

## A LESSON FOR THE DAY ;

OR

THE CHRISTIANITY OF CHRIST, OF THE CHURCH,  
AND OF SOCIETY.

"Hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches, . . . I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest, and art dead."—BIBLE.

EVERY man has at times in his mind the Ideal of what he should be, but is not. This ideal may be high and complete, or it may be quite low and insufficient; yet in all men, that really seek to improve, it is better than the actual character. Perhaps no one is satisfied with himself, so that he never wishes to be wiser, better, and more holy. Man never falls so low, that he can see nothing higher than himself. This ideal man which we project, as it were, out of ourselves, and seek to make real; this Wisdom, Goodness, and Holiness, which we aim to transfer from our thoughts to our life, has an action, more or less powerful, on each man, rendering him dissatisfied with present attainments, and restless, unless he is becoming better. With some men it takes the rose out of the cheek, and forces them to wander a long pilgrimage of temptations, before they reach the delectable mountains of Tranquillity, and find "Rest for the Soul," under the Tree of Life.

Now there is likewise an ideal of perfection floating before the eyes of a community or nation; and that ideal which hovers, lofty or low, above the heads of our nation, is the Christian ideal, "the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus." Christianity then is the ideal our nation is striving to realize in life; the sublime prophecy we are laboring to fulfill. Of course, some part thereof is made real and actual, but by no means the whole; for if it were, some higher ideal must immediately take its place. Hence there exists a difference between the actual state in which our countrymen are, and the ideal state in which they should be; just as there is a great gulf between what each man is, and what he knows he ought to become. But there is at this day not only a wide difference between the

true Christian ideal, and our actual state, but what is still worse, there is a great dissimilarity between *our ideal*, and the ideal of Christ. The CHRISTIANITY OF CHRIST is the highest and most perfect ideal ever presented to the long-eyes of man; but the CHRISTIANITY OF THE CHURCH, which is the ideal held up to our eyes, at this day, is a very different thing; and the CHRISTIANITY OF SOCIETY, which is that last ideal imperfectly realized, has but the slightest affinity with Christ's sublime archetype of man. Let us look a little more narrowly into the matter.

Many years ago, at a time when all nations were in a state of deep moral and religious degradation; when the world lay exhausted and sick with long warfare; at a time when Religion was supported by each civilized State; but when everywhere the religious form was outgrown and worn out, though the State yet watched this tattered garment with the most jealous care, calling each man a blasphemer, who complained of its scantiness, or pointed out its rents; at a time when no wise man, any where, had the smallest respect for the popular Religion, except so far as he found it a convenient instrument to keep the mob in subjection to their lords; and when only the few had any regard for Religion, into whose generous hearts it is by nature so deeply sown, that they are born religious; at such a time, in a little corner of the world, of a people once pious but then corrupted to the heart; of a nation well known only to be justly and universally hated—there was born a man; a right true man. He had no advantage of birth, for he was descended from the poorest of the people; none of education, for he was brought up in a little village, whose inhabitants were wicked to a proverb; and so little had schools and colleges to do for him, that his townsmen wondered he had learned to read. He had no advantage of aid or instruction from the great and the wise; but grew up and passed his life, mainly, with fishers, and others of like occupation,—the most illiterate of men.

This was a true man; such as had never been seen before. None such has risen since his time. He was so true, that he could tolerate nothing false; so pure and holy that he, and perhaps he alone of all men, was justified in calling others by their proper name; even when that

proper name was Blind Guide, Fool, Hypocrite, Child of the Devil. He found men forgetful of God. They seemed to fancy he was dead. They lived as if there had once been a God, who had grown old and deceased. They were mistaken also as to the nature of man. They saw he had a body; they forgot he is a soul, and has a Soul's Rights, and a Soul's Duties. Accordingly they believed there had been Revelations, in the days of their fathers, when God was alive and active. They knew not there were Revelations every day to faithful Souls;—Revelations just as real, just as direct, just as true, just as sublime, just as valuable, as those of old time; for the Holy Spirit has not yet been exhausted, nor the River of God's inspiration been drunk dry by a few old Hebrews, great and divine souls though they were.

He found men clinging to tradition, as orphan girls cling to the robe of their mother dead and buried, hoping to find life in what had once covered the living. Thus men stood with their faces nailed to the past; their eyes fastened to the ground. They dreamed not the sun rose each morning fresh and anew. So their teachers looked only at the west, seeking the light amid dark and thundering clouds, and mocking at such as, turning their faces to the East, expounded the signs of new morning, and "wished for the day."

