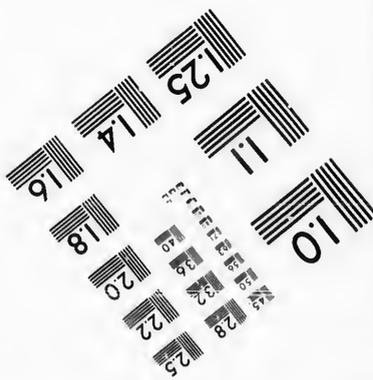
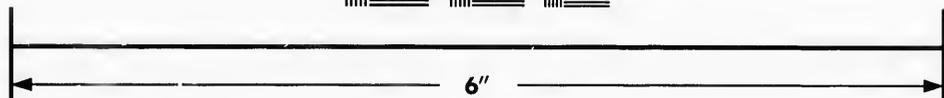
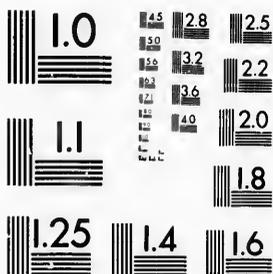


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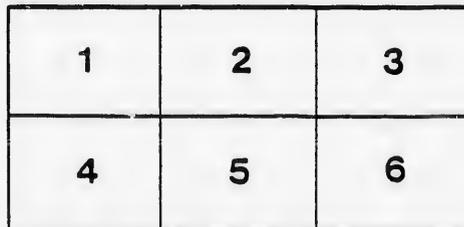
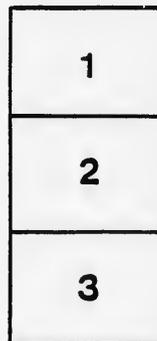
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HUMAN REASON
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THE PERFECT MORALITY.

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BY

JAMES WATSON, A.M.

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1885.

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PREFACE.

The following discourse was delivered to the PRESBYTERIAN SYNOD of MONTREAL and OTTAWA, at Cornwall, Ontario, on the twelfth day of May, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-five. Venturing to think that it sets forth the most important truth in a form adapted to the present time, the author has caused a few hundred copies to be printed, partly for his own use, and partly for public sale.

Modern education being in a high degree naturalistic, persons of literary, scientific and philosophic taste, are often inclined, with a curious mixture of timidity and arrogance, to shrink from the christian religion as if it did not belong to humanity. An attentive perusal of the following hints may, with the blessing of God, excite some doubters to more serious inquiry; restrain the hastiness of the proud; confirm the faith and strengthen the heart of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; in fine, it may help to deepen and extend the persuasion that no human culture can be complete without the all-important element of vital christianity. No man ought in the name of reason and liberty to dispute the authority of perfect truth, or refuse the benefit of its saving virtue. An honest and good heart, readily attracted by the beauty and awed by the majesty of "the truth as it is in Jesus," will ingenuously discern all the manifold signs of his presence and supremacy.

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LUKE XII, 57.

“ Yea, and why even of yourselves do ye not judge what is right.”

A hypocritical people pretended that they desired more evidence to remove their unbelief, but our Lord told them that there was evidence enough before them, if only they were disposed to discern it. “ And he said also to the people, when ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, there cometh a shower ; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, there will be heat ; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth, but how is it that ye do not discern this time ? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right ? ” The right was set before them, and they had some ability to discern it, but they lacked the desire.

So is it with unbelievers still, who often pique themselves on the superior activity and penetration of their understandings, yet continue in doubt of the truth and obligation of the christian religion. “ Among the subjects now being discussed,” say they, “ with a keenness and searching rigour unknown in former times, are questions so fundamental as the existence and personality of God, and the existence and immortality of the human soul. Reason is doing its work thoroughly, it is digging down to the very

foundations of religion, with the full and passionate determination that the faith of the future, be it neo-christianity or any other, shall be founded on a rock, not on a quicksand. The Reformation of the nineteenth century is an infinitely more portentous phenomenon than its forerunner of the sixteenth. It is no mere reform. The question now is, whether christianity shall continue to exist, even with such radical changes as will make it virtually a new thing; or whether it shall be replaced by an altogether new edifice, built upon a scientific foundation of positive verifiable truth."

Such talk is common and very cheap: and too many are puffed up by it, so that this synodal discourse may be neither out of time nor out of place if it discuss the claims of reason and right,—of human reason and perfect morality.

HUMAN REASON.

I. It exists. Of himself man can judge. Hence it is clear as consciousness that we are endowed by nature with a faculty of reason, thought, knowledge. There is evidence of this which the human mind cannot conscientiously reject. It is certainly true, we know it.

