

INSTITUTES

OF

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

BOOK THIRD.

THE MODE OF OBTAINING THE GRACE OF CHRIST. THE BENEFITS IT CONFERS, AND THE EFFECTS RESULTING FROM IT.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEGINNING OF JUSTIFICATION. IN WHAT SENSE PROGRESSIVE.

To illustrate what has been already said, and show what kind of righteousness man can have during the whole course of his life, mankind are divided into four classes. I. First class considered, sec. 1-6. II. Second and third classes considered together, sec. 7, 8. III. Fourth class considered, sec. 9 to end.

Sections.

1. Men either idolatrous, profane, hypocritical, or regenerate. 1. Idolaters void of righteousness, full of unrighteousness, and hence in the sight of God altogether wretched and undone.
2. Still a great difference in the characters of men. This difference manifested. 1. In the gifts of God. 2. In the distinction between honourable and base. 3. In the blessings of the present life.
3. All human virtue, how praiseworthy soever it may appear, is corrupted. 1. By impurity of heart. 2. By the absence of a proper nature.
4. By the want of Christ, without whom there is no life.
5. Natural condition of man as described by Scripture. All men dead in sins before regeneration.
6. Passages of Scripture to this effect. Vulgar error confounding the righteousness of works with the redemption purchased by Christ.
- 7 The second and third classes of men, comprehending hypocrites and Christians in name only. Every action of theirs deserves condemnation. Passage from Haggai. Objection. Answer.
8. Other passages. Quotations from Augustine and Gregory.
9. The fourth class, viz., the regenerate. Though guided by the Spirit, corruption adheres to all they do, especially when brought to the bar of God.
10. One fault sufficient to efface all former righteousness. Hence they cannot possibly be justified by works.
11. In addition to the two former arguments, a third adduced against the Sophists, to show that whatever be the works of the regenerate, they are justified solely by faith and the

- free imputation of Christ's righteousness.
12. Sophism of the Schoolmen in opposition to the above doctrine. Answer.
 13. Answer explained. Refutation of the fiction of partial righteousness, and compensation by works of supererogation. This fiction necessarily falls with that of satisfaction.
 14. Statement of our Saviour, viz., that after we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants.
 15. Objection founded on Paul's boasting. Answer, showing the Apostle's meaning. Other answers, stating the general doctrine out of Chrysostom. Third answer, showing that supererogation is the merest vanity.
 16. Fourth answer, showing how Scripture dissuades us from all confidence in works. Fifth answer, showing that we have no ground of boasting.
 17. Sixth answer, showing, in regard to four different causes, that works have no part in procuring our salvation. 1. The efficient cause is the free love of the Father. 2. The material cause is Christ acquiring righteousness for us. 3. The instrumental cause is faith. 4. The final cause the display of the divine justice and praise of the divine goodness.
 18. A second objection, founded on the glorying of saints. An answer, explaining these modes of expression. How the saints feel in regard to the certainty of salvation. The opinion they have of their own works as in the sight of God.
 19. Another answer, viz., that the elect, by this kind of glorying, refer only to their adoption by the Father as proved by the fruits of their calling. The order of this glorying. Its foundation, structure, and parts.
 20. Conclusion. The saints neither attribute anything to the merits of works, nor derogate in any degree from the righteousness which they obtain in Christ. Confirmation from a passage of Augustine, in which he gives two reasons why no believer will presume to boast before God of his works.
 21. A third objection, viz., that the good works of believers are the causes of divine blessings. Answer. There are inferior causes, but these depend on free justification, which is the only true cause why God blesses us. These modes of expression designate the order of sequence rather than the cause.

1. IN farther illustration of the subject, let us consider what kind of righteousness man can have, during the whole course of his life, and for this purpose let us make a fourfold division. Mankind, either endued with no knowledge of God, are sunk in idolatry; or, initiated in the sacraments, but by the impurity of their lives denying him whom they confess with their mouths, are Christians in name only; or they are hypocrites, who with empty glosses hide the iniquity of the heart; or they are regenerated by the Spirit of God, and aspire to true holiness. In the first place, when men are judged by their natural endowments, not an iota of goodwill be found from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, unless we are to charge Scripture with falsehood, when it describes all the sons of Adam by such terms as these: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity." "They are all gone aside: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." In short, that they are *fleshy* under which name are comprehended all those works which are enumerated by Paul; adultery, fornication, un-

cleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and all kinds of pollution and abomination which it is possible to imagine.* Such, then, is the worth on which men are to plume themselves. But if any among them possess an integrity of manners which presents some semblance of sanctity among men, yet because we know that God regards not the outward appearance, we must penetrate to the very source of action, if we would see how far works avail for righteousness. We must, I say, look within, and see from what affection of the heart these works proceed. This is a very wide field of discussion, but as the matter may be explained in few words, I will use as much brevity as I can.