This true man saw through their sad state, and comforting his fellows he said, Poor brother man, you are deceived. God is still alive. His Earth is under your feet. His Heaven is over your head. He takes care of the sparrows. Justice, and Wisdom, and Mercy, and Goodness, and Virtue, and Religion are not superannuated and ready to perish. They are young as Hunger and Thirst, which shall be as fresh in the last man as they were in the first. God has never withdrawn from the universe, but he is now present and active in this spot, as ever on Sinai, and still guides and inspires all who will open their hearts to admit him there. Men are still men; born pure as Adam and into no less a sphere. All that Abraham, Moses, or Isaiah possessed is open unto you, just as it was to them. If you will, your inspiration may be glorious as theirs, and your life as divine. Yea, far more; for the least in the New Kingdom is greater than the greatest

in the Old. Trouble not yourselves then with the fringes and tassels of thread-bare tradition, but be a man on your own account.

Poor sinful Brother, said he to fallen man, you have become a fool, an hypocrite, deceiving and deceived. You live as if there were no God; no soul; as if you were but a beast. You have made yourself as a ghost, a shadow, not a man. Rise up and be a man, thou child of God. Cast off these cumbrous things of old. Let Conscience be your Lawgiver; Reason your Oracle; Nature your Temple; Holiness your High-priest; and a Divine Life your Offering. Be your own Prophet; for the Law and the old Prophets were the best things men had before John; but now the Kingdom of Heaven is preached; leave them, for their work is done. Live no longer such a mean life as now. If you would be saved—love God with your whole heart, and man as yourself. Look not back for better days and say Abraham is our father; but live now, and be not Abrahams, but something better. Look not forward to the time when your fancied deliverer shall come; but use the moment now in your hands. Wait not for the Kingdom of God; but make it within you by a divine life. What if the Scribes and Pharisees sit in the seat of authority? Begin your kingdom of the divine life, and fast as you build it, difficulties will disappear; false men shall perish, and the true rise up. Set not for your standard the limit of old times,—for here is one greater than Jonah or Solomon,—but be perfect as God. Call no man master. Call none father, save the Infinite Spirit. Be one with him; think his thoughts; feel his feelings, and live his will. Fear not; I have overcome the world, and you shall do yet greater things; I and the father will dwell with you forever. Thus he spoke the word which men had longed to hear spoken, and others had vainly essayed to utter. While the great and gifted asked in derision, Art thou greater than our father Jacob—multitudes of the poor in spirit heard him; their hearts throbbed with the mighty pulsations of his heart. They were swayed to and fro by his words, as an elm-branch waves in the summer wind. They said, this is one of the old Prophets, Moses, Elias, or even that greater Prophet, the "desire of all nations." They shouted with one voice,

He shall be our king; for human nature is always loyal at its heart, and never fails of allegiance, when it really sees a real hero of the Soul, in whose heroism of Holiness there is nothing sham. As the carnal pay a shallow worship to rich men, and conquering chiefs, and other heroes of the Flesh, so do men of the spirit revere a faithful Hero of the Soul, with whatever in them is deepest, truest, and most divine.

Before this man had seen five and thirty summers, he was put to death by such men as thought old things were new enough, and false things sufficiently true, and like owls and bats shriek fearfully when morning comes, because their day is the night, and their power, like the spectres of fable, vanishes as the cock-crowing ushers the morning in. Scarce had this divine youth begun to spread forth his brightness, men had seen but the twilight of his reason and inspiration, the full noon must have come at a later period of life, when experience and long contemplation had matured the divine gifts, never before nor since so prodigally bestowed, nor used so faithfully. But his doctrine was ripe, though he was young. The truth he received at first hand from God required no age to render it mature. So he perished. But, as the oak the woodman fells in Autumn on the mountain side scatters ripe acorns over many a rood, some falling perchance into the bosom of a stream, to be cast up on distant fertile shores, so his words sprung up a host of men; living men like himself, only feebler and of smaller stature. They were quickened by his words, electrified by his love, and enchanted by his divine life. He who has never seen the Sun can learn nothing of it from all our words; but he who has once looked thereon can never forget its burning brilliance. Thus these men, "who had been with Jesus," were lit up by him. His spirit passed into them, as the Sun into the air, with light and heat. They were possessed and overmastered by the new spirit they had drunken in. They cared only for truth and the welfare of their brother men. Pleasure and ease, the endearments of quiet life and the dalliance of home, were all but a bubble to them, as they sought the priceless pearls of a divine life. Their heart's best blood—what was it to these men? They poured it joyfully as festal wine was spent at the marriage in Cana

of Galilee; for, as their teacher's life had taught them to live, so had his death taught them to die to the body, that the soul might live greater and more. In their hearts burned a living consciousness of God; a living love of man. Thus they became rare men, such as the world but seldom sees. Some of them had all of woman's tenderness, and more than man's will and strength of endurance, which earth and hell cannot force from the right course. Thus they were fitted for all work. So the Damascus steel, we are told, has a temper so exquisite, it can trim a feather and cleave iron bars.

