

# Heir of Heaven – Heir of Hell

*The HEIR of HEAVEN Walking in Darkness, and the HEIR of HELL Walking in Light.*

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*“Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow”—ISAIAH 50:10-11*

THE WORD OF GOD appears to me to resemble a vast and deep mine, in which precious metals of various kinds lie concealed. The rocks and mountains and the general surface of the ground above the mine, every eye may see; but “the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places” (Isa. 45:3) that lie beneath, are known to but few. And thus many letter-learned professors and wise doctors may understand the literal meaning of the Scriptures, and explain very correctly the connection and the historical sense of the text, who are as ignorant of the rich vein of experience that lies beneath the surface of the letter, as the mules in South America are of the nature and value of the silver which they draw up from the bottom of the mine. “Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it...The stones of it are the place of sapphires, and it hath dust of gold. There is a path [that, namely, which lies through the mine] which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye [that is, the keen-sighted, but unclean professor: Lev. 11:13-14; Isa. 35:8] hath not seen” (Job 28:1,6-7).

In this deep mine do God’s spiritual labourers work, and as the blessed Spirit leads them into different veins of experimental truth, they bring forth “the precious things of the lasting hills,” to the comfort and establishment of His people. Thus, to one of Christ’s ambassadors is given a clear light upon the doctrines of grace, which have been riveted in his soul, and a door of utterance communicated to set them forth with unction and power. On another sent servant of the Lord is bestowed a divine acquaintance with the depths of his own inward depravity, under which he groans, being burdened, and a tongue like the pen of a ready writer to unfold the secret recesses of a deceitful and desperately wicked heart. Whilst to another spiritual labourer is given a heavenly light into the difference between natural and supernatural religion, and utterance bestowed to open up the various delusions whereby Satan, transformed into an angel of light, deceiveth the nations.

According, then, to the line which God the Holy Ghost has distributed to each of His own sent servants (2 Cor. 10:13,16), does He usually lead them to such parts of the Word as fall in with their own experience, and shine with the same light that has shone into their souls. Thus, they “see light in God’s light,” and as the blessed Spirit of all truth is pleased to shine upon a text, a peculiar light is thrown upon it, a peculiar

entrance is given into it, a peculiar unction and savour rests upon it, a peculiar beauty, force, truth and power seems to shoot forth from every part of it, so that every word appears dipped in heavenly dew, and every expression to drop with honey.

Whenever a text has been thus opened to me, I have seen a ray of light shine as it were all through it, and it has seemed clothed with divine beauty and power. The words have perhaps been in my mind for days and have been bursting forth continually from my lips. I have seen a fulness and tasted a sweetness in them, which carried with it its own evidence, that they were the words of the ever-living God; and when I have gone with them into the pulpit, I have usually had a door of utterance set before me to unfold what I have seen in the text, and power has generally accompanied the word to the hearts of God's people. Whilst at other times, and those much more frequent, the same text, as well as every other, has been hidden in darkness, and I have groped for the wall like the blind, and groped as if I had no eyes.

But if my eyes have been opened to perceive anything aright, or to see wondrous things out of God's law, it is, I believe, to discover somewhat of the difference between natural and spiritual religion. And thus, as you have probably perceived, I find myself led from time to time to speak from such texts as that which I have read, in which the strong line between what is *of God* and what is *of man*, what is *of the Spirit* and what is *of the flesh*, is clearly drawn.

In the two verses of the text, we find two distinct characters traced out by the hand of the blessed Spirit—the one, a child of *God*; the other, a child of the *devil*. The one an HEIR OF HEAVEN; the other an HEIR OF HELL. One of these characters is said “to walk in darkness, and to have no light;” the other, “to compass himself about with sparks of his own kindling.” One is encouraged “to trust in the name of the LORD, and to stay upon his God;” against the other it is threatened that “he shall lie down in sorrow.”

Now I by no means assert that the one character represents *all* the family of God, any more than that the other character represents all the offspring of Satan. But it has pleased the blessed Spirit to bring together two opposite characters, to set them side by side, and so place them in strong contrast with each other. And thus I feel myself led to unfold as God shall enable me, these two different characters: *first*, because I believe the one represents the experience of *many* children of God during well-nigh the whole, of *some* during a part, and of *all* during one period or other of their spiritual life; and, *secondly*, because I believe the other character traces out the beginning, middle and end of thousands of dead professors in the present day.

But as none can reasonably object, if I describe a character, to my giving him a name, that we may know him again, I shall call the one THE HEIR OF HEAVEN WALKING IN DARKNESS, and the other THE HEIR OF HELL WALKING IN LIGHT.

## The HEIR of HEAVEN

The text opens in a very striking and solemn way. It begins with a question, an appeal, as it were, to the consciences of those to whom it is addressed, “WHO IS AMONG YOU THAT FEARETH THE LORD?” Now the very form in which this striking question is put to the HEIR OF HEAVEN, when compared with the mode of address employed in the next verse to the heirs of hell, seems to show that the first of these characters is very rare, the second very frequent. Thus, the question, “*Who* is there among you” is worded as if the blessed Spirit were selecting one person out of a crowd, as if He were pointing out a solitary character amidst a numerous company. Whilst the word “you”—“Who is there among *you*?”—seems to show that this company is a troop of professors, the same who are afterwards addressed, “Behold, *all* ye that kindle a fire.”

We have, then, a character pointed out by the finger of God Himself, separated by His distinguishing hand and sealed with His own divine mark as belonging to Himself. This living soul, this gracious character, this heir of heaven, whom God has here singled out, is stamped by the blessed Spirit with three marks. The *first* is, that “he fears the Lord;” the *second*, that “he obeys the voice of God’s servant;” the *third*, that “he walks in darkness, and has no light.” We will, with God’s blessing, then consider these three remarks separately.

## 1. He Fears God

The first mark, then, of that heir of heaven whose character we are endeavouring to trace is, that “HE FEARS GOD.” “Who is among you that feareth the Lord?” But here the question at once arises: *What* sort of fear is this which the Holy Ghost has thus stamped with His divine approbation? “Is it of heaven or of men?” To err here is to stumble at the very outset, and to throw the whole into confusion. We must therefore, at the very threshold of our inquiry, lay it down as a positive principle, that the fear here spoken of is not a fruit of the flesh, but the work of the *Spirit*; not a product of nature, but the offspring of the Holy Ghost. And this distinction needs to be drawn, and to be insisted on, with greater carefulness, because there is a *natural* fear of God as well as a *spiritual* one. The very devils believe and tremble. The children of Israel whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, feared God when they heard “the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud” (Exo. 19:16), “so that all the people that were in the camp trembled.” Saul feared God when that awful sentence fell upon his ear: “Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me,” and “he fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel” (1 Sam. 28:20). Felix feared God when “he trembled, as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). “Terrors are upon the hypocrite,” said Zophar (Job 20:23,25) “when God casteth forth the fury of His wrath upon him, and the glittering sword cometh out of his gall.” And “terrors,” saith Bildad (Job 18:11), “shall make the wicked afraid on every side, and shall drive him to His feet.”

The fear of the Lord, then, spoken of in the text is no natural dread of God, no fleshly alarm of a guilty conscience, no late remorse of an enlightened judgment, trembling at the wrath to come.

Nor, again, is it any such fear of God as is impressed upon the mind by what is called “a religious education.” Against this the Lord especially directs a sentence of condemnation: “Their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men.” (Isa. 29:13).

The fear of God, then, which He has in the text and elsewhere stamped with His divine approbation, is that which He Himself implants with His own hand in the soul. As it is written, “I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me” (Jer. 32:40). This is the fear which is called “the beginning of wisdom” (Pro. 9:10); and is said to be “the fountain of life,” “the strong confidence” (Pro. 14:26-27), and “the treasure” (Isa. 33:6) of a child of God, and that which “endures forever” in his heart (Psa. 19:9).

But how is this divine fear, this godly awe, this holy trembling, produced in the soul? It is not sufficient to say: “It is implanted by the hand of God,” and so leave it. The question arises: *How does* the blessed Spirit work it in the soul? To this I answer, that in producing it God works by certain means. A spiritual man is not a steam-engine, or a piece of machinery, driven round and round by cogs and wheels in a certain mechanical course, without feeling and without consciousness. The grace of God indeed works invincibly and irresistibly upon the soul, and produces certain effects in it; but not in the same way as a weaver’s loom makes a piece of cloth, or as a spinning jenny makes cotton thread.

