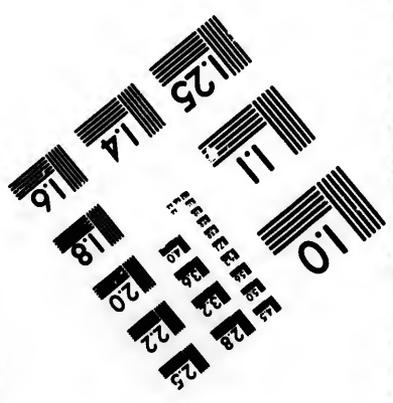
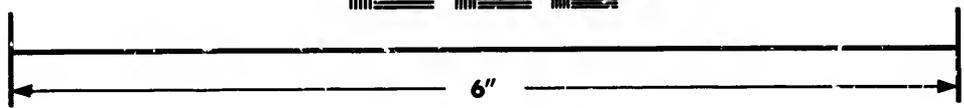
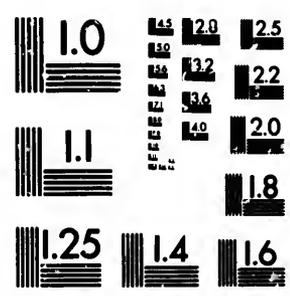


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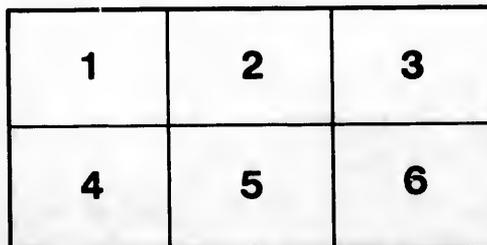
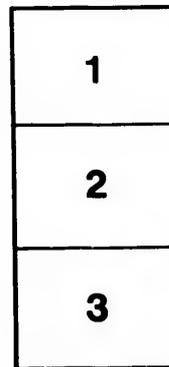
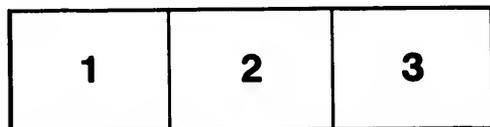
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# Pharisaism