Forth to the world are sent these willing seedsmen of God; bearing in their bosom the Christianity of Christ, desiring to scatter this precious seed in every land of the wide world. The Priest, the Philosopher, the Poet, and the King,—all who had love for the past, or an interest in present delusions,—join forces to cast down and tread into dust these Jewish fishermen and tent-makers. They fetter the limbs; they murder the body; but the word of God is not bound, and the soul goes free. The seed, sown broadcast with faith and prayers, springs up and grows night and day, while men wake and while they sleep. Well it might, beneath the hot sun of persecution, and moistened by the dew that martyrs shed. The mailed Roman, hard as iron from his hundred battles, saw the heroism of Christian flesh, and beginning to worship that, saw with changed heart, the heroism of the Christian soul; the spear dropped from his hand, and the man, new-born, prayed greater and stronger than before. Hard-hearted Roman men, and barbarians from the fabulous Hydaspis, stood round in the Forum, while some Christian was burned with many tortures for his faith. They saw his gentle meekness, far stronger than the insatiate steel or flame, that never says enough. They whispered to one another—those hard-hearted men—in the rude speech of common life, more persuasive than eloquence, That young man has a dependent and feeble father, a wife, and a little babe, newly born, but a day old. He leaves them all to uncertain trouble, worse perhaps than his own, yet neither the love of young and blissful life, nor the care of parent, and wife, and child can make him swerve an inch from the truth. Is there not God in this? And so when the winds

scattered wide the eloquent ashes of the uncomplaining victim to regal or priestly pride, the symbolical dust, which Moses cast towards Heaven, was less prolific and less powerful than his.

So the world went for two ages. But in less than three centuries the faith of that lowly youth, and so untimely slain, proclaimed by the fearless voice of those trusting apostles, written in the blood of their hearts, and illuminated by the divine life they lived—this faith goes from its low beginning on the Galilean lake, through Jerusalem, Ephesus, Antioch, Corinth, and Alexandria; ascends the throne of the Cæsars, and great men, and temples, and towers, and rich cities, and broad kingdoms lie at its feet. What wrought this wondrous change so suddenly; in the midst of such deadly peril; against such fearful odds? We are sometimes told it was because that divine youth had an unusual entrance into life; because he cured a few sick men, or fed many hungry men, by unwonted means. Believe it you who may, it matters not. Was it not rather because his doctrine was felt to be true, real, divine, satisfying to the soul; proclaimed by real men, true men, who felt what they said, and lived what they felt? Man was told there was a God still alive, and that God a Father; that man had lost none of that high nature which shone in Moses, Solomon, or Isaiah, or Theseus, or Solon, but was still capable of Virtue, Thought, Religion, to a degree, those sages not only never realized, but never dreamed of. He was told there were Laws for his nature,—laws to be kept: Duties for his nature,—duties to be done: Rights for his nature,—rights to be enjoyed: Hopes for his nature,—hopes to be realized, and more than realized, as man goes forward to his destiny, with perpetual increase of stature. It needs no miracle but a man to spread such doctrines. You shall as soon stay Niagara with a straw; or hold in the swelling surges of an Atlantic storm, with the “spider’s most attenuated thread,” as prevent the progress of God’s truth, with all the Kings, Poets, Priests, and Philosophers, the world has ever seen; and for this plain reason, that Truth and God are on the same side. Well said the ancient, “Above all things Truth beareth away the victory.”

Such was the nature, such the origin of the CHRISTIAN-

ITY OF CHRIST; the true ideal of a divine life; such its history for three hundred years. It is true that, soon as it was organized into a church, there were divisions therein, and fierce controversies, Paul withstanding fickle Peter to the face. It is true, hirelings came from time to time to live upon the flock; indolent men wished to place their arm-chair in the church and sleep undisturbed; ambitious men sought whom they might devour. But in spite of all this, there was still a real religious life. Christianity was something men felt, and felt at home, and in the marketplace, by fire-side and field-side, no less than in the temple. It was something they would make sacrifice for, leaving father and mother and child and wife, if needful; something they would die for, thanking God they were accounted worthy of so great an end. Still more it was something they lived every day; their religion and their life were the same.

