

LECTURE LIX.

THE ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND SALVATION.

SYLLABUS.

1. What is the distinction made by the Westminster Assembly, between this grace, and the assurance of Faith?
Conf. of Faith, cb. 18. Ridgley, Qu. 80, § 1. Turretin, Loc. xv, Qu. 17, § 3-10.
2. State the Doctrine of Rome, concerning assurance of grace and Salvation, and her motives herein : Of early Reformers ; and of our Standards.
Council of Trent. Sess. 6, ch. 9, and Canones, 13, 14. Bellarmine, de Justif. bk. iii, chs. 6, 8. Calvin, Inst. bk. iii, ch. 2. Com. on Rom. iv : 16 ; viii : 34. Genevan Cat. p. 137. Niemyer. Augsburg Conf. § 5, and 20, Dörner's Hist. Prot. Theol., Vol. i, § 1, ch. 4, § a. Louis Le Blanc against Bossuet. Turretin, as above. Hill. bk. v. ch. 2. Conf. § 3.
3. Is the assurance of grace and salvation of the essence of Saving Faith ?
See Calvin, Turretin and Conf. as above. Ridgley, Qu. 81. Dick, Lect. 68. So. Presb. Rev. Jan. 1872., Art. i. Theol. of Plym. Brethren. Hill, as above. Sir W. Hamilton, on Unconscious Modifications of the Mind.
4. Prove that this assurance is attainable ; and should be the aim of every Believer.
Turretin, as above. Ridgley, Qu. 80.
5. By what means is it to be sought ?
See Rom. vii : 16, with Calv., Scott, Hodge, &c., in Loco. Watson's Theol. Inst. ch. 22, § 2. Hill, as above. J. Newton's Sermon, 20. H. Bonar's "Way of Peace," pp. 23, 24, 39, 262. Waymarks in Wilderness, Vol. iii, pp. 245, 263. Theol. of Plym. Brethren, as above. Chalmers' Theol. Inst. Vol. ii ch. 10.
6. Reply to objections ; and especially to the fear of its fostering Carnal Security.
Same authorities. and Turretin, Loc. iv, Qu. 13. Dick, Lect. 78.

“THE Assurance of Grace and Salvation” is “an infallible assurance of faith,” that the subject is in a state of grace,

and will be saved. The saving faith which our Confession discriminates from this, is the direct action of a full and cordial belief in the Gospel promise, with a receiving and resting on Christ from the heart. The latter, every true believer has, except when confused temporarily by the extreme buffetings of temptation ; the former is the complementary attainment of mature and vigorous faith. Some

works present us the same distinction by the phrases: "Assurance of Hope;" "Assurance of Faith." Others of the Reformed divines object much to this nomenclature, as being of a Jesuit origin. They argue, also, that assurance of hope must always accompany assurance of faith, because there must always be some hope, where there is any belief of the heart. They ask: How is hope defined? As desire, with expectation. Now, if a man has any belief of the heart, he desires. So, hope and faith, and the assurance of each, must be inseparable. This reasoning is employed, both against the pair of terms as a nomenclature; and (by others) against the very discrimination, which our Confession asserts. See here, say they, proof, that the Westminster Confession was wrong, and Calvin right: and that there is no faith where there are not both kinds of *πληροφορία*. But the solution is extremely easy. No supporter of the Westminster view denies, that even the weakest true faith is attended with an element of hope, more or less consciously felt; all we assert is: that there may be saving faith, and yet not a *πληροφορία ἐλπίδος*. Others, as we intimated, seem shy of this nomenclature, because of its Jesuit origin. They indeed, used, as they invented it *mala fide*: They represented the assurance of hope as grounded partly on the believer's own pious disposition, which they always assert to be mutable. Such an affection would not deserve to be called an assurance. But let us represent to ourselves an assurance of hope grounded "upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of the graces unto which these promises are made, and the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God;" and I see not why the phraseology should be rejected. It is, indeed, entirely scriptural. See Owen on Heb. vi: 11, and Poole's Synopsis on Col. ii: 2; Heb. xi: 1. Here we have the *πληροφορία τῆς συνέσεως*, and the *πληροφορία ἐλπίδος*. Does not the apostle distinguish between the assurance of the understanding and the assurance of hope? Again, it is objected, that since the faith and the hope have the same object, the blessings of redemption and the same warrant, the promises of God, they must be inseparable. I have admitted, that some degree of hope, perhaps scarcely conscious hope, is involved in all true faith. But the answer is in this fact. The promises are always practically conditioned on an instrumental condition; whence the assured expectation of enjoying them, the essential element of the *πληροφορία ἐλπίδος*, must be practically suspended on the consciousness that the terms are fulfilled. The promises are assuredly mine, provided I have genuine faith. (This expresses the *πληροφορία ἐλπίδος*.) But I know that there is a spurious faith. Hence, although I have some *ἐλπίς* from the moment I embrace that truth, I do not have the *πληροφορία ἐλπίδος*, until I have eliminated the doubt whether my faith is, possibly, of the spurious kind.

