

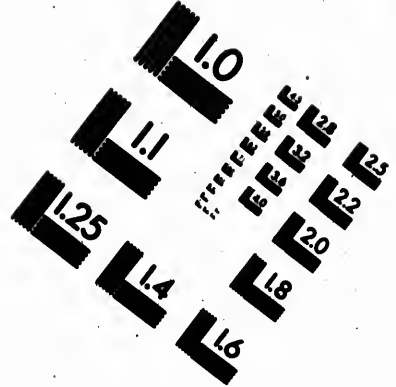
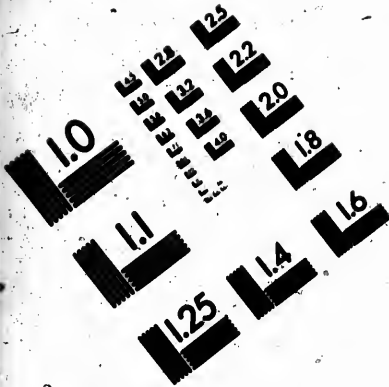


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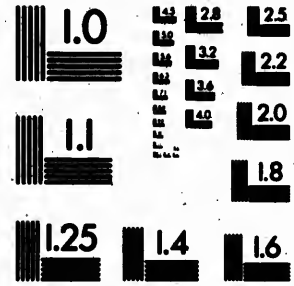
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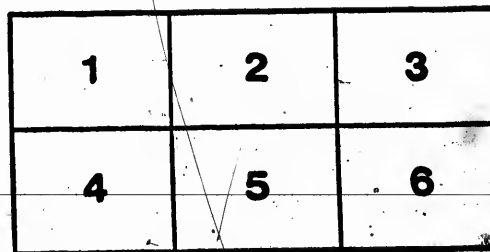
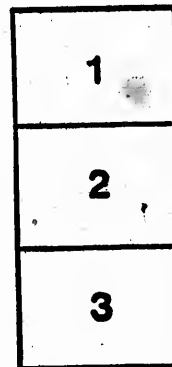
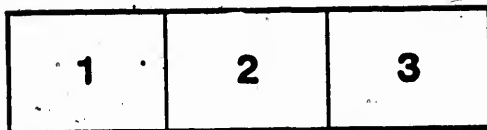
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THE NEGATIVE

—AND—

The Larger Hope

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OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

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THE NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

—AND—

The Larger Hope.

UNITED CHURCH
ARCHIVES

By THE REV. WM. COCHRANE, D.D.,

ZION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BRANTFORD.

BRANTFORD:

J. R. SALMOND.

1892.

NOTE.

The following pages contain the notes of a sermon preached by Rev. Dr. Cochrane upon the occasion of his entering upon the 31st year of his ministry, in Zion Church. In its delivery, many of the points alluded to were discussed at length, with special reference to the attacks made on the evangelical faith at the present day.

BRANTFORD, June, 1892.

JAN 29 1962

THE NEGATIVE THEOLOGY, AND THE LARGER HOPE.

"Which say to the seers, See not : and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits."—ISAIAH, chap. 30, verse 10.

"According as it is written, I believed, therefore have I spoken ; we also believe, and therefore speak."—II. CORINTHIANS, chap. 4, verse 13.

We have in these passages, two thoughts presented for our consideration on this anniversary occasion : 1st, The guilty clamour that prevails in many places at the present day, for a style of preaching that endeavors to quiet and stifle conscience ; and 2nd, The attitude that the pulpit should take, in refusing to conceal, or modify, or explain away the words spoken by almighty God.

Israel of old, conscious of wrong-doing and expecting just retribution, says to the Prophet : " Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits,"—that is, flatter us : tell us that after all we are not so bad as we seem and feel : stand between us and an angry God, and stay his righteous indignation. Speak to us things, in accordance with our prejudices and feelings, although they should be deceitful and false. Like the consumptive patient, who feels that his days are numbered, but finds momentary relief, if the Doctor will only say that still there is a little hope, and that the end may yet be far off ; so backsliding Israel begs the Prophet for one word of comfort—one ray of sunshine amid the encircling gloom.

