

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07994817 4

*Religion as a Personal
Experience*

—
By William M. Brundage



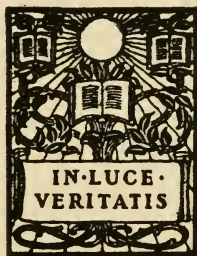
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

MAY 11 1916		
JUL 2 1916		
JUN - 5 1916		
JUL 6 1916		

RELIGION AS
A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

BY
WILLIAM MILTON BRUNDAGE



BOSTON
AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

1914

56

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
65770
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.
R 1914 L

NEW YORK

NEW YORK

NEW YORK

TO
MY WIFE
DEDICATE THIS BOOK



THE
MUSEUM
OF
THE
CITY OF
NEW YORK

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I PERSONAL RELIGION	I
II NEED OF RELIGION	13
III THE CONSECRATION	26
IV THE SERVICE THAT FOLLOWS	41
V THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH	55
VI THE TRANSFIGURATION OF LIFE	69
VII WORSHIPING AND WORKING TO- GETHER	82

I

PERSONAL RELIGION

Religion as a Personal Experience

I

PERSONAL RELIGION

IT is not at all unusual in our time to hear intelligent, cultivated, even highly trained people gravely discuss the place of religion in modern life, as if it were an open question whether or not religion has as important a part to play in the future as it has played in the past; as if there can be anything in this world of supreme importance, apart from religion; as if religion, personal religion, can mean anything less than fellowship with God, the Source and Ground of man's being. Religion is not something artificial or abnormal, something extraneous to be added on to an otherwise complete, well-rounded life. Religion is not something that a man may live without; rather is it

the natural, normal fulfillment of life itself, life's blossoming out into perfect beauty and significance. It is the conscious bringing of man's will into harmony with the will of God, with Good-Will, so that henceforth all discords cease, and the individual life makes music with the Whole. Religion means nothing at all that is worth while if it does not mean the personal commitment of the life to the service of high and holy ideals; if it does not mean salvation from the presence and power of evil; if it does not mean living in a divine universe, in sympathy and cooperation with one's human brothers.

Such being the true nature of religion, no man can be said to live to any high and holy purpose, to appreciate what life in its fullness actually means, until he has experienced religion, until he has found the living God for himself. Saint Augustine knew whereof he spake when, at the very beginning of his Confessions, he exclaimed: "O Lord, Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee."

"Thou madest us for Thyself." Man is made for religion, for conscious fellow-

ship with God, and can never find repose, can never be at peace with himself, until this conscious union with God has been attained. From the very nature of the case, however, he must find God for himself, he must experience religion for himself. All that another can do is to point out the way, in the following of which the individual may thus find God. This is all that another can do. Religion is a personal matter between the individual and his God.

It is, therefore, because they have never experienced religion for themselves that so many cultivated and highly-trained people of our time gravely discuss the place of religion in modern life as if it were an open question. They utterly fail to perceive the interior and personal nature of religion. They confuse religion with the institutions of religion, with the creeds and ritual of the churches. They do not distinguish the religion of authority from the religion of the spirit; trust in the God of whom one has heard from others, from trust in the God with whom one has become personally acquainted.

Now what we describe as a hear-say religion may for a considerable time seem

4 *Religion as a Personal Experience*

to be adequate for the needs of life, seem to perform the functions of personal religion. But its fatal defect lies in the fact that it can not successfully endure the test of life's serious experiences. It can not be relied upon just when it is most needed. It is a house built upon the sand; when the storm beats upon it, it falls.

It is a matter of common observation that so long as our lives are without grave trials, so long as our friends and loved ones are spared to us, so long as the sky is clear and radiant, the birds sing in the branches of the trees, the flowers blossom beside our path, so long as prosperity smiles upon us, we get along very well with a hear-say religion, a religion accepted upon authority. For a time we may fail to seriously miss anything out of our life. Indeed we are ready to resent it if any person questions us, no matter how kindly, concerning the basis of our religious faith.

Believe in God? Most certainly we do. Only the fool "hath said in his heart, There is no God." Pray? Of course we pray; we pray the prayers our mothers taught us to pray. Our mother's religion is good enough for us. We at-

tend church with greater or less regularity. We give ready assent to the most elaborate creeds. Such staunch defenders, are we, of the powers that be in church and state, that we join in the denunciation of all heretics and unbelievers and traitors. We live respectable lives. Not in any sense are we hypocrites. In so far as we have given our beliefs any thought, our intellect has approved, even though our heart has never been touched.

Thus we fondly dream, in this the time of our health and prosperity, that we can always live contentedly upon the religion of authority, a religion that we have never made our own by personal experience. The tragedy of it all is too deep for words.

For into our life some day sorrow bursts like a flood. Our good health fails us; we are afflicted with a grave disease. Hitherto we have never known what physical weakness and pain mean; we are dismayed now that we experience them for the first time. Health gone, our very livelihood is imperiled. As our hard-earned savings slowly melt away, we are threatened with dire poverty, actual want.

Or it may be that friends in whom we trusted have failed us, have turned

against us and are seeking to injure us,—our trusted friends! Stunned, bewildered, we do not know in whom we can trust. Whereas formerly all men spoke well of us, we are now misunderstood, misrepresented, grievously maligned. It seems as if enemies rise up against us on every side.

Or it may be that under the stress of temptation, we have committed an evil deed, a cowardly, a dastardly deed. We have violated no outward law, it may be, but we know that we have sinned; our consciences condemn us. We are ashamed; we are troubled by remorse.

Or it may be that our sheltered home is invaded by death; our beloved is stricken down at our side. We are dumb with anguish. All our proud self-sufficiency crumbles into dust. The skies have become inky black; the birds have hushed their songs; the light of our life has been extinguished.

Where now is our religion, the religious faith we once professed to hold, the faith in which at one time we had actually persuaded ourselves that we confidently trusted, the religion that had come down to us as a part of our heredity from the past, the religion that had been accepted

upon mere authority, or through the persuasion of our parents and friends, or through the books we had read, or the sermons we had heard preached? The old arguments listened to so often in the home or in the church, grown familiar to us in the pages of our favorite authors, seem to have lost their force, and convince no longer.

Pray? Alas, to whom can we pray? We have not forgotten the prayers we learned at our mother's knees, but we can not pray them as our mother prayed them. We have lost our mother's God; or we see now that we never knew Him. All our life long we have heard about Him, and foolishly believed that we knew Him. Grave doubts for which we were wholly unprepared sweep over and engulf us. We are not sure any longer that there is a God or, at least, a God whom we can trust. What if the testimony of parents and friends, of poets and saints, aye, and even the testimony of the Bible itself prove to be all a mistake? What if, after all, the insistent apostles of unbelief in the ancient and modern world, at whose violent diatribes in our happy prosperous days we have been wont to derisively smile,

prove to be in the right? What if after critical investigation the good Master of Nazareth turns out to be but a self-deluded enthusiast, and His personal trust in the Heavenly Father to be but an empty dream? What if the Great Companion be dead, as poor Clifford affirms? What if there be no enduring Spiritual Reality in and behind the universe?

Is there anything left to us that is actually worth while? Are there any Eternal Values? Upon what, upon whom, can our troubled, restless, agonized soul repose?

Let no reader for a moment complain that the author is dealing with merely hypothetical cases, and not with actual human experiences. Through a long ministry he has become personally acquainted with men and women who have suffered in just the ways described. And such a possible catastrophe ever waits upon a mere formal, conventional religion, a religion accepted upon the testimony of another but never experienced by the individual himself, whenever life's real crises arise. When the test which can not be evaded comes, personal religion, spiritual fellowship with God, supreme trust in the Eternal Values that has been won,

alone can sustain hope, courage and even sanity itself. Nothing else in such an hour can possibly avail. "O Lord, Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee."

Do you not see that it is because of man's divine origin, because man is a free spirit, a child of the good God, that he can not be satisfied, that he can not be at rest, until he enters upon his rightful inheritance, until he becomes spiritually united to God? And he must find God for himself. Again we must remember that all that one man can do for another, all that father and mother can do for their child, all that the best-beloved can do for his friend, all that the great religious teachers and leaders of the world can do, all that the good Master can do for any free man is to help to awaken within him the desire to be at one with God, and to point out the way to God. That way, however long or short it may be, however difficult or easy, must be trod by the individual himself. In no other manner can man enter into life, into fullness of life.

Certainly the process of finding God, of experiencing religion is not one and the

same for all men; it is as varied as human nature itself. For many persons it is a gradual process, covering, it may be, a series of years, so quiet and orderly as to be unmarked by any apparent crises; while for others it may be sudden and striking, and the critical experience burst upon one like a flash of lightning out of the enveloping darkness. In most cases the stages of the process are distinct and easy to be traced, step by step. In any event, whether the process be gradual or sudden, the end attained, the goal reached, is one and the same for all, whether Jew or Gentile, orthodox or heretic, young or old, ignorant or learned, rich or poor, of humble station or of exalted rank, whether possessed of rare gifts or of but a single talent.

The one who has attained has reached the goal, has entered into fellowship with God, has actually experienced religion, will be conscious of the fact. There will be no uncertainty, no serious doubt about it. He can and ought to know in whom he has believed. Is not this what one would naturally expect in a world that is intelligible, rational? If I am a child of God I ought to know it. The child ought to

be able to find his Father, and to commune with Him; and when he has found Him and become reconciled to Him, the child ought to be aware of the fact, ought to be assured of his divine relationship. It is perfectly reasonable to urge such a claim. The experience of humanity justifies it.