Many quibbles have been offered by Papists and rationalists, to show that neither of these (and especially not the assurance of hope) can rise so high as to deserve the name of an infallible assurance. If the latter did, it is urged, it should give a certainty of heaven equal to the certainty of our own existence, a certainty admitting of no degrees, and no increase by additions of subsequent evidence. But what sober believer can honestly claim this? Now, the answer to all this is easily found in an appeal to common sense. What does a man mean when he says he is sure of a thing? That he clearly sees some evidence of its truth, which mounts above even the highest probability, to demonstration. Any valid portion of such evidence is proper ground of certain conviction. Does this imply that the evidence cannot be increased, so that the certainty shall have a wider basis? By no means. So, although it was certainty before, it now becomes a more satisfactory certainty. Again: Assurance of faith, and still more, assurance of hope, embrace as elements of evidence, the state of the soul's own moral affections. The latter, for instance, is based upon a consciousness of the exercise of trust, love, penitence, submission, and peace. Hence, to every one who knows human nature, it is manifest that, however demonstrative may be such evidence in its very highest and purest examples, the certainty based upon it will be much more felt and conscious, at some times than at others, because the actings of those holy emotions, and the soul's attention to and consciousness of their actings, are more lively at times, than at others. Will not the soul, after it is actually in heaven, have more lively attention to, and consciousness of, its present blessedness at some times than at others? Does not the bereaved widow, who knows her loss only too well at all times, feel it far more sensibly at some times than at others? Third: it is a most incorrect analysis which either banishes the will from among the causes of belief, in cases of moral truths and evidences presented to the mind, or which denies that the certainty arising of such moral truths can be intellectually correct; because there is a voluntary element in it. In the case of all moral objects of belief, conviction is far from being a bare intellectual result; the state of the will powerfully modifies it. (See my analysis of Saving Faith). So obvious is this, that Des Cartes actually places belief among the emotional states of the soul. And yet, the rectitude of the state of will, which concurs in producing a given moral conviction of mind, may itself be the object of the mind's certain cognition. So that the mind, while aware that this mental conviction has been produced in part by a state of will, as well as by a light of evidence, shall also be certain that the will acted aright in that case; and hence, the given belief, though in part a result of the affections, will be felt to be intellectually as valid as though

Cavils against Possibility of Assurance.

it were a cold truth of abstract mathematics. If the student will remember, that the belief of this proposition, "I am now in a state of grace," or "I am not," is just one of those moral propositions, concerning which the state of will is most influential, he will see the application of these principles. It will appear why the intellectual belief of such propositions should vary in its felt strength; viz: because the active and voluntary part of its elements vary. And it will appear that this degree of fluctuation (so to speak) is not at all incompatible with certainty, and a proper intellectual basis of evidence. To dispute this, is as though one should say that, because the waters of the sea do not bear up the boat with the same immobility with which a stone pedestal bears its statue, therefore the waters do not sustain the boat. The assurance of hope, in the breast of the true and eminent saint, is a certainty at its lowest ebbs; at its higher floods, it is both solid and joyful.

That the saint ought to know he is a saint as clearly as he knows that he breathes, is simply playing Assurance a Moral Conviction, not a Sense Perception. with words. Who does not know that sensation-consciousness has a palpable element about it, which belongs to no intellectual belief, not even that of the exact sciences? The scholar knows that "the square of the hypotenuse is equal," &c.; but he does not feel it, as he feels his existence.

Romanists deny that a certain assurance of hope can be attained, except in the case of those eminent 2. Romish Doctrine Touching Assurance. saints and ascetics, to whom God gives it by special revelation—as to Stephen and Paul. In other cases, they judge it not attainable, not to be sought after, and not beneficial, even if attainable. Their motive is, obviously, to retain that power of priestcraft over souls, by which they may make gain of their absolutions, masses, indulgences, &c. The soul completely and finally justified in Christ, and assured thereof by grace, would be independent. 2 Cor. iii: 17.