2. First, then, I deny not, that whatever excellent endowments appear in unbelievers† are divine gifts. Nor do I set myself so much in opposition to common sense, as to contend that there was no difference between the justice, moderation, and equity of Titus and Trajan, and the rage, intemperance, and cruelty of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian; between the continence of Vespasian, and the obscene lusts of Tiberius; and (not to dwell on single virtues and vices) between the observance of law and justice, and the contempt of them. So great is the difference between justice and injustice, that it may be seen even where the former is only a lifeless image. For what order would remain in the world if we were to confound them? Hence this distinction between honourable and base actions God has not only engraven on the minds of each, but also often confirms in the administration of his providence. For we see how he visits those who cultivate virtue with many temporal blessings. Not that that external image of virtue in the least degree merits his favour, but he is pleased thus to show how much he delights in true righteousness, since he does not leave even the outward semblance of it to go unrewarded. Hence it follows, as we lately observed, that those virtues, or rather images of virtues, of whatever kind, are divine gifts, since there is nothing in any degree praiseworthy which proceeds not from him.

3. Still the observation of Augustine is true, that all who are strangers to the true God, however excellent they may be deemed on account of their virtues, are more deserving of punishment than of reward, because, by the pollution of their heart, they contaminate the pure gifts of God, (August, contra Julian, Lib, iv.) For though they are instruments of God to preserve human society by justice, continence, friendship, temperance, fortitude, and prudence, yet they execute these good works of God in the worst manner, because they are kept from acting ill, not by a sincere love of goodness, but

* Jer. xvii. 9; Gen. viii. 21; Ps. xciv. 11; xxxvi. 2; xiv. 2, 3; Gen. vi. 3; Gal. v. 19.

† Latin, “in incredulis.” French, “en la vie des infideles et idolatres;” —in the life of infidels and idolaters.

merely by ambition or self-love, or some other sinister affection. Seeing then that these actions are polluted as in their very source, by impurity of heart, they have no better title to be classed among virtues than vices, which impose upon us by their affinity or resemblance to virtue. In short, when we remember that the object at which righteousness always aims is the service of God, whatever is of a different tendency deservedly forfeits the name. Hence, as they have no regard to the end which the divine wisdom prescribes, although from the performance the act seems good, yet from the perverse motive it is sin. Augustine, therefore, concludes . that all the Fabriciuses, the Scipios, and Catos,* in their illustrious deeds, sinned in this, that, wanting the light of faith, they did not refer them to the proper end, and that, therefore, there was no true righteousness in them, because duties are estimated not by acts but by motives.

4. Besides, if it is true, as John says, that there is no life without the Son of God, (1 John v. 12,) those who have no part in Christ, whoever they be, whatever they do or devise, are hastening on, during their whole career, to destruction and the judgment of eternal death. For this reason, Augustine says, “Our religion distinguishes the righteous from the wicked, by the law, not of works but of faith, without which works which seem good are converted into sins,” (August, ad Bonif. Lib. iii. c. v.) He finely expresses the same idea in another passage, when he compares the zeal of such men to those who in a race mistake the course, (August. Præf. in Ps. xxxi.) He who is off the course, the more swiftly he runs is the more distant from the goal; and, therefore, the more unhappy. It is better to limp in the way than run out of the way. Lastly, as there is no sanctification without union with Christ, it is evident that they are bad trees which are beautiful and fair to look upon, and may even produce fruit, sweet to the taste, but are still very far from good. Hence we easily perceive that every thing which man thinks, designs, and performs, before he is reconciled to God by faith, is cursed, and not only of no avail for justification, but merits certain damnation. And why do we talk of this as if it were doubtful, when it has already been proved by the testimony of an apostle, that “without faith it is impossible to please God?” (Heb. xi. 6.)

5. But the proof will be still clearer if divine grace is set in opposition to the natural condition of man. For Scripture everywhere proclaims that God finds nothing in man to induce him to show kindness, but that he prevents him by free liberality. What can a dead man do to obtain life? But when he enlightens us with the knowledge of himself, he is said to raise us from the dead, and make us new creatures, (John v. 25.) On this ground we see that

* Latin, “omnes Fabricios, Scipiones, Catones.” French, “tous ceux qui ont esté prizez entre les Pagans;”—all those who have been prized among the Heathen.