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A SERMON

PREACHED IN

CHALMERS \* CHURCH, \* QUEBEC

ON SABBATH, 23RD DEC., 1888

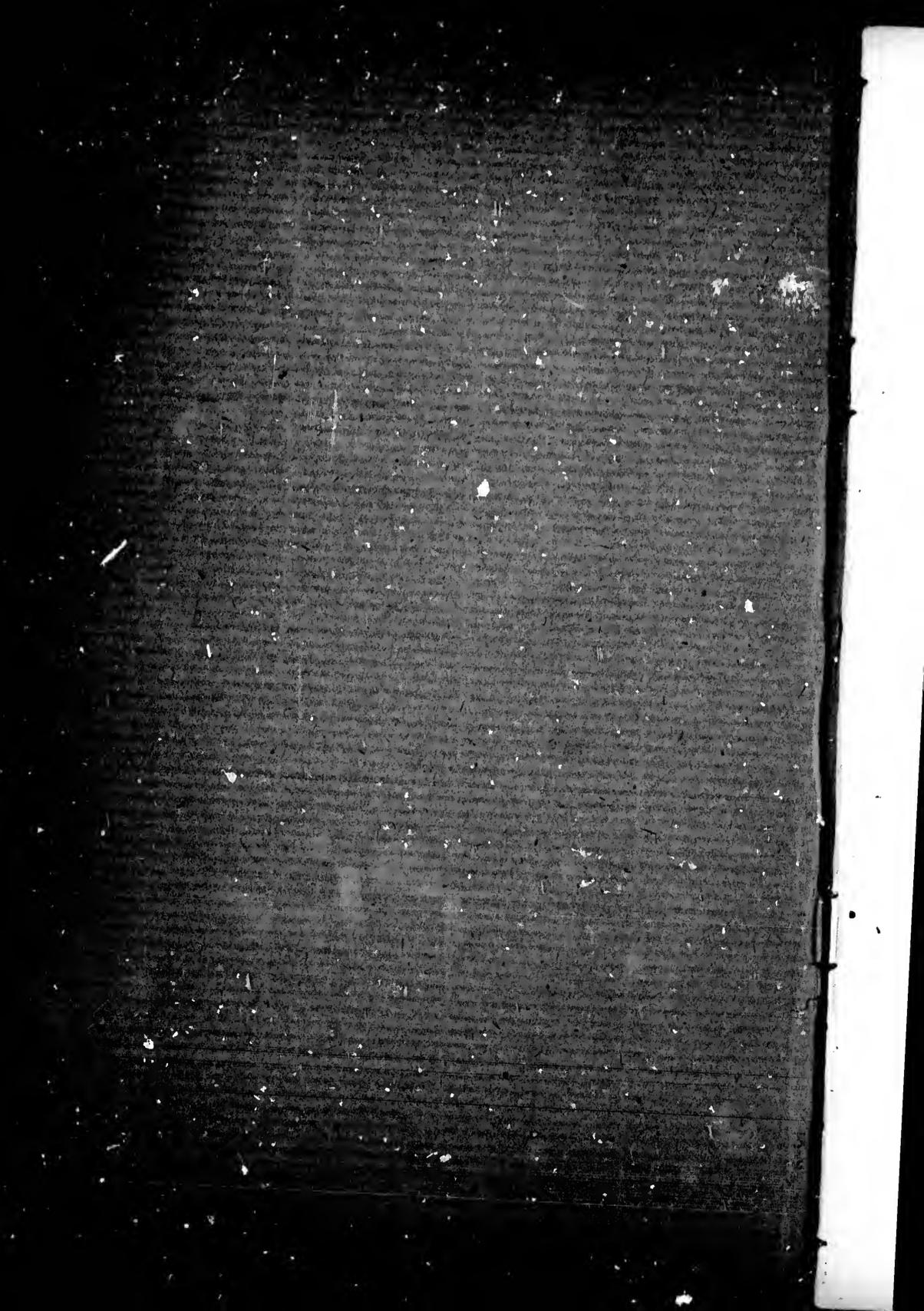
BY

THE REV. THOS. MAGIDAM

*with 13 ay*  
STRATHROY, ONT.

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# PHARISAISM :

A Sermon preached in Chalmers Church,

Quebec, on Sabbath, 23rd Dec.,

✦ 1888. ✦

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*A special desire having been expressed by some of those who heard it, to have this sermon in permanent form, the author acceded to their request, and it is now printed for their own and their friends' improvement and instruction.*

*Quebec, January, 1889.*

YE SERPENTS, YE GENERATION OF VIPERS, HOW CAN  
YE ESCAPE THE DAMNATION OF HELL ?

23. 33

—Matthew, 23:33.

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These terrible words form the culmination of a series of awful denunciations poured out in swift and startling succession upon the Scribes and Pharisees, throughout this whole chapter. "Over their guilty heads, he rolls crash on crash of moral indignation, in a very thunder storm of utter condemnation." Nor was this tone adopted by Jesus on a single occasion only, but can be traced along his whole ministry ; while even before that we find John the Baptist summing up his estimate of them in the phrase " generation of vipers. "

What was it that called forth such torrents of frightful invective from the lips of the gentle gracious Saviour ?

A brief sketch of the History, principles and spirit of the Pharisees, may help towards an intelligent answer to this question, and afford at the same time some very practical lessons for use in the present day.

With regard to the Scribes it need only be remarked that they are associated with the Pharisees in the scope of these denunciations for the reason that most of them were Pharisees. As transcribers and teachers of the law, the Scribes constituted a profession ; the Pharisees formed a great national party, composed of all classes. Many Pharisees were not Scribes ; a few, but very few, Scribes were not Pharisees. Hence we need only concern ourselves with the Pharisees.

Historically, we find this great party beginning to assume a distinctive existence in the period between the close of the Old Testament and the time of Christ. Palestine had been subjugated by Alexander the Great, and remained long under the sway of a family of Syrian Greek kings, known as the Seleucidæ, who succeeded the Macedonian Conqueror in that division of his empire. It was part of