The earlier Reformers, having learned to abhor this trafficking in the peace of immortal souls, felt impelled to teach that assurance is of the essence of saving faith, (though compelled to modify their assertion, in order to include even Bible saints). Thus, Calvin, Institutes, Bk. iii, ch. 2, § 7: "Faith is a steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence towards us," &c. Com. on Rom. viii: 16. "*Stat itaque Sententia, Neminem posse nomenari filium Dei, qui non se talem agnoscat.*" Of this, more anon.

The earlier Arminians (of Holland) taught that certain assurance of final salvation is not attainable in this life; and that to doubt thereof is salutary, and conducive to humility. So far as assurance is predicated of our final perseverance, and our election, the later Arminian Doctrine.

Arminians of Wesley's school must of course concur. But they teach, as one of their most distinctive points, that an assurance of present conversion (followed by some hope of final salvation) is not only possible, but essential to every true believer. And this is the immediate teaching of the Holy Ghost to the heart, without the Word or self-examination. Yet assurance of hope is not made by them of the essence of faith. First, say they, come repentance and faith, then justification, then regeneration, then this inwrought consciousness of adoption—faith itself being defined as a believing and embracing of the gospel. Here we have the mystico-scholastic notion of a revealed and immediate witness, borrowed from Rome through a Moravian medium by Wesley, and asserted as the privilege and attainment of every true convert. A still more direct historical channel may be found for the transmission of this doctrine into the Wesleyan System from the scholastic theology of the Romish monks. Wesley was a great admirer of Thomas a Kempis, of whose work he published an edition. Here, in the experience of this mystical scholastic, the idea appears in full form.

The Calvinistic world has now generally settled down upon the doctrine of the Westminster Assembly, that assurance of hope is not of the essence of saving faith; so that many believers may be justified though not having the former: and may remain long without it; but yet an infallible assurance, founded on a comparison of their hearts and lives with Scripture, and the teaching and light of the Holy Ghost, through and in the Word, is the privilege, and should be the aim of every true believer. Yet, this assurance, while both scriptural, reasonable and spiritual, and thus solid, may be more sensibly felt at sometimes, and may even be temporarily lost through sin, according to the remarks of our section I.

Before proceeding to argue this, let us briefly show (see Lect. on Faith,) what we have again asserted; that assurance of hope is not of the essence of saving faith. First: not only do some, yea many, who give other excellent evidences by their fruits, in our days lack this assurance; but some Bible saints lacked it at times. See Ps. xxxi : 22; lxxvii 2, 5; Is. l : 10, &c. These men did not therefore cease to be believers? The proof is so obvious that Calvin is obliged to modify the assertions of which we have seen specimens, to include these cases, until he has virtually retracted his doctrine.

(b.) Second: this doctrine really adds to the proposition which is the object of saving faith. That proposition is: "whosoever believeth shall be saved;" and according to its very nature, it must follow that the moment it is believed,

Doctrine of Westminster Assembly.

3. Assurance not of the essence of Faith, proved (a) by experience.

The Opposite Would Place Another Proposition as Object of Faith.

the sinner is saved, whether he sees any other truth or not. To teach the view of the first Reformers, instead of exalting Christ, as they, with their modern imitators boastfully claim, really calls the soul away from Christ, and bids him look at another proposition touching the state and actings of his own soul, before he is permitted to trust in Christ. Our view scripturally directs him to find his comfort by looking wholly out of himself to Christ. Indeed, if we adhere strictly to the terms of the gospel, we shall see that the exercise of such a faith as Calvin describes is an impossibility, without a new and direct revelation in every case. Thus, "no man is saved in Christ till he has come to believe that Christ has saved him." But it is only by believing that he is saved in Christ; so that this definition of faith requires the effect to precede its own cause. The sinner must therefore find out the "benevolence of Christ towards himself," not from the gospel promise, but from the Holy Ghost directly, without the gospel. But are we ready for this? Do we surrender the great truth, that Christ is the object, to which the Holy Ghost points the believing soul? And is Christ revealed anywhere but in the Word? I repeat: the Word nowhere says that A. B. shall be saved; but that "whosoever believeth shall be saved." How then is A. B. to know scripturally, that he is actually saved? Only by the rational deduction from the pair of premises, of which one is given by the Word, and the other by his regenerated consciousness: thus, "whosoever truly believes is saved." But I am conscious of truly believing; therefore I am saved." Now, my point is: that the mind cannot know the conclusion before it knows the minor premise thereof. On the contrary, it can only know the conclusion by first knowing both the premises. The student may see the rational and scriptural order copiously discussed by Turretin, Loc. xiv. qu. 14, § 45 to 52. The attempt may be made to escape this argument by saying that since faith is a divine and supernatural grace inwrought by the almighty Spirit, it can proceed independent of this rational order. But I answer: Does not the Holy Ghost always act on the soul according to its rational laws? Are not those laws of God's making? Does the assistance of the Spirit of all Truth result in the soul's acting abnormally, and against its proper laws? Unless then, there is a direct, immediate revelation to A. B. of his personal share in Christ, which no Calvinist asserts, there is no escape from my argument.