It will be the purpose of the author in the chapters that follow to describe in the simplest terms what he believes constitutes a genuine religious experience, and how it can be attained. What he will try to describe is an experience that has been realized by men and women of all religious bodies throughout Christendom, and by numerous persons outside of all forms of organized religion. He will seek to avoid matters of sectarian controversy, insisting only upon what is common to all. He will attempt no elaborate argument. Spiritual facts, and not theoretical arguments, are most effective in the consideration of such a theme. While he will seek to be untechnical in the language employed, he will freely make use of terms filled with the associations of the past, whenever he can make clear the sense in which he uses them. What is said will be in the nature of a confession of faith. The appeal will

be to the underlying experience of serious, spiritually-minded men and women.

The author has entered upon this undertaking because he verily believes that a personal experience of religion is of infinitely more value than any other possession; that life is not worth living without it; that human society can be redeemed only through the service of those who possess it.

II

NEED OF RELIGION

II

NEED OF RELIGION

NATURAL and normal as is an experience of religion, no man can attain it until he has first felt the supreme need of it. An experience of religion must verily present itself to him as the only possible fulfillment of life; as a treasure to be searched for with all diligence; as a pearl of great price to be acquired at whatever sacrifice. The growing man must reach a stage in his development at which he can not be satisfied without reconciliation to God, without coming into harmony with his highest and holiest moral ideals. He must at last solemnly resolve to search for God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, search until he find Him.

The breaking up of the ordinary man's hitherto thoughtless, easy-going content which issues in such a resolve comes sooner or later to all healthy-minded, normal men and women. We say to all normal men and women, and we mean just this; for

we can not consider as responsible human beings abnormal, defective, exceptional individuals to whom it may never come. Such exceptional cases do not invalidate the truth of the great law of human life; "Man can not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Man can not live as the lower creatures about him, for in him have been created a hunger and a thirst which no material food and drink can satisfy. He has discovered for himself that his "life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"; he has learned that in these words the Master of the good life gave expression not only to the experience of his own race, but to the experience of mankind. Read the biographies of the world's greatest men, the prophets of Israel, the sages of India and the Far East, the wise men of Greece and Rome, the foremost philosophers and poets of modern Europe and America, and discover for yourself how well-nigh universal is this divine discontent with mere things; this frank recognition of the need of spiritual realities; this profound conviction that nothing but religion can satisfy the human soul.

Physical comforts such as adequate food and drink and shelter are not to be ignored and despised; but these at their best are utterly inadequate to satisfy the needs of a man. Man must have bread, but he must have much besides. He must have books as well as bread. He must have pictures, sculpture, music and other means for the satisfaction of his higher nature. But even then the normal, fully-developed man, the man who has grown a soul, is not content. His moral and spiritual nature must be satisfied; his aspirations after Truth and Beauty are not more insistent than his aspirations after the Good. And more than this; just as certainly as he needs the society of friends and human sympathy does he need the friendship and sympathy of the Great Companion, the Heavenly Father. Apart from His companionship, without conscious fellowship with Him, he can not live to any high and worthy purpose. Until he has made the Eternal Good-Will the law of his personal life he has not begun to live as a man.

Or let us approach this human need in another way. Life has well been described as the adjustment of the individual organism to its environment, "the con-

tinuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations." The cessation of such adjustment means death, while the more perfect the adjustment, the more complete and abundant the life. For such perfect adjustment, for just such complete and abundant life, every living creature is seeking. Throughout the entire creation one prayer, conscious or unconscious, is rising to the Source of all life for more of life.

The environment of the lower creatures, of plants and of animals, is physical. Man, too, on his animal side, seeks adjustment to his physical environment. But even the most perfect physical adjustment does not satisfy him. He has become conscious of another environment. There are influences all about him, events in his daily life, the play upon him of forces from the unseen world, intimations of higher, spiritual values which are continually making him dissatisfied with even the completest adjustment to his physical environment. He is forever conscious of failure to make perfect his adjustment. "What lack I yet?"

Not a day passes but that with greater or less insistence he puts to himself, if not

to another, this question which the young ruler put to Jesus. The very sense of physical satiety impels him to seek elsewhere for real and abiding sources of content. Sooner or later he discovers that the words of James Russell Lowell are literally true:

“Man can not be God’s outlaw if he would,
Nor so abscond him in the caves of sense
But Nature still shall search some crevice out
With messages of splendor from that Source
Which, dive he, soar he, baffles still and lures.”

That Source is the Living God.

Neither caves of sense nor caves of the mere intellect can satisfy him. He may seek to acquire the widest and most comprehensive knowledge. In the exercise of his critical reason he may derive the greatest satisfaction. But when he peers down deep below the surface, he very soon perceives that the universe includes vastly more than his critical reason is able to subsume under its most elaborate categories. To properly adjust himself to the spiritual universe he discovers that he has developed a reason, practical as well as critical, which he must trust as a part of his divine inheritance. Behind and be-

yond his logical understanding is a categorical imperative that commands him to do not only what is pleasing and profitable, not only what is gratifying to appetite and passion, but what is righteous and generous and kind; that commands him to give as well as get, to serve as well as be served.

Sooner or later he becomes aware of a scale of values within him by which he must pronounce judgment upon all his actions. For his actions are different from one another not only in the quantity of pleasure they bring; they differ from one another in quality as well as in quantity. It is somehow worthier and better, infinitely worthier and better, to be just than to be unjust, no matter what the immediate consequences may be; it is worthier and better to be true than to be false, to be brave than to be a coward, to be gentle and affectionate than to be cruel and hateful. His conception of these higher values may be crude and defective, but the inward command to act in harmony with these higher values can not be ignored nor misunderstood. He can not be persuaded that his higher inspirations stand unrelated to some external Reality; that they

arise within him simply to be thwarted. For the time he may stifle them; for the time they may seem to be altogether smothered: but they will persist in most unexpectedly reappearing and reasserting themselves to confound him. Hunger and thirst after righteousness he must and will because it is his nature to become righteous. "O Lord, Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee." Because he is spirit, he must adjust himself to the Eternal Spirit.

Ay, the need of religion is in the heart of every one of us, the need of help in our weakness, of comfort in our loneliness and sorrow, a clue to the mystery that envelops us,

"the guiding thread so fine
Along the mighty labyrinth."

It is not necessary for any one to prove it to us, to appeal to the past, to recount the confessions of men and women of all nations and of all times. We have only to appeal to the men and women all about us, no matter how worldly-wise and sophisticated they may be, no matter how preoccupied and absorbed their lives, no

matter how deeply they may have buried themselves in the pursuit of gain, in the accumulation of mere material goods.

Once at least in every twenty-four hours the most active and preoccupied of us all must stand face to face with our neglected ideals, the ideals of childhood and early manhood or womanhood: "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Voices will persist in coming to us in the night when all the noises of the day have been stilled. We may escape from these voices in the hours of feverish activity, but in the quiet of our own chamber we must commune with them.

To drown these insistent voices we may resort to wild excesses, drink ourselves into insensibility; the distraction will be but transient. Sooner or later will come the awakening; the masks will be torn off; and the real self against which we have offended, the God against whom we have sinned, will confront us as we are. The proudest, most arrogant, most self-sufficient among us can not escape the humbling of his pride, the exposure of his weakness. It is only the abnormal and not wholly sane who, while in rebellion against God, consciously shut off from the source of spir-

itual power, will not in the hour of self-revelation confess that they are as destitute of power for the noblest ends of life as the machine detached from the dynamo.

With greater or less clearness, then, a sense of the urgent necessity of religion, of union with God, is awakened within man just as soon as he becomes a man. This vivid sense of personal need, this first step towards the religious life, is called by different names. Our fathers were wont to call it "The Spirit's awakening and convicting of sin." Are there any simpler, clearer and better terms by which to describe the experience?

Sin means missing the mark, failing to attain the Good conceived as the goal of human activity. The failure may consist of the choosing of a lower in the presence of a higher good. The unthinking gratification of appetite in a beast is perfectly innocent, while in a human being it is a sin. There is nothing wrong in the display of ugliness in a bull thwarted in its purpose; in man ugliness is a sin. Jealousy among the cocks of a barnyard is amusing; to yield to jealousy among men is a sin. For the young cuckoo to ruthlessly crowd its foster-brothers out of the nest to starve,

in order that it may enjoy exclusively the protection and support of the foster parents is to follow the only instinct it knows; while for a human being to act in a similar manner would be to violate higher instincts and to sin.

The conviction of sin is the consciousness that one has violated his nobler nature, has chosen a lower in the presence of a higher good, has missed the mark at which he aimed. A conviction of sin always implies that a higher and ideal good has been conceived; that good not having been attained, a sense of unworthiness has been awakened. This conviction of personal unworthiness, of actual lawlessness against the divine order is a step towards an experience of religion; is indeed positive evidence that the individual has grown a soul. It is the experience of every prodigal son when he comes to himself, to his higher and worthier self, and begins to realize for the first time what a great mistake he made when he left his father's house to journey into "the far country" of sin. In that far country he is perishing with hunger, while at home there is bread enough and to spare. But he can not turn his face homeward until he has

been awakened to appreciate his folly, until he has come to his better self.

Although they may differ widely in their description of this awakening of the soul, all religious teachers agree in recognizing the fact. This life of ours is one and the same, wherever and whenever lived, whether in ancient Palestine, or in Puritan England, or in modern America. Strictly speaking there are not different kinds of human nature; neither, strictly speaking, are there different kinds of religion, of personal religion. There is but one religion known to us under different names, inasmuch as there is but one God and Father of men, though He may be worshiped under different names.