Yet the possibility of knowledge is often questioned. Not that the facts of knowledge are disputed; but the belief in existence which they imply is challenged. So that we are sometimes told, in the name of modesty to abandon all positive affirmation and meekly confess ourselves hopelessly ignorant.

It might have been expected that the glare of illuminism would be followed by the night of obscurantism. At any rate, we know that David Hume and Immanuel Kant came after Lord Herbert and Matthew Tindal. First too much was claimed for human reason and then too little. Infidels, unwilling to receive the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, sought to excuse their unbelief either by alleging the sufficiency of unaided reason for the guidance of life, or by pretending that the human understanding could not rightfully assent to any thing as certainly true.

Some had ventured to think that certainty of knowledge originated in the bodily senses. Others remarked that much more intelligence was given forth by the intellect than came to it from the bodily senses. Most admitted that if we would find the whole human origin of knowledge we must take into account the entire inner sense of consciousness and impute to man a native power of thinking truthfully, prior to trial and experience. According to Leibnitz "Reason pure and bare, distinguished from experience, has only to do with truths independent of the senses," whilst "Reason consisting in the enchainment of truths naturally attained by the human mind has a right to connect also those which experience furnishes to it, in order to draw mixed conclusions." Truths of reason he represents as of two sorts: first, those called *eternal* truths, which are absolutely necessary, so that their opposite implies a contradiction; and second, those which may be called *positive* because they constitute the laws which God has pleased

to give to nature, or depend on them. This, however, was a light too clear to agree with the sceptic's love of obscurity. He preferred to urge that human reason is, either altogether illusive, or at best only a law to itself and void of any authority higher than that of rational self-will.

Reason is neither illusive nor unwarranted. It carries its vouchers in its very nature, and its dictates cannot be rejected with impunity. Its veracity is abundantly confirmed by experience. Its authority is inherent; and this appears the more evident when we observe its right to command the will. "God" we confess, "hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined, to good or evil." Being voluntary agents we act freely; not always with deliberation, yet always spontaneously. But we ought also to act rightly. As in mathematics we are bound by the principles of arithmetic and geometry, in logic by the necessary conditions of thought, and in physics by the laws of force, so in morals we are bound by the rule of right. This, indeed, does not necessitate obedience, but it is obligatory, so that we cannot transgress it without sin. In fact, its authority over us we spontaneously, and often deliberately, assert; approving ourselves if we obey, condemning ourselves if we disobey. Hence, many acknowledging the authority of practical reason to legislate, have been disposed to regard the will as necessarily just and good. But will and reason do not necessarily agree. They

are often in conflict, and will is always *wrong* when it is not sustained by right reason.

Framing empirical and arbitrary notions of space and duration, and adopting them as necessary conditions of thought, many thinkers feign manifold contradictions of reason and become so bewildered in their imaginations, that they deem faith in objective truth to be impossible without violating the fundamental laws of human intelligence. But there is no conflict between the genuine dictates of reason and the belief of evident objective truth. As evidence is the criterion of truth, so it is the light of reason and the ground of certitude. The human understanding indeed is finite and therefore cannot fully comprehend the infinite. This is altogether too high to be perfectly known by us; yet we know it in part.

The range of human reason is very wide, extending as it does, not only to "things seen and temporal," but to things "unseen and eternal." As perception of the outer world and consciousness of self, awake naturally in the human mind, so does the knowledge of God. This knowledge is not originally the result of abstraction and imagination. It is the spontaneous outcome of the thinking power within us. We are born to it. Essentially metaphysical and theological our soul of itself asserts instinctively the existence of God. Having a native sense of God and an innate tendency to recognize Him, human nature contradicts itself if it say, there is no God. The denial of God contravenes the fundamental law and testimony

of reason. Men, indeed, show a strong desire to deny God, and they act very much as if the thought of their heart were there is no God; but in this they sin heinously and become self-condemned; for there is in them a conscience ever ready to rebuke their error and punish their impiety. Pearson on the Creed spoke forcibly when he said, "let Caligula profess himself an atheist, and with that profession hide his head, or run under his bed, when the thunder strikes his ears, and lightening flashes in his eyes; those terrible works of nature put him in mind of the power, and his own guilt of the justice of God, whom, while in his wilful opinion he weakly denieth, in his involuntary action he strongly asserteth. So that a deity will be granted or extorted, and where it is not acknowledged it will be manifested. Only unhappy is that man who denies him to himself, and proves him to others; who will not acknowledge his existence, of whose power he cannot be ignorant." Men may imagine a God to themselves as they please. They may conceive of him as a possible or necessary Being without attributes; they may clothe him with the properties of the finite universe; they may describe him as an absolute idea ever coming and going in their own mind, or in nature; they may speak of him as an endless process of development; they may look on him as an infinite and eternal energy; they may picture him as an image reflected in the shifting mirror of their own fancy; they may suppose him to be the essence and virtue of humanity; or they may exhibit him as the

work of their own hands, "saying to a stock, Thou art my father, and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth." But all idols are an abomination in the sight of the Living God, before whom the human conscience instinctively trembles, as in the presence of its Almighty Creator and Lord.