Third: if faith were such an exercise as this, when once the finally impenitent reach hell, it will no longer be fair to punish them for not believing unto salvation; for it will then be manifest that had they believed in Christ's benevolence towards themselves, it would not have been true. So that in refusing to believe, they acted so far properly: the Holy Ghost never

Finally Lost, Could
not be Convicted for
Unbelief.

gave them a warrant to believe. But the premise which leads to this conclusion cannot be right; for we know that God commands all men, everywhere, to repent and believe.

The scriptural argument against this exaggerated doctrine may be much strengthened by recalling the passages where self-examination is enjoined on professed believers; and that, not only as to the general propriety of their lives, but as to the very point, whether their state of grace is genuine. Here may be consulted Rom. v:4; 1 Cor. xi:28; 2 Cor. xiii:5; 2 Pet. i:10. Marks or signs are also laid down, by which one may try whether he has true or spurious faith. Jno. xv:14; 1 Epist. of John iii:14, 19. This apostle tells his people, that he wrote the epistle in order to enable them to know that they had eternal life. Our argument is: that had the assurance of our own grace and salvation been an essential part of faith, believers could not have been reasonably commanded to examine and settle the question: the simple fact that it needed examination would have shown them no believers at all.

The scriptural argument advanced by Calvin for his extreme view of faith amounts mainly to this: that the Apostles generally address believers and speak of them as persons assured in their hope, e. g., 2 Cor. xiii:5; v:1; 1 Peter i:8 and 9; 1 Jno. v:19, &c. But the first of these passages, when properly construed, only says that men are reprobates unless they have Christ formed in them, not unless they recognize Him in them. And to all of them, we reply, that when the sacred writers thus address a whole Church of professed believers in terms appropriate only to the best, they only use the language of Christian hope, charity and courtesy. The proof is indisputable: for those very Corinthians are sharply rebuked by Paul, and exhorted to examine themselves jealously; and John says that one object he had in writing his epistle, was to enable the people to come to an assurance of hope. 2 Pet. i:10; 1 Jno. iii:9, 10. The "we" which these apostles use are often no others than the apostles themselves, with any Christians of like attainments. But there is also some justice in the surmise, that assurance of hope was more generally given in those primitive days, because the Church was called to testify, and to suffer more. So that if it should even appear that it was the common attainment of believers then, this would not prove it of the essence of faith.

Those who revive the doctrine of Calvin here, also argue, that doubt and faith are opposites; so that where there is doubt, there cannot be hearty faith: that my conception of faith is really no faith at all; because it directs the inquirer to repose his trust, not upon the word and faithfulness of Christ, but upon certain affections which he supposes he sees in him-

self: and that, since consciousness attends all the operations of the soul, no man can believe without being conscious he believes. They insist much on the immediate and intuitive nature of consciousness in this concern, and even represent it as a species of sense-instinct. It is compared to "the animal sense of departed pain and present ease."

The reply to the first of these points is, that the weak believer does not doubt Christ at all; but only himself. It is not on the major, but on the minor premise of the believer's syllogism, that his consciousness is obscure. He can always say, with emphasis, that, were he only sure his deceitful heart was not deluding him with a dead faith, his assurance would be perfect. Now, mistrust of Christ is inconsistent with faith; but we are yet to learn that self-mistrust is incompatible with that grace. The second point receives its solution from the same syllogism. What would the minor premise be worth to establish a conclusion, without the major? But the weak believer takes that proposition: "Whosoever believeth is saved," solely on the authority of God. When that same God tells him that there are two kinds of believing, only one of which fulfils the term of that proposition, and that the deceitfulness of the heart often causes the false kind to ape the true; and when the humble soul inspects his own faith to make sure that it meets the terms of God's promise, prompted to do so by mistrust of self, it passes common wit to see, wherein that process is a "trusting in self, instead of God's word." To the argument from consciousness, there are two replies. One is: that distinct consciousness does not attend all the actions of the soul. There are, unquestionably, unconscious modifications of the mind. But it is more to our purpose to remark, that when the mind is confused by great haste, or the agitation of vivid emotions, or when the mental states are very complex, the remembered consciousness is obscured, or even lost. This well known truth evinces, that there may be a soul exercising a true though immature faith, and not distinctly conscious of it. But the other reply is still shorter: There is a spurious, as well as a genuine faith. If the man thinks he believes aright, he is conscious of exercising what he thinks is a right faith. This is the correct statement. Now, if the faith needs a discrimination to distinguish it from the dead faith, just to the same extent will the consciousness about it need the same discrimination.