The Apostle Paul, when writing to the Corinthian Church, many of whom were leading grossly immoral and inconsistent lives, and whose plain language was calculated to give offence, equally with that of the Prophets of old,

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says : " We having the same faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken : we also believe, and therefore speak." He evidently quotes David's words in the 116th Psalm—"I believed, therefore have I spoken." The circumstances of these two men were very different, but they had the same faith. Paul was not ashamed to proclaim a full, unabridged, unmutated gospel. He had unbounded confidence in the truth of the message committed to his charge, and delivered it with a frankness and fearlessness that showed how indifferent he was to human criticism.

The reason why he was so dogmatic and outspoken in his preaching, lay in the fact that

HE BELIEVED WHAT HE SPOKE.

He had not only studied the deep things of God, and was in addition supernaturally inspired, but he had experienced the power of the doctrines of christianity in his heart and life. There were many things still beyond the grasp of his reason, but since God had spoken, he believed these, as firmly as if he understood them. His testimony is not second-hand—what the gospel had done for others—but what it had done for him. Possessed of a regal, independent mind, capable of sifting the true from the false, and the essential from the accidental, he accepted in all its fullness, the teachings of christianity, in their bearings upon the present life, and the life to come.

That such was the unvarying spirit and character of Paul's preaching and writings, need hardly be said. In his former epistle to the Corinthians, he says, "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful, but with me it is a very small thing, that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord." And writing to the Thessalonians, he says, "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak : not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any

time used ve flattering words, nor of men sought glory—God is witness." Such quotations, which might be indefinitely multiplied, give us the secret of his sublime audacity and daring. He spoke not simply as an ambassador, commissioned to declare certain truths, but from a profound belief in their reality. He could not be silent, nor forbear, charged as he was with the message of life or death to immortal souls. He illustrated in his practice what Archbishop Whatley said in one of his pastorals: "It is not enough to believe what you maintain: you must maintain what you believe, and maintain it because you believe it."

And is it not historically true, that the great leaders of opinion in statesmanship and theology, have been men of decided views, whose minds

WERE NOT IN SOLUTION OR DOUBT,

as to the ground they occupied, but who were thoroughly assured of their conclusions. Their beliefs were based upon truths, and supported by conscience. As Luther once said—"If I am to listen to the thought of another, let him speak out what is clear and positive: of the problematical I have enough in myself already." So say intelligent congregations who come from week to week to listen to God's word. Denials, objections, negatives, and obscurities, are stumbling blocks to earnest souls. What is positive and affirmative, alone has power. It follows then, that

CONVICTION

is the first essential of successful preaching. By successful preaching, I do not mean that which amuses and pleases and gratifies the curious and the light-minded, but that which leads men to a higher conception of the great ends of existence, and helps them wisely to prepare for a never-ending life beyond. The solemn truths of the gospel cannot be profitably discussed, where there is not honesty and genuine belief on the part of the preacher. The training of the schools may present arguments to the reason, why christianity should be accepted as true, to the rejection

of other systems, but cannot impart such conviction as Paul had. As John says, "it is the unction of the Holy one," that enables men to know the deep things of God. The instances are comparatively rare, where men of piety and experience, became skeptical of divine truth. Deep convictions increase with age and fellowship with the unseen. The early preachers were called witnesses. A witness tells not what another man saw, but what he himself has seen and known. That is the truest eloquence which speaks of realities, which does not deal with abstractions, but with concrete facts and living experiences—which can say, "We have seen it and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was manifested in us." After a sermon of great power preached in a New England pulpit, the question was asked, "How long did it take to prepare that discourse?" and the reply was, forty years. And so Paul, after long experience and proof of what the gospel was and had done for him, spoke with an assurance that could not be gainsaid or refuted. His hearers felt when he was declaring the whole counsel of God, and revealing the more severe aspects of truth, as was remarked of one in late years—"That man would never say what he does, unless he really believed it."

What then, let us ask, are some of the things that religious teachers should believe before they speak?