In thinking of God we should attend to the relations in which we are connected with him. We are dependent on him for our existence. His will is law to us and we are the subjects of his government. His absolute perfection claims our utmost reverence and love: ungodliness in us is sin of the greatest enormity and deserving the severest condemnation. Without his mercy we should be forever wicked and miserable. Thus related to God, and feeling deeply, as we ought, that, whether we will or not, we have truly to do with him, we shall be convinced that there is awful reality in the existence of the supreme being. Our idea of him, being felt to be in its foundation not the product of our imagination, or the creature of our will, but a natural knowledge derived from God himself, our hearts will own to a sense of his existence, like the intuitive assurance which we have of our own identity and the world's actuality. Living in conscious affinity with him who "teacheth man knowledge," we shall be quite sure, both that "he is," and that he is in converse with us.

It would be preposterous in us to boast, as some have presumed to do, that we can discern the grandeur of the visible heavens and admire the sublimity of the

moral law, yet affirm that there are no marks by which we can know the Almighty. "Thus saith the LORD, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."—(JER. ix. 23, 24).

Our sinfulness has vastly increased our need of divine help. Perplexed by guilt, enslaved by depravity, troubled by the present and afraid of the future, we need a great salvation from Him against whom we have sinned. That salvation we could not ourselves find out. The law of nature, adapted to man in his original state of innocence and sufficient then for his direction, now convicts us of sin and shows that we cannot be saved from deserved woe, except by a miracle of grace. Whether there were such a miracle reserved for us in the mind of God, who could tell? It was a mystery hid in the counsel of God's will, which he alone could reveal. To say that the Almighty must provide for the wellbeing of his rebellious children, as if he were the slave of a passionate parental fondness, is as bad as to say that he *could* not exercise mercy in consistency with justice. If we were to receive the needed light we must depend for it upon the authority of divine wisdom.

It is false to say that reason and authority are radically opposed to each other. There is authority

in reason itself; else there would be no right of private judgment and no obligation to think truthfully. Spurious authority reason spurns; true authority reason honors. It is reasonable to believe on the authority of men; much more so to believe on the authority of God, who cannot lie. It is our highest duty to hear his word and govern ourselves by the intimations of his will, in whatever way they may be given to us. We should be held guilty of the most wretched ingratitude and imprudence, if under the pretence of any impossibility, or improbability, or disagreeableness, we refused to believe a supernatural communication bearing the marks of a divine testimony and revealing to us the great salvation. The fact is, that the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is holy, has, in his unspeakable goodness, condescended to meet the terrible exigency of human reason by the revelation of the "new covenant in Christ's blood." Christianity is God's way of human salvation. Let all men use their judgment and make due trial of the glorious Gospel, as they ought, and they will find in the Lord Jesus every thing that they need; they will find in Him what imperfect and abused reason could never realise,—righteousness, rational perfection, the perfect morality.

THE PERFECT MORALITY.

II. There is nothing better than morality. Only all morality is not equally good. It is reason's duty to choose the perfect; a morality not godless and soulless, not christless, but thoroughly christian.

1. *Not godless and soulless.*

That men averse to God should doubt the existence of immortal souls is not strange. God being the father of our spirits, we cannot see any ground for their existence if he be left out of account. Nor is it much to be wondered at, if, pretending to be ignorant of God and immortal souls, some men at the same time admit the moral capability of the human race and advocate moral improvement. They abhor the knowledge of God and of godlike souls; yet they themselves have souls endowed by nature with conscience. Supposing themselves to live in and for this world alone, they still feel a sense of duty prompting them to do things morally good and to refrain from things morally evil; and they anticipate consequences corresponding to their actions as right or wrong. Very defective however, must that morality be which neglects God, depreciates the human soul and looks not beyond the life of the body in the present world. So loaded with falsehood, injustice and unkindness, so narrow in its sympathies, and so feeble in its aspirations, it deserves very little respect. Mere positivists, keeping out of view the absolute perfection of God, are apt to maintain that moral law is determined arbitrarily, that there is no steady rule by which moral character can be judged, and that in fact there is no fixed character of morality at all. Resolved to learn only from partial experience the positive law prevailing in the universe, they doubt if the order of evolution in existence be directed by perfect morality. The moral origin and

constitution of the universe are hid from them, and must ever be so till in the supreme law to which the whole creation is subject they recognize the manifestation of that sovereign will which is invariably guided by perfect wisdom. We are not competent to appreciate all the legislation of God ; but whether we can discern the propriety and utility of his ordinances, or not, we may rest assured that the Holy One knows his own mind and will do all things according to the rectitude of his eternal nature.