God works, then, by *means*. But by *means* I do not understand what are usually called “*means of grace*,” such as preaching, praying, reading the Word, etc., which many persons speak of, as though, if made use of by carnal men, they would bring grace into their hearts almost as necessarily as a water-pipe carries water into a cistern. No. For though prayer and hearing the Word, etc., contain in them blessings for the spiritual, thousands have used what are called “the means of grace,” who have lived and died *without* grace; for “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for, but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” By “means,” then,

and “God’s working by means,” I understand not means on *our* part, but means on *God’s* part. I intend by “the Word,” those gracious and powerful operations of the blessed Spirit on the soul, which produce a certain effect and create a certain experience within.

Thus the means which God employs to raise up a holy fear of His great name in the soul, is to cast into it a ray of divine light out of the fulness of the Godhead. “God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,” says Paul (2 Cor. 4:6), “hath shined in our hearts.” “In Thy light,” says David (Psa. 36:9), “we see light;” and again: “The entrance of Thy words giveth light” (Psa. 119:130). Until, then, this supernatural light out of the fulness of God enters into the soul, a man has no knowledge of Jehovah. He may say his prayers, read his Bible, attend preaching, observe ordinances, “bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and give his body to be burned;” but he is as ignorant of God as the cattle that graze in the fields. He may call himself a Christian, and be thought such by others, may talk much about Jesus Christ, hold a sound creed, maintain a consistent profession, pray at a prayer meeting with fluency and apparent feeling, may stand up in a pulpit and contend earnestly for the doctrines of grace, may excel hundreds of God’s children in zeal, knowledge and conversation; and yet, if this ray of supernatural light has never shone into his soul he is only twofold more the child of hell than those who make no profession—“The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.”

But the same ray of supernatural light which reveals to us that there is a God, manifests also His purity and holiness, His universal presence, His abhorrence of evil and His heart-searching eye. And this it manifests not as a mere doctrine, to form an article of a creed or a part of a system, but as a mighty truth, a divine conviction, lodged and planted in the depths of the soul, which becomes, so to speak, a part of ourselves, so as never more to be sundered from us or lost out of the heart.

But it may be asked, *how* are we to know whether *we* possess this spiritual and genuine fear of God, and how are we to distinguish it from all counterfeits? Like all other graces of the blessed Spirit, it must be seen in its own light, tasted in its own savour, and felt in its own power. But wherever this divine fruit of eternal election grows, it will be manifested by the effects which it produces. And thus, those children of God, who have not faith to believe, nor spiritual discernment to see, nor divine unction to feel, that they are true partakers of this heavenly fear, may have it manifested to their consciences that they really possess it, when they hear its effects and operations traced out, and have an inward witness that they have experienced the same. And this is the grand use of *experimental preaching*, against which so many proud professors shoot out their arrows, even bitter words; that, under the Spirit’s unction, it sheds a light on the path of those that walk in darkness, removes stumbling stones out of the way of those that are ready to halt, strengthens the weak hands, and confirms the feeble knees. To see the sun shining in the mid-day sky and to feel its cheering beams is the surest evidence that he is risen; but to see him reflected in the trembling waters of a brook, or to trace him dimly through clouds and mists, is a proof also that it is day. And thus, those dear children of God, who cannot behold the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, nor feel His warmth in their souls, may see Him reflected in the experience of their trembling hearts, or trace His work within through the mists of unbelief. A child of God may not be able to see the *fear itself*, yet may feel that he has experienced its *effects and operations*, when he hears them traced out by a minister of Christ, who speaks out of the fulness of an exercised heart.

One evidence, then, of our being partakers of this godly fear is the INWARD FEELING OF GUILT and the SENSE OF OUR EXCEEDING VILENESS which always accompanies it. The same ray of divine light which manifests Jehovah to the soul, and raises up a spiritual fear of Him within, discovers to us also our inward depravity. Until we see heavenly light we know not what darkness is; until we view eternal purity we are ignorant of our own vileness; until we hear the voice of inflexible justice we feel no guilt; until we behold a heart-searching God we do not groan beneath our inward deceitfulness; and until we feel that He abhors evil we do not abhor ourselves.

Thus all supernatural communications from God and manifestations of Him show us, at the same moment and in the same light, a holy Jehovah and a fallen sinner, heavenly purity and creature vileness, God on the

throne of light and a worm of the dust, a righteous Judge and a leper on the dunghill. The regenerate soul looks with the spiritual eye which the Holy Ghost has planted in it, first up unto God, then down into itself. So it was with Moses, when he heard “the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words” and said, “I exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb.12:19,21). Thus was it with Job, when he said: “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:5-6). Isaiah, on a similar vision of the glory of the Lord cried out: “Woe is me! for I am undone” (6:5). Daniel’s “comeliness was turned in him into corruption” (10:8); and John “fell at Christ’s feet as dead” (Rev. 1:17). If you have never felt guilt, nor abhorred yourself in dust and ashes, you may depend upon it that you have never “seen God” (3 John 11); and if you have never seen God with the spiritual eye of a living faith, you are dead in sins, or dead in a profession.

As Job says: “Your excellency may mount up to the heavens, and your head reach unto the clouds” (Job 20:6); but if you have never felt in your mouth “the wormwood and the gall,” have never groaned, being burdened, nor roared for very disquietness of heart; if you have never cried as a criminal for mercy, nor put your mouth into the dust—you are a dead branch, a rotten hypocrite, an empty professor. You may talk about the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ like one of those “prating fools that shall fall” (Prov.10:10); but if the plague of leprosy has never broken out in you, and that “deeper than the skin” (Lev. 13:25); and if you have never as a loathsome wretch, a monster of inward pollution and iniquity, had “your clothes rent, your head bare, and a covering upon your upper lip” (Lev.13:45), you have never tasted the love, nor felt the atoning blood of the Saviour. He is to you a name, not a person; an idea, not a reality; a Saviour in the letter, not a Saviour in the Spirit; a Christ in your Bible, not a Christ in your heart; an Immanuel of whom you have heard, but not an Immanuel whom you have seen, and who is “God with you.”

Another evidence of the reality and genuineness of the fear of the Lord in the soul is **THE WAY IN WHICH WE APPROACH GOD IN SECRET PRAYER**. Until we see God in the light of His own manifestations, we cannot worship Him in spirit and in truth. We may utter prayers in public or in private, written or unwritten, taught in childhood or learned in age, repeated from memory or suggested at the moment; and yet, if we have never seen God in the light of His holiness, we have never prayed to Him in our lives. Some of you in this congregation may have had family prayers, and others of you may have prayed at prayer meetings, and been so pleased with your own gift and the applause of empty professors as to think yourself fit for the ministry, and have got your foot almost on the steps of a pulpit. And what advantage have you reaped by your fleshly prayers? Are you nearer to heaven or more acceptable to God? No. But on the contrary, to the long, black catalogue of your sins you have added that blackest of all— *presumption* . Instead of pleasing God, you have offended Him; instead of worshipping, you have mocked Him; and instead of taking so many steps nearer and nearer to heaven, you have only been taking so many steps nearer and nearer to hell. “Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth, they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear” (Isa. 1:14-15). “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers, therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Matt. 23:14).

Now the only cure for this awful presumption and hypocrisy is the fear of God planted by His own divine hand in the soul. He that is blessed with godly fear, as an internal, abiding principle, cannot mock God. He cannot offer Him the dead sacrifice, the stinking carcase of formality, superstition, tradition, hypocrisy and self-righteousness. He cannot go on, year after year, to mock the ever-living Jehovah to His face, as thousands do in the Church of England, and out of it, by confessing grief for sins for which they never felt sorry, asking for blessings which they never desired, and thanking God for mercies for which they have no gratitude. His soul will be, more or less deeply, and more or less frequently, penetrated with such an inward reverence, such a holy awe, such a realizing sense of the solemn presence of the great holy God of heaven and earth that he will confess his sins, not out of a Prayer Book, but out of the depth of a contrite heart; will beg for mercy, not as a child repeats his A B C, but as a sinking criminal at the bar of judgment; and will cry

for the light of God's countenance, not as a Parish Clerk mumbles forth, "Hear us, good Lord," but as one in whom "the Spirit itself maketh intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered."

## 2. He Obeys the Voice of His Servant

But that "he fears God" is not the only mark given in the text of that heir of heaven, whose path we are endeavouring to trace. He is said also "TO OBEY THE VOICE OF HIS SERVANT." To discover whom the Holy Ghost means in this place by "the Servant of God" is perhaps not a matter of much difficulty. It is a name and an office which the adorable Redeemer Himself condescends to bear. "Behold, *My Servant*, whom I uphold, Mine Elect in whom My soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1), was the title by which He was addressed by God the Father more than seven hundred years before He appeared upon earth. Again, it is said of Him (Isa. 53:11): "By His knowledge shall *My righteous Servant* justify many;" and not to multiply instances, the promise runs (Zech. 3:8): "Behold, I will bring forth *My Servant*, the Branch." Thus the voice of God's Servant in the text may justly be explained to refer to that ever-blessed Mediator, "who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the *form of a servant*, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:6-7).