When the reasonings of these theologians are analysed, they evidently disclose this basis, viz: Because the testimony of consciousness is immediate and intuitive, they have obviously slidden into the idea that it is supra-rational. But the truth is, that consciousness is a rational faculty, just as truly as is the logical faculty. The only difference is, that its acts are

True Account of
Consciousness.

primary acts of the reason, while the deductive and comparative are secondary. Hence, there is the most perfect consistency in our representing, as Scripture does, such consciousness as cohering with, and assisted by, the deductions of the reason. And when Scripture gives the premises for such deductions, and the illumination of the Spirit guides them, it is hard to see why they should be held so unworthy to be compared with the primary intuitions; seeing especially that these, if not guided by the same Spirit, must infallibly reflect whatever counterfeit affection the deceitfulness of indwelling sin may have injected. How short and plain this statement: that our whole salvation is by the instrumentality of the truth? But truth only acts on man's intelligence; whence the whole process of salvation must be as truly rational as it is spiritual.

We argue that the assurance of hope is attainable, and should be sought by all believers; first, presumptively:

Because such a state of the case seems necessarily implied in the duty of seeking Christ. God makes it our duty to use means to place ourselves in union with Christ. Must there not be some way for us to know whether we have obeyed and do obey this command? It will not avail to say, that God makes it our duty to keep on striving just the same, to establish this union with Christ, to the end of life. True, He commands us to repeat our acts of faith and repentance all the time. But if we are not in Christ we have never believed aright, so that the thing we should be counselled to is, not to repeat those same abortive efforts, but to set about a new kind of efforts. See Rev. iii : 17, 18.

Second: The Scripture is full of commands, prayers, and promises for assurance of hope. 1 Cor. xi : 28; 2 Cor. xiii : 5; 1 Cor. ii : 12; John xiv : 20; Heb. vi : 18; 2 Pet. i : 10; 1 Jno. ii : 3; v : 13; iii : 14, &c.; Rev. ii : 17. It is true that God commands us to be "perfect," as He is perfect, and to pray for entire conformity to Christ; while yet Calvinists do not believe that this perfection is attainable in this life, by any. But here are commands of a more definite sort. e. g., 1 Cor. xi : 28; 2 Cor. xiii : 5, commands to use an immediate means, self-examination, for the attainment of an end immediately connected therewith, namely, assurance. Here are promises given, Jno. xiv : 20, &c., of the enjoyment of assurance. These things make out a different case.

Third: Both in Bible times and since, there have been instances of assurance actually enjoyed through God's blessing on the ordinary means of grace. Since the days of inspiration, saints of the greatest sobriety and truthfulness have professed such assurance, and have been encouraged by it to brave the

4. Assurance Attainable.

Because it is Our Duty to be in Christ.

Promises Imply it.

Has Actually Been Attained.

most fearful trials. Such cases are widely distinguished from the multitudes of fanatical self-deceivers. In Bible days we find a number of other cases. Ps. ciii : 2 ; xvi : 8-10 ; Rom. v : 1 ; Gal. v : 22 ; 1 Thess. v : 9 ; 2 Tim. i : 12 ; 1 Pet. i : 8 ; 1 Jno. ii : 3 ; Phil. iv : 6, 7, &c.

To these it has been objected, that they were inspired cases. Note, e. g., in 1 Pet. i : 8, the Apostle was inspired but not the Christians to whom he wrote ! Moreover, there are very few cases in Scripture where we see any individual receive a revealed assurance directly of his own interest in redemption. An examination will impress us how remarkably chary God has been of such helps ; and how generally peculiar spiritual charisms were bestowed for the benefit of the Church, and not of the individual.