- A. The reality of a God, as against Materialism.
- B. The creation of the world by Almighty power, as against Atheistic evolution.
- C. The fact of the fall, as against the mystical or poetical theory.
- D. The universal depravity of the human race, as against the theory that men are born pure.
- E. The Divinity of Christ, as against Unitarianism and Socinianism.
- F. The necessity and results of Christ's death, as against the ethical views of the atonement.
- G. The immortality of the soul, as against Annihilationism and conditional immortality.

- H. The resurrection of the body, as against an immortality of spirit alone.
- I. The final judgment, that awaits every human being, and seals their doom for weal or woe, as against a future probation, or the salvation of good and bad alike.

In a word, the preacher should believe in God's word from Genesis to Revelation:—"that all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The fundamentals of the christian religion are the atonement of Christ, the availability of his death as a real expiation for sin, and the necessity of faith and repentance, in order to peace in the present, and happiness in the future. Any toning down of such doctrines, which are common to all the churches of christendom, is dishonorable

IN A CHRISTIAN TEACHER,

and deserving of severest condemnation. If a professed Minister of Christ, does not believe such truths, his way is clear. An honest politician, when he changes his views, goes over to the party that he is most in accord with. Even the Treasury benches and the gains of office will not prevent him taking this manly course. Much more surely, a minister of the gospel, when he finds himself at variance with the articles or Creed of his Church will no longer remain within her pale. If he speaks beyond what he believes, he is guilty; if he speaks in opposition to his ordination vows, he is equally guilty; and if he has not made up his mind, in regard to vital questions in theology, he should exchange the place of teacher for that of student, and remain there until he has arrived at somewhat definite conclusions, regarding the verities of religion. It serves no good purpose to throw out doubt, concerning truths generally accepted, unless there is something better to put in their place; "Casting fire-brands, arrows and death, and saying, am not I in sport": and it is equally wrong to make pretence of keeping technically within the limits of a Creed, while attacking the individual doctrines, that make

up that Creed. Truth not only in speech, but in the inward parts, is expected of him, who standing in Christ's stead, beseeches men to be reconciled to God.

When an ambassador is sent from St. James or Washington, to represent his country at a foreign court, he receives his commission and instructions. He goes there, not in his individual but in his representative capacity. He is advised before leaving, as to the course he is to pursue and that in every case of diplomacy, he must loyally carry out the mandates of his superiors. If on any occasion, he finds himself at variance with the sovereign or the cabinet that has accredited him, it is not his part to substitute his own views for theirs, or carry on an intrigue that may injure or disgrace his country. He will, as an honest man, resign his trust, and gracefully retire to private life, where he can speak and act, untrammelled by the responsibilities and obligations of office. It is so with the Judge upon the bench also. He is appointed not to make, but to explain and administer law while sitting there: not to change, but to explain and apply, what has been laid down for his guidance. If there are certain laws, relating to criminal procedure, or the punishment of crime, which he cannot approve or enforce with a good conscience, he will retire from the judiciary, at whatever sacrifice. Surely we have a right to expect similar manliness, on the part of ministers of religion, who hold their commission direct from heaven, and who deal with matters, affecting the eternal happiness or misery of their fellow men! Miserable poltroons like Aaron Burr, who basely confer with the enemy, while pretending to serve their country, are regarded as

DESERVING OF LASTING OPPROBRIUM.

They go down to the grave, "unwept unhonoured and unsung," and their names are allowed to rot. And so it should be. If I have openly and voluntarily subscribed to a creed, and in the presence of Almighty God said, I will teach it, how dare I, in any way antagonize its spirit! Persecution! say certain sentimental religionists, when a church demands