the policy of these rulers to assimilate the Jews as far as possible with their other subjects. With this object, they strove to eliminate these elements of national life and feeling which were fitted to maintain their solidarity as a distinct people. They endeavoured to spread Greek customs, and to introduce the Greek language, very much as the Germans are seeking to Germanize the French speaking provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to day. These efforts were partially successful. An increasing number of the Jews gradually began to conform to the manners of their masters, and to use their language to such an extent that the books of the New Testament had to be written in Greek as the tongue familiar to the greater part of the people. We find reference to this process of Grecising the Jews in the books of the Maccabees which, though apocryphal, are yet historical records. There, this period is described in one place as "the mingling," in another as "the time of the mingling." Time-serving wordlings, men of mere expediency, "trimming" politicians, and people of no religious or patriotic feeling, readily adopted Greek ways. Of these were the Saducees, and afterwards the Herodians. But there was a more earnest section of the nation who held firmly to their own religion, and time-honoured national usages. This was the religious and patriotic party, corresponding very closely to the Covenanters of Scotland. With them the national interests were bound up with religion, as adherence to the national religion in Scotland was intimately associated with the popular struggle for civil rights against the despotic efforts of the Stuarts. All that was best, manliest, most earnest, most patriotic, most religious, among the people, refused to conform. From this, apparently, that party got the name Pharisees, which means, according to the best authorities "separated," or "non-conformist." Indeed the word Pharisee is almost identical with "non-conformist" not only in literal, but also in historical meaning. The Pharisees were the non-conformists, the nationalists, the patriots, the religious and orthodox party among the Jews; and like the English non-conformists and Scottish Covenanters, originally constituted the best element of the nation. Politically, their position corresponded to the party of Italian unity a few years ago, when, filled with hatred of Austrian domination, they hugged to their hearts the memories of Italy's former greatness, struggled against imported customs, and sighed for delivrance from the foreign yoke. While the Sadducees were ready to adapt themselves to the necessities of the times, and discarded, without a pang of regret, their old national usages, the Pharisees clung tenaciously to every thing Hebrew. Theirs was at first a splendid conservatism which attached itself to the best traditions of the religious and national life of their fathers.

So far as we have gone, we can only admire the Pharisees ; and it may appear surprising that this loyal, religious party should be assailed with such unmeasured condemnation by Jesus. But we shall immediately find the explanation. Conservatism, whether political or religious, has its peculiar dangers ; just as Liberalism has in other directions. If conservatism, even of what is good, refuse to adapt itself to changing conditions, and persist in hugging in its bosom, as a sacred fetich, the petrified remains of principles once instinct with throbbing life and power, it rapidly becomes a danger which may menace the very existence of Church or State. That was what happened with the originally useful and admirable conservatism of the Pharisees. It passed through a process of gradual degeneration, till, in New Testament times, it had become justly liable to the fearful indictments hurled against it by our Saviour.

It may afford a fresh and interesting line of thought to trace the stages of this process of degeneration, and thus to study the genesis of the corruption into which it ultimately led.

*I. We find the germinal element of its decay in a gradual, and almost necessary, transition from admiration of the past, which was entirely worthy, into an idolatry of that past which produced utter incapacity for a proper adjustment to the living present.*

As national humiliation was piled on humiliation, their untameable patriotism was driven to feed itself on the glorious memories of former days. Their national pride, baffled, galled, and maddened, by the bitter iron of a foreign yoke, eagerly reached back into the splendid past to extract nutriment for itself from the historic triumphs of their earlier national life. Hungrily they feasted this unconquerable pride on the theoretic privileges accorded them as Abraham's children and the chosen people of God ; on the sublimity and perfection of their national code of Mosaic legislation ; on the brilliant military achievements of David's Kingdom, and on the splendid commercial and industrial prosperity of Solomon's empire. In the thought of these things they found their only consolation now. But here lay the secret root of their danger. There is no grander heritage for man, family, nation, or Church, than that of thrilling memories of a great and noble history. But when that history becomes an idolatry and ceases to be an inspiration, it dwarfs the life, destroys elasticity, kills out energy, and fosters narrowest unreasoning bigotry. It paralyses all capacity for fruitful adaptation to the altering conditions of life and action produced by the incessantly changing movements of Providence. When a man begins to live mainly in the past of his youthful days, decay