Such was Christianity as it was made real in the lives of the early Christians. But now, the CHRISTIANITY OF THE CHURCH, by which is meant that somewhat which is taught in our religious books, and preached in our pulpits, is a thing quite different, nay, almost opposite. It often fetters and enslaves men. It tells them they must assent to all the doctrines and stories of the Old Testament, and to all the doctrines and stories of the New Testament; that they must ascribe a particular and well-defined character to God; must believe as they are bid respecting Christ and the Bible, or they cannot be saved. If they disbelieve, then is the anathema uttered against them; true, the anathema is but mouthfuls of spoken wind; yet still it is uttered as though it could crush and kill. The church insists less on the divine life, than on the doctrines a man believes. It measures a man’s religion by his creed, and calls him a Heathen or a Christian, as that creed is short or long. Now in the Christianity of Christ, there is no creed essential, unless it be that lofty desire to become perfect as God; no form essential, but love to man and love to God. In a word, a divine life on the earth is the all in all with the Christianity of Christ. This and this only was the Kingdom of God, and eternal life. Now the church, as keeper of God’s Kingdom, bids you assent to arbitrary creeds of its own device, and bow the knee to

its forms. Thus the Christianity of the Church, as it is set forth at this day, insults the soul, and must belittle a man before it can bless him. The church is too small for the soul; "the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." Some writer tells us of a statue of Olympian Jove, majestic and awful in its exquisite beauty, but seated under a roof so low, and within walls so narrow, that should the statue rise to its feet, and spread the arms, it must demolish its temple, roof and wall. Thus sits Man in the Christian church at this day. Let him think in what image he is made; let him feel his immortal nature, and rising, take a single step towards the divine life—then where is the church?

The range of subjects the church deigns to treat of is quite narrow; its doctrines abstract; and thus Christianity is made a letter and not a life; an occasional affair of the understanding, not the daily business of the heart. The Ideal now held up to the public, as the highest ever spoken to man, is not the ideal of Christ, the measure of a perfect man, not even the ideal of the Apostles and early Christians. Anointed teachers confess without shame, that Goodness is better than Christianity. True alas, it is better in degree, yes different in kind from the Christianity of the church. Hence in our pulpits, we hear but little of the great doctrines of Jesus; the worth of the soul; the value of the present moment; the brotherhood of all men, and their equality before God; the necessity of obeying that perfect law God has written on the soul; the consequences which follow necessarily from disobeying; consequences which even Omnipotence cannot remove; and the blessed results for now and forever, that arise from obedience, and the all importance of a divine life. The power of the soul to receive the Holy Ghost; the divine might of a regenerate man; the presence of God and Christ *now* in faithful hearts; the inspiration of good men; the Kingdom of God on the Earth—these form not the substance of the church's preaching. Still less are they applied to life, and the duties which come of them shown and enforced. The church is quick to discover and denounce the smallest deviation from the belief of dark ages, and to condemn vices no longer popular; it

is conveniently blind to the great fictions which lie at the foundation of Church and State; sees not the rents, daily yawning more wide, in the bowing walls of old institutions; and never dreams of those causes, which, like the drugs of the Prophet in the fable, are rending asunder the Idol of Brass and Clay men have set up to worship. So the mole, it has been said, within the tithes of an inch its vision extends over, is keener of insight than the lynx or the eagle; but to all beyond that narrow range is stone blind.

Alas, what men call Christianity, and adore as the best thing they see, has been degraded; so that if men should be all that the pulpit commonly demands of them, they would by no means be Christians. To such a pass have matters reached, that if Paul should come upon the Earth now, as of old, it is quite doubtful that he could be admitted to the Christian Church; for though Felix thought much knowledge had made the Apostle mad, yet Paul ventured no opinion on points respecting the nature of God, and the history of Christ, where our pulpits utter dogmatic and arbitrary decisions, condemning as infidels and accursed all such as disagree therewith, be their life never so godly. These things are notorious. Still more, it may be set down as quite certain, that if Jesus could return from the other world, and bring to New England that same boldness of inquiry, which he brought to Judea; that same love of living truth, and scorn of dead letters; could he speak as he then spoke, and live again as he lived before, he also would be called an infidel by the church; be abused in our newspapers, for such is our wont, and only not stoned in the streets, because that is not our way of treating such men as tell us the truth.

Such is the Christianity of the church in our times. It does not look *forward* but *backward*. It does not ask truth at first hand from God; seeks not to lead men directly to Him, through the divine life, but only to make them walk in the old paths trodden by some good pious Jews, who, were they to come back to earth, could as little understand our circumstances as we theirs. The church expresses more concern that men should walk in these peculiar paths, than that they should reach the goal. Thus the means are made the end. It enslaves men to the Bible; makes it the soul's master, not its servant; forgetting

that the Bible, like the Sabbath, was made for man, not man for the Bible. It makes man the less and the Bible the greater. The Saviour said, Search the Scriptures; the Apostle recommended them as profitable reading; the church says, Believe the Scriptures, if not with the consent of reason and conscience, why without that consent or against it. It rejects all attempts to humanize the Bible, and separate its fictions from its facts; and would fain wash its hands in the heart's blood of those, who strip the robe of human art, ignorance, or folly, from the celestial form of divine Truth. It trusts the imperfect Scripture of the Word, more than the Word itself, writ by God's finger on the living heart. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," says the Apostle. But where the spirit of the church is, there is slavery. It would make all men think the same thoughts; feel the same feelings; worship by the same form.