Just as soon as this divine awakening of the human soul has been attained, just as soon as the conviction of sin has become a personal realization, every earnest man must share the profound self-reproach of Saint Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

The utterance of such a cry is far from being an indication of the sufferer's weakness and pusillanimity, as has been claimed; rather is it an indication of weakness and

pusillanimity to seek to stifle the conviction which has provoked such a cry, to seek to restrain the passionate yearnings after forgiveness and newness of life, to seek to repress the prayer for victory over the lower self, for real union with God. Whenever men have thus sought to stifle their convictions, to harden their hearts against repentance, to persist in starving their spiritual nature, they have but made plain to all about them their own reckless folly, their own pitiful immaturity. They are but foolish, headstrong children who must be set to learn life's lesson all over again. Once more they must be taught by pain and disappointment and sorrow. Poor, half-starved, imperfectly developed human creatures, they stagger across this stage of human life, and go out into the future world without ever having begun to live in this. But go where they may, they can not escape from the Eternal God who ever suffers with them, suffers to redeem them. The foolish hardening process in which they are engaged can not endure forever; their rejection of the good life can not be final and absolute.

To every man who shares Paul's cry of agony, "O wretched man that I am! who

shall deliver me from this body of death? ” and who sincerely seeks for deliverance, deliverance will come. In the very realization of the need, in the very agony of repentance, will come to the obedient man the vision of possible deliverance: “ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Deliverance from this body of death, emancipation from bondage to the lower self of animal ancestry with its clamorous appetites and passions, with its boundless egotism, its cruelty and heartless greed is possible in one way, and in but one way, the way of self-sacrifice, of renunciation, of obedient love, the very way in which Jesus Christ trod.

Through the moral force of His life, a life the type of all heroic self-sacrifice, and through such moral force alone, can the real man, the higher spiritual self within every one of us, win a final victory, enter into union with the living God, attain what we mean by an experience of personal religion.

III

THE CONSECRATION

III

THE CONSECRATION

“ IF any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.” These words of the Master of the good life, reported in all three Synoptic Gospels, clearly point out the way by the following of which every man may find God for himself, point out the only way by which a man can be delivered from “this body of death.” Aroused from his thoughtless, easy-going content, fully awake at last to a sense of personal need, sincerely penitent for the wrongdoing of the past, and turning resolutely away from such wrongdoing, he must in the very spirit of the good Master consecrate himself to God, solemnly dedicate himself to the service of God and of man.

Hitherto he has been living a self-centered life, devoted to the lower self which isolates, which separates him from God and from his fellows. He must sacrifice

this lower divisive self, in the interests of his higher spiritual self, the self which loves and serves. And lo! his very self-surrender constitutes his complete self-realization, for "Die to live" is the law of the universe.

It is perfectly true that man ought never to have become consciously separate from God; he ought never to have left his Father's house. His parents and teachers ought to have so lived out their religion before him, to have so impressed upon his growing mind and heart the supreme importance of religion, to have so wisely and patiently encouraged and helped to develop within him a personal religious life, that he should never remember the time when he did not love and trust God, when God's good-will was not the law of his life, when it was not his highest joy to serve his fellow men. He ought never to have made the adventure into "the far country"; he ought always to have remained at home in his Father's house. The experience of Edward Everett Hale ought not to be an uncommon one.

"I always knew that God loved me, and was always grateful to Him for the world He placed me in. I always liked

to tell Him so, and was always glad to receive His suggestions to me."

Dr. Hale does not claim that he always did what was right, always acted up to the best he knew, always served his fellow men with disinterested devotion. But from his earliest recollection he was never conscious of any serious alienation from his Heavenly Father. "I was always glad to receive His suggestions to me." So ought every human child to feel. It is his divine birthright.

The most of us, however, never thus learned as little children to delight to do the Father's good-will, or if we learned it, we soon forgot the lesson. If the experience has come to us at all as a permanent possession, it has come to us in maturer years only after we have returned from "the far country" into which we had strayed. It came when we made the supreme commitment of our life to God, when heartily sorry for all our self-worship and self-seeking, we cast ourselves upon our knees before our Father and poured out into His ear all the story of how we had yielded ourselves to appetite and passion, to pride, falsehood and greed.

Up to that moment of consecration we

had not always been glad to receive God's suggestions to us, though we may have tried hard to persuade ourselves that we were. We followed too much "the devices and desires of our own hearts." We preferred to choose our own way and were resentful if we were ever thwarted in prosecuting it. We were jealous and rebellious if others seemed to be more highly favored by fortune than we. This does not mean that we deliberately fought against God, were consciously hostile to the Good. Often we tried to follow what we knew to be the better way. Again and again we longed to be just and kind and true, but temptation proved too powerful for us to resist. When at critical moments we halted between two conflicting opinions, too often the less worthy opinion, the ignoble selfish motive won the victory. Our life was never of a single piece; in the weaving of it we followed no one consistent pattern, never actually willed to follow one consistent pattern.

But henceforth, in so far as we can make it, our life shall be of a single piece. Henceforth what God wills, we will. As the good Master taught us, with perfect whole-heartedness, with simple abandon,

we devote ourselves to the service of others. Henceforth we shall find our chief joy in making those about us happy. We deliberately burn our bridges behind us, for, God helping us, we shall not return the way we came. Our fondly cherished idols are shattered, everything we foolishly loved better than God's goodwill. Humbled is all our pride and vain-glory. All hatred and ill will, all unworthy compromises with falsehood and cowardly love of ease, all pursuit of unjust gain are abandoned.

Henceforth the one question that shall concern us will be, not what and how much can I get, but what and how much can I give; not how can I be best served, but how can I best serve? Are there any difficult and dangerous tasks to be performed, "Here am I; send me." At last I have made the supreme choice, have embarked upon the divine adventure. At whatever cost, with singleness of purpose, I shall try to be brave and pure and true and just and good. This is what we mean by consecration.

No persuasions of others even the most impassioned and eloquent can effect this radical change in the trend of a man's life,

this self-surrender and self-dedication to a holy cause; others may encourage and help the individual to make it, but that is all that they can do. No change, nor even transformation in a man's material environment, though it may help, can effect this radical change in the man's spirit. No mere intellectual acquirements, no mere increase of knowledge can effect it. Unqualified assent to all the creeds of the world can not effect it, nor can the most rigid observance of the most elaborate ritual of worship.

God alone, the Immanent Spirit working in man's conscience, through man's affections and will, can effect it. Because man is a child of God, life of His Life, spirit of His Spirit,

“When duty whispers low, Thou must,
The youth replies, I can.”

It is never the youth apart from God who says I can; it is the youth at one with God. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His own good pleasure.” It is the higher, diviner self, never apart from God, which wins the victory of the spirit.

Let no man deceive himself in this matter and suppose that he can ever know what personal, spiritual religion actually means until he has made this supreme commitment of his life to God, this perfect dedication of intellect, affections and will to the highest and holiest and best he knows. On this point all the world's greatest religious teachers are perfectly agreed. What they call the highest and holiest and best they can conceive does not greatly matter, whether Allah, Jehovah, Ahura Mazda, God, Eternal Righteousness, Spiritual Reality, or that name which seems to us the most tender, and satisfying, and profoundly true, "Our Father"; what supremely matters is the personal dedication. By whatever symbol we represent Him to whom we are dedicated, He is the Father of us all, the Source and Ground of all being, the one Infinite and Eternal God.

All religious men recognize one another as brethren, in the last analysis, simply and solely by the fact that they share in this supreme consecration. Perhaps never before had this fact been so conspicuously recognized as at the great Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in the year 1893.

The sessions of this parliament which brought together representatives of all the important religions of the world were opened by the words of the Lord's Prayer recited in unison, "Our Father who art in Heaven." And all who understood English joined in the singing of the hymn, "Nearer, my God, to Thee." It was a sublime occasion, unparalleled in human history, never possible until our own age of growing toleration and widening human sympathy.

This was the positive teaching of that great parliament: Whatever be your nationality, whatever be your race, whether rich or poor, whether of humble rank or of exalted station, whether ignorant or learned, there is but one way by which you can experience religion; you must be reconciled to your God, come into personal fellowship with Him, come into perfect accord with your ideal Good. So long as you are selfish and self-seeking you can not know what personal religion means. But if you are consecrated to God, and are living the life of consecration, you have entered into the Communion of Saints, whatever be your particular church communion; you have become a new creature; you

“have changed your market cart into a chariot of the sun”; you have passed from death, spiritual death, unto eternal life.

And there is no doubt or uncertainty in the mind of any person as to whether or not he has made this supreme consecration. The experience stands out with startling distinctness in the field of consciousness. Certainly this supreme commitment of one's life to God is not all that an experience of religion means, but it is an essential part of it, and brings its own proper attestation. I may pray day after day, and year after year this petition of the Lord's Prayer, “Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven,” and try to enter into the spirit of the words, and actually persuade myself for a time that I mean just what the words express. But when at last I do come to mean it, come to vividly comprehend what the words imply and all that they imply, I discover that I never prayed the prayer before; that never before have I actually known what it means to say, “Thy will be done.”

The author can never forget the first time he actually prayed this prayer. It was in a dimly lighted college chapel, on a cold, bleak October day. A drizzling

rain was falling without, so that the atmosphere of the chapel was exceedingly depressing. The students, most of them present under compulsion, were prepared for a dreary hour. There did not promise to be anything very inspiring and uplifting in the service; not even the singing was as spirited as usual. And when the preacher announced his text, it proved to be the familiar, even hackneyed question of the Roman Jailer to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" What does it mean to be saved, not simply from the penalty of sin but from the presence and power of sin? Salvation is an ethical process, a radical change from a self-centered life to a God-centered life, from devotion to self to devotion to others. The treatment of the text was remarkably fresh and suggestive, and one hearer at least in that chapel audience found himself from the very beginning listening to the speaker with eager interest, listening as though the message were addressed to his own soul. And to his soul it was addressed. He forgot all about the time and place; the sermon gripped him as in a vise. He was stirred to the depths of his being; his conscience was thoroughly

aroused. If that is what salvation means, he knew very well that he had never been saved.