has surely set in ; senility has commenced ; the promise of his life is gone ; its fruitfulness and enterprise ended ; he is already withering up. When a family doats merely on its ancestry its sun will soon set. We see the operation of its stunting, arresting principle in all regions of human life. The poet, musician, painter, sculptor, architect, who ties himself slavishly to an antique school of art, however splendid, infallibly cramps his genius, and forfeits original power. No one can study the period of the *Renaissance*, in any of these departments of art, without perceiving how certainly that "backward look" enfeebles the boldness of the forward flights of free genius. So is it with nations. It was notably so with the Pharisees, who constituted the bulk of the Jewish nation. With eye fixed on the past, they refused, with a passionate impatience, to conceive of a future which should not be an exact reproduction of antiquity. If the results hoped for are to be grander, the lines on which they are shaped must be precisely the same. Messianic times must be a glorified duplicate of Mosaic or Davidic times. Hence it came about that the Pharisees learned to pass more and more lightly over the scriptures that prophesied of a suffering Messiah, robed only in moral power and spiritual majesty, and exercising only a spiritual sway over the inward hearts and lives of men ; and brooded more and more intently on such descriptions as might be construed into predictions of a Messiah excelling David in material power, who should dash the yoke off their neck, and set up with unparalleled splendour an earthly throne of David at Jerusalem. With successive generations this tendency strengthened, till by the time of Christ it had hardened into a narrow inveterate bigotry which no evidence could shake. Need we wonder at the fierce rage with which they met the claims of the Carpenter of Nazareth who made so little of those material and external splendours which to them had become the chief attraction of the Messianic hope? Pharisaism, with its backward look, and stunted conceptions, had no place for the development of new forces, in new and unfamiliar, unhistoric lines. Hence its bitter opposition to that moral and spiritual revolution which Christianity evoked. Itself a dead rigid thing, it must be broken up and perish under the clash of those newly evolved vital forces, which were destined to bring fresh life into humanity. The new wine must burst the old dried bottles. Wedded as it has become to the past, Pharisaism must be shivered in pieces to give place to the kingdom of Light, Liberty and Progress which is at hand. Hence in part the severity with which Christ struck at it as an irreconcilable antagonist of His Kingdom.

II. *This cramping Idolatry of the Past was the natural mother of that slavish dependence upon tradition against which our Saviour spoke so sternly as freezing up the living energies of the Divine word.*

In their idolatrous veneration of the past, they clung in timid helplessness to the opinions and decisions of the old expositors of the word; afraid to trust themselves to venture a single step beyond the interpretations of the rabbis. Those old explanations came practically to gain an authority superior to Scripture itself, because they were understood as determining its sense. Thus the Pharisees were charged by Christ with "making the Word of God of none effect through their traditions." (Mk. 7. 15.) We too are familiar with a similar process. Catholics reason from the decisions of Councils; Protestants, sometimes, from the definitions of creeds and confessions, till the teaching of Scripture is largely distorted. Not to instance the constantly extending deviation from Scripture of the former, we need only specify the remarkable change observable by every student of Protestant theology in the vigour, boldness and independence with which the Reformation leaders grappled at first hand with Scripture, as compared with the uncertainty of tread, and the timidity of mental grasp shown by the post-Reformation theologians.

But in addition to this sterility, necessarily resulting from a slavish regard for old opinions, we find that the errors and ~~effects~~ *defects* pertaining to them, become accentuated and magnified with the process of the ages, till some great convulsion shatters the traditional creed, and forces men to fresh and independent consideration of the inspired sources. Calvinism, for example, is sometimes presented in a way that would startle Calvin himself, by men who adopt his views as sound, and thinking it is proof of orthodoxy to stretch them to the utmost, distort those sublime principles of Divine sovereignty to a degree that over-rides the freedom of the human will, destroys responsibility, and narrows the full presentation of a free Gospel.

More than this. A creed that has been crystalized in traditional formulæ tends with inferior minds to become fossilized and petrified. Adopted without earnest identifying thought, and followed with subservient docility, the statements which originally embodied conceptions of truth throbbing with vital practical meaning, become mere dead terms, barren verbal propositions, which manacle the living, life-giving principles of the Divine word in fetters of iron. Men fall into a routine of religious conceptions which have not been verified by a vigorous process of personal investigation, experimental application, and individual appropriation. It often requires a wave of heretical opinion to sweep over the Church to awaken men's minds to the