The church itself worships not God, who is all in all, but Jesus, a man born of woman. Grave teachers, in defiance of his injunction, bid us pray to Christ. It supposes the Soul of all our souls cannot hear, or will not accept a prayer, unless offered formally in the church's phrase, forgetting that we also are men, and God takes care of oxen and sparrows, and hears the young ravens when they cry, though they pray not in any form or phrase. Still, called by whatever name, called by an idol's name, the true God hears the living prayer. And yet perhaps the best feature of Christianity, as it is now preached, is its idolatrous worship of Christ. Jesus was the brother of all. He had more in common with all men, than they have with one another. But he, the brother of all, has been made to appear as the master of all; to speak with an authority greater than that of Reason, Conscience, and Faith;—an office his sublime and Godlike spirit would revolt at. But yet, since he lived divine on the earth, and was a hero of the soul, and the noblest and largest hero the world has ever seen, perhaps the idolatry that is paid him is the nearest approach to true worship, which the mass of men can readily make in these days. Reverence for heroes has its place in history; and though worship of the greatest soul ever swathed in the flesh, however much he is idealized and represented as incapable of sin, is

without measure below the worship of the ineffable God; still it is the purest and best of our many idolatries in the nineteenth century. Practically speaking, its worst feature is, that it mars and destroys the highest ideal of man, and makes us beings of very small discourse, that look only backward.

The influence of real Christianity is to disenfranchise the man; to restore him to his nature, until he obeys Conscience, Reason, and Religion, and is made free by that obedience. It gives him the largest liberty of the Sons of God, so that as faith in truth becomes deeper, the man is greater and more divine. But now those pious souls who accept the church's Christianity are, in the main, crushed and degraded by their faith. They dwindle daily in the church's keeping. Their worship is not faith, but fear; and bondage is written legibly on their forehead, like the mark set upon Cain. They resemble the dwarfed creed they accept. Their mind is encrusted with unintelligible dogmas. They fear to love man, lest they offend God. Artificial in their anxiety, and morbid in their self-examination, their life is sickly and wretched. Conscience cannot speak its mother tongue to them; Reason does not utter its oracles; nor Love cast out fear. Alas, the church speaks not to the hearty and the strong; and the little and the weak who accept its doctrines become weaker and less thereby. Thus woman's holier heart is often abased and defiled, and the deep-thoughted and true of soul forsake the church, as righteous Lot, guided by an angel, fled out of Sodom. There will always be wicked men who scorn a pure church, and perhaps great men too high to need its instructions. But what shall we say when the church as it is impoverishes those it was designed to enrich, and debilitates so often the trusting souls that seek shelter in its arms?

Alas for us, we see the Christianity of the Church is a very poor thing; a very little better than Heathenism. It takes God out of the world of nature and of man, and hides him in the church. Nay, it does worse; it limits God, who possesseth heaven and earth, and is from everlasting to everlasting, restricting his influence and inspiration to a little corner of the world, and a few centuries of history, dark and uncertain. Even in this narrow range,

it makes a deity like itself, and gives us not God, but Jehovah. It takes the living Christ out of the heart, and transfigures him in the clouds, till he becomes an anomalous being, not God, and not man; but a creature, whose holiness is not the divine image, he has sculptured for himself out of the rock of life, but something placed over him, entirely by God's hand, and without his own effort. It has taken away our Lord, and left us a being whom we know not; severed from us by his prodigious birth, and his alleged relation to God, such as none can share. What have we in common with such an one, raised above all chance of error, all possibility of sin, and still more surrounded by God at each moment, as no other man has been? It has transferred him to the clouds. It makes Christianity a Belief, not a Life. It takes Religion out of the world, and shuts it up in old books, whence, from time to time, on Sabbaths and fast-days and feast-days — it seeks to evoke the divine spirit, as the witch of Endor is fabled to have called up Samuel from the dead. It tells you with grave countenance, to believe every word spoken by the Apostles, — weak, Jewish, fallible, prejudiced, mistaken as they sometimes were — for this reason, because forsooth Peter's shadow, and Paul's pocket-handkerchief cured the lame and the blind. It never tells you, Be faithful to the spirit God has given; open your soul and you also shall be inspired, beyond Peter and Paul it may be, for great though they were, they saw not all things and have not absorbed the Godhead. No doubt the Christian church has been the ark of the world; no doubt some individual churches are now free from these disgraces; still the picture is true as a whole.