Like so many others he had joined the church as a child; without question he had accepted the creed of his church, and supposed that he was a Christian. For the past seven years he had, with varying degrees of success, tried to live the good life. Most of the ordinary vulgar forms of vice were, by reason of his early training, unattractive to him; his temptation did not come from them. But self-centered he was, passionately ambitious to carry out his own selfish plans, at whatever cost, to attain his own personal ends.

His father had been a devoted minister of religion, and just before he died had called his young son to his bedside and earnestly prayed that when the son grew to manhood, he might take up and carry on his father's tragically interrupted work. The son loved and honored his father, but child as he was, he could not and would not seriously consider the work of a minister of religion. He thought that he was too well acquainted with the sacrifices that such a life-work involved. He rebelled against the very thought of entering upon

it. His tastes did not incline him to it, while his ambition pointed in a very different direction. It could not be God's will that he should be called upon to make the sacrifices that his father had made. He would try to be a good man, but he could serve the world better, and with much more pleasure and profit to himself, in some other way. And thus he sought to dismiss the matter, and plunged into his studies with feverish intensity, and as far as lay within his power prepared for his chosen calling.

That afternoon in the college chapel was the crisis of his life, and in a vague way he was conscious of it. He had long been restless, uneasy, dissatisfied with himself. At last he stood at the parting of the ways. Under the influence of the preacher it seemed as if all the wretched sophistries by which he had been trying to evade the plain issue, were ruthlessly brushed aside. This was the question that he must then and there decide: should he, or should he not at last do what he knew he ought, renounce his selfish ambitions, relinquish, if need be, his fondly cherished hopes and plans for the future, commit his life wholly unto God, and from henceforth follow in

the path in which God might lead? Should he persist in living for self or should he begin to live for others? If he became persuaded that God called him to be a minister of religion, was he willing to enter upon even so difficult a task?

While the preacher was still a long way from the end of his sermon, he bowed his head upon the back of the seat before him, and for the first time in his life prayed in perfect sincerity the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done." What the good God wills concerning my life, I will. I can live no longer in conflict with my conscience, for life is not worth living on such terms. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

In that quiet hour the struggle of years was ended. His awakened spiritual nature had come to feel the need of perfect union with God. There and then he made the supreme self-surrender, and consecrated his life to God. As far as he knew he kept nothing back, made no reservation. His highest and holiest ideal had proved stronger than his personal inclination and ambition. And he found God for himself. A great calm pervaded his entire being. He felt as the prophet Isaiah when the live coal from the altar

touched his lips; "Lord, here am I; send me." Send me on any difficult errand that may seem wise to Thee. What before seemed impossible has become a privilege.

The congregation was dismissed, and he went out into the storm. But the gloom that had depressed him had vanished, and "a great light shone round about him." In spite of the storm the trees of the college campus had never before seemed one half so beautiful. It was a transformed world, a wonderfully fresh new world into which he had entered.

Those about him cleverly criticised the sermon of the afternoon, as college students will. He felt no resentment, but only an amazed and tender pity. Why could they not see what that sermon had meant to him, and what it might have meant to them? They appeared utterly unmoved by what had effected nothing short of a revolution in his personal life.

Since that day in the college chapel his convictions concerning many things have been greatly modified. Many of the beliefs he then held he holds no longer. But from that day to this he has never once questioned the reality of what he then ex-

perienced; he has never for any length of time lost faith in the God to whom he there and then dedicated his life.

Something like this, then, is what is meant by a consecration, a dedication of one's life to God. We modern men and women do not and can not think of the Eternal God in the same way; we do not and can not describe religion in the same terms. But in some God, some Supreme Intelligence, some "Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness," some Good-Will at the heart of things we must believe, and to that Supreme Good-Will we must dedicate our lives. For all time and at any cost, we must break with our old self-centered lives, and devote ourselves to the cause of righteousness and human brotherhood. Only as we make the supreme venture of faith, do we discover a sure foundation beneath our feet.

And there is no other way whereby we can be saved. "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

IV

THE SERVICE THAT FOLLOWS

IV

THE SERVICE THAT FOLLOWS

IF the personal consecration, the supreme commitment of one's self to God, has been made with clear intelligence and with perfect sincerity of heart, the devoted service of one's fellow men, an active life of truth, righteousness and good-will, naturally and inevitably follows. The peace, the inward approval that comes to a man when the conflict between his lower self and his higher, spiritual self is ended by the victory of the higher, is but a foretaste of the fuller, richer and abiding joy experienced when he actually begins to do the Father's will, actually begins to live the good life. An experience of religion is exceedingly defective, in truth is no genuine religious experience, which ends at the moment of consecration. It is one thing to be brought to the point where you can pray with true humility of spirit, "Thy will, not mine be done," and it is another and very different thing to begin patiently, stead-

fastly to do what you know to be God's good-will, begin in very truth to enter upon the realization of your ideals.

"I go, sir," said the responsive son of Jesus' parable, when his father bade him go work in his vineyard. In all probability the son had a real regard for his father, and fully intended to go and work; but "he went not." He readily committed himself to the performance of a task which he never performed. His willingness to go was but a transient emotion.

Thus many a would-be religious man has mistaken the emotion which attended the consecration of his life to God, for a genuine "assurance of faith" which can be fully experienced only by those who are actually living the religious life. A vision may be vouchsafed me; I may eagerly engage to perform the task involved; and then after all miserably fail.

"If any man will come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." It is the will and the deed, the will followed by the deed, that counts. He only is the true disciple who follows along the difficult way his Master trod, the way of self-denying service. The Kingdom of God of Jesus' vision will never

come on earth among men until Christians of all sects learn that there can be no true religion apart from a life of brotherly kindness and social justice.

For a man is called upon to make the surrender of self, the consecration of his life to God, not as an end in itself, not as an attainment in itself of any real worth, but simply and solely as a means to a divine end. It is self-surrender for a very concrete and definite positive purpose, for nothing less than that man may become a co-worker with the Eternal God. The self-surrender, the consecration, is but the first necessary step to be taken in an exceedingly long and laborious service to last as long as life lasts. In very truth, "There is no discharge in that war."

Burst out into joyous, exultant song when you have once and forever resolved to become reconciled to your ideal, you may and must, for the experience justifies it. Radiantly smile through your grateful tears as you kneel at the heart's inner shrine, and make the supreme consecration. "Arise, and go in peace," after you have once for all decided in the only reasonable and right way the most important question man is called upon to decide, to live as a

child of the good God ought to live. But do not be seriously disturbed because when you awake on the morrow the emotion of to-day may have subsided. Do not break down on the very threshold of the new life, just when you are summoned to prove the sincerity of your consecration by the fidelity of your service. Emotion or no emotion, that service must be entered upon now, from this very moment, and can be entered upon in spite of the absence of all emotional ardor, for true it is that

“ tasks in hours of insight willed
Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.”

“ Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? ” From the moment of dedication the religious man will begin to do, to act, to achieve. He will not consent to be the dupe of a mere emotionalism. He will not be disobedient to the heavenly vision. What truth and justice and good-will to his fellow men require he will perform. Religion and ethics are one, and can not be separated. In the very act of consecrating himself to God, he consecrates himself to the service of his fellow men. He can not begin to be a religious man

without beginning to be a moral man.

What we call Christian Ethics is not a body of formal rules of conduct; it is the living of the Christ life, in the spirit in which the good Master lived it. It is the living to-day under modern conditions of the very life that Jesus of Nazareth lived in ancient Palestine under the conditions of his age. There can be no Christian faith worthy of the name that is not grounded in Christian ethics. The argument of the Apostle James is unanswerable: "Show me thy faith apart from thy works and I by my works will show thee my faith." The highest morality is practical religion in all human relationships. Religion is the broader term because it includes morality.

When we speak to-day of "salvation by character," what we mean, I take it, is that we do not believe that there can be any salvation which does not save. We can not believe in any non-natural, magical rescue from bondage to appetite and passion, to pride and greed: nor in any miraculous escape from future remorse and shame. The only faith that saves from the presence and power of sin is a faith which in-

volves the resolute activity of the individual who has sinned. He must sincerely repent of his sin, of all the wrongdoing of the past; he must steadfastly turn away from all wrongdoing; he must turn to God, the alone Good, and dedicate his life to Him; and trusting in the divine within himself, he must begin to do what is just and true and good. Salvation is nothing more nor less than the creating of a new character. What he becomes, the character that he develops, is the only objective test of his religion.

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee.” The man who has come into union with God alone appreciates what the Hebrew prophet is trying to express in these words. He ardently longs after a fuller and fuller possession of the very qualities of character which he perceives to be divine. Nothing less than the possession of them can satisfy him.

He must be pure, holy in thought, in word and in deed, pure in his secret chamber as well as in the company of others. The purity he loves and seeks is no mere negation; it is positive, active, aggressive. He is the foe of whatever sullies the purity

of others. He would make the "beauty of holiness" irresistibly attractive to even the most indifferent.

He must be true in all his speech, in all his acts; true at any cost. He will be too brave and loyal ever to compromise with falsehood. His reverence for truth will constrain him to choose to be true even at the sacrifice of place and power among men, even at the sacrifice of any and every material good. He will love truth better than he loves his own life.

He must be just in things great and small, to every man. He will not only avoid all injustice; he will be positively just. He will be just to poor and rich alike, to the weak and powerful alike, to superior and to inferior, to employer and employé alike, to the alien and stranger as well as to friend and neighbor, to the black or red or yellow man as well as to the white man. He will be just in all his business relations, in all his political relations, in all his social relations.