Fourth: The nature of the graces in exercise in the Christian heart would show, that the true believer ought to be able, with due care, to come to a certain knowledge whether he has them. In other things, men can usually interpret their own consciousness with confidence ; they can certainly tell whether they love or hate, or believe in a fellow-man. Villains usually have a lurking consciousness that they are villains ; and efforts at self-deception are usually conscious. But Christian principles are described as peculiar, and as the very strongest principles of the soul. Why then should not the love, joy, peace, trust, submission, penitence, of a renewed heart become palpable to it, with due self-examination ? We should remember also, that God, by His providential trials, calls to duty and sacrifice for His sake and bereavements, speedily gives most believers excellent tests of genuine religious principles. It is objected, that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" I reply, that the believer is not required to know everything about this deceitful heart, (an impossibility for him) in order to know his own conversion ; but only to know some things. And moreover, in knowing these, he is promised the aids of the Holy Ghost. And this leads us.

Last: To argue from the witnessing of the Holy Ghost. His testimony with our spirits is promised, in various places and forms ; and surely this pledges God to make assurance a practicable attainment. See Rom. viii : 16 ; Eph. i : 13 ; iv : 30 ; 2 Cor. i : 22 ; 1 Jno. ii : 27.

Comparing sections 3 and 4, we may see that although the dogma of the Reformers was erroneous, their practical feeling concerning the importance of assurance was much more correct than ours. The saints of that age did not, like so many now, sit year after year, in sinful indolence, complaining of the want of

Consciousness of
Graces Should Give it.

Holy Ghost Prom-
ises it by His Witness.

We Should Never
Tolerate its Absence.

assurance, and yet indifferent to its cultivation. To them it was as the vital breath, to be either enjoyed perpetually, or else, if not enjoyed, to be sought with intense exertion. Now, we say, that while Faith may subsist without assurance of hope, every believer can and ought to attain in due time to the latter. And though it may be absent from a true Christian, yet no true Christian can be satisfied with its absence. If he feels the reality of heaven, he will wish to know whether it is to be his. If he truly believes there is a hell, he must earnestly long to be certified that he shall avoid it. He cannot be content to plod on, not knowing whether or not his feet are on the blood of the Redeemer, whom he loves, whether the viper, sin, which he hates, still enfolds his heart; whether he is to spend the approaching eternity bathing his weary soul in seas of heavenly rest, or buffeting the fiery billows of wrath. A willingness to be ignorant of these things is proof of indifference. The chief reason why so many live on without assurance is, that they have no true faith.

The means for attaining this assurance of hope are indicated by comparing the Confession, chap. 5. Means of Assurance. Self-examination, etc. xviii, § 1, 2, 3. In the first place, he who would seek it successfully, must be a true believer, (not clearly known to himself as such, for then there would be nothing farther to seek, but known as such to God). Hence he who seeks long, without attaining, should probably do his first works again. In the next place, he should endeavor to live, in heart and life, in a consistent manner, exercising those principles and that conduct which the Scriptures ascribe to true children of God. For, in the third place, one means of assurance is the comparison which the believer makes between the Bible description and his own heart and life. But the experience of Christians, I am persuaded, finds this process of self-examination and comparison rather an indirect than a direct means of assurance. For a faithful self-inspection usually reveals so much that is defective, that its first result is rather the discouragement than the encouragement of hope. But this leads the humbled Christian to look away from himself to the Redeemer; and thus assurance, which is the reflex act of faith, is strengthened by strengthening the direct actings of faith itself. Now, if there is nothing, or little, in himself which can be compared favorably with the Bible-measuring rule, of course assurance cannot properly result. This comparison, then is to be made in the work of self-examination, which must be honestly, thoroughly, and prayerfully performed. We say, prayerfully, for man's heart is deceitful; self-love, self-righteousness, spiritual pride, hope, and fear, are nearly interested in the decision, and the understanding of man is too feeble and uncertain an instrument, at best, to be trusted with the everlasting and irreparable issues of this question, when unaided.