But what sort of voice is this? Is it the mere voice of Christ in the Scriptures? Is it the naked precept, the naked promise, or the naked invitation? No. What is the Bible more than any other book when it is not clothed by the Spirit with almighty power and irresistible energy? The Bible is nothing without the Spirit. It is in itself a mere list of words and syllables, an assemblage of vowels and consonants, a collection of printers' types and inks, which, without the Spirit's divine application, can no more convey life and light into the soul than a letter sent by the post can communicate its contents to the eyes of a man born blind. Unless the Eternal Spirit give a voice to the dumb letter, and take truth out of the Bible, and rivet it in our hearts, the Bible is no more to us than another book.

If your religion is only in the Bible, and has no existence out of the Bible *in your own soul*, which is the case with thousands who are considered great Christians, the same fire that will at the last day burn up the Bible will burn up your religion with it. No, my friends, we must have the truths of the Bible, which were written there by the finger of the Holy Ghost, taken out of the Bible, and written by the same Holy Ghost upon our hearts. To have the truth in the Bible only is like having the Ten Commandments written up at the east end of a church, which, with their gilt letters and flourished capitals, mightily please the eye of a Pharisee, but which differ as much from "the commandments's coming" with power (Rom. 7:9) as the prayer of a dead formalist differs from the cries and groans of a broken-hearted saint.

The Bible is a mighty magazine, a vast reservoir of blessed truth, but the precepts and promises of the Bible have no more power in themselves to convince or comfort the soul than the swords and muskets in the Tower of London have power to start from their places and kill the spectators. Both are merely dead instruments, lifeless weapons, and need a mighty hand and an outstretched arm to give them power and efficacy. "The words that *I speak* unto you," says the Redeemer (John 6:63), "they are spirit and they are life;" "Written not in tables of stone," says Paul (2 Cor. 3:3), "but in fleshy tables of the heart."

Thus, "the voice of God's Servant," which those in the text are said to "obey," is not the mere voice of Christ in the Scriptures, but such a voice, "powerful and full of majesty," as called Lazarus forth out of the tomb. This voice, heard by the sheep alone (John 10:27), raises up the dead in sins (John 5:25); penetrates the conscience (Heb. 4:12); casts a flood of light within, and carries conviction into the inmost recesses of the soul. Not that I mean any voice is heard by the outward ear; the voice that I speak of is the voice of Christ in the Scriptures, applied with divine authority and power to the soul by the Holy Ghost.

Thus, to some He applies by His Spirit a word of encouragement suited to their case. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," may be the voice of God's Servant to a burdened child. The suitability of the invitation to the wants of the weary soul, the tender kindness of the Speaker, the sweetness that distils from every word of the passage, all meet at once within; hope springs up in the heart,

strength is communicated to believe, a spirit of prayer rises up from the very bottom of the soul, and strong desires after the enjoyment of Christ within, pour themselves forth in wrestling cries. But whatever be the word of encouragement which the voice of Jehovah's Servant speaks to him that fears God, the effect is one and the same. That voice is as powerful, and as full of majesty now (Ps. 29:4), as when it said, "Let there be light, and there was light." But though it never speaks in vain, for "He spake, and it was done: He commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9); yet the different degrees of strength in which this voice speaks to the soul vary as much as the loudest voice from the feeblest whisper, or the strongest wind from the gentlest breeze. And just according to the strength in which that voice speaks to the soul will there be all the different degrees of encouragement and consolation, from the feeblest, faintest glimmering of hope to the full blaze of the assurance of faith.

But *promises* are not the only parts of the Word which the voice of Christ addresses to those that fear God. The *threatenings* and warnings contained in the Scriptures He speaks home to the soul as well as the promises. The shepherd *drives* his flock at times before him, as well as *draws* them at others by going before them. The wise parent chastises his child when needful as well as fondles it. There is much presumption, pride, hypocrisy, deceit, delusion, formality, superstition, will-worship and self-righteousness to be purged out of the heart; and "as the blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil, so do stripes the inward parts of the belly" (Prov. 20:30). I look upon the road to heaven as a narrow path that lies between two hedges, and that on the other side of each hedge is a bottomless ditch. One of these ditches is *despair*, and the other is *presumption*. The hedge that keeps the soul from falling into the pit of despair is that of the promises; and the hedge that keeps the soul from sinking into the abyss of presumption is that of warnings, precepts and threatenings. Without the spiritual application of the promises the soul would lie down in despair, and without the spiritual application of the precepts and warnings it would be swollen with arrogance, puffed up with pride, and ready to burst with presumption.

But the voice of God's Servant that speaks to him that fears the Lord uses the precept not only in the way of conviction, as I have just described, but also in the way of direction. It not only accuses the soul for any breach of the precept, but also applies the precept itself with power, and enables the soul to obey it. Time will not allow me to mention all the various precepts which the voice of Christ applies to the conscience, but there is one above all others which He invariably speaks, sooner or later, to everyone that fears God so that I cannot pass it by, and that is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17). The people of God are often for a long time, but more especially in their spiritual infancy, when their faith is weak and their judgment ill-formed, mixed up with ungodly systems. On this point I can speak feelingly and experimentally; for how long was I, to my shame, buried in the corrupt, worldly system of the Church of England; and how many struggles and difficulties had I within before I could snatch myself from her!

When divine light enters into the soul, it finds some, as in my case, in the Establishment, others it finds amongst the Wesleyans, others amongst the General Dissenters, but all wrapped up, more or less, in some outward form, and mixed up with dead professors. Now, the very first entrance of divine light actually and really separates the heir of heaven from the herd of professors with whom he is mingled. But as Lot "lingered" in Sodom, after "the angels hastened him, saying, Arise;" so do new-born souls often linger in ungodly systems, under dead ministers, and amidst a dead people, before they have strength given them to take up the cross, go without the camp, and bear the reproach of Christ. Some are prejudiced against God's people, others view with a kind of undefined suspicion Christ's sent ministers, others are afraid of the doctrines that they preach, and most cleave very close to their own dear reputation, and fear lest to join "the outcasts of Israel" should injure their business, offend their customers, incense their relations, or tarnish their self-righteousness. But sooner or later every quickened vessel of mercy hears the voice of God's Servant speaking in the name and with the authority of the Father, and bidding him to come out and be separate from all that He hateth. The soul is now enlightened "to know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogues of Satan" (Rev. 2:9). The soul is taught "to try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1), and "to try them which say they are apostles, and are not, and finds them liars" (Rev. 2:2).

A little intercourse with the children of God dispels every prejudice and melts the soul into union with them. A few times hearing the experimental ministers of Christ makes him say, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace;" and the sweet kindlings of life within, amidst a living people and under a living minister, show him as with a ray of light the whited sepulchres—the dead people and the dead priest, amongst whom he has hitherto been walking. Thus his carnal fears about his good name and his worldly interests are scattered to the winds, and he says to the spiritual Israel, as Ruth of old said to Naomi, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

### 3. He Walketh in Darkness and Hath No Light

But there is a third mark with which the blessed Spirit in the text has stamped that heir of heaven whose character we are endeavouring to trace. "HE WALKETH IN DARKNESS, AND HATH NO LIGHT." This may well at first sight strike us with surprise. "Is it possible," reason asks, "that one who fears God, and obeys the voice of His Servant, should be in this condition?" "Obedience brings light, disobedience is the only cause of darkness," sounds from a thousand pulpits. "Live up to your privileges, cultivate holiness, be diligent in the performance of your duties, if you would enjoy the pleasures of a cheerful piety," cry aloud a thousand task-masters. Without denying that disobedience produces darkness of soul, for the experience of every believer testifies that 'sin separates between him and his God' (Isa. 59:2), we cannot allow that it is the *only* cause, or that obedience *necessarily* produces light. To speak so is to go point blank against the text, is to ascribe merit to the creature, is "to sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag," and to boast like him of old: "By the strength of *my* hand I have done it, and by *my* wisdom, for I am prudent" (Isa. 10:13). We must go higher, then, than the creature, and trace it up to the sovereign will of the Creator, even to Him who says: "I form the light and create darkness" (Isa. 45:7).

Here, then, is a character whom God Himself declares to fear His great name, and to obey the voice of His Servant, and yet he is one "who walketh in darkness, and hath no light." Two things, we find, are here said of him: (1) That he *walketh in darkness*. (2) That he *hath no light*. We will consider each separately.

