. Whole epistles are devoted to it in the New Testament. The last act of mercy in our Saviour's life was a triumphant display of it. It is a question of every day's use and experience. The error here must be fatal: mistakes here may lead to everlasting ruin.

We will direct your attention to some particulars which well illustrate the importance of this doctrine.

Justification by faith is THE ONLY SURE FOUNDATION FOR PEACE OF CONSCIENCE—peace with God, and peace in our own souls. God is unspeakably pure and holy; he searches the heart; all our thoughts are open to him; he is infinitely wise; he is Almighty; he is our Judge: sin is that which his soul hateth; who may stand before him when once he is angry? Where is the regenerate that is wholly free from sin? *There is not, says Solomon, a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.* In many things we all offend, says St. James. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, says St. John.* Right views of the doctrine of justification affect, then, our peace with God, and our comfort in walking with him; every hour and every moment. What work of devotion, what act of charity, will you venture to rely upon as unexceptionable in his sight? Your very tears of repentance want to be repented of; your very prayers are defiled and polluted; your very charity needs his forgiveness—in the words of Isaiah, *all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and we all do fade as a leaf.* Nay, the heavens are not clean in his sight, and he charges his angels with folly; nay more, if you had done all perfectly, you had then only done your duty, and were still an unprofitable servant. How then can you attain forgiveness and peace of conscience by such imperfect works of your own righteousness? The more you work to justify yourself, the more you are defiled before God. Nothing but a divine atonement and the righteousness of a Divine Saviour at all meets your wants. It is only the blood of Jesus, that cleanses from all sin—*God was manifest in the flesh, He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* In such a stupendous miracle of mercy there is ample and satisfactory ground of hope, and thus justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. O the littleness of our minds that would attach the spotted and tattered rag of human righteousness to the glorious and splendid robe of our incarnate and divine Redeemer—that would cast in our miserable works, as a make-weight to turn the scale in our favour. Oh wretched infatuation, that would for the sake of clinging to a straw, leave hold of the life boat of the Gospel. There must be misgivings in such a course even now.—At times there must be, without this doctrine, agonizing distress, and horrors of conscience in this life, and what will it be when every refuge of lies is swept away!

Justification by faith is CONNECTED WITH RIGHT VIEWS OF EVERY OTHER TRUTH. The false views of the Romanists on justification give rise to indulgences, masses for the dead, Purgatory, the intercession of the saints, the merit of works, worship of images, relics, celibacy, pilgrimage, and the whole mass of the corruptions of Popery. If I am to be saved by my own goodness in all or in part, well may every kind of superstition be multiplied to bolster up a false hope. Here is the root of that poisonous tree which spreads such a baneful influence through Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, and every Catholic country, as to wither and blast all that is holy and excellent in the fairest portions of our globe. Let free justification be proclaimed, and all Babylon shall fall before the life-giving doctrine, and truth and righteousness shall spring forth before the nations. For from free justification branches out every other scriptural doctrine, in just proportion and beauty. Though sinners are acquitted; yet it is by such a stupendous sacrifice, that the honour of the Divine Government is not merely maintained, but advanced and illustrated. The Law of God, in all its extent and spirituality, is established. The purity, justice, holiness, and love of God are brightly displayed; the evil of sin, and its

tremendous consequences are strongly exhibited; the most powerful motives to the fear and love of God are presented to the human mind. As men's minds are clear on this point, so will their views of other truths be distinct and evangelical. Confusion here will make all the rest of our sentiments obscure and unscriptural. This is one grand connecting link in that chain of doctrine which reaches from eternity to eternity. *Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son . . . whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified.* (Rom. viii.)

Justification by faith is THE REAL SPRING OF RIGHT OBEDIENCE. We are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Separated from him we can do nothing. But he has received the Holy Spirit, which he bestows in connexion only with this doctrine. Thus he bestowed the miraculous gifts of the Spirit; as the Apostle appeals to the Galatians. *This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* Gal. iii. 2. and thus we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Gal. iii. 14. Besides, look at the obvious tendency of each doctrine. If I seek to be justified by works, how can gratitude and ardent love have free scope, and what obedience which does not spring from love can be acceptable? The law which I have broken, and obedience to which God cannot but require, stirs up a constant enmity of heart against Him. But justification by faith is founded on Christ, who is our peace—He has abolished in his flesh the enmity—God, who for this gave his only begotten Son, is reconciled to me—is my most bountiful Benefactor, is my most loving friend; I feel nothing but obligations of the strongest force to him. If I am to be justified by works, I view God as an Exactor, as an austere hard Master, as a severe Judge.—I fear, but I cannot love. *Now love is the fulfilling of the law, and love freely flows from the sense of boundless benefit and blessing; I resist harshness, I will not yield to power, I melt at once under love. We love him because he first loved us.* If we have much forgiven, we love much; if we have but little (in our own notion and foolish imagination,) if we have but little forgiven, we shall love little. Justification by faith showing God to be our tender and loving Father, instead of the spirit of bondage, the spirit of adoption pervades the whole soul. Instead of servile fear, filial confidence, holy reverence, and sweet affections take possession of the heart. The mercies of God become the animating motive to present our bodies a living sacrifice to his service. *The law being dead wherein we were held, we serve in newness of spirit; being made free from sin, and become servants to God, we have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.* How important then is a doctrine which thus affects all our springs of action, is thus connected with all our religious acts, and only as we are influenced by the spirit of which, can any part of our obedience be acceptable to God.

Justification by faith WILL ALONE AVAIL US IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT. The Romanists generally represent the day of judgment as a day of terror. I do not wonder at this. If the best human being is to be justified before God by his works, well may he, who is still, at his best estate, a sinful creature, tremble to appear before the pure, holy, and heart-searching Jehovah. But the Scriptures bid the righteous to look forward to it as a day of deliverance, of joy, and of triumph (1 Cor. xv. 57, 1 Thess. iv. 12—18. 2 Thess. ii. 13, &c.) and faith in Christ, as our righteousness, enables us to look to it with calm and holy joy, and sweet assurance of a happy acceptance. (Luke ii. 29, 30. 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.) True, we shall be judged according to our works, and the works of the righteous will then be declared to prove their faith in Christ Jesus, (Matt. xxv. 35—40.) and to proportion their reward; (Gal. vi. 6—10.) but the ground of acceptance then is faith in their Lord, *whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.* This made even the devoted St. Paul count all but loss that, as he says, *I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.* Phil. iii. 8—11. Viewing the freedom of his justification, and the blessed effects of this doctrine already produced in his heart and life, by the power of the Spirit, in love to God and love to man, the Christian can, in his brighter moments, with a holy confidence and a joyful anticipation, look forward to that great day, and adopt every word of the Apostle, *We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him; herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.*

O when the storm of divine wrath is ready to break forth, and everlasting ruin impends over the wicked, how shall we shrink from standing in our own righteousness, how will all the vain schemes and devices of human wisdom utterly fail us, and how inexpressibly important will it be to have an interest in a method of salvation appointed by our Judge, who has already declared, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my words, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.* Finally, as most important of all, this doctrine EXULTANTLY GLORIFIES GOD. It illustrates all his perfections. How wonderful is that wisdom which finds a method of justly absolving the unjust! How pure that justice which demands such a substitute as the only Son of God, and requires him to die an accused death! How extensive that grace,

How extensive that grace,