common honesty on the part of its professors and clergymen. Not so, but regard for the man himself, that he may be saved from acting a double part, and that the denomination may be delivered from discord and faction. When a teacher of religion, remains in his church, not because he agrees with her standards, or loves his work, but simply for "the Priests office, and the piece of silver and morsel of bread," it is time that the partnership was dissolved. A church without a creed, can exert no influence upon the world, and a minister who is the slave of other men's opinions, with a bias to undermine the foundations of faith, and lower the standard of righteousness, is a bane rather than a blessing. Mourned over by all good men, he is laughed at by the bad, for his unfaithfulness and cowardice. Speaking with uncertain sound, temporising with the truth, wasting time in touching the shallows of momentous questions whose depths neither man nor angel have yet fully fathomed, he accomplishes nothing, beyond disintegration and the unsettling of souls. The criminality of such conduct, can only be described in God's own language: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; nor speakest to warn them the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." Such is the judgement pronounced, upon him who keeps back or dilutes the the truth, because it is opposed to popular beliefs, and excites hostility, instead of acting in the spirit of Micaiah when he refused to speak flattering words to the King of Israel.—"As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that I will speak."

In the estimation of the old reformers, the men who framed our creeds and formularies, it was deemed prejury, for a man to violate his ordination vows. Now it seems as trifling a matter, as the casting aside of an old worn-out garment. A weather-beaten American citizen, we are told, recently stood on the platform of a railroad coach, while the

train was speeding away at the rate of 50 miles an hour. "You can't stand on the platform," shouted the conductor. "What are platforms for anyhow?" asked the traveller. "Platforms are not made to stand on: they are made to get on," was the reply. And so it would appear, some men make use of creeds to help them to get on in the church, but not to stand on, or defend. The Reformers held that doctrines were indispensable to life: freethinkers say, that no matter what or how little a man believes, if he only does right, all will end well. The infidelity of the past century, sought expression in the poet's lines:—

"For modes of faith let fools and bigots fight,
His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right;"

and skeptics of all classes, still greedily repeat the sentiment as if it were a truism, that commanded universal acceptance. Creeds and confessions they say, are dungeons, for old antiquated pietists, whose intellects are incapable of expansion, and who are afraid to exercise liberty of thought and freedom of speech. *They* are men of progress, unmoved by legal threatenings, who like Claverhouse of old, after the shooting of John Brown, are willing "to take God into their own hands." They will worship any God, or no God, just as they please, and they will accept revelation, only in so far as it is approved by their reason, and in keeping with their conduct. Out of the wrecks of our present Bible, another is to emerge, "sifted, purified and reconstructed, and having all the superhuman ingredients ejected," which shall serve humanity more nobly, than the old has done.

Surely it need not be seriously argued, that behind the outward life, there must be a creed: that just as the tree with its buds and blossoms and fruit, must have a root, so character must have a foundation. "Truth quickens, error kills: truth feeds, error poisons: without truth, life is an impossibility—a mere air bubble." And wonderful to say, the very men who jeer at creeds, in order to escape from what conscience tells them, is the doom of the evil doer, go to work and prepare a creed that will enable them to revel

in their carelessness, and roll sin like a sweet morsel under their tongue! They give it to the world under a new name, such as Restorationism, or Annihilationism or The Larger Hope, whereas it is 6000 years old, and spoken by the arch-enemy of mankind, when he said to our first parents in the garden:—"Ye shall not surely die"

The negative theology of the age, is due in many cases to an insatiable craving for notoriety, that resurrects and reclothes the old worn out skeletons of infidelity that were buried a hundred years ago. It pays, speaking as a business man would say, to be a sceptic. "They thought said a clergyman's wife lately, of shutting up the Church, as hardly anybody attended the services. But that is all changed now. My husband is now preaching heresy, and he has given the cause of religion, such an awakening, as it has not had for years. His salary is raised, and everything is in the most prosperous condition." Such egotistic, irreverent, self-advertising skepticism has its little day, but carries no weight with bible reading men and women, however much it may attract the young, and gratify the scoffer. None the less, is it reckless and destructive. "If it can give pain to any old saint, it does it; and thinks it has done a smart thing in doing it. If it can undermine or disturb the foundation of a young man's faith, before his mind has matured enough to understand the reasons of that faith, it counts it a great victory, and speaks of its exploit, as if it had done some great thing. Its emblem is the sword and the dagger: the dark lantern and the poisoned cup. Its hands never hold the trowel, nor carry the mortar. The light in which it works is not the broad light of open and honest day, in which men build and energize, but the prying, concealed light of suspicion, creeping along on its own dark errand, guiltily trying to wrench away the fastenings from something that does not belong to it. It works only to destroy and disintegrate and raze to the ground, alike the roofs which protect men from the tempests, and the monuments which the past has erected, in grand and solemn perpetuation of its greatness." Its exponents, although comparatively few in number are active,