#### *To Walk In Darkness*

"To walk in darkness" implies something habitual. It is not that he feels darkness occasionally, that he is immersed in it for an hour or a day at a time, or that he has long seasons of it chequered with days and weeks of light. The expression "to walk" in Scripture always implies something continual, something habitual, something prolonged through a considerable space of time. Thus, some are said "to walk in pride," others "in a vain show," others "after their ungodly lust," others "after the flesh;" in all which places it means some habitual conduct, some course of action spread through a long period. The expression, therefore, of the text, "to walk in darkness," implies a long, unvaried, unbroken continuance in it. The figure is taken from a man journeying by night, who has neither moon nor stars to shine upon his path.

But the word "darkness" needs explanation likewise. It is not the darkness then of the unregenerate that is here meant, such as David speaks of: "They know not, neither will they understand; *they walk on in darkness*" (Psa.82:5). Neither is it the darkness of sin, such as Paul speaks of: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph.5:11). But it is a darkness of feeling, a darkness of inward experience, the darkness of a regenerate soul, and such as is peculiar to the elect. There are TWO KINDS OF DARKNESS. One such as has never given place to light, like the darkness of a deep cave or mine, into which the rays of the sun have never penetrated. The other a darkness produced by the absence or withdrawal of light. Thus the long, long night which brooded over the earth when "it was without form and void," before God said, "Let there be light," is an instance of the first kind of darkness. The first night which fell upon the earth when the sun set for the first time is an instance of the second. The first resembles the darkness of the ungodly; the second the darkness of the regenerate.



There was neither fruit, nor flower, nor beauty, nor ornament in the dark waters of chaos, as there is neither grace nor anything lovely in the dead soul. But after beauty had covered the earth under the creating hand of Jehovah, it was there still, though unseen and covered with darkness, when the new-born sun left for the first time his seat in the heavens. Thus after light has sprung up in the soul, and the hand of God has created it anew, though its faith and hope are hidden in darkness, still they are there. And this is the grand distinction between the darkness of the heir of heaven and the darkness of the heir of hell. Light has never visited the one, it is the withdrawal of light which causes the darkness of the other. Thus spiritual darkness is only known to those who have enjoyed spiritual light, as the absence of God is only felt by those who have tasted His presence.

“To walk in darkness,” then, is to feel light removed, hope faded away, faith at its last gasp, love withered out of the heart, God absent, salvation despaired of, evidences lost, ancient landmarks gone, anchorage failed, comfort changed into mourning, and peace into despondency. To walk in darkness is to find the Bible a sealed book, prayer a burden, ordinances a weariness, spiritual conversation a task, and all religion an enigma. It is to be tossed up and down on a sea of doubts and fears, and to wander here and there amidst fogs of confusion and mists of perplexity. It is to feel ignorant of everything that we have once known, and to be at a loss what to think either of ourselves or of God, of His present dealings or past mercies, and to find one black night of confusion fallen upon our path, so that “if we go forward, God is not there, or backward, but we cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand that we cannot see Him” (Job 23:8-9). And as when God “maketh darkness and it is night, all the beasts of the forest do creep forth” (Psa. 104:20), so in this darkness of soul do doubts and fears, jealousies and suspicions, temptations and lusts, vile passions and all the hidden filth and obscenity of the heart, enmity and rebellion, blasphemy and infidelity, atheism and despair, fretfulness and inward cursing, devilism and all the monsters as well as all the crawling reptiles of the carnal mind, all creep forth to harass and torment the soul.

### *To Have No Light*

But the blessed Spirit has added another expression to denote the experience which we are endeavouring to trace, “he hath no light.” I cannot say that I am fond of alluding to the original Hebrew or Greek of the Bible, or of finding fault with the translation, as such petty criticism is much more often employed to display one’s own half-knowledge than to edify the Church of God, and has often the evil effect of unsettling the minds of Christ’s people, and of opening a door to the assaults of the enemy. I should not therefore take any notice of the true meaning of the word “light” in the text, if the force and beauty of the passage had not been much obscured by an imperfect translation. The word then translated “*light*” in the text means something more than mere light, and signifies rather *brightness* or *shining*. It is thus translated: “the *shining* of a flaming fire” (Isa. 4:5); “until the righteousness thereof go forth as *brightness* (Isa. 62:1); “the court was full of the *brightness*” (Ezek. 10:4); “His *brightness* was as the light” (Hab.3:4). Thus, when it says of the heir of heaven in the text, that “he hath no *light*,” it means that he hath no shining light, no brightness, no radiancy. He has indeed light, yea, divine and supernatural light, and by this heavenly light he has seen God and has seen himself, knows good and evil. The veil upon his heart has been rent in twain from the top to the bottom. His “eyes have been opened, and he has been turned from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18). If he literally and actually had no light, he would be dead in his sins. “Ye are all,” says Paul—that is, babes as well as fathers—“ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day” (I Thess. 5:5). “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord” (Eph.5:8). “Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (I Peter 2:9).

This heir of heaven, then, has light but *not* SHINING LIGHT. He has light to see sin and holiness, guilt and judgment, iniquities that reach unto heaven, and the flaming sword of justice stretched out against them; but he has not the brightness of divine manifestations. He has twilight, but not sunlight. But who knows not that the first glimmer of twilight which dawns upon the dark world comes from the sun, and is a part of the same beams which blaze in the mid-day sky? The sun himself indeed is yet hidden beneath the earth, but his rays are refracted by the air, and bent down out of their course to enlighten the world, long before he himself

rises in the east. And so the child of God, who has no sweet view of Jesus as his Saviour, is still enlightened by His beams; and as sure as “the day star has arisen in his heart” (II Peter 1:19), will “the Sun of Righteousness” one day arise upon him “with healing in His wings.”

Thus the heir of heaven in the text has *light* to see the evil of sin, but not *brightness* to enjoy the pardon of it. He therefore sees and feels the curse of the law, but not its removal out of the way; the pollution of all his thoughts, words and actions, but not the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness; the leprosy, but not the cleansing of the leper; the malady, but not the remedy; the wound, but not the oil and the wine; the justice of God, but not His mercy; his own total insolvency, but not the frank forgiveness of the debt; that God is his Master, but not that God is his Father (Mal.1:6). Thus: “He is led, and brought into darkness, but not into light” (Lam. 3:2); “sits desolate on the ground” (Isa. 3:26), and not “with Christ in heavenly places;” mourns sore like the dove, but mounts not up with wings as eagles; feels himself black as the tents of Kedar, but not comely as the curtains of Solomon (Song 1:5); sighs as a prisoner (Ps.79:11), but does not leap as “a hind let loose” (Gen. 49:21); is lost and driven away and broken and sick, but is not yet sought out, brought back, bound up, and strengthened (Ezek. 34:16).

But what do I mean when I say that the heir of heaven has light to see guilt and wrath and condemnation, but not mercy, love and pardon? Do I mean that he merely *sees* these things as certain revealed truths, as a system of dry doctrines, just as our DEAD CALVINISTS that swarm through the country see everything and anything but their own ignorance? No. I am speaking here not of a brain-religion, or head-knowledge, or tongue-work, or that miserable, dry, barren, marrowless, moonlight acquaintance with the doctrines of grace which hardens the heart, sears the conscience, and lifts up the soul with presumption, to dash it down into the blackness of darkness for ever. The heir of heaven in the text is not one of those graceless professors who, like the caricatures that we sometimes see in the picture shops, are all head and no body, and who have neither a heart to love Christ, nor bowels of compassion to melt into godly sorrow, nor hands to touch Him, nor feet to run the way of His commandments. The heir of heaven has too much going on at home, too much soul-trouble, too much indoors work, too many temptations, difficulties and conflicts, to allow him to furnish his head with empty notions. He wants to have the gold, silver, and precious stones within, which the fire will not burn, and leaves to dead Calvinists the wood, hay and stubble of dry doctrines, vain contentions and unprofitable disputes.

This is the character, then, whose experience we have endeavoured to trace, an heir of heaven walking in darkness. But we must not leave him here. God has not left this tried child of His without a word suitable to his case. He has addressed to him an exhortation, which in fact is a promise: “LET HIM TRUST IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, AND STAY UPON HIS GOD.” Now this exhortation is not addressed to this heir of heaven, as if he had any strength or power of his own to do that to which he is exhorted. If he could trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God, his darkness would well nigh cease. His trouble, in these seasons of inward darkness is, that he cannot believe, that he cannot trust, but that unbelief, and doubt, and despondency so press him down that he cries, “I am shut up, and I cannot come forth” (Ps. 88:8). “But you ought to believe, you ought not to doubt, you ought not to give way to your unbelief,” says one of those who sit in Moses’ seat, one of those “physicians of no value,” who know the disease by *theory* only, and have never felt the malady for which they are prescribing. As well might they say to the criminal in the condemned cell, handcuffed and double-ironed, “You ought to come out;” or to a man up to his neck in a slough, “You ought not to give way to sinking;” as lavish their oughts and ought-nots upon one who walks in “darkness and has no light.”