He must be kind and generous, possessed by the spirit of good-will. He will be kind and generous even to his enemies, to those who hate him and have grievously wronged him. What is possibly harder

still, he will be kind and generous to those whom he has wronged. A love that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things," will triumph in his daily life. His love will be so great that it will be impossible for him to separate his individual good, his personal happiness, security and well-being, from the good, happiness, security and well-being of others. He will never forget that "we be brethren," in the one great family of God the Father of us all. When his brothers and sisters suffer, he will suffer with them, and will not be comforted until they, too, are comforted. In the critical situations of life his love will prove to be more than a mere sentiment; it will be active, aggressive, victorious good-will.

To what particular form of human service he will devote himself will depend upon the circumstances of his life and training, upon his native and acquired gifts, upon his individual tastes, upon the opportunities that are presented to him. His very livelihood itself will be his particular form of service, and the spirit in which he pursues it will be profoundly religious. No one can dictate to another just how that

other can best serve. Every form of genuine, helpful human service, every service that actually ministers to the legitimate needs of man is alike honorable, provided only the motive be equally pure and disinterested. Every man, and not alone the minister of religion, ought to pursue a divine calling, ought to hear the voice of God calling him to his particular life work. It should be a "God-given hest" to which he responds.

When the disciples rebuked the woman who broke a cruse of the costly ointment of spikenard and lavishly poured it out upon the head and feet of her beloved Master, Jesus in turn rebuked them; "Let her alone; why trouble ye her? . . . She hath done what she could." In her endeavor to show her love and gratitude she followed her clearest leading. In this simple story is taught a most valuable lesson.

Who are we to disapprove of and denounce as wasteful and impractical any form of genuine human service, no matter how widely it may differ from our own? The consecrated artist serves when he paints beautiful pictures or carves noble statues, or designs and erects admirable

buildings, or composes sublime symphonies just as truly as the minister of religion, or the teacher in the school, or the mother in the home, or the business man at his desk, or the carpenter at his bench. Provided only that there be the same spirit of consecration, the digger of a useful ditch or the builder of a safe road serves just as truly as the prime minister of a great state. And Milton is right. Given the same consecration,

“ They also serve who only stand and wait.”

It is the spirit in which one does what he can, rather than what he does. No matter how restricted the range of one's activities, the spirit to serve must be controlling.

What repelled George Eliot in the teaching of so many professed Christians of her time is certainly not so common as it was, but in many quarters it still persists. She called the religion which insisted so exclusively, as it seemed to her, upon individual preparation for a future world, while it so tragically ignored efforts put forth to transform this present world into the Kingdom of God, the religion of “ other-worldliness.” What must I do to

be saved? signifies to multitudes of people, What must I do to escape future punishment and attain future blessedness? not What must I do to be delivered from a selfish life here and now?

“One world at a time,” was Father Taylor’s gentle rebuke of this religion of “other-worldliness,” for he knew that a genuine experience of religion is the best possible preparation for the enjoyment of any world. The ardent devotee fleeing from the cares and distractions of the world about her, willfully evading its serious responsibilities, ignoring its numerous and importunate calls for personal service, to kneel in raptures before a sacred shrine in some protected cell, represents an abnormal and unwholesome type of religion. Not apart from the world, apart from his fellow men, alone in some secret chamber before a shrine does a man’s religious experience come to perfect flower, but in the crowded street, on errands of mercy, or in the noisome tenement house, or in the chamber of pain. “My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me.” My life is to do the will of Him who sent me.

No; man can not experience religion alone; he never could; he never can. In-

deed there has never been a great religious teacher among any people who has not taught with greater or less clearness this fundamental truth, that there can not be any assurance of salvation, any consciousness of union with the good God which does not come through association with others along the lines of human service here and now. There can not be any purely individualistic religion worthy of the sacred name of religion, which begins and ends with a mere subjective experience.

This does not mean that the most spiritual of men must always live in the public eye. It was a profound need that drove the good Master out into the wilderness, or up into the mountain under the stars, or beside the silent sea, to be alone with God, to meditate and pray. Without these hours of solitude he could not do the work he was sent to do. Paul in the crises of his life, Martin Luther in the crises of his life, Abraham Lincoln in the crises of his life, needed these hours of solitude just as Jesus did. The modern religious man needs them just as much, for the active life must be renewed by these hours of solitary reflection. To replenish its exhausted

energies, to marshal its disorganized forces, the individual soul must often be alone with its God. Most great beneficent deeds are preceded by meditation and prayer.

All such hours of meditation and prayer apart from one's fellows, however, are but seasons of preparation, simply means to the one divine end of human service. They are but to aid the consecrated man the better to serve his brethren, to serve them more wisely, heartily, efficiently, and prove equal to all the emergencies of life. It is the service of men, and not contemplation, meditation, that must constitute the center of life.

God is my Father; man is my brother. Until I become consciously a child of God, at one with Him, and because I am His child, a brother to all God's children, the humblest and the meanest as well as the most exalted, my personal life has not come to complete fulfillment. I must find God for myself "down among His people," wherever wrongs are to be righted, wherever sorrowful hearts are to be comforted. To experience religion, "pure and undefiled religion," is to become a citizen of the Kingdom of God of Jesus' vision,

a useful and loyal citizen. The Kingdom of God means the transfiguration of the present world, the reign of truth, purity, justice and good-will here and now. It is only as I am working with all my mind and heart to advance the interests of this Kingdom of God, that I can at last come to know what personal religion actually means, that I can attain the assurance of faith so vividly described by prophets and saints of every age and of every race.

V

THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH

V

THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH

WHOEVER has won a victory over his lower animal self, has consecrated his life to God and the prosecution of high and worthy spiritual ends, has actually begun to serve those about him in the spirit of good-will, must sooner or later experience an inward assurance, a firm persuasion of faith, an unshaken confidence in the presence and power of God in his personal life. This "full assurance of faith," as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes it, is the crown of a personal experience of religion. No faithful and obedient child of God can forever remain in darkness and uncertainty. "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching," is just as true to-day as it was nineteen hundred years ago. If the conditions are fulfilled this assurance will just as certainly come as the light will come in the morning, as the flowers will come

in the spring. Sooner or later there will come to the man who is doing the will of God the abiding conviction that he is not alone, struggling alone towards the shining heights, but that the Great Companion is with him to give him and the cause he serves ultimate victory.

No voice of approval and assurance may speak to him from without, although so clear and vivid may be the experience that many persons have actually thought that they heard such a voice and have responded to it. But from within the voice will certainly speak; through man's own spiritual nature will the Eternal Spirit be revealed. "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

"Go not my soul in search of Him,
But to thyself repair;
Wait thou within the silence dim,
And thou shalt find Him there."

If this is God's world, and man be not merely a creature but a child of God, the child ought to know it and live perpetually in the joy of such a knowledge. If man has grown a soul, and has come to feel his need of religion; if he has consecrated his

life to the highest and holiest and best that he has been able to conceive, to his God; if he has begun to live for others, live not to be served but to serve; he will find repose in the Eternal. "Lord, Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee." Find repose in God, experience the full assurance of faith, every child of God living the divine life most certainly will.

This assurance, this confidence, this firm persuasion of faith, however, does not come to all persons in the same manner. It may come very gradually like the dawn in our Northern land; or it may come more suddenly, as day bursts upon tropic lands; or it may come like a lightning flash, and abide forever. As far as we know, Jesus of Nazareth never remembered the time when he was not consciously a child of God, living in his Father's world, engaged in his Father's business. When twelve years of age in the temple at Jerusalem there was but one motive which controlled him; "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business"? To Saint Paul the experience came later in life after his dazzling vision.

To Saint Augustine it came suddenly,

“by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart.” To Saint Francis of Assisi it came only after a long travail of spirit, several years after he had forsaken his selfish pleasures and had begun to follow in the footsteps of his Master. To Savonarola it came gradually while he was engaged in his work for the reformation of the morals of the people of Italy. Martin Luther attained it by degrees; he had been two years a monk before his heart was at rest, and he was consciously at one with God.

Although as a child George Fox “knew pureness and righteousness,” as he quaintly confesses, it was not until years afterward that the “inner light” dawned upon his soul. In the tireless service of his Master it steadily grew clearer and brighter.

During all the years in which John Wesley was engaged in the service of others, in Oxford and in America, with the chief motive, as he confesses, of saving his own soul, he was restless, inwardly dissatisfied, without any assurance of faith; he was trying to be a good man, a Christian man, but he did not know what personal religion means. It was only when at last,

at the age of thirty-five, he had forgotten all about himself in his devoted service for the salvation of others, that he tells us, "I felt my heart strangely warmed . . . and an assurance was given me." From that hour he became the great evangelist to the people of eighteenth century England and America.

Theodore Parker like Edward Everett Hale seems never to have remembered the time when he was not in conscious fellowship with God. He is describing his own experience when he says: "In the child it is only the faint twilight, the beginning of religion, that you take notice of, like the voice of the bluebird and the phœbe, coming early in March, but only as a prelude of that whole summer of joyous song which, when the air is delicate, will ere long gladden and beautify the procreant nest."

To James Martineau at the age of seventeen, when he was engaged in learning to be an engineer, "under a sudden flash and stroke of sorrow," as he describes it, "the scales fell from his eyes, and the realities and solemnities of life first came upon him. Here it was that the religious part of his life commenced; in

fact, the light was so overpowering and so strong, that it bore him from the workshop of his occupation, and turned him from an engineer into an evangelist." It was to this sudden experience that he referred in old age, as the beginning of his conscious religious life: "Who can ever forget the intense and lofty years when first the real communion of the Living God — the same God that received the cries of Gethsemane and Calvary — and the sanctity of the inward Law, and the sublime contents of life on both sides of death, broke in a flood of glory upon his mind, and spread the world before him stripped of his surface-illusions, and with its diviner essence cleared."