2. *Not Christless.*

A Jewish Scribe having asked, which is the great commandment in the law, the Lord Jesus answered him :—"The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel ; the Lord our God is one Lord ; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely, this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." Kant, the advocate of the categorical imperative and a loveless morality, said with reference to the two great commandments : "It is only the practical love which is meant in that summary of all laws. In this sense, to love God signifies to do all his commandments gladly ; and to love the neighbour signifies to perform gladly all duties toward him." Comte, who laid so much stress on "a spontaneous sociability of human nature," affirmed that "when the morality of an advanced society bids us love our neighbours as ourselves, it embodies, in the best way,

the deepest truth, with only such exaggeration as is required in the formation of a type, which is always fallen short of in practice." These two men, looking at human nature from different points of view, observed a radical evil in its present character, which rendered sincere obedience to the perfect moral law impracticable. Yet they professed to expect that in course of time the human race would become perfectly good without the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. All, indeed, who think that the precept of the moral law is the only thing very valuable in christianity slight Christ, and imagine that, without Him there is virtue enough in humanity to raise mankind to perfection. The obstacle presented by guilt and depravity, they suppose, would gradually disappear as men advanced in self-culture. Rather than despair of a good issue to human effort, unbelievers, who discredit miracles wrought by God, prefer to trust in the idea of an omnipotence in the human will. But what in the natural course of things, can we reasonably expect from the development of humanity under the dominion of sin? Natural causes operating according to natural laws, the sinful heart will become more sinful. "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." There is no good ground for hope that men left to themselves would ever work out their own redemption and rise to a life of true holiness. Thanks be to God, our Saviour, the greatest benefit Christ has conferred on us is, not the republication of the moral

law of nature, but the revelation of the divine philanthropy. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

3. *Thoroughly Christian.*

The end to be reached being set before us in the two great commandments, the question is, how can such perfection be attained? It is easy to say, be ye perfect, respect and develop in yourselves the character of humanity, respect and realize the order conceived by human reason, make yourselves worthy of eternal happiness; you ought and therefore you can. Such maxims require moral virtue; they do not impart it. We are not warranted to argue, men ought and therefore they will. Duty and choice do not necessarily agree. Men pursue their course of life freely, doing good or evil as they pleased. Alas! they have abused their natural liberty, incurred condemnation, and alienated their heart from righteousness. Their own conscience convicts them of sin. Instead of being disposed to yield a willing obedience to the moral law, they are of themselves ready to dread, hate, and break it. Their circumstances have become unfavourable and the lawlessness within renders sincere obedience impracticable. The fault of this lies, not in the original constitution of human nature, but in the wilful corruption of human character. The great question, then, which moralists should solve is, how can human will be rectified? Too often they shirk that question, or give it

an evasive answer, even when Christianity is at hand to instruct them.

By Christianity we mean that which is revealed in the everlasting Gospel ; not any of the counterfeits, ancient or modern, which are offered as substitutes for it. Incarnation of divinity without a divine person, redemption without a ransom, justification without a perfect righteousness, a covenant of peace without a proper atoning sacrifice, a good conscience without an adequate vindication of moral law, a pure heart without faith in divine love, and such like incoherent fancies may suit those who resolve their belief into a feeling devoid of thought ; but a sound understanding, discerning that truth is not self-contradictory, can no more find rest in meaningless mysticism, or in vague idealism, than in the romantic theory of the soul's salvation by the physical power of Sacraments. The christianity by which men are made holy is found in the genuine Gospel of Jesus Christ. "Sanctify them through thy truth : thy word is truth."

The fundamental privilege of justification by means of faith in the substitutionary work of the Son of God sets a man right in his relation to God and brings him under the internal direction of a holy principle of life which effectually inclines him to every duty. Moral dependence on God is thus established, and the believer endowed outwardly and inwardly with every thing requisite for spiritual progress, perseveres till he arrive at perfection. Deriving his virtue from the Lord

in whom he is justified, he grows in spiritual strength and beauty and usefulness, so that God is glorified in him.