God does not so mock one of His children, nor when he asks for bread does He give him a stone. But does not He say in the text, “Let him *do* this and that”? He does; but with the exhortation HE GIVES POWER to do what the exhortation bids. A king does not send his general to take a town without giving him soldiers to take it with. Thus the King of Zion, when He gives a precept, and exhortation, or an invitation, gives to His people ability to perform what He commands. “Where the word of a king is, there is power.”

It is ignorance of this truth in their own experience that makes so many letter-ministers lay heavy burdens on men's shoulders, which they themselves never touch with one of their fingers. Thus the Lord, who in the text bids this child of His to trust in His Name, secretly but powerfully works this very trust in him to which He exhorts. There is in the midst of his darkness at times a WAITING for light. There is a secret resting upon the eternal arms which are underneath. What keeps the heir of heaven from the razor, the halter, or the pond, to which the devil and his own despairing heart would at times drive him? What preserves him from the ale-house, the gambling table, or the brothel? What holds him up in a consistent walk, day after day, in the midst of floods of temptation, when lust and passion fill every corner of his heart, and seem ready every moment to boil over and drown him in destruction and perdition? What makes him sigh and groan, and hold on his way, with a tender conscience and unblemished life? Is there no faith here in operation? Is there no trusting in the Lord, and staying upon his God in the midst of his temptation? Is it nature, and unbelief, and a work of the flesh, and a delusion of the devil that hold him up? Who that has eyes to see, and a heart to feel does not perceive that this heir of heaven, walking in darkness and having no light, has the *same faith* in exercise which Peter had when he walked upon the sea? His faith is indeed hidden in the bottom of his heart, and struggling for life and liberty, under the weight of temptations and trials, as the seed under the clods is pushing its roots downwards and its blade upwards, though pressed on every side with the stiff clay.

I remarked that this exhortation contained a PROMISE suitable to the case of this tried soul. This promise is not expressed in so many words, but is wrapped up as it were, in the bosom of the exhortation. It is contained, I believe, in a little word of great meaning, in the little pronoun of three letters, "HIS." "Let him stay upon HIS God." It is by these little pronouns, overlooked by learned doctors and heady professors, that salvation is sealed upon the soul, and made an eternal reality: "Who loved *me*," says Paul, "and gave himself for *me*." "I have loved *thee* with an everlasting love." How many years of temptation, doubt and fear will often roll heavily on before "THEE" is sealed upon the heart, and before "ME" and "MINE" can drop from the lips! *My Father, My Saviour, My God*, hundreds of living souls cannot pronounce. "*My*" falters from the tongue, and dares not come forth, because "I have loved *thee*, I have redeemed *thee*, thou are *Mine*," and such similar testimonies, have not been yet spoken by the mouth of God to the soul.

How different is this godly fear, this tender conscience of a living soul, from the pealing voices that sound "Our Father," through the aisles of the Parish Church, speaking of the Holy Ghost who sanctifies *them*; and from the loud burst, "*My Jesus hath done all things well*," that swells in bass, tenor, and treble from the pews and galleries of the Independent Chapel. These presumptuous mockers will find on a dying pillow, when "their lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness," that it is one thing to call God their Father and Christ their Saviour out of a Prayer Book or a Hymn Book, and another thing "to receive the spirit of adoption," whereby living souls cry, "Abba, Father."

God, then, seals this heir of heaven as a son, by saying to him, "Let him stay upon *his* God;" as though He said to him; "Though thou canst not call Me *thine*, I call thee *Mine*; I am still *thy* God though thou canst not call Me, Father." He is thus encouraged to stay upon his God, and to hope in His mercy. Almost invisibly to himself, and in a deep, mysterious, incomprehensible manner, he is "holpen with a little help" (Dan. 11:34), and though he continually falls, he is not utterly cast down. "Though faint, he still pursues"; though weary, he holds on his way; though often defeated by sin and Satan, he does not surrender; though foiled again and again, he still perseveres; though God gives no answer, he ceases not to cry; though "plunged again and again in the ditch" of heart-evil (Job 9:31), he cannot lie there, but struggles forth into the light of day; and though he expects that his corruptions will one day break forth to destroy him utterly, and sweep him away into despair beyond the mercy of God and beyond the pity of His people, he is still checked and restrained as if by an invisible hand.

Sometimes he obtains a respite from his besetments just when they seem ripened into action; at others, providential interpositions restrain the outbreakings of inward temptations, when opportunity favours them most. Conscience works at one time, the fear of man at another. Godly sorrow keeps him in this instance, and a sense and sight of the evil of sin in that. Now the fear of God, and now inward feelings of uprightness and integrity; at one moment the weight of guilt, and at another, fear of bringing a reproach on the cause of

Christ; to-day, a sense of God's goodness and mercy; to-morrow, earnest desires to live to His glory—these and similar workings, which none but gracious souls know, act as a counterpoise to the vile iniquities that seem pent up in his heart as water in a mill dam.

Thus he seems always working and counter-working, doing and undoing, fighting and yielding; raging with inward passions, and softened into contrition; diving into all the pollution of a fallen nature, and rising up into the presence of a holy God; hating sin, and loving it; longing after the vilest iniquities, and pained at an idle word; feeding upon the filthiest garbage, and eating manna; revelling in a train of past sins, and abhorring himself as the vilest monster that crawls upon the earth. At times he feels earnestly desirous never to sin more, and would fain be as holy as an angel; at other times he feels as if the sins of thousands were pent up in his bosom, and as if his vile heart could lie down and wallow in all the abominations which have ever been conceived by the mind, uttered by the lips, or acted by the man.

But mark, my friends, that all these are INWARD workings, not outward actions; God forbid! And forget not that all these hidden sins are locked up in the saint's own bosom, and though they roar and swell there, are kept down by the hand of God, as boiling water is kept by the top of the cauldron. God forbid that we should encourage sin, or lead anyone to think lightly of that abominable thing which God hateth. No. In his right mind a living soul would sooner die than that his corruptions should break forth into action, and his burden is that he feels such powerful workings of sin within. But all these things keep him low, mar his pride, crush his self-righteousness, cut the locks of his presumption, stain his self-conceit, stop his boasting, preserve him from despising others, make him take the lowest room, teach him to esteem others better than himself, drive him to earnest prayer, fit him for an object of mercy, break to pieces his free-will, and lay him low at the feet of the Redeemer, as one to be saved by sovereign grace alone.

Thus, the only wise God shows His children enough of themselves to keep them, and enough of His goodness to preserve them from despair. When the gale of free grace blows, the ballast of corruption keeps the vessel from pitching over; and when the storms of temptations arise, the anchor of hope holds her head from driving on the rocks of destruction. Thus the heir of heaven "sings of mercy and judgment;" has a thorn in the flesh, as well as manifestations of God; is kept as a wayfaring man in the highway of the redeemed, with "his eyes right on and his eye-lids straight before him" (Isa. 35:8-9; Pro. 4:25). And though for the most part he walks in darkness, and has no light, he is yet encouraged and enabled "to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

Thus have I laid open, as far as God has enabled me, the experience of a living soul. Who here can say, "It is mine"? Who can "subscribe with his hand" (Isa. 44:5) that such things have passed within, in the secret depths of his heart betwixt him and God? But mark well, my friends, lest we have no shuffling, no taking up on one side and not on the other, no setting up a "vile" experience instead of a "precious one" (Jer. 15:19), no resting upon inward workings as marks of grace, unless they be such as "accompany salvation."

Many will set up their sins, their fretfulness, their evil temper, their unbelief, their hardness of heart and deadness of soul as evidences. Now, I feel all these things as evidences against me, and not for me, and to make them witnesses in my behalf is like a criminal's making the evidence of his crimes so many witnesses in his favour. It is not sin, but the workings of grace under sin; it is not unbelief, but the strugglings of faith against unbelief; it is not inward evil, but sorrow for it; it is not iniquity, but the pardon of it; it is not lust, but deliverance from the power of it; it is not pride, but humility; it is not hardness of heart, but contrition; it is not deadness, but life; it is not man's rebellion, but God's mercy felt within—that is the TRUE EVIDENCE of a work of grace. You are proud, you confess, but so is Satan; unbelieving, but so is the atheist; murmuring, but so are the reprobate (Isa. 8:21); covetous, but so is the worldling; doubting, but so is the hypocrite; despairing, but so was Judas; prayerless, but so are the carnal; hardened, but so was Pharaoh; fearful, but so are the lost (Rev. 21:8); pierced with guilt, but so was Cain.