This vivid consciousness of the reality of the unseen world, this assurance of faith, is but the consummation of a personal religious experience; it is impossible for it to stand alone. It comes only to the sincere, self-forgetting soul, only to him who has made the supreme consecration, who has entered upon the life of human service. "He that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." All who have thus experienced religion for themselves can unite and clasp hands across

the chasm of race and of creed and of years. There is not one way for the European to experience religion, and another for the Asiatic, and another for the African. There was not one way of experiencing religion nineteen hundred years ago, and another way for our present age; one way for Paul, and another way for Martineau. The assurance of faith is one and the same for all. "The seekers of the light are one."

“ One in the freedom of the truth,
One in the joy of paths untrod,
One in the soul's perennial youth,
One in the larger thought of God.”

Hymns of all languages that have sprung out of a personal experience of religion can be sung by all who share the experience. The language may differ; the symbols employed may differ; but the essential spirit of them all is the same. It is indeed a glorious company of apostles, prophets, martyrs and saints that unite in praising the one and only God and Father of us all!

But how shall this assurance of faith be tested? How shall we be able to distinguish between what is true and what is

spurious? "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them," by their conduct, by their lives. An assurance of faith is of no value whatsoever unless it has back of it a divine life. "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." This is the actual fruit a man's life must bear before he can have any confidence in the genuineness of his professed assurance.

Longfellow's poem entitled "Legend Beautiful" teaches an often neglected truth. The Blessed Vision had visited the cell of a monk who was the devoted almoner of the Brotherhood. While he was rapturously kneeling before his radiant guest, the convent bell rang clamorously, summoning him to go and minister to the sick and the poor who were thronging the courtyard. Should he go and forsake the Blessed Vision, or should he stay?

"Then a voice within his breast
Whispered, audible and clear
As if to the outward ear:
Do thy duty; that is best;
Leave unto thy Lord the rest."

He immediately rose, left the cell and

went and ministered to the sick and the poor. When he returned to his cell an hour later, in a somewhat weary and despondent mood, there was the Blessed Vision as before, only more divine.

“ Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled.”

The Blessed Vision is a fit symbol of what we mean by an assurance of faith. The mystic vision, the confident inner assurance of being at one with God, comes only to him who is devoted to the service of his fellow men, and abides with him only so long as he resists the temptation to be diverted from the active to the contemplative life. And to such a man, sooner or later, it will come. For there is nothing strained or unnatural or morbid about such an assurance. “The most recent psychology,” says Prof. Winchester in his “Life of John Wesley,” when he comes to speak of Wesley’s critical experience of religion, “pronounces these sudden transitions from a lower to a higher, a perturbed to a restful spiritual state, however caused, to be no proof of morbid or abnormal psychological conditions, but rather, in countless instances, to mark the ingress of new truth

and new motives otherwise inaccessible." Such experiences imply a spiritual psychology, but is there any other psychology worthy of the name?

A half century ago, it seemed to many of the brightest minds of Europe and America that the entire universe could be explained, adequately explained, in terms of matter and force. The marvelous discoveries of modern physical science had for the moment intoxicated men, swept them off their feet. Walt Whitman well describes the attitude of the age in these lines from the "Song of the Universal":

"Lo! keen-eyed towering Science,
As from tall peaks the modern overlooking,
Successive absolute fiats issuing.
Yet again, lo! the Soul above all Science,
For it has history gathered like husks about the
globe,
For it the star-myriads roll through the sky.
.
For it the partial to the permanent flowing,
For it the real to the ideal tends."

The reign of philosophical Naturalism was short-lived, and we of the present generation are living in the age of the "Soul," of Spiritual Reality. Even most scholars

devoted to the study of physical science have become more modest in the claims they put forth; they have come to perceive more clearly, to discriminate more carefully, to appreciate more profoundly. Many of them are frank enough to recognize the truth of Kepler's words, "I think Thy thoughts after Thee, O God." Lord Kelvin, up to his death a short time ago England's foremost physicist, was a pronounced advocate of a spiritual psychology. To him the soul was "above all science." He knew from his own experience what personal religion means. And this is true of Sir Oliver Lodge and of other men of science of the same rank.

It can not be denied, however, that there are among us many pure, high-minded men and women who are heartily devoted to the service of man, and yet who can not find God, can not attain the assurance of faith of which we speak. These reverent truth-seekers declare that they do not know. They know what love to man means; what love to God means, they do not know.

The negative testimony of even these best of men and women can not in the slightest degree disturb the faith of those

who possess an experience of their own, and who "know whom they have believed." Those who know pass no ungenerous criticism upon their fellow workers in the holy cause of humanity, and do not question their fellow workers' sincerity. What they do question is, whether these sincere comrades have been seeking for God in the right quarter; whether they may not have been trying to grasp by means of purely intellectual processes what must be acquired in an entirely different manner.

According to the testimony of the greatest religious teachers of every age the way of religion is so plain and simple that "wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." Is it not possible that for many persons in our highly sophisticated age the way of religion is too plain and simple to be easily recognized? They are looking for something so very different. They have been wont to grapple with difficult and intricate problems, and in the very contest to experience the keenest delight. They are disappointed, almost grieved, when in place of what they expect, there is pointed out to them the homely way along which so many common wayfarers are traveling. "Suffer little

children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye can not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Such a simple, child-like self-surrender shocks their pride.

Or may there not be lurking in their minds a survival of that mischievous prejudice of certain forms of early Puritanism against a religion that is not stern and somber? The assurance of faith which multitudes of their fellows experience is too good to be true. They positively distrust what brings happiness and peace. Just because this assurance of personal religion so marvelously transfigures human life and irradiates even difficult and dreary and most trying human experiences, it must be mere self-delusion.

No, no! religion at its best is not stern and somber and forbidding; it is the most attractive thing in human life, the fullest of joy and blessedness and content. The assurance of faith means that man has come to his own in a divine universe. Man is the child of the Eternal Father! Why should he not rejoice, rejoice evermore? All men are God's beloved children!

“ God’s in his heaven —
All’s right with the world.”

At the secret heart of things all is right. Every human child is on the way towards perfection. The universe is one; there is no permanent dualism within it. There is work enough for the children of God to do to set right what seems to be wrong with the existing order, but it is work towards

“ one far-off divine event,
Towards which the whole creation moves.”

It is work together with God; it is God’s own work.

Can there be anything selfish, divisive, ignoble, in this joyful assurance? There is nothing in it but what makes a man or a woman a more devoted son or daughter, a father or mother a more devoted parent, a citizen a more alert and courageous servant of the commonweal, a brother man a more loyal and affectionate brother. An experience of religion which is consummated in such an assurance of faith means that at last the individual life has come to perfect flower, the individual man into perfect union with God.

VI

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF
LIFE

VI

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF LIFE

“ OLD things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” So it seemed to Saint Paul after he had been delivered from “ this body of death,” after he had begun to live the very life of Jesus Christ, to spend himself in the service of his brethren, “ in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” “ If God be for us who can be against us? ”

Just such a transfiguration follows upon a genuine experience of personal religion to-day. “ Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Whenever a man comes into accord with his higher self, into harmony with the divine will, and gives himself in true self-forgetfulness to the service of others, the entire world — the world of physical nature and the world of human nature — becomes transformed. It is a fresh, new,

divine world out upon which he looks, everywhere filled by a mysterious divine presence,

“ A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused.”

Every place upon which he stands becomes holy ground. In the flower-strewn meadow, in the recesses of the forest, in the ocean waves, in the purple hills, in the snow mountains, in the sunset sky, in the overarching starry spaces at midnight, in the Madonna's smile, in the faces of little children, in every heroic action, in every homely service of man to man, he beholds God. All the world becomes suffused with

“ The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet's dream.”

“ The consecration ” is what transforms the ordinary common-place man into a poet, a seer who henceforth lives, not by bread alone, but by “ admiration, faith and love.” All visible things become symbols of spiritual realities which “ eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.”

He who has experienced religion for himself has found God for himself, is never alone, is nowhere alone. "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?"

"Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet —
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

For him prayer ceases to be a mere formal exercise, cold and lifeless, and becomes vital, throbbing with spiritual meaning. It becomes actual communion with the Great Companion, spirit communing with Spirit, friend meeting Friend, child gazing confidently up into the Father's face. It becomes the throwing wide open of all the avenues of approach to one's being to the instreaming of divine light and power and love.

"I do not pray because I would,
I pray because I must:
There is no meaning in my prayer
But thankfulness and trust."

So long as a man's religion rests upon the testimony of others, is a mere hearsay religion, he has never learned what true

prayer means; he first begins to pray when he finds God for himself. Henceforth he does not need to be told what are, and what are not the proper objects of prayer. He does not need to discuss the question as to what changes are effected by prayer, for such questions have lost their significance and have become trivial. Instead of philosophizing about prayer, he begins to pray. It becomes the most natural thing for him to pour out into the ear of his Heavenly Father all his secret longings and aspirations, all his hopes and fears, and to rejoice in the divine sympathy, comfort and strength which come to him through prayer. In such personal communion everything that affects the welfare of a child of God is important, and it becomes irrelevant to seek to discriminate between what is great or small, what is trifling or important. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows."