“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ establishes the whole moral law, and consequently must be itself most highly moral in obligation as in efficacy. It may be called positive as instituted by the sovereign will of God; it is moral, however, as founded on the eternal holiness of his character. The obligation to believe in Jesus Christ is laid upon us by the revelation which God has given of his Son. As rational creatures we ought to believe what God tells us. As sinful creatures we ought to repent and believe the Gospel. This, in the circumstances in which we are placed is the fundamental part of moral duty, without which we can neither worship God nor do good to men, as we ought. The aversion of the careless, the proud and the despondent to faith in Christ accounts for their unbelief, but does not alter their duty. The obligation to believe depends not on the character and will of man, but upon the authority of God. In mercy as well as in equity, he has commanded us to believe in his Son; and if we refuse the moral law will condemn us as guilty of the greatest sin.

The order of christian duties and virtues should be carefully observed. Flattering themselves that they are not altogether wicked, unbelievers are ready to presume on the merit of their endeavours and expect

to be rewarded for it at last. Destroy their pride of worthiness and they fall into despair. It is not so with genuine believers in Christ. Conscious of the desperate wickedness discovered in their hearts they at the same time trust in the perfect Saviour for pardon, purity and peace. The love of Christ rules in their hearts and they henceforth live, not to themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again. Faith, unfeigned in them, works by love out of a pure heart and a good conscience.

The degree of holiness attainable in this world is various. Much is left to depend on our own diligence. A free obedience being sought, ample room is given for deliberation and choice. Temptations come from society, from Satan, from the inferior principles of our nature which are not in themselves wrong, and what is worst of all, from the remains of indwelling sin. Hence the life of faith in the Son of God is maintained with difficulty. The Holy Spirit, who is given to believers and who works in them mightily, could raise them to perfection at once; but he wills that they fight their way to it with his help. "Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." In covenant with God through Christ, under grace, and well disposed though imperfect, we obtain the pardon and renewal which we continually need till we enter into glory.

Why do not all men cultivate this thoroughly christian morality? They need it. They cannot educe it from natural principles. They cannot create it.

But they are capable of it and they may acquire it by fellowship with Jesus Christ. Why then do they not all possess it, as they ought? Because they do not all desire it. Men are prone to love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. The only effectual remedy for this is regeneration by the Holy Spirit of God : in whom we must principally trust for the moral transformation of mankind. "Ye must be born again."

CONCLUSION.

Some in this advanced age of the world would have us to think that the reformation of the nineteenth century is a change from Evangelical Christianity to unbelief and they know not what ; just as many imagined that the flood of infidelity which came to a head in the eighteenth century and broke on the beginning of the present must have at last drowned out the life of the Church of Christ. In reality the reformation of the nineteenth century is a change from infidelity to faith ; and this not merely the faith of modern romanticism and idealism, but the faith of common sense, and what is best of all, the faith of the Gospel. The progress of evangelical religion in this century, at home and abroad, has been very great, and it is sure to continue till the whole world be turned to the Lord. The vitality of the christian religion can be verified experimentally by every one who chooses to comply with the gracious invitation of the Saviour : "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon

you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Divinely humane in its nature and cosmopolitan in its tendency, the genius of christianity seems to be represented in the Book of Revelation, as an angel which the Apostle John saw " fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, fear God and give glory to him ; for the hour of his judgment is come, and worship Him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." The noise and display of infidelity fill many with a dread of consequences, which restrains them from openly denying the Gospel ; but their faith in Christ is hypocritical. They would fain be at once infidels and christians. They would be glad to enjoy the benefits of the Redeemer's reign, if only he would not claim their hearts. But the reformation which our Lord conducts being spiritual, reason itself demands that we honour Him sincerely. Love to the Son of God is, indeed, the sum and test of perfect morality.

" When first the Rhodian's mimic art array'd
The queen of beauty in her Cyprian shade,
The happy master mingled on his piece
Each look that charmed him in the fair of Greece.
To faultless nature true, he stole a grace
From every finer form and sweeter face ;
And as he sojourn'd on the Ægean isles,
Woo'd all their love, and treasur'd all their smiles ;
Then glow'd the tints, pure, precious, and refined,
And mortal charms seem'd heavenly when combin'd !
Love on the picture smiled ! Expression pour'd
Her mingling spirit there—and Greece ador'd !"

In these last times and as christians we can do much better than that. Look unto Jesus, the image of the invisible God. "He is thy Lord ; and worship thou him."—AMEN.