Let us take up the other side. Do you ever loathe yourself like Job, turn to the wall as Hezekiah, weep like Peter, put your mouth in the dust as Jeremiah, fear God as Joseph, pant after Him as David, find Him the strength of your heart as Asaph (Psa. 73:26), cry, "Woe is me!" as Isaiah (6:5), have a tender heart as Josiah,

wrestle with God as Jacob, are of a sorrowful spirit like Hannah, and obey the voice of the Lord's Servant as the heir of heaven in the text? You may find on a dying pillow, when conscience grasps you by the throat, that neither doubts nor fears are able to save, but the revelation of Christ to the soul, the sprinkling of His blood, and the manifestation of His righteousness.

## The HEIR of HELL

But we now have to draw a different picture, the fearful picture of an HEIR OF HELL WALKING IN LIGHT. Our materials for this sketch (for, of a character so various, so intricate, so ever-changing, so branching out into a thousand shapes and a million hues, our description can only be a very feeble sketch) must be drawn from three sources: (1) From Scripture. (2) From observation of others. (3) From what I know of the deceitful workings and delusions of my own heart.

To some who know neither their own deceitfulness and hypocrisy, nor the awful delusions of the devil as an angel of light, I may appear harsh, bitter, severe, bigoted, narrow-minded, and to deserve every other term of reproach which self-seekers and flesh-pleasers heap upon those who fearlessly hunt out their refuge of lies. To preach the gospel in our days is to preach to PLEASE EVERYBODY AND OFFEND NOBODY; to starve the children, and feed the bastards; to beat the heir, and caress the dog; to call the children of God antinomians, and to call empty formalists decided Christians; to style opening up Satan's delusions "preaching in a bad spirit;" and wrapping up hypocrites, impostors, Pharisees, and self-deceivers in their delusions, "not preaching in the spirit of the gospel." This turning of things upside down, this calling good evil and evil good, and putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, may God ever keep me from, and may He enable me to speak boldly and faithfully, whether men will hear or forbear, that by manifestation of the truth I may commend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

I called your attention in the beginning of this discourse to the different form of the address to the heir of heaven and the heirs of hell. The first, I observed, was singled out by the hand of God as a solitary individual out of a numerous company by the expression, "Who is there among you?" etc.; whilst the latter were stamped as an immense troop by the differently worded phrase, "Behold, *all ye* that kindle a fire," etc. The road to heaven is "strait and narrow, and few there be that find it;" whilst "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat" (Matt. 7:13-14). Thus the heir of heaven is represented as a solitary traveller, a lonely pilgrim, journeying on amidst darkness and sorrow; but the heirs of hell as a merry troop, with their blood boiling high with confidence, and their spirits undismayed with fear.

The blessed Spirit, then, calls our attention by the expression, "*Behold!*" "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire," etc. Usually, I believe, whenever we find the word "Behold!" or the similar word "Lo!" prefixed to a passage of Scripture, it introduces something that is weighty and important. If a man says to us, "Look here or there!" we, of course, expect there is something strange, something worth seeing, something not of everyday occurrence. And thus the blessed Spirit seems in the text to call our attention to a strange sight, to something we should not expect to see, and which we might not observe, unless our notice was especially directed to it. And what is this strange sight, this spectacle, to which the Holy Ghost calls our particular attention? It is to "a generation pure in their own eyes, and yet not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12).

I may very simply arrange all that is said of the heirs of hell in the text under two heads: (1) Their *conduct*. (2) Their *sentence*.

## 1. Their Conduct

We will consider, then, as God shall enable us, their CONDUCT first, that we may understand their *crime* before we hear their sentence. The catalogue of their offences is a very short, but it is a very black one. The sum total of their crimes is stated in a few words, but it is heavy enough to sink them down into hell. To give their complicated offences a single name, we will call it “HIGH TREASON AGAINST THE TRIUNE JEHOVAH;” this is to say, high treason, first, against God the Father, in presuming to call themselves His children, when He has never elected them. Secondly, against God the Son, in calling Him their Saviour, when He never redeemed them. Thirdly, against God the Holy Ghost, in walking in a light which He has not kindled, and resting in a confidence which He has not inspired.

The charge against them consists of two heads—the bill of indictment, so to speak, contains two counts: First, that “they kindle a fire.” Secondly, that “they compass themselves about with sparks.” The one is the origin of their crime, the other the continuation; the first is the bud, the second the fruit. The first accusation is, that “lust conceives and bringeth forth sin;” the second accusation is, “sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Let us trace up their crimes then to the fountainhead. They “kindle a fire.” This implies their taking hold of religion without religion taking hold of them; that they come to the law without the law coming with power to them. But here lies the core of their offence, this is the turning point of their case, that they take up a *counterfeit* religion and call it the *true* one; that they kindle a *false* fire, and say that it came down from heaven.

It would be a crime if the forgers of money were to coin *gold* and *silver* into sovereigns and shillings. It would be “an iniquity to be punished by the judge,” to be guilty of such daring presumption as to stamp the king’s head and superscription on coin that never came out of his mint. But to coin the king’s head upon lead and copper, to gild or plate over these base imitations, so as to represent the gold and silver coins of the realm, to utter and pass them off as genuine, in order to defraud honest men, this multiplies the offence a hundred-fold. According to the ancient laws of this land, therefore, the crime of forgery is high treason, and the punishment death.

Apply this to the crime of false professors. If it were possible for these forgers to procure for themselves the right religion, which they can never do, for God keeps that in His own hands, they would still be guilty of the most awful presumption in calling their religion the religion of God. But when, as is the true state of the case, their religion is nothing but a base counterfeit, nothing but, “a potsherd covered with silver dross” (Pro. 26:23), it multiplies the offence a thousand-fold. Let us, however, enter more clearly into their case, that that Scripture may be fulfilled: “Reprobate silver shall men call them, for the Lord hath rejected them,” and again, “Whose hatred is covered with deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation.” But as examples are more striking than mere assertions, and as it is better to describe living characters than hint a little here and a little there, which hints the right persons are never sure to take, I will, with God’s help, try to sketch out a few likenesses, who may, if they have a mind, see their faces in the looking-glass which I shall hold up before their eyes.

I might point then, first, if I were minded so to waste my breath and your time, to the heathen, the Jew, the Roman Catholic, and the Socinian, as all instances of men who “kindle a fire, and compass themselves about with sparks,” and shall at last “lie down in sorrow.” But I am not fond of shooting my arrows where they are not likely to hit, and prefer coming a little closer home. To preach so is to beat the air, and imitate the high-church ministers of the Establishment, who are wonderfully severe against the Pharisees and Sadducees of old, and the Papists and the Unitarians of present times, and know not that they themselves equal the Pharisee for self-righteousness, the Sadducee for unbelief, the Roman Catholic for superstitious ceremonies, and the Socinian for hatred and contempt of the doctrines of grace and the mysteries of vital godliness.

We will leave, then, such false religions as Popery and Socinianism to the righteous judgment of God, who says of all such delusions: “Is not this laid up in store with Me, and sealed up amongst My treasures? To Me belongeth vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time” (Deut. 32:34-35). Let us rather pass on to such delusions as occur daily before our eyes. And I know not with whom we had better begin than the

corrupt ministers of a carnal Establishment. These take high ground, and put themselves forward as the only successors of the apostles, as the only ministers of Christ, the only stewards of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. I once heard a minister of this stamp declare, in a sermon preached at Oxford before the Bishop and his assembled clergy, that there was no hope of salvation whatever for any man who wilfully separated or dissented from the Church of England. And this is, I believe, the received opinion amongst such clerical bigots. But what is all their religion made up of from the first to last? It is nothing else but a tissue of forms and ceremonies of man's invention. This is the fire which they have kindled, and these are the sparks with which they compass themselves. Their boast, for instance, that they receive their ministry in a direct line from the apostles, what is it but a spark of fire which they have kindled to warm themselves into a persuasion that they are the true ministers of Christ?

The distinguishing mark of all false religion is, that it commences with *man* and not with *God*. "Behold, all ye that *kindle* a fire," etc. So Aaron made the golden calf, so Nadab and Abihu offered false fire, so Korah, Dathan and Abiram took each man his censer, so Balak built seven altars and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar, so Gideon made an ephod in Ophrah, so Micah had a Levite for his priest, so Saul offered the burnt-offering, Jeroboam set up the calves in Bethel, and the women wept for Tammuz at the door of the Lord's house (Ezek. 8:14).