"Fear not." It is in the trust which conquers all fear, in the trust which is victorious over all doubt and despair that

personal religion culminates. "Take no thought for your life," does not mean to live without painstaking plan, without proper provision for the future; it means to live without anxiety, without tormenting care, without fear. The victory has been won, even although one may not always be conscious of it. As we know very well, even the most devoted of men can not always feel alike, can not always and everywhere be equally conscious of the divine presence. There come times when emotional ardor has cooled, and when physical weakness and pain have obscured the vision of the spirit.

They have dulled the vision of the spirit; they have not obliterated it. Even amid the darkest sorrows, the most disturbing perplexities of human experience, when the burdens of the religious man seem to be greater than he can bear, when his pathway seems to be closed by insuperable obstacles, and he halts in trouble and bewilderment, almost heart-broken, uncertain in which direction to turn, he is not forsaken, he is not left alone, he does not despair. The voice of gentle stillness which whispers "Peace, Peace," the light which steadfastly shines about him, the un-

seen hand which guides along the perilous way, is the voice of God sounding more clearly, the light of God shining more brightly, the hand of God gripping more firmly in just so far as he remains unshaken in his resolution to live the divine life, and to make righteousness and goodwill his chief concern.

“ O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! ” Such a cry of agony may be wrung from his heart, as it was wrung from the heart of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. But the spirit of trust and obedience will not fail. “ O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done! ”

No disappointment, no pain, no sorrow, no loss of friends and loved ones, no threatened peril to the beloved cause, nor the approach of death itself “ shall be able to separate us from the love of God,” from the conscious support and comfort of the Heavenly Father. The surface of the life of the child of God may be lashed into a very tumult of commotion, but down below in the deeps of his nature there will remain quietness and repose, “ the peace of God

that passeth all understanding." All transient surface emotions will yield to the abiding convictions in the deeps of his nature.

He who lives constantly in fellowship with God will not be seriously amazed and disturbed even by the many difficult moral problems which here and now he is unable to solve. He knows too well how narrowly he is hemmed in by natural and inevitable barriers. "For now we see through a glass darkly . . . now I know in part." There is an eternal future in which to learn, in which to acquire fuller and more adequate knowledge. "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." Somewhere, sometime, when we come to see "face to face," all these difficult moral problems shall be solved.

For the present, he possesses a clue to the mystery; holds in his hand "the guiding thread so fine along the mighty labyrinth"; and this is enough. He is thoroughly convinced that partial knowledge, instead of being of little worth, is of great worth, is genuine knowledge as far as it goes; that the circle of light within

which he securely moves is no less bright because there is darkness all about it. And he knows, too, that the circle grows wider and wider, has actually grown wider and wider since he became obedient to the divine laws.

In just so far as he knows, he will obey. He will trust; he will pray; he will toil. All remediable human suffering he will seek to relieve; all the wrongs of human society he will resolutely labor to set right. He will find his supreme joy in this very toil. Because he is at one with God all his efforts to realize on earth the Kingdom of God of Jesus' vision will be not only whole-hearted and tireless, but patient and hopeful, for does not God the Eternal Right work through him and together with him? His work is God's work; it is his just because it is God's.

His suffering and toiling brethren for whom his heart bleeds are God's children, every one of them; they are objects of a love infinitely transcending his own. The Eternal God is not only the Creator of men; He is the suffering Savior of men, suffering with them that He may redeem them, that "out of weakness" they may be "made strong."

“ Do I find love so full in my nature, God’s ultimate gift,
That I doubt His own love can compete with it?
Here the parts shift?
Here the creature surpass the Creator,—the end,
what Began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for
this man,
And dare doubt He alone shall not help him,
who yet alone can? ”

The confident assurance that because
God is good, good must finally triumph in
every human life,

“ that good shall fall
At last — far off — at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring, ”

will not make the man who has experienced religion a mere inactive spectator, a quietist; will not in the slightest degree lessen his vigorous participation in the struggle towards the final good. What it will do is this; it will reënforce his courage, give him proper poise, save him from despondency and despair, make him divinely patient even when the struggle seems most desperate. “ He that believeth shall not make haste, ” and only he that believeth.

One never employs such terms as haste and hurry when speaking of the work of a

truly great man, a man at one with God. His work always gives the beholder a consciousness of power held in reserve. It is so well done just because no haste, no anxiety, no feverish impatience, has entered into the doing of it. The really great man works zealously, steadfastly but never wastefully; he works calmly, with the repose, not of exhaustion nor of weakness, but with the repose of power. He has learned the secret of the repose of the Eternal Father, and therefore his work is efficient, beneficent, enduring. Fluctuations of feeling, varying degrees of clearness in his convictions, in the vividness of his faith, the religious man must expect; for while he is spirit akin to the Eternal Spirit, he is here and now an embodied spirit, more or less subject to the mutations of the physical organism he uses. As Saint Paul so well describes it, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." Even after the transfiguration on the mount of vision the good Master was obliged to go down from the mountain into the desolate plain to grapple with the grim forces of evil. Emotional reactions must be expected and provided for. Just as in the olden time the sacrifice must be daily

repeated, and the light before the altar constantly replenished, so must the experience of religion be constantly renewed, the consecration made over and over again, the human service be ever begun afresh.

It is no mere magical transfiguration which we are attempting to describe, an experience which once possessed will always suffice. The very first act of the busiest day must be the reconsecration of the life to God, and the last conscious act of the waking hours must be the renewal of the consecration. Only thus will the days be bound together into one perfect whole.

Thus consecrated, thus hallowed, in the abiding assurance of faith, in joyous beneficent activity, will the days of the conscious child of God pass swiftly into years. Every year will grow better and better, fuller of human interest and of a divine content. And old age itself will be transfigured, glorified. To think of old age as a period in life to be dreaded, as a period of vain regret, of a fond backward gazing towards the joys and satisfactions of youth, is to think of the human spirit as subject to decay. To the conscious child of God old age will be a period of eager, joyous anticipation of "the best that is to be."

The truly religious man will grow old beautifully, as the leaves upon the trees of our Northern land grow more beautiful as they pass from the green of summer to the crimson, purple and gold of autumn. As the fruits of the orchard mellow and ripen towards the harvest time, so will a religious man's nature mellow and ripen with the advancing years. Browning's Rabbi Ben Ezra is the type of what every old age ought to be:

“ Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, ‘ A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be
afraid.’ ”

Whoever has found God for himself, whoever has experienced personal religion, sees all, and is not afraid. He has caught at least a glimpse of the whole as planned. To him the transfiguration of life means, also, the transfiguration of what in our ignorance we call death. He is fully persuaded that death is but an incident in the life of the children of God. Life, the only life worth considering, goes right on in a straight line, this side of death, and be-

yond. Death ends nothing except grievous bondage to this body of flesh and blood. The child of the Eternal can not die, can not cease to exist. He can not fall by the wayside just as he has begun to climb towards the shining heights. His moral tasks, his service of love, his beneficent activities are commenced here, only commenced; they must be continued yonder under freer and more favorable conditions. His ideals, his highest and holiest ideals, beckon him forward, forward forever! He trusts the inspirations of the world's greatest poets and prophets, because there is something within him that assures him of the truth of what they see.

“ Joy, shipmate, joy!
(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry)
Our life is closed, our life begins,
The long, long anchorage we leave,
The ship is clear at last, she leaps!
She swiftly courses from the shore,
Joy, shipmate, joy.”

VII

WORSHIPING AND WORKING
TOGETHER

VII

WORSHIPING AND WORKING TOGETHER

FOR centuries throughout Christendom it has been customary to divide human beings into two mutually exclusive classes, saints and sinners, the saved and the unsaved, the sheep and the goats of the Gospel parable; but the modern world has learned to discriminate more carefully. If there is to be any division into classes — a rather perilous undertaking at the best — at least three, rather than two, must be recognized. First there is a comparatively small class of persons who “fear not God, nor regard man,” but live hard, narrow, selfish lives, feeding upon husks, the food of swine and not men. These persons seem to be utterly indifferent to the Eternal Values; they seem never to have grown a human soul. They are certainly defectives, and must be treated as such. A few of them may be described as degenerates.

There is a second and much more

numerous class of men and women who, while often living very much as those who compose the first class, described above, are more or less discontented with themselves, and with their selfishness and sin. They have come to possess ideals to which in a fitful fashion they seek to be loyal. They believe in God and desire to do His will; they actually desire to live for others, to engage in some beneficent service. But they are weak and vacillating, the creatures of varying impulses and moods. Many of them may be described as having "come to themselves," and as having started on the way home from "the far country" into which they had strayed, even although they do not seem to have made much progress on the way.

And finally, there are those who may be said to have attained, to have reached home, to have found God, to be in purpose and will at one with Him, to be devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the service of their fellow men. By reason of their simple trust, perfect consecration, loyal service, they are rejoicing in the assurance of faith, an assurance which nothing can disturb. They do not claim to be saints because they have learned to appreciate

what saintship implies; because they have won ideals so far in advance of their present attainment. What they do claim, however, is their divine inheritance, their right to be called the children of God; and by their lives of purity, truthfulness, righteousness and love they seek to justify their claim. These are the men and women who constitute the "one holy church of God," that spiritual body which appears

" Through every age and race,
Unwasted by the lapse of years,
Unchanged by changing place."

The members of this spiritual body are to be found under every form of organized religion, and outside of all organizations. In many respects they are diverse from one another. They do not think alike and can not subscribe to the same creeds; they do not explain their religious experience in the same way, do not employ the same ritual of worship, do not participate in the same sacraments, are not engaged in the same forms of human service. And yet, inasmuch as they all share one common spirit, are entirely one in purpose and practical aim, whenever and wherever they meet, they recognize one another as fel-

low-worshippers and fellow-workers, worshipping the same God, though it may be under different names, working together loyally towards one common Brotherhood of Man. Though they do not belong to the same visible church, they belong to the one invisible spiritual body, the One Holy Catholic Church. I trust, I love, I serve, not simply I believe, is the pass-word that is never disregarded among these children of the good God.