the kindness of God toward us is often commended, especially by the apostle: “*God,*” says he, “who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ,” (Eph. ii. 4.) In another passage, when treating of the general call of believers under the type of Abraham, he says, “God quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were,” (Rom. iv. 17.) If we are nothing, what, pray, can we do? Wherefore, in the Book of Job the Lord sternly represses all arrogance in these words, “Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine,” (Job xli. 11.) Paul explaining this sentence applies it in this way,— Let us not imagine that we bring to the Lord any thing but the mere disgrace of want and destitution, (Rom. xi. 35.) Wherefore, in the passage above quoted, to prove that we attain to the hope of salvation, not by works but only by grace, he affirms that “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them,” (Eph. ii. 10;) as if he had said, Who of us can boast of having challenged God by his righteousness, seeing our first power to act aright is derived from regeneration? For, as we are formed by nature, sooner shall oil be extracted from stone than good works from us. It is truly strange how man, convicted of such ignominy, dares still to claim any thing as his own. Let us acknowledge, therefore, with that chosen vessel, that God “hath called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace;” and “that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward men appeared not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us;” that being justified by his grace, we might become the heirs of everlasting life, (2 Tim. i. 9; Tit. iii. 4, 5.) By this confession we strip man of every particle of righteousness, until by mere mercy he is regenerated unto the hope of eternal life, since it is not true to say we are justified by grace, if works contribute in any degree to our justification. The apostle undoubtedly had not forgotten himself in declaring that justification is gratuitous, seeing he argues in another place, that if works are of any avail, “grace is no more grace,” (Rom. xi. 6.) And what else does our Lord mean, when he declares, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance?” (Matth. ix. 13.) If sinners alone are admitted, why do we seek admission by means of fictitious righteousness?

6. The thought is ever and anon recurring to me, that I am in danger of insulting the mercy of God by labouring with so much anxiety to maintain it, as if it were doubtful or obscure. Such, however, is our malignity in refusing to concede to God what belongs to him until most strongly urged, that I am obliged to insist at greater length. But as Scripture is clear enough on this subject, I shall contend in its words rather than my own.

Isaiah, after describing the universal destruction of the human race, finely subjoins the method of restitution. "The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him," (Isaiah lix. 15, 16.) Where is our righteousness, if the prophet says truly, that no man in recovering salvation gives any assistance to the Lord? Thus another prophet, introducing the Lord as treating concerning the reconciliation of sinners, says, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy," (Hosea ii. 19, 23.) If a covenant of this kind, evidently forming our first union with God, depends on mercy, there is no foundation left for our righteousness. And, indeed, I would fain know', from those who pretend that man meets God with some righteousness of works, whether they imagine there is any kind of righteousness save that which is acceptable to Him. If it were insane to think so, can any thing agreeable to God proceed from his enemies, whom he abominates with all their deeds? Truth declares that we are all the avowed and inveterate enemies of God until we are justified and admitted to his friendship, (Rom. v. 6; Col. i. 21.) If justification is the beginning of love, how can the righteousness of works precede it? Hence John, to put down the arrogant idea, carefully reminds us that God first loved us, (1 John iv. 10.) The Lord had formerly taught the same thing by his Prophet: "I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him," (Hosea xiv. 4.) Assuredly he is not influenced by works if his love turns to us spontaneously. But the rude and vulgar idea entertained is, that we did not merit the interposition of Christ for our redemption, but that we are aided by our works in obtaining possession of it. On the contrary, though we may be redeemed by Christ, still, until we are ingrafted into union with him by the calling of the Father, we are darkness, the heirs of death, and the enemies of God. For Paul declares that we are not purged and washed from our impurities by the blood of Christ until the Spirit accomplishes that cleansing in us, (1 Cor. vi. 11.) Peter, intending to say the same thing, declares that the sanctification of the Spirit avails "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," (1 Pet. i. 2.) If the sprinkling of the blood of Christ by the Spirit gives us purification, let us not think that, previous to this sprinkling, we are anything but sinners without Christ. Let us, therefore, hold it as certain, that the beginning of our salvation is as it were a resurrection from death unto life, because, when it is given us on behalf of Christ to believe on him, (Phil. i. 29,) then only do we begin to pass from death unto life.