Every form or system, therefore, which is based upon FREE-WILL and the power of the creature is stamped at once as *false* fire. But where shall we find the power of the creature more daringly asserted than amongst the Ranters and Wesleyan Methodists? Their creed is, that man can turn to God of himself, can make himself a new heart, can come to Christ, can believe, hope, and love of his own free-will, and by the exercise of that natural strength which they assert that all men possess. Thus, free-will kindles a fire and presumption blows up the coals. So that all their religion, so far as it is the work of the creature, is nothing but a counterfeit of the work of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the elect. Natural belief supplies with them the place of supernatural faith, creature confidence the place of divine assurance, cob-web hopes the place of a good hope through grace, fleshly convictions the place of godly sorrow, noise in prayer the place of the Spirit of supplications, and groans and shouts of "Amen" and "Lord, hear," the place of communion with God. Shouting to the top of the voice is with them preaching with power, singing hymns to ballad tunes is praising God, free-will exhortations to dead sinners is preaching the gospel, working a reformation in the life is conversion to Christ, fiery zeal against the doctrines of grace is earnestness in the cause of God, and going out of the world with a seared conscience is dying triumphantly in the full assurance of faith.

I once visited one of their converts, who was proclaimed all over the country as triumphing over death. He certainly had no fears of dying; but when I began to sound the foundation of his hope, I found him ignorant of himself, ignorant of the curse of the law, ignorant that he deserved to be sent to hell; and therefore, though he talked about Jesus Christ, he was yet ignorant of the blood of sprinkling and the revelation of a justifying righteousness. Like all self-deceivers, he could not bear the probe, but after a few questions, turned away from me and returned no answer. Thus they begin in delusion, are trained up in it, and mostly die in it. The weekly confessional of the class-meeting kindles the fire of hypocrisy, each member not wishing to be behind another in experience. The love-feast, the watchnight, by the excitement of lights, late hours and singing, the bawling of the preacher, and the groans and Amens of the hearers, kindle a fire which passes off for the love of God. The impassioned rant of a preacher, calling upon the wicked to turn to God, lights up a spark of natural feeling which they gladly seize as the meltings of the blessed Spirit. Zeal for John Wesley, or the cause of the Primitive Methodists, raises a fire within which blazed forth in the support of new chapels, local preachers, Arminian writings, and a thorough hatred of unconditional election, particular redemption, and imputed righteousness.

I remarked that false religion took a thousand different shapes and colours, and therefore we need not wonder if it sometimes clothes itself in a form the direct opposite to Arminianism. It matters little to Satan how the fire is lighted up, so long as the hand of God does not kindle it. DEAD CALVINISM is as good a kind of fuel with which to light up the flame of false religion as the rotten sticks of free-will and creature merit. Thus, a sound creed kindles the flame of pride over those whose judgments are not so well informed;

notions in the head light up the sparks of presumption; election floating in the brain sets on fire a false confidence; distinguishing mercy, received as a doctrine in the head and not felt as a truth in the soul, blows up the coals of arrogance; and sovereign grace itself, learned in a mechanical way like the lesson of a parrot, instead of melting the heart with flames of divine love, only hardens it like a piece of clay into stone.

Now all these dead Calvinists, these bastards and not sons, these children of the bond-woman and not the children of the free, however they may differ in their creed from the Arminians, resemble them in this—that they kindle a fire. It is not God that gives them either light or heat. They teach themselves the doctrines of grace, and do not receive them from heaven; and believe in election, particular redemption, imputed righteousness and final perseverance, not because any one of these truths has been sealed upon their hearts, but because they read of them in the Bible or hear them from the pulpit.

These, then, “kindle a fire”; for I am sure if God had kindled one in their hearts, and “shut it up in their bones” (Jer. 20:9), it would soon burn them out of a carnal establishment. “The Articles of our venerable Establishment, our incomparable Liturgy, the wisdom and piety of the Reformers, the apostolic succession of the Bishops, the admirable mean between Popery on the one hand and enthusiasm on the other, the eminent men that have been ministers in the Church of England, the judicious Hooker, the holy Leighton, the spiritual Hervey, the evangelical Romaine, the sound Scott, the pious Newton”—who has not heard all these sparks rushing from the fire kindled and blown up by the mouth of evangelical preachers? These are the sparks at which they warm themselves, when any damp, chilling convictions of the badness of their cause arise in their minds; and with the same embers do they kindle a fire in the bosoms of their hearers. But who that has a spark of spiritual light does not see that all these pleas and excuses are a false fire, and that the question at the last day will be, not whether Newton, Romaine, or Hawker remained in a carnal system, but what warrant had their apologists to do evil that good might come, or refer to the example of men instead of the standard of truth given by the ever-living God?

But I should omit a large section of fire-kindlers if I did not take notice of another class of religious professors, namely, the General Dissenters. These call themselves Calvinists, but are really Arminians, profess free grace, but actually are advocates for free-will. Sunk in carnality, buried in worldliness, steeped up to the lips in an empty profession, destitute of the life of God, these do indeed require the tinder-box of nature, the flint and steel of human exertion to procure some sparks of false fire. The Sunday morning prayer of the dead minister, furnished with overflowing supply of choice words and elegant phrases, and set off with a handsome gown and bands, easy action, soft manners, and a gold ring on each little finger, has a wondrous efficacy in lighting up the fire of natural religion which the busy week has well nigh quenched.

The spark being thus kindled, the nicely divided sermon proceeds to blow up the reviving embers by a lecture on the duty of believing, well seasoned with thunders from Mount Sinai, warnings against Antinomianism, and cautions against enthusiasm, and thoroughly spiced with human arguments, academic eloquence, appeals to reason, and quotations from authors. The drowsy prayer meeting, the monthly ordinance, the weekly lecture, the daily chapter, the formal family prayer, the legal author, the religious chit-chat, picked up by gossiping from house to house—all serve to blow up the dying spark of natural religion; and where these fail, aid is borrowed from the excitement of politics and the spirit of party, or burning zeal against what are called high doctrines, and the narrow-minded bigots that hold them. Thus a burning-glass is never wanting to kindle a fire, and bellows are always at hand to blow up the flame.

Now all these characters, however in other respects they differ, yet resemble each other in this particular, that they begin with God instead of God’s beginning with them. Thus their religion is not of heaven, but of earth; not the work of the Holy Ghost, but the hard labour of the creature; not the fruit of free grace, but the offspring of free-will; not a heavenly principle born of God, but a spurious imitation, born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man.

But the characters we are describing are not only said to kindle a fire, but “to compass themselves also about with sparks.” These sparks, of course, rise from the same fire which they have kindled, and come out of the flame when blown up to its due height. With these sparks they are said “to compass,” that is, to *surround*



themselves. Thus they stand in the midst of the flame, and the sparks that fly out of the fire on every side completely encircle them. But what is the effect of this fiery circle with which they are surrounded? It, of course, cuts off all view of everything beyond it. The sparks that fly up in every direction as the fire is blown, allow the kindlers of it to see nothing but the flame from which they proceed; and in proportion as the fuel burns and the sparks fly, does the blazing pile throw everything into darkness but itself and those on whom it glares.

Thus, all false religion, just in proportion as it seizes hold of the mind, blinds it to the truth, fills it with prejudice, sears the conscience, hardens the heart, inflames it with party zeal, and makes every faculty boil over with hatred, fury and bigotry against all that see not as it sees, and act not as it acts. Zeal for the false religion of the Church of Rome kindled the Smithfield fires in the days of bloody Mary, and zeal for the Church of England now inflames almost as violently the hearts of thousands against Dissenters. Zeal for the doctrines of Methodism warms some, zeal for moderate Calvinism, as it is termed, fires others. Each false sect has its own bonfire, and the light which comes from it, each is fully persuaded is the blaze of heavenly truth. The heat which is thrown out as the sparks fly upward increases the delusion by supplying a false warmth, a fiery zeal to put into action the erroneous persuasions which the light has kindled in the mind.

So that herein lies the counterfeit whereby false religion *imitates* the true. In true religion there is light to see and warmth to feel. In false religion there are just the same two properties. Does God cast a light into the hearts of the heirs of heaven? So does Satan cast a light into the heads of the heirs of hell. Does God communicate warmth, together with light, to make the hearts of His people burn within them? So does Satan, by the sparks of natural religion, inflame into bigotry, heat and zeal, the carnal minds of his children. Does the one see? So does the other. Does the one act from feeling? So does the other. Is the one convicted of truth? So is the other equally convinced of error. And does the one act from a desire to please God? So does the other think that by persecuting the saints he does God service. Thus, the more conscientious a man is, the greater enemy will he be to the Church of Christ if he compass himself about with sparks of false fire. The more that he acts from principle, the more determined will be his attacks; and the more that he is heated with false zeal, the more violent will be his opposition to the truth of God. Thus *professors are far more bitter against the children of God than the profane*; and those who have a false religion are much more violent against the truth than those who have no religion at all. Priests, therefore, have always been the greatest enemies of true religion in every age; and its greatest foes now are the corrupt priests in the Establishment and the false priests amongst the Dissenters.