Alas, it is true that men are profited by such pitiful teachings; for the church is above the community, and the CHRISTIANITY OF SOCIETY is far below that of the church; even in *that* deep there is a lower deep. This is a hard saying no doubt. But let us look the facts in the face, and see how matters are. It is written in traveller's journals and taught in our school-books, that the Americans are Christians! It is said in courts of justice that Christianity is part of the law of the land. With the innocent meaning, it is likely, that the Law of the Land is part of Christianity. But what proofs have we that the men of

New England are Christians? We point to our churches. Lovely emblems they are of devotion. In city and village, by road-side and stream-side, they point meekly their taper finger to the sky, the enchanting symbol of Christian aspiration and a Christian life. Through all our land of hill and valley, of springs and brooks, they stand, and most beautiful do they make it, catching the earliest beam of day, and burning in the last flickering rays of the long-lingering sun. Sweet too is the breath of the Sabbath bell: dear to the hearts of New England; it floats undulating on the tranquil air, like a mother's brooding note calling her children to their home. We mention our Bibles and religious books, found in the houses of the rich, and read with blissful welcome beside the hearth-stone of the poor. We point to our learned clergy, the appointed defenders of the letter of Christianity. All this proves nothing. The Apostles could point to no long series of learned scribes; only to a few rough fishermen in sheepskins and goat-skins. They had no multitude of Bibles and religious books, for they cast behind them the Old Testament, as a law of sin and death, and the New Testament was not then written, save in the heart; they had no piles of marble and mortar; no silvery and sweet-noted bell to rouse for them the slumbering morn. Yet were those men Christians. They did not gather of a Lord's-day, in costly temples, to keep an old form, or kill the long-delaying hours; — but in small upper rooms; on the sea-shore; beneath a tree; in caves of the desert mountains; or the tombs of dead men in cities, met those noble hearts, to worship God at first hand, and exhort one another to a manly life, and a martyr's death, if need were.

We see indeed an advance in our people above all ancient time; we fondly say, the mantle of a more liberal culture is thrown over us all. The improved state of society brings many a blessing in its train. The arts diffuse comfort; industry and foresight afford us, in general, a competence; schools and the printing-press, which works indefatigably with its iron hand, day and night, spread knowledge wide. Our hospitals, our asylums, and churches for the poor give some signs of a Christian spirit. Crimes against man's person are less frequent than of old, and the legal punishments less frightful and severe. The rich do

not ride rough-shodden over the poor. These things prove that the age has advanced somewhat. They do not prove that the spirit of Religion, of Christianity, of Love, the spirit of Christ, of God, are present among us and active; for enlightened prudence, the most selfish of selfishness would lead to the same results; and who has the hardihood to look facts in the face, and call our society spiritual and Christian? The social spirit of Christianity demands that the strong assist the weak.

We appeal as proofs of our Christianity to our attempts at improving ruder tribes, to our Bibles and Missionaries, sent with much self-denial and sacrifice to savage races. Admitting the nobleness of the design, granting the Christian Spirit is shown in these enterprises, — for this at least must be allowed, and all heathen antiquity is vainly challenged for a similar case, — there is still a most melancholy reverse to this flattering picture. Where shall we find a savage nation on the wide world that has, on the whole, been blessed by its intercourse with Christians? Where one that has not most manifestly been polluted and cursed by the Christian foot? Let this question be asked from Siberia to Patagonia, from the ninth century to the nineteenth; let it be put to the nations we defraud of their spices and their furs, leaving them in return our Religion and our Sin; let it be asked of the Red-man, whose bones we have broken to fragments, and trodden into bloody mire on the very spot where his mother bore him; let it be asked of the Black-man, torn by our cupidity from his native soil, whose sweat, exacted by Christian stripes, fattens our fields of cotton and corn, and brims the wine-cup of national wealth; whose chained hands are held vainly up as his spirit strives to God, with great, overmastering prayers for vengeance, and seem to clutch at the volleyed thunders of just, but terrible retribution, pendent over our heads. Let it be asked of all these, and who dares stay to hear the reply, and learn what report of our Christianity goes up to God?

We need not compare ourselves with our fathers, and say we are more truly religious than they were. Shame on us if we are not. Shame on us if we are always to be babies in religion, and whipped reluctant into decent goodness by fear, never growing up to spiritual manhood.

Admitting we are a more Christian people than our fathers, let us measure ourselves with the absolute standard. What is religion amongst us? Is it the sentiment of the Infinite penetrating us with such depth of power, that we would, if need were, leave father and mother and child and wife, to dwell in friendless solitudes, so that we might worship God in peace? O no, we were very fools to make such a sacrifice, when called on for the sake of such a religion as that commonly preached, commonly accepted and lived. It is not worth that cost; so mean and degraded is religion among us. Religion does not possess us as the sun possesses the violets, giving them warmth, and fragrance, and color, and beauty. It does not lead to a divine character. One would fancy the bans of wedlock were forbidden between Christianity and Life, also, as we are significantly told, they have been between Religion and Philosophy; so that the feeling and the thought, like sterile monks and nuns, never approach to clasp hands, but dwell joyless, each in a several cell. Religion has become chiefly, and with the well clad mass of men, a matter of convention, and they write Christian with their name as they write "Mr.," because it is respectable; their fathers did so before them. Thus to be Christian comes to nothing, it is true, but it costs nothing, and is fairly worth what it costs.