But here, we are again compelled to defend our Confession against the charge: that by directing the believer to seek assurance of his gracious state from the discovery in himself of supposed graces, we are encouraging him to build on a self-righteous foundation. It is strange that these writers do not remember the fact, that the Bible commands Christians (see p. 704,) to do the very thing they denounce. And to a plain mind, it seems a most perverse charge, that it is self-righteous to infer from his possession of certain qualities in oneself that God is reconciled to him; when the very premise of his inference is, that he could never have wrought these qualities in himself; but if they are in him, they were wrought by sovereign grace. The question to be settled for our assurance is: Is God reconciled to us? The process is: "Yes, God is reconciled" (conclusion) "because we find in ourselves changes which He alone can work;" (premise) "and which only unbought love prompted Him to work." Where is the self-righteousness of this? How does it lead to boasting, or vain confidence? Let us, for illustration, compare the process by which our opponents suppose the immediate consciousness of believing ministers the assurance of salvation to every believer immediately. If that process holds, it yet involves thus much of an illation: "My consciousness of faith assures me I am saved, because God works faith in none but the saved." Now why is not the parallel process equally valid for any other grace, which only God works? He assures us, that "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, meekness, temperance" are as truly "fruits of the Spirit," as faith is. (Gal. v : 22). The only difference is, that faith is related to the other graces as a seminal principle: and that it is the organ of our justification: but this does not change the case. Why is it self-confidence and self-righteousness to infer God's favour from other effects which He alone works, and works only in His own people: and yet so scriptural to infer our safety from the faith which God works in us? And since there is a spurious faith, which is discriminated from the genuine by the lack of right fruits, it is too obvious to be disputed, that we should examine those fruits, in order to assure ourselves. So evident is this, that we find even Calvin, (Bk. iii : Ch. ii : § 7,) in view of the existence of a dead faith simulating the living, concede the doctrine. "In the meantime, the faithful are taught to examine themselves with solicitude and humility, lest carnal security insinuate itself, instead of the assurance of faith." And Luther, as Dorner assures us, sometimes speaks more scripturally than Calvin, distinguishing between "an assuring faith" (the fuller attainment) and "a receiving faith," which he regards as true faith, and justifying. Nor "did he shrink from treating the new life of love, which is forming, as an evidence of faith."

It may be argued, that unless the inward marks are infal-

Spiritual Discernment Necessary on Either View. lible, no assurance of our salvation can be founded on them; but their scheme offers directly the infallible promise of God, as the exclusive basis of the assurance. I answer by referring the student to the fact, that the same quickening grace which bestows faith, also bestows spiritual discernment. How else did the sinner, blind by nature, see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?" This spiritual discernment is promised to direct the believer in his examination.

When arguing for these scriptural means, we should not forget that the habit of introspection may be abused, to divert the eyes of the soul too much from Christ. Dr. Chalmers, in the place cited, has admirably illustrated a law of the mind, which should caution us against that abuse. The essential condition for the conscious flow of any affection is the presence of its object, at least in thought, before the mind. Thus, Christ must be directly before the thought, in order for love to Christ to flow forth consciously to Him. But when we begin to inspect our love for Him, we substitute another object. Hence the current of our love subsides as soon as we attempt to measure it. This explains a difficulty which has embarrassed many Christians: and it presents another ground for asserting the necessity of the Spirits' witness, that we may safely interpret our own feelings.

This witnessing, saith the Confession, is without extraordinary revelation. His agencies here, are doubtless what they are, as to their degree and nature, in His other sanctifying operations through the Word; neither more nor less inscrutable, and just to the same extent supernatural. Thus, it is His to illuminate the soul, giving to the understanding spiritual apprehensions of Truth. It is His to shine upon His own work in our hearts, both brightening it, and aiding us in the comparison of it. It is His to stimulate our righteousness, caution, and impartiality, by renewing and sanctifying the dispositions, and quickening our apprehensions of the Divine Judge, and of the stake at issue. Thus the comparison between our graces and the Bible standard, is made under His superintendence and light; so that while He communicates no new revealed fact, contributes nothing new, so to speak, to the material of the comparison, or of the measuring rule, the result of the measurement is trustworthy. If such a soul finds in itself the evident actings of such graces as the Bible calls for, then it has an assurance which is both scriptural and reasonable and spiritual. It is according to the rule of Scripture. It is reached according to the laws of the human understanding, intelligently and solidly. But best of all, it is also formed under the superintendence of the Holy Ghost, and He enables the humble, prayerful inquirer, to repose on it

with "a hope inexpressible and full of glory." Such an assurance may well be called infallible. It may be aped indeed, so far as human judgment can distinguish, by false security; but the difference is known to God, and to the believer, conscious as he is of thorough candour, humility and submission; and the judgment day will reveal the difference.

Now the ideas of the Wesleyan concerning this witness of the Holy Ghost, are far different. He makes it indeed an independent revelation, by which the Holy Ghost reveals immediately to the convert's mind, without a mediate process of self-examination and comparison, that he is now reconciled. All the arguments on which they rely to establish this view, against ours, may be reduced to two: that two witnesses are said (Rom. viii: 16), to concur, whereas our view seems to make no other testimony than that of our own spirits (assisted indeed by the Holy Ghost), and that the assurance cannot proceed mediately from the believer's consciousness of Christian affections within; because those affections are only evoked by the assurance of our adoption. 1 Jno. iv: 19. To the first of these I reply, their view excludes the witnessing of the believer's spirit at least as much as ours seems to exclude that of God's.