power and richness and health of the Divine word. Men think themselves orthodox, when they are merely manipulating by a mechanical logic the several propositions of their creed. Even a sound creed adopted on trust, and repeated by rote, may be less fruitful of practical good than a defective creed which has been personally thought out, and has come to the birth after many a pang of sore intellectual and soul struggle, as a real personal possession. A sound creed may be a soulless creed. The crystalized formula must be vitalized by personal absorption and verification before it can be a living power. So long as a creed is fighting for existence it is a real thing to the minds and hearts of its adherents. But when it has passed beyond this stage the danger begins. The late John Stuart Mill, in his treatise on Liberty used language, to which thoughtful minds cannot refuse assent, however much at variance with that author on other points. Speaking of such accepted forms of doctrinal belief he says, "when it has come to be an hereditary creed, and to be received passively, not actively—when the mind is no longer compelled, in the same degree as at first, to exercise its vital powers on the questions which its belief presents to it, there is a progressive tendency to forget all of the belief, except the formularies, or to give it a dull and torpid assent, as if accepting it on trust dispensed with the necessity of realizing it in consciousness, or testing by personal experience; until it almost ceases to connect itself at all with the inner life of the human being. Then are seen the cases, so frequent in this age of the world as almost to form the majority, in which the creed remains as it were outside the mind, encrusting and petrifying it against all other influences addressed to the higher parts of our nature; manifesting its power by not suffering any fresh and living conviction to get in, but itself doing nothing for the mind and heart, except standing sentinel over them to keep them vacant." Alas, there is too much truth in this, and also in his further sneer that doctrines thus held are "chiefly - viceable to pelt adversaries with." Probably this language will recall to your minds the oft quoted lines:

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds."

There is truth in this. Earnest souls battling honestly with difficulties, (raised not by vanity or a spirit of intellectual sophistry seeking to cover faults of practice, but by experimental inability to harmonize the doctrines with the facts of consciousness, and the feasibilities of personal conduct,) are in a more hopeful state by far, than those who yield a lazy inoperative acceptance of the truth, which does not affect the life and character. To what a lamentable extent are accepted beliefs of truth—that has a direct and tremendous bearing on human

feeling and conduct, practically ignored. To deny bluntly from this place such doctrines as that of the Deity, the Atonement, Future Judgment, would startle every ear, and create a storm of just indignation; but is it not the case that to some the statement of these momentous doctrines, which to you are familiar platitudes, has ceased to awaken even a ripple of passing purpose to act in harmony with them, or to disturb consciences that have come to regard them as meaningless words, instead of living things? The spirit of our creed must be incorporated in our very being before it is to us an effective reality. The Pharisee not only adopted the errors of tradition; but having begun thus to adopt beliefs ready made, without personally testing them, out of deference to the authority of the fathers, he carried the process into the residue of sound scriptural belief which he entertained, until he evacuated it of its power over heart and life. In this aspect the Pharisee is not extinct, but sometimes sits in the pew, stands in the pulpit, and occupies the teacher's chair.

III. The next development of Pharisaism grows necessarily out of the last. *It magnified the externals of religion till it lost the inner spirit, and multiplied observances and prohibitions till it actually created occasions of sin.*

On the directly moral side, the Pharisees worked on the basis of a creed not absorbed into the very essence of their souls, and consequently ran morality and religion out to the surface. They attended to the letter, and not to the spirit. In seeking conformity of conduct to their formal beliefs, they overlooked the more vital importance of motive. To such as were not protected by a deep spiritual-mindedness, the Mosaic system offered some temptations in this direction. "The difference between the Old Covenant and the New was, that the former *prescribed*, the latter inspired . . . the former laid down the rules, the latter brought man's heart into a condition in which such rules became a part of his nature." (Lias 2 Cor. II. 6) Herein lies the grand distinction and superiority of the Christian dispensation over the Mosaic. The New Covenant directs our attention more to our *states* than to our *acts*. But the Pharisees lost sight of such spirituality as undoubtedly existed in the Mosaic system, and concentrated attention on acts, on doing, on outward conformities, rather than on states, on being, on inner harmony of soul. They thought the seventh commandment was kept, when its outward breach was avoided; but Christ told them that it was broken even by inward lust. They never dreamed that the spirit of the sixth commandment included hate in the heart as well as the actual crime of murder. They practically forgot that