Religion should be "a thousand-voiced psalm," from the heart of man to man's God, who is the original of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, and is revealed in all that is good, true, and beautiful. But religion is amongst us, in general, but a compliance with custom; a prudential calculation; a matter of expediency; whereby men hope, through giving up a few dollars in the shape of pew-tax, and a little time in the form of church-going, to gain the treasures of heaven and eternal life. Thus Religion has become Profit; not Reverence of the Highest, but vulgar hope and vulgar fear; a working for wages, to be estimated by the rules of loss and gain. Men love religion as the mercenary worldling his well-endowed wife; not for herself, but for what she brings. They think religion is useful to the old, the sick, and the poor, to charm them with a comfortable delusion through the cloudy land of this earthly life; they wish themselves to keep some running

account therewith, against the day, when they also shall be old, and sick, and poor. Christianity has two modes of action, direct on the heart and life of a man, and indirect through conventions, institutions, and other machinery, and in our time the last is almost its sole influence. Hence men reckon Christianity as valuable to keep men in order; it would have been good policy for a shrewd man to have invented it on speculation, like other contrivances, for the utility of the thing. In their eyes the church, especially the church for the poor, is necessary as the Court-house or the Jail; the minister is a well-educated Sabbath-day constable; and both are parts of the great property establishment of the times. They value religion, not because it is true and divine, but because it serves a purpose. They deem it needful as the poll-tax, or the militia system, a national bank, or a sub-treasury. They value it among other commodities; they might give it a place in their inventories of stock, and hope of Heaven, or faith in Christ, might be summed up in the same column with money at one per cent.

The problem of men is not first the Kingdom of God, that is a perfect life on the earth, lived for its own sake, but first all other things, and then, if the Kingdom of God come of itself, or is thrown in to the bargain, like pack-thread and paper with a parcel of goods, why very well; they are glad of it. It keeps "all other things" from soiling. Does religion take hold of the heart of us? Here and there, among rich men and poor men, especially among women, you shall find a few really religious, whose life is a prayer; and Christianity their daily breath. They would have been religious had they been cradled among cannibals, and before the flood. They are divine men; of whom the spirit of God seems to take early hold, and Reason and Religion to weave up, by celestial instinct, the warp and woof of their daily life. Judge not the age by its religious geniuses. The mass of men care little for Christianity; were it not so, the sins of the forum and the market-place, committed in a single month, would make the land rock to its centre. Men think of religion at church, on the Sabbath; they make sacrifices, often great sacrifices, to support public worship, and attend it most sedulously, these men and women. But here the matter

ends. Religion does not come into their soul; does not show itself in their housekeeping and trading. It does not shine out of the windows of morning and evening, and speak to them at every turn. How many young men in the thousand say thus to themselves, Of this will I make sure, a Christian Character and Divine Life, all other things be as God sends? How many ever set their hearts on any moral and religious object, on achieving a perfect character, for example, with a fraction of the interest they take in the next election? Nay, woman also must share the same condemnation. Though into her rich heart God more generously sows the divine germs of Religion; though this is her strength, her loveliness, her primal excellence, yet she also has sold her birthright for tinsel ornaments, and the admiration of deceitful lips. Men think of religion when they are sick, old, in trouble, or about to die, forgetting that it is a crown of life at all times; man's choicest privilege; his highest possession; the chain that sweetly links him to Heaven. If good for anything, it is good to live by. It is a small thing to die religiously; a devil could do that; but to live divine is man's work.

Since Religion is thus regarded, or disregarded by men, we find that talent and genius, getting insight of this, float off to the market, the workshop, the senate, the farmer's field, or the court-house, and bring home with honor the fleece of gold. Meanwhile, anointed dulness, arrayed in canonicals, his lesson duly conned, presses, semi-somnous, the consecrated cushions of the pulpit, and pours forth weekly his impotent drone, to be blest with bland praises, so long as he disturbs not respectable iniquity slumbering in his pew, nor touches an actual sin of the times, nor treads an inch beyond the beaten path of the church. Well is it for the safety of the actual church, that genius and talent forsake its rotten walls, to build up elsewhere the church of the first-born, and pray largely and like men—Thy kingdom come. There is a concealed skepticism amongst us, all the more deadly because concealed. It is not a denial of God,—though this it is whispered to our ear is not rare,—for men have opened their eyes too broadly not to notice the fact of God, everywhere apparent, without and within; still less is it disbelief of the Scriptures; there has always been too much