Between those who differ so widely from one another in taste, in temperament, in natural gifts, between those who possess different degrees of culture, who speak different languages, who inherit different traditions, there naturally can be no organic unity, not even upon the most generous terms. Even the wisest and saintliest of men will describe the God in whom they believe, the God whom they have found for themselves, in language more or less colored by the philosophical school in which they have been trained, by the race to which they belong, by the age in which they live. Granted that the truth at the heart of all religions is one and the same, men's interpretations of that truth will never be the same; neither will

their ecclesiastical organizations be the same. Their organizations will differ as their theologies differ.

In so far as the religion of the spirit gains the ascendancy in all these religious organizations, however, this is what we have a right to expect; these organizations shall cease to be hostile to one another, cease to be divisive centers fostering the bitterness of envy and jealousy among their adherents, and shall more and more foster the spirit of sympathy and goodwill. For are they not all engaged in the same undertaking, fighting the same battle against one common enemy, worldliness, indifference to the claims of high ideals, selfish greed in all its protean forms? Are they not all seeking the same goal, a redeemed human society? As true spirituality gains the ascendancy, these various organizations will become friendly, co-operative bodies, everywhere presenting to the common enemy one united front; all working together towards the one common goal.

Naturally and fittingly may one cherish his own religious body, highly prize his own theological or philosophical system, because this has helped him to find God for

himself, has quickened his personal religious life; but the God whom he has found to be his companion and friend is not the exclusive God of his sect, but the God of the whole earth, the God and Father of all men. His experience of religion did not come to him by reason of what his church holds apart from his fellow men, apart from the disciples of other religions, but by reason of what all hold in common. His very religious experience ought to bind him by the closest of ties to his fellow men. What is essential and vital in his religious experience is his trust in God, the personal commitment of his life to God, and the service of man which inevitably follows such consecration and service. This is what actually counts, and everything else, precious and important though it may be, is unessential, and not worth contending for.

“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Heart faith, rather than the reasoned conclusions of the intellect, hallowed though the latter may be by the many generations of believers, is of supreme importance. Does a man actually place before himself as his supreme Good, his ideal towards which his entire being aspires,

“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are to be revered, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gracious”? It is this attitude of his entire moral being, and not the historic belief to which he professes to adhere, and not the symbols which he uses to express his worship, and not the ecclesiastical organization to which he belongs that determines what he actually is, that determines whether or not he is a sincere member of the one holy church of God.

We are living at a time when all churches, all religious bodies of every name, are being subjected to a searching test, are being tried “so as by fire.” Not the hostile world only, but their own most earnest spiritual members are testing them. In the light of what has been ascertained to be essential in religion, what is the real character of these churches? Are they simply societies of respectable persons of similar tastes and of kindred pursuits who come together to gratify their social instincts, or to help bolster up one another’s religious opinions, or to minister to one another’s emotional cravings, or to help merely to perpetuate the existence of a sect,

or even the existence of this present social order? Or are they organizations first of all to promote the spread of pure and undefiled religion, the religion of personal experience, and thus spiritualize the whole of life? Do they seek primarily to perpetuate themselves, to fill up and strengthen their own ranks, or are they willing to lose their own life if thereby they may the more surely and the more speedily usher in the Kingdom of God?

Are their services of worship calculated mainly to soothe and comfort those who participate in them, to make them feel better satisfied with themselves and with their fellow-worshippers, to make it easier for them to justify what they do out among their fellow men, or are they calculated to create within the hearts and minds of their worshippers a divine discontent with themselves and with what they are doing that is opposed to justice and human brotherhood? Is their principal object, or at least the principal end they attain, to provide æsthetic enjoyment, or to prove spiritually strengthening and uplifting?

Are the churches centers not only of spiritual light, but also of spiritual power, communicating that power to all who come

657705

in touch with them? Do they actually inspire the worshiper to "go out into all the world to preach the gospel to every creature"? Do they exert even upon the more reluctant a kind of divine compulsion to share with their fellows an experience that glorifies their own lives?

If this is what they actually accomplish in the community, we care not by what name they may be called, nor what their past history may have been, nor what claims they may urge or fail to urge; they are indeed one and all branches of the Church Universal, the one Holy Church of the living God. They do not need to fear, for they will successfully meet every test that may be applied to them. They can not be supplanted. Their future is assured.

For this is an age of specialization. Only those individuals and organizations that can not perform their work most efficiently are supplanted. Everyone will admit that certain lines of work in which the Christian Churches were engaged in the past, and rightly engaged, have been taken up and carried on more successfully by other agencies. Such agencies are hospitals, asylums, organized charities,

benevolent societies, schools of all kinds, fraternal organizations without number. All these specialized organizations perform their particular service to the community to-day more efficiently than the churches can perform it. But the distinctive work of ministering to the religious life belongs to the churches as much as it ever did. They are the only organizations which stand committed to just this work. In so far as they perform this work, are true to their distinctive mission, none of the hostile forces of the modern world can prevail against them. If we understand by the church organized religion in all its various forms, we must claim that the church is certainly a divine institution.

The church is a divine institution, but not an infallible institution. In her attempts to arbitrarily control the growing religious life of man she has made many and grievous mistakes in the past. Fallible men of authority in the church have presumed to place limitations upon the operation of the divine Spirit, and the Spirit has broken through all these artificial restraints. Over and over again has the church needed to be reformed, and

again and again has she been reformed. But because of her unique mission she has endured through all the vicissitudes of the past, and will endure for all time. If religion is what we claim that it is, not something abnormal, not something that a man can live without, but rather the natural, normal fulfillment of life itself, life's blossoming out into perfect beauty and significance, the church that ministers to this religious life, that fosters the development of this life, stands in no danger of being discredited and outgrown in the modern world. Changed in many respects, and adapted to modern conditions she must and will be; but so changed, so adapted, the church will continue to be what she has been in the past, the greatest and most highly valued of human institutions. Other institutions may serve the end of their existence, decline and utterly perish; the church will never decline and perish. Her work will never be completed, not even when human society shall have been transformed into the Kingdom of God, and all men have consciously become the children of God and brethren one of another. Her work will continue to be to help to minister to the religious life, to

help to keep alive and strengthen the consciousness of divine fellowship and of human brotherhood.

To-day, and in all the days to come, the church as organized religion will continue to make use of all the instrumentalities that have been tried and have proved helpful and even necessary for the successful prosecution of her work. She will continue to avail herself of the noblest and most beautiful architecture, sculpture, and painting to adorn her houses of worship; of the noblest and most beautiful poetry and music to enrich her ritual of worship. She will study even more faithfully than in the past her Holy Bible, humanity's literature of spiritual wisdom and power. Prayer and praise will fill her temples as in the most devotional age, but it will be a more intelligent prayer and a more appreciative praise. Her passion for righteousness will not be less than that of Israel's greatest prophets; it will be profounder and even more intense. Her whole-hearted devotion to truth will not be inferior to that of the foremost leaders of modern science. Her love and goodwill will be the love and goodwill of the Prophet of Nazareth.

Without such a church, without organized religion, there can be no redemption of human society, no enduring brotherhood of man. Unless men worship together, share in the conscious fellowship of God, together ascribe supreme worth to their spiritual ideals, they will not long work together towards one divine end. Whenever persons who are true brothers in spirit, loyal in their service to their fellow men, deny this, and themselves claim to reject all religion in the interests of humanity, they do not understand the language they employ. In so far as they are sincere, in so far as they are actual brothers, it is not religion which they reject, but what in the past has too often been confused with religion, and declared to be religion. What they reject is the undue emphasis the church has been wont to place upon ritual, polity and creed, and upon preparation for the world to come, and the too slight emphasis she has placed upon Christlike human service here in this world. They can not and do not reject the religion of the great prophets and saints of all time, such as we are endeavoring to describe; they can not and do not reject the church as the spiritual body of men and women worshiping and working together because they have found

God for themselves, have committed their lives to Him and have begun to minister to others; they can not and do not reject a church which exists not for the aggrandizement of a favored class, or of select individuals, but simply for the good of man.

It is a long discipline, for the individual and for society, to bring man's feelings and thoughts and words and deeds into abiding harmony with what man himself conceives to be truth, justice and good-will. It is indeed a long and tedious process to redeem human society from bondage to false and unworthy standards of values, from indifference to the high and holy interests of life, from all pettiness and narrowness of vision, from all selfish greed, from all lack of love. We do not claim for a moment that the Kingdom of God can come down out of heaven, out of the realm of the ideal, and be set up on earth in a day, or a year, or in the lifetime of any one of us. Over and over again must be done what seems to be the same preliminary work of education. Over and over again must men be taught how to find God and how to treat their brother man. "The word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a

little and there a little." This, as Isaiah saw, is the divine method of education, of the education not of Israel only, but of the human race. Each lesson is a link in the chain, a step in the ascending stair, a page in the great book of life. The Master of Life will advance the pupil just as soon as he is ready for it. The lesson, however, must be learned at whatever cost, through struggle and failure and renewed struggle, for there is no other way.

This is the task set the church in every age, the task of being the world's inspired and inspiring teacher of religion. Who can undertake such an exalted task? Only those who have experienced religion, only those who have found God for themselves. The men and women of personal religion in all the churches can and will, humbly yet courageously and confidently, undertake this task. The vision has been vouchsafed to them, and they will not be disobedient; they have received the command, and they will prove loyal to their "God-given hest." All barriers between them of race and creed will be broken down, and together will they worship and together will they work for the redemption of the world.

APR 21 1972