virulent and aggressive. What is called "The Higher Criticism," is no longer confined to the Old Testament, but includes the New. The Pentateuch, is now declared to have been the work of other hands than Moses: the Prophetical writings, are not the productions of the men whose names they bear; Ecclesiastes is not Solomon's, and the book of Daniel is of a far later age, by some unknown author. The writers of the New Testament are equally unreliable, the miracles are spurious, and the Epistles, but the opinions of fallible men. In a word, the Bible is not trustworthy, for when we have eliminated so much, what is there remaining? We are reminded of the down-east landlord, who in the days before the war used to keep a hotel at the line where two states met. It was called patriotically, the Union Hotel. One day a tired traveller drove his tired horse to the door with the request, "Landlord, give my horse a good dinner of oats, and prepare me a porter-house steak." "Stranger," said the host, "that is all right, only we don't happen to keep any oats, and we are out of fresh meat." "Well," said the pilgrim, wearily, "at any rate you can give my horse some hay, and me some fresh eggs?" Truth is, friend, we don't keep hay, and just now we haven't any eggs?" "Now, landlord," said the occupant of the buggy, looking straight at him, "will you be so good as to tell me what you *do* keep?" Drawing himself up proudly the boniface replied, "Yes, sir, I keep the Union Hotel." And so we shall probably be permitted to keep the covers of the Bible, if not the contents. And yet these men who are uprooting old beliefs, and sapping and undermining christianity, deny that they are infidels. When pressed to tell us, what they do believe, they say—we are simply enquiring after truth—the trend of scholarship is in the direction of larger hope: modern scholarship is as yet undecided, but professors in London, Cambridge and New York, favor this and that interpretation. Has it come to this that men of mature years, set apart to speak for God, have no clean-cut opinions of their own, but can only give to their congregations, the guesses and speculations of others? Has

God spoken in a language so obscure, that it cannot be understood? Granted, that this Bible has come down to us, through the Greek and Hebrew, is not the version that we have, an honest translation of the original; and is it not a fact that the newly revised version, has not changed one word or sentence that affects its solemn declaration? Older than the pyramids of Egypt: firmer than the everlasting hills; it stands immovable and impregnable, in spite of the petty assaults of feeble man, who would, but cannot explain away the solemn things of God. As the poet says:—

“ There are in this unreverential age,
 Who, dazed by vain philosophy, have clasped
 The revelations of the sacred page
 Among the bursten bubbles of the past.
 Be ours the wisdom still to hold them fast:
 Not as despising aught that sense can teach,
 Or any light that closer search may cast
 On this world's mysteries, or thought can reach
 From inmost corners of its right domain:
 But firmly fixed in this: that after each
 Has reaped its ripest knowledge, there remain
 Truths that transcend, both human thought and speech,
 And nature's oracle. These to despise,
 When God unveils them, let us think unwise.”

It is very true, that men who believe as Paul did and persuade men by the terrors of the Lord, may expect to meet with opposition and the supercilious contempt of the profane. Paul frequently roused the enmity of both Jew and Gentile, for the doctrine of the resurrection and a final righteous judgment, were quite as distasteful then as they are now. He was buffeted, reviled, defamed, made as the filth of the world, and accounted as the off-scouring of all things, scourged, beaten and imprisoned. He bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. But none of these things moved him, nor awed him into a guilty silence. He harrowed up the feelings of self-righteous hypocrites, who under the mark of virtue perpetrated the grossest wickedness, and denounced them as worthy of eternal wrath. The mercy and love of God that he had himself experienced

and that he delighted to dwell upon, did not blind him to the terrible vengeance that a God of infinite holiness has in store for the profane and wilful transgressors of his law. This great tender-hearted man, who had such heaviness and sorrow of heart, because of the unbelief of his countrymen, that he would almost have imperilled his own salvation for theirs, believed that the perdition of ungodly men was as certain as the salvation of the righteous: that it is not only in the natural and material world, "that lightnings and thunders roll and rend or in the lower heavens that the furies seem to play," but that these are but faint symbols of the day of wrath, of the tribulations and anguish, that await every soul of man that doeth evil. Keble in his *Christian Year*, asks the question:—

"And is there in God's world so drear a place,
Where the loud bitter cry is raised in vain?
Where tears of penance come too late for grace,
As on the uprooted flower the genial rain?"