the deeper reading of the whole law required to its right fulfilment a real love to God and man, over and above its outward observance. Thus they fell into an utter distortion of the proportionate heinousness of outward and inward sins. Sins of a flagrant fleshly kind they sternly denounced, but sins of the spirit little troubled them. Murder, adultery, theft, lying, neglect of ceremonial observances of religion, were sins visited with the heaviest penalties of their condemnation; but ambition, malice, envy, scorn, evil thinking, pride, avarice, covetousness, worldliness, selfishness, scarcely gave their consciences a moment's uneasiness, unless indeed they burst to the surface in some outbreak of a scandalous character. Are we free from this danger? We very properly cry shame on open breaches of the moral code, and grosser forms of sin; but do we minimize, and almost overlook sins of the spirit that burrow in our souls like cancers, and blacken them in God's sight sometimes more than sins which are visited with the sharpest condemnation of public opinion, and the severest censures of Church discipline? God forbid that we should extenuate the evil of the grosser forms of sin; but God forbid, not less, that we should conceal from ourselves the odiousness and danger of sins of heart, spirit, thought, temper and feeling. There are those who never transgress the rules of decorum, and who often severely denounce such as do, who are yet nursing in their hearts the very spirit that cast the wicked angels out of heaven. We may scorn the poor drunkard who soaks himself in liquor till the reason is dethroned; but may be soaking our own whole being in sordid worldliness, till God himself is dethroned, and our heart grows hard as adamant. Sometimes a clique of sanctimonious religionists may groan in pious phrase over the wickedness of those who practice dancing, card playing, theatre-going, horse racing, Sabbath-breaking and other forms of worldliness, who may themselves be, in the very act of deploring, expending as much spite, and nursing as much self-righteousness in their religiously phrased lamentations as would outweigh in the scales of Divine judgment, the whole catalogue of sins denounced. It is one of the tricks of a perverted conscience to fix our eye upon some outward form of transgression, and concentrate our attention, and expend our indignation on it, till we have no eye or condemnation for corroding inner vices. Severity against outward evils is the readiest way of diverting our attention from our own heart-sins, while it gives us the luxury of posing as abhorrent of vice, and at the same time of gratifying our malevolent passion for denunciation, and flattering our own sense of superior virtue. We can

"Compound for sins we are inclined to  
By damning those we have no mind to."

But in religion as in medicine we must remember that surface diseases, though most repulsive, are not always dangerous. In both cases too, the most efficacious remedy will probably be that which enters the blood and works from within; not an external application alone which may only send in the disease on more vital parts.

*the most*

But while dead to the spirit of God's word, and largely ignoring the evil of spiritual sins, the Pharisees ~~worked~~ industriously ~~over~~ the ground of external religion. Working intellectually from the basis of a series of formal beliefs, which had never been absorbed into their inner nature, they learned to treat the doctrines of their faith with the merely mechanical manipulation of a wretched and barren verbal dialectic. Like the school-men of the 14th century they reasoned, analyzed, and refined with a quibbling formal logic, by which they piled deduction on deduction and inference on inference, till they built up a system of moral casuistry of unparalleled, and often ridiculous minuteness. Scrupulous about the letter of the Scripture in its bearing on external conduct, they adopted a principle of interpretation known as "setting a hedge about the Law;" fencing it off as it were to prevent even an approach to the violation of it. When anything was commanded they tried to go a little beyond what was strictly required, to make sure of doing all. When anything was forbidden they enlarged the prohibition to make sure of doing nothing that was prohibited. In this way they fancied they would always "err on the safe side." This principle at first sight appears wise and commendable; but it was by it that they so extended the scope of the Law as to make it what the Apostle calls "a yoke" which they were not able to bear. Prohibitions and observances were so multiplied as to actually create endless occasions of sin. Allow me to quote some examples from which one is disposed to shrink, so foolish do they appear. To take instances regarding the Sabbath, we find that for fear of inferentially profaning the day by encouraging work, they would not eat an egg that had been laid on that day, or perhaps even the following day, because its production involved Sabbath labour! A man with a wooden leg must not go out on the Sabbath, because that would be carrying a burden! A person must not wear hob-nailed shoes on the Sabbath, or carry a handkerchief, or go out with a false tooth or a gold plug in the tooth, for that would also be carrying a burden! If a piece of wadding in the ear fell out, it must not be replaced, for that would be work! On similar principles it was forbidden to take an emetic, set a broken bone, or replace a dislocated joint on the holy day! But precaution must be taken against even an accidental breach of the Sabbath. Accordingly, a tailor must not go out with his needle on the day previous, lest he should forget and carry it during the sacred

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hours! These are specimens of an elaborate system of minute details of prohibitions and injunctions, covering every department of private, social and public life, which that puerile process of defining, subdividing, and atomizing the Divine Law produced. We may think such trifling too ridiculous for serious notice; but grave rabbis devoted their most strenuous thought to such frivolous refinements—all to make sure of erring on the safe side!