belief in their letter, though far too little living of their Truths. But there is a doubt of man's moral and religious nature; a doubt if Righteousness be so super-excellent. We distrust Goodness and Religion, as the blind doubt if the sun be so fine as men tell of; or as the deaf might jeer at the extatic raptures of a musician. Who among men trusts conscience as he trusts his eye or ear? With them the Highest in man is self-interest. When they come to outside goodness, therefore, they are driven by fear of hell, as by a scorpion whip; or bribed by the distant pleasures of Heaven. Accordingly, if they embrace Christianity, they make Jesus, who is the archetype of a divine life, not a man like his brothers, who had human appetites and passions; was tempted in the flesh; was cold, and hungry, and faint, and tired, and sleepy, and dull—each in its season—and who needed to work out his own salvation, as we also must do. But they make him an unnatural character; passionless; amphibious; not man and not God; whose Holiness was poured on him from some celestial urn, and so was in no sense his own work, and who, therefore, can be no example for us, goaded as we are by appetite, and bearing the ark of our destiny in our own hands. It is not the essential element of Christianity, *love to man and love to God*, men commonly gather from the New Testament; but some perplexing dogma, or some oriental dream. How few religious men can you find, whom Christianity takes by the hand, and leads through the Saharas and Siberias of the world; men whose lives are noble, who can speak of Christianity as of their trading, and marrying, out of their own experience, because they have lived it? There is enough cant of Religion, creeds written on sanctimonious faces, as signs of that emptiness of heart, "which passeth show," but how little real Religion, that comes home to men's heart and life, let experience decide.

Yet, if he would, man cannot live all to this world. If not religious, he will be superstitious. If he worship not the true God, he will have his idols. The web of our mortal life, with its warp of destiny and its woof of free will, is most strangely woven up, by the flying shuttles of time, which rest not, wake we or sleep; but through this wondrous tissue of the perishing, there runs the gold

thread of eternity, and like the net Peter saw in his vision, full of strange beasts and creeping things, this web is at last seen to be caught up to heaven by its four corners, and its common things become no longer unclean. We cannot always be false to Religion. It is the deepest want of man. Satisfy all others, we soon learn, that we cannot live by bread only, for as an ancient has said, "it is not the growing of fruits that nourisheth man, but thy Word, which preserveth them that put their trust in thee." Without the divine life we are portionless, bereft of strength, without the living consciousness of God, we are orphans, left to the bleakness of the world.

But our paper must end. The Christianity of the Church is a very poor thing; it is not bread, and it is not drink. The Christianity of Society is still worse; it is bitter in the mouth and poison in the blood. Still men are hungering and thirsting, though not always knowingly, after the true bread of life. Why shall we perish with hunger? In our Father's house is enough and to spare. The Christianity of Christ is high and noble as ever. The Religion of Reason, of the Soul, the Word of God, is still strong and flame-like, as when first it dwelt in Jesus, the chiefest incarnation of God, and now the pattern-man. Age has not dimmed the lustre of this light that lighteneth all, though they cover their eyes in obstinate perversity, and turn away their faces from this great sight. Man has lost none of his God-likeness. He is still the child of God, and the Father is near to us as to him who dwelt in his bosom. Conscience has not left us. Faith and Hope still abide; and Love never fails. The Comforter is with us; and though the man Jesus no longer blesses the earth, the ideal Christ, formed in the heart, is with us to the end of the world. Let us then build on these. Use good words when we can find them, in the church, or out of it. Learn to pray, to pray greatly and strong; learn to reverence what is Highest: above all learn to live; to make Religion daily work, and Christianity our common life. All days shall then be the Lord's-day; our homes, the house of God, and our labor, the ritual of religion. Then we shall not glory in men, for all things shall be ours; we shall not be impoverished by success, but enriched by affliction. Our service shall be worship, not idolatry.

The burthens of the Bible shall not overlay and crush us; its wisdom shall make us strong, and its piety enchant us. Paul and Jesus shall not be our masters, but elder brothers, who open the pearly gate of Truth and cheer us on, leading us to the Tree of Life. We shall find the Kingdom of Heaven and enjoy it now, not waiting till Death ferries us over to the other world. We shall then repose beside the rock of ages, smitten by divine hands, and drink the pure water of life as it flows from the Eternal, to make earth green and glad. We shall serve no longer a bond-slave to tradition, in the leprous host of sin, but become free men, by the Law and Spirit of Life. Thus like Paul shall we serve the Christ within; and like Jesus serving and knowing God directly, with no mediator intervening, become one with Him. Is not this worth a man's wish; worth his prayers; worth his work, to seek the living Christianity; the Christianity of Christ? Not having this, we seem but bubbles, — bubbles on an ocean, shoreless and without bottom; bubbles that sparkle a moment in the sun of life, then burst to be no more. But with it we are men, immortal Souls, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.