But, how can this concurrence of two witnesses be better described than in such a case as we have supposed? We protest that our view does most fully and fairly avow the concurrence of God's Holy Ghost in the witnessing. He witnesseth along with our spirits. To the second argument, we reply that is worthless to all except a Synergist. It is simply absurd, in our view, to assert that the believer can never have any regenerate exercises characteristic of the new life, until after he has an assurance of his adoption: when we believe, and have proved, that faith itself is a regenerate exercise, as well as repentance. Second: it is false that the renewed soul has no regenerate exercises till they are evoked by an assurance of its acceptance. This is not the sense of Jno. iv: 19. The first love of the new-born soul is not thus mercenary; it cannot help loving, and repenting, and adoring, though unconscious of hope. And last: surely the exhibition of the goodness, grace, truth and love of God made to all sinners in Jno. iii: 16, is enough to evoke the first actings of love on the new-born sinner's part, while he is still unconscious of a personal hope. To say that a regenerate soul could look at this lovely exhibition of God's mercy towards "whosoever will receive it," and feel no love, because forsooth not yet assured of its own personal interest in it, is to say that that soul is still in the gall of bitterness.

This idea of an immediate witness we disprove, 1st, by the fact that self-examination is commanded, which would be superfluous to him already

Wesleyan Doctrine
of the Witness.

Replies.

Refutation, Farther.

assured by a revelation. 2nd. Because revelations have ceased, and Christians are now remanded to Scripture as the whole and sole source of all the religious informations needed to carry the soul to heaven. Jno. v : 39 ; 1 Cor. xiii : 8 ; 2 Tim. iii : 15 -17. 3rd. It contradicts the experience of the very best converts [tried by their fruits], who often exhibit good marks of penitence, submission, love : when their souls are so absorbed by the sense of God's holiness and majesty, and their own vileness, that they dare not rejoice in their acceptance. And it equally contradicts the experience of maturer converts, who usually have their assurance dawn slightly, and grow gradually, as their experience and graces grow. See Is. xlii : 16 ; Rom. v ; 4. 4th. It opens the doors for untold self-deceptions, mistaking the whispers of self-love, carnal security, spiritual pride, fanaticism, or Satan, for this super-scriptural witness. The most biting argument against it is in the history of Wesleyan revivals, with their spurious conversions. John Wesley was himself so sensible of this objection, that he appeals to the other concurrent witnessing, that of the Christian's consciousness compared with Scripture, to show him that the previous witness is the Holy Ghost, not a delusion. This virtually surrenders his dogma: for this witness of the believer's spirit, although mentioned last, is in reality precedent in order. As the ambassador's credentials must precede his recognition, so this witnessing of the conscious graces in the heart must give credence to the immediate impression!

Assurance of hope, scripturally founded, will result in advantage only. It increases spiritual joy. Thus it promotes usefulness, Nehemiah viii : 10. It unseals the heart to praise God. It stimulates evangelical labours. 1 Cor. xv : 58. It nerves us for self-denial. It lifts us above carnal temptations. Phil. iv : 7.

Some have thought the assurance of hope arrogant, as though it were modest and seemly to be in suspense concerning our salvation. I answer: If we expected to save ourselves, so it would be. To be in suspense whether Christ is able, and willing, and faithful, surely is no mark of our humility ; but, on the contrary, it is a dishonor to Him.

The main objection, however, is, that assurance, coupled with the doctrine of perseverance of saints, will become the sure occasion of spiritual indolence and carnal security. We reply, that if an unrenewed man should persuade himself unscripturally that he is in Christ, this result would surely follow. But how can it follow to that man who scripturally finds his hope on the existence in himself of a disposition to flee from sin, strive after holiness, and fight the good fight of faith ? He hopes he is a Christian, only because he sees reason to hope that he shall strive to the end. The perception in himself of the depraving consequence charged above, would at

once vitiate the evidence that he was, or ever had been, a child of God, just in proportion as it was realized. The watchful garrison are confident that they shall not fall victims to a surprise, because they intend to watch. Such assurance only stimulates effort. The drunken rioters go to sleep flattering themselves they shall not be surprised; but this is presumption, not assurance. In the actual experiences of Christians, he who enjoys the grace of assurance ever walks most carefully and tendery before his God, lest the precious elixir be lost through negligence, See Ps. cxxxix: 21, 24; 2 Cor. v:6-9; Heb. vi:9-12.