Now what was the effect of all this? By adding to the stringency and minute particularity of observance of the Divine Law, it really added to the Law, and thereby *manufactured a vast range of new possibilities of transgression*. Human life became so tied down by a multitude of petty regulations as to fetter all freedom of action by the constant fear of inferential transgression. A man could scarcely move without trampling on some precept. He was tripped up at every turn, till hope died out, conscience was irritated, and self-respect humiliated.

The difference between living a right life on these maxims and on those of purified inner motive, regulated by the general principles of the word, was like that of one practising manners from constant memory-reference to a book of etiquette, as compared with acting on motives of inbred politeness.

Is this tendency to enlarge the law by a structure of remote inferences entirely dead in our day? It is to be feared not. We find strong currents of feeling running in similar directions still. Do we not find many acts raised to the rank of sins, which Scripture carefully declines so to designate? Take the case of luxuries. Is there not a powerful tendency to regard ascetic abstinence as intrinsically superior in virtue to moderate indulgence? Are there not muttered indications of a desire to exclude from Church privileges those who use certain luxuries which are distasteful to a certain class of Christians? May it not be sometimes in the sphere of popular amusement, that we are inclined to show an ultra-protective spirit which narrows, more than God has done, the limits to which we may go without sin? The plausible maxim of erring on the safe side may become, in unwise hands, a dangerous instrument of restriction and intolerance. It provokes reaction too. Excessive strictness defeats itself, as we often see in family government. We do not always possess the right to enforce upon others what we may legitimately consider a law for our own consciences. Our Saviour himself plainly teaches that we must leave room for some diversity of action within a certain region of conduct. The Son of man made no pretence to ascetic severity.—He came eating and drinking. John the Baptist practiced the most rigid austerity—he came neither eating nor drinking. Yet no man dare find fault with Christ himself, while he throws his broad shield over John's very dif-

ferent practice. There is as much as an intimation that there is a sort of neutral sphere in which every man, up to a certain point is at liberty to follow the dictates of his own conscience, but must not make his practice a law to others. The modern Pharisee sometimes stretches the law too far, as did his ancient prototype, in pushing ~~influence~~ *influence* too boldly.

Up to the point we have reached we might attribute the errors of the Pharisees to narrowness of judgment, and deficiency of intellectual and spiritual insight. A blind idolatry of the past, a hide-bound traditionalism, a shallow externalism, and a burdensome system of petty prescriptions and restrictions, are scarcely in themselves evils of such moral turpitude as to account for the blighting scorn, and bitter invective which ever blazeth forth from Jesus against them. But advance a stage to the results which naturally and actually flowed from these principles, to the sad fruitage of these pernicious roots, and we shall cease to wonder at the terrible thunderbolt flung at the heads of the Pharisees in our text: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers; how can ye escape the damnation of Hell."

IV. *Two hideous vices were born of the system. Its natural Daughters were self-righteousness and sham-righteousness* (if the ugly word may be allowed to describe the ugly thing).

1. First-born is self-righteousness.

A religion which had worked itself to the surface of life under the operation of the causes we have been considering, and clothed itself in a web of outward forms, infallibly led those whose circumstances favoured a considerable success in outward conformity, to compare themselves complacently with others less successful. The consequence was an inflated sense of superior righteousness, and a corresponding contempt of other men. Hence our Lord puts into the mouth of the Pharisee in the temple, as descriptive of the spirit of the class the words: "God I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

Popular sentiment agrees with Scripture in regarding self-righteousness with contempt and abhorrence. The calm self-complacency of the self-righteous man, and his air of lofty superiority are repugnant to all. His supercilious contempt for others is offensive, while there is often a well-founded suspicion that the virtues he so ostentatiously professes are not always real. Such a man stalks about among his fellow-men wrapped in a mantle of self-sufficiency, with every feature and every gesture proclaiming, "I am holier than thou." Nothing more effectually kills out all generous sympathy with humanity, nothing more surely wraps the soul in narrowness and self-conceit.