## 2. Their Sentence

I said that I should consider, first, the conduct of the heirs of hell, and then their SENTENCE. Their sentence, then, as pronounced by the mouth of God in the text, is twofold. The first part is contained in the words. "Walk ye in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled." To be given up to *judicial blindness* is one of the most awful sentences that can issue from the mouth of God. And such is the first part of the punishment awarded against those who kindle a fire, and compass themselves about with sparks. It is as though the mouth of the Judge of the whole earth spoke to them thus: "You have chosen to deceive yourselves; I will not undeceive you. You have kindled a false fire; I will not extinguish it that I may give you the true one. No. Walk in the light of your fire. Enjoy your false confidence, rest securely on your delusive hopes, foster your presumptuous faith, comfort yourselves with your rites, forms, and ceremonies, and be fully persuaded of the truth of your false doctrine. 'I also will choose your delusions' (Isa. 66:4). Thus go on to fill up the measure of your iniquities, to call evil good and good evil, and to put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, until you have neither eyes to see the one, nor taste to discern the other."

This, then, is the sentence of God against those heirs of wrath who are wrapped up in the delusions of false religion. And as is the sentence, so is the execution. The effects we see every day passing before our eyes, and taking place in well-nigh all the churches and chapels of the land. Thus the professor of natural religion walks in the light which he himself has kindled. Divine wrath in his soul against sin and the curse of the law

in his conscience have never roused him from his dream of creature merit and fleshly righteousness. Carnal security holds him fast in her iron arms. Vain confidence has drugged him asleep with her opium dose. Neither guilt nor terror, doubt nor fear, ever disturbs his repose. Like the Dead Sea, there is in him the utter absence of life and motion. Pleased with himself, and charmed, like a youthful beauty, with the reflection of his own face, he glides securely on through life without cutting conviction, one piercing thought, one staggering doubt whether he be going to heaven. Or if such doubts should for a moment arise, the consistency of his past life, his attention to what he calls “the duties of religion,” his kindness to the poor, and a thousand other such friendly suggestions, rise up in a body to expel the intruding doubt from his mind. He is cheerful, as having no trouble nor sorrow, and that is christened by the name of “cheerful piety.” He is good tempered, and that is called “Christian meekness.” He is friendly to all, and that is named “the spirit of a true Christian.” He attends church or chapel, kneels at the sacrament, or sits at the ordinance, and that is considered “the essence of religion.” He has no doubt of his state, and that is called “enjoying a full assurance.” He is liberal to the poor, and that is termed “love to Christ.” He condemns nobody, and thinks well of everybody, and that is considered “walking in the spirit of the gospel.” He reads the Bible much, and religious authors more, and that is called being “a most advanced Christian.” He remembers texts and sermons for half a century back, and by repeating them continually passes current as “a most established believer.”

Thus all these sparks of natural virtue and fleshly religion furnish light and heat by which he walks, and at which he warms himself. “He is not in trouble as other men”—that is, Christian men—“neither is he plagued like other men” (Ps. 73:5). He never feels cold, for his fire always burns; nor dark, for his sparks always give light. He never mourns, for he feels no sins to mourn for; nor is burdened with guilt, because his conscience was never made tender. He never grieves for the absence of God, because he has never felt His presence; nor cries that he may know Christ, for he thinks that he knows Him enough already. He never groans beneath temptation, because he has no new principle within to feel its load. The devil does not harass him, for he has him safe already; nor do the terrors of the Lord alarm him, for God has given him up to judicial blindness. Thus surrounded with prosperity, and furnished with more than heart can wish, “his house is safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon him; he sends forth his little ones like a flock, and his children dance; he takes the timbrel and harp, and rejoices at the sound of the organ” (Job 21:9-12).

But there is a second part of their sentence which remains to be considered: “This shall ye have of Mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.” Of this sentence part is executed in this life, but sometimes its whole weight is deferred until the life to come. Thus, in some cases, the delusion which is spread over the heart is rent asunder on a dying pillow. The flattery of professors, the self-deceit of the heart, the delusions of Satan, all which had buoyed up the soul with empty hopes, vanish into air at the approach of the king of terrors. One flash of eternal fire in the conscience dissolves the dream into which he had been cheated. The sparks of Tophet “ordained of old, which the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone doth kindle” (Isa. 30:33), burn up the wood, hay and stubble accumulated for years. The reality of death, the certainty of eternity, the stern justice of God, the impossibility of escape, the recollection of the past, the terror of the future, the clamour of a guilty conscience, rush in like a flood, and sweep away into despair all the refuge of lies so long sheltered in. Free-will snaps asunder, “as the thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire” (Judges 16:9); human merit disappears, “as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney” (Hos. 13:3); natural faith withers away “as the streams of brooks when it is hot are consumed out of their place” (Job 6:17); and despair swallows up vain hopes, as “drought and heat consume the snow waters.”

He who thought that he was a great Christian now finds that he is no Christian at all. He who fondly imagined himself on the road to heaven, finds himself suddenly at the gates of hell. And now he learns that these doctrines are true which he either denied or held in unrighteousness. The iron gates of election, the deep impassable gulf of God’s decrees, the brazen bars of that reprobation which he once disbelieved and fought against, but which is now borne witness to by his gnawing conscience, the irreversible purpose of Jehovah “to have mercy on whom He will have mercy,” and on them alone—all, all shut out hope, and drive

the soul down fathoms deep into the agony of despair. “God now laughs at his calamity, and mocks when his fear cometh” (Prov.1:26). He calls upon the Lord, but “He answers him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets” (I Sam.28:6). Thus, “he is brought into desolation as in a moment, and is utterly consumed with terrors” (Ps 73:19). So it was with Ahithophel, with whom David once took sweet counsel, and walked to the house of God in company, who “when his counsel was not followed, gat him home to his house and hanged himself” (II Sam.17:23). So it was with Saul, when the Lord departed from him and became his enemy (I Sam. 28:16), and “he took a sword and fell upon it” (I Sam. 31:4). So it was with Judas, when he hanged himself in an agony of despair, and falling headlong his bowels gushed out. So it was with Francis Spira, at the time of the Reformation; and so have I known it myself in the death-bed of several professors.

But it is *not always in this life* that God executes this sentence, “Ye shall lie down in sorrow,” against the heirs of hell. On the contrary, in the majority of cases, the criminal is respited and the execution of the sentence deferred. This so stumbled Asaph, and made his steps well nigh to slip, that he saw the ungodly not only prospered in the world and increased in riches, but that even when they came to die, “there were no bands [that is, terrors] in their death,” but even in that solemn hour that “their strength was firm.” And thus it is continually now. Hundreds of professors die like lambs, whose everlasting portion will be amongst the goats.

“Our departed friend” (says a paragraph in some religious periodical) “could not boast of great manifestations. He was indeed on principle opposed to those death-bed displays of which some think so highly. But he was a consistent character, an affectionate father, a kind husband, a warm supporter of the church,” or “a steady friend to dissent,” as the case may be, “and he is doubtless gone to his reward.” “So they wrap it up” (Micah 7:3). When the real state of the case is that he began in delusion, continued in it, and died in it. The veil was not rent off his heart until the invisible state disclosed to him for the first time the awful reality that he had died with a lie in his right hand. Still the sentence is true, and executed to the letter, though deferred for a while. “This they have at God’s hand, they lie down in sorrow;” if not on a bed of death, on the flaming pillows of eternal fire.

But none of the heirs of heaven shall lie down in sorrow. There may be gloom, doubts, and fears for a time on a death-bed, and if there has been a previous manifestation of pardoning love and the inward revelation of Jesus, there may not be triumphant joy, but there will be a hope that anchors within the veil, a faith that rests on the finished work of the Saviour, and a love that goes out after God. “The end of the upright is peace;” “they rest on their beds,” “have hope in their death” (Prov. 14:32), and find the rod and the staff of God to comfort them as they walk through the dark valley.

I have drawn two opposite characters—their beginning, progress and end. Which are you? If an empty professor, unless grace prevent, your sentence is recorded, that you shall lie down in sorrow. If a living soul, though now you are walking in darkness, and have no light, you shall one day behold the face of God with joy.