And this is his answer:

"Tis ever so: the sovereign Lord of souls,
Stores in the dungeon of his boundless realm,
Each bolt, that o'er the sinner vainly rolls,
With gathered wrath the reprobate to whelm.

Will late remorse,
Recall the shaft the murderer's hand has sped,
Or from the guiltless bosom turn its course?
Then may the embodied soul not fear to meet,
The God whom here, she would not learn to love."

This negative theology has been tried, and found wanting. It is a travesty upon religion. It proceeds upon the assumption that men need not atonement for sin, and that heaven is the reward of works, and not of grace. The little dainty sermonettes and moral essays that are now read from certain pulpits, have nothing in common with Apostolic or Reformation preaching. The great Dr. Chalmers tried this style in the earlier stages of his ministry. He expatiated on the meanness of dishonesty, the villiany of falsehood and the despicable acts of calumny—upon all those deformities of character which awaken the natural indignation of the

human heart,—but his hearers remained in full alienation from God, for Christ through whose blood the sinner is pardoned, was scarcely ever spoken of. The rustics in the parish of Kilmany, were entranced by the eloquence of the young preacher, but neither changed nor reformed. At length, after being brought to the confines of the grave, he came back to life a changed man, feeling how empty all his past years had been for God. His opinions became thoroughly revolutionized. His former theology and preaching he denounced, as one-sided and worthless: and from the burning lips and fire-touched tongue of the new evangelist, there was heard the cry in every sermon, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." Did you feel anything particularly in church to-day—said a young man to a companion, after hearing Chalmers preach on the text, "God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"? I never felt myself to be a lost sinner till to-day, when I was listening to that sermon." "It is very strange, said his companion, —it was just the same with me." Now, instead of polished essays, or the amiabilities and proprieties of life, he preached the doctrine of original depravity, guilt, retribution and a judgment to come, and instead of the wondering, sluggish, passive multitudes that formerly hung upon his lips, he found awakenings and conversions: reformation in morals, and a turning from death unto life. It is ever so, the preaching of smooth things, only leads to continuance in wickedness, and never produces change of heart.

From your delicate, refined, effeminate and ornamental preachers, who toy and trifle with the solemn threatenings of scripture, it is refreshing to meet with earnest simple-minded men of God, who preach the gospel in its entirety. They may not in all cases have had the full advantages of theological training, nor give to their discourses the lavish profusion, that characterises scholars, nor have the pomp and pageantry and authority of Ecclesiastical appointments, but they have what is far better, a firm hold of the simple gospel,

which is able to make men wise unto salvation. If they have not the regulation military cloak of the soldier, they wield the sword of the spirit, "which is quick and powerful; piercing, even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

If there are any in this assembly, who are crying like Israel of old, "speak unto us smooth things"—who are saying to themselves, "peace, peace," when there can be no peace,—let me ask them to realise, the end of all this mockery. Cowper gives us a picture of the man, who hopes that natural goodness, will find favour with God, and the penitent soul who waiting for mercy, has no other plea:—

"But that thy blood was shed for me."

"Hark! universal nature shook and groaned,
T'was the last trumpet—see the Judge enthroned:
Rouse all your courage at your utmost need,
Now summon every virtue, stand and plead.
What! silent! Is your boasting heard no more?"

All joy to the believer: He can speak—
Trembling yet happy, confident yet meek.
Since the dear hour that brought me to thy feet
And cut up all my follies by the root,
I never trusted in an arm but thine,
Nor hoped, but in thy righteousness divine!

Pride falls unpitied, never more to rise,
Humility is crowned, and faith receives the prize."