But the self-righteous man carries his airs into the presence of God himself. Religion is honoured by his acknowledgement of it; the Church by his adhesion to it. That the Almighty should be other than pleased with such a man as he, never enters his mind. He is rich and increased with goods, and hath need of nothing. Hence our Saviour indicates the hopelessness of effecting any good on him: "They that are whole need not a physician but they that are sick." His soul is smitten with the blight of arrested development. So long as he is satisfied with his own goodness, improvement is simply hopeless. There is deep truth in Browning's words, "Man's good is knowing he is bad." Only when he learns like Paul that all his own righteousnesses are as "filthy rags," and counts them but loss, will he submit himself to the mercy of God, and cast himself humbly on his grace.

2. The worst fruit of Pharisaism, however, was and is what we have termed sham-righteousness or hypocrisy. That was the culmination of a vicious and hollow system. That was what called forth the most merciless castigations of Jesus: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (M. 23, 27.)

All the Pharisees were not hypocrites: men are often better than their system, and a large crop might be expected in every generation. The impossibility of conforming to all the requirements of their vast and endlessly detailed body of rules put them under powerful temptation to hide their short-comings, to make "clean the outside of the cup and of the platter," though within they might be "full of extortion and excess;" while blindness to the spirituality of the law left their consciences at ease in regard to inner sins, and the upgrowth of their ingenious but perverted and puerile dialectic enabled them to get round any precept the pressure of which might be inconvenient. To escape the stringency of their own rules, they employed all the resources of their subtle and sophistical ingenuity. The prohibition, for example, of carrying a burden out of the house on the Sabbath day, in Jeremiah XVII. 22, often proved a troublesome restriction. Explaining the home as the place where the members of a household ate together, they taught that if all the families living, say, in one court, united in placing an article of food in a given place the day before, that constituted them all one family, and all their dwellings a common home; so that there would be no transgression of the law in carrying articles from one house to another on the Sabbath. In the same way they extended the limits of the lawful Sabbath day's journey. If a person

contemplated going farther than the legal distance, he had only to place two meals the day before at the very outside of the limit, and then, starting from this point as his home, he was at liberty to make his journey almost twice his legal distance. By such tricks of logic they got over almost any irksome precept, not only of their own traditions but also of the clear commands of Scripture.

What could the result be but utter falsity and hollowness? Manly integrity was sapped at the root. Reason was prostituted to the vile service of tricking conscience. Morality became the football of sophistry. All true moral perceptions were lost, the spiritual faculty killed. To appear well unto men became the one great article of their practical creed. As our Saviour expresses it: "all their works they do for to be seen of men." "The hypocrite," says old Gurnall, "sets his watch not by the sun but by the town clock." The semblance of sanctity serves him as well as the reality, provided it be not found out. A mere veneering of religion may cover rottenness and pollution, but it will answer the purpose quite as well for him as the genuine article, if that is not truly in his heart. The Pharisee loved to pray standing at the corners of the streets that he might be seen of men; but he could devour widows' houses. He was strict in tithing such trifles as mint and anise and cummin; but he omitted the weightier matters of the law: judgment, mercy and faith.

He is alive to-day. Sleek, and smooth spoken, with religious sentiments dropping from his lips, and pious talk in fulsome abundance; he may be a very wolf in sheep's clothing. He may sneak around and stab you in the dark in a way the mere man of the world would be ashamed of. His mouth may be a repository of spiritual phrases, and his heart a hell of bitterness and selfishness. He may talk religion, and practice deceit and dishonesty. "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"

*The rest on next page.*

*The Author had no opportunity of seeing the proof.*

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Time will not admit of calling special attention to the lessons of our subject ; but we cannot close without pointing out that it was among the religious people of the day that those evils arose. Almost all the religion of the Jews was among the Pharisees—they were the equivalent of our “professing christians.” Imagine the effect when Christ throws among them shell after shell of condemnation. But the point I wish to press home is this: That there is real danger of us getting into an unreal and hollow religious profession, and that without deliberate hypocrisy.

The mode of Church life and teaching may develop the external, the ostentatious and noisy elements of our nature, till the inner reality ceases to operate, or is shrivelled up, and men’s religion becomes as it were, a department run without much relation to practice. We must guard against that.

Our personal religion also may gradually slip into a formalism of outward act, and what might be called outer thinking and feeling, till even real Christian people sometimes lose the deeper, truer, virtues of humanity to a degree that allows them to be rebuked by the manlier, if less pretentious, virtues of men of the world.