7. Under this head the second and third class of men noted in the above division is comprehended. Impurity of conscience proves that as yet neither

of these classes is regenerated by the Spirit of God. And, again, their not being regenerated proves their want of faith. Whence it is clear that they are not yet reconciled, not yet justified, since it is only by faith that these blessings are obtained. What can sinners, alienated from God, produce save that which is abominable in his sight? Such, however, is the stupid confidence entertained by all the wicked, and especially by hypocrites, that however conscious that their whole heart teems with impurity, they yet deem any spurious works which they may perform as worthy of the approbation of God. Hence the pernicious consequence, that though convicted of a wicked and impious mind, they cannot be induced to confess that they are devoid of righteousness. Even acknowledging themselves to be unrighteous, because they cannot deny it, they yet arrogate to themselves some degree of righteousness. This vanity the Lord admirably refutes by the prophet: "Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean," (Haggai ii. 11-14.) I wish these sentiments could obtain full credit with us, and be deeply fixed on our memories. For there is no man, however flagitious the whole tenor of his life may be, who will allow himself to be convinced of what the Lord here so clearly declares. As soon as any person, even the most wicked, has performed some one duty of the law, he hesitates not to impute it to himself for righteousness; but the Lord declares that no degree of holiness is thereby acquired, unless the heart has previously been made pure. And not contented with this, he declares that all the works performed by sinners are contaminated by impurity of heart. Let us cease then to give the name of righteousness to works which the mouth of the Lord condemns as polluted. How well is this shown by that elegant similitude? It might be objected, that what the Lord has commanded is inviolably holy. But he, on the contrary, replies, that it is not strange that those things which are sanctified in the law are contaminated by the impurity of the wicked, the unclean hand profaning that which is sacred by handling it.

8. The same argument is admirably followed out by Isaiah: "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. 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: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes,” (Isaiah i. 13-16, compared with lviii.) What is meant by the Lord thus nauseating the observance of his law? Nay, indeed, he does not repudiate any thing relating to the genuine observance of the law, the beginning of which is, as he uniformly declares, the sincere fear of his name. When this is wanting, all the services which are offered to him are not only nugatory, but vile and abominable. Let hypocrites now go, and while keeping depravity wrapt up in their heart, study to lay God under obligation by their -works. In this way they will only offend him more and more. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight,” (Prov. xv. 8.) We hold it, therefore, as indubitable, indeed it should be notorious to all tolerably versant with Scripture, that the most splendid works performed by men, who are not yet truly sanctified, are so far from being righteousness in the sight of the Lord, that he regards them as sins. And, therefore, it is taught with perfect truth, that no man procures favour with God by means of works, but that, on the contrary, works are not pleasing to God unless the person has previously found favour in his sight.* Here we should carefully observe the order which Scripture sets before us. Moses says, that “the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering,” (Gen. iv. 4.) Observe how he says that the Lord was propitious (had respect) to Abel, before he had respect to his works. Wherefore, purification of heart ought to precede, in order that the works performed by us may be graciously accepted by God: for the saying of Jeremiah is always true, “O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?” (Jer. v. 3.) Moreover, the Holy Spirit declared by the mouth of Peter, that it is by faith alone the heart is purified, (Acts xv. 9.) Hence it is evident, that the primary foundation is in true and living faith.

9. Let us now see what kind of righteousness belongs to those persons whom we have placed in the fourth class. We admit, that when God reconciles us to himself by the intervention of the righteousness of Christ, and bestowing upon us the free pardon of sins regards us as righteous, his goodness is at the same time conjoined with mercy, so that he dwells in us by means of his Holy Spirit, by whose agency the lusts of our flesh are every day more and more mortified, while that we ourselves are sanctified; that is, consecrated to the Lord for true purity of life, our hearts being trained to the obedience of the law. It thus becomes our leading desire to obey his will, and in all things advance his glory only. Still, however, while we walk in the ways of the Lord, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, lest we

* See August. Lib. de Pœnit., and Gregory, whose words are quoted, Sent. Lib. hi. Quæst. 7.

should become unduly elated, and forget ourselves, we have still remains of imperfection which serve to keep us humble: "There is no man that sinneth not," saith Scripture, (1 Kings viii. 46.) What righteousness then can men obtain by their works? First, I say, that the best thing which can be produced by them is always tainted and corrupted by the impurity of the flesh, and has, as it were, some mixture of dross in it. Let the holy servant of God, I say, select from the whole course of his life the action which he deems most excellent, and let him ponder it in all its parts; he will doubtless find in it something that savours of the rottenness of the flesh, since our alacrity in well-doing is never what it ought to be, but our course is always retarded by much weakness. Although we see that the stains by which the works of the righteous are blemished are by no means unapparent, still, granting that they are the minutest possible, will they give no offence to the eye of God, before which even the stars are not clean? We thus see, that even saints cannot perform one work which, if judged on its own merits, is not deserving of condemnation.

10. Even were it possible for us to perform works absolutely pure, yet one sin is sufficient to efface and extinguish all remembrance of former righteousness, as the prophet says, (Ezek. xviii. 24.) With this James agrees, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all," (James ii. 10.) And since this mortal life is never entirely free from the taint of sin, whatever righteousness we could acquire would ever and anon be corrupted, overwhelmed, and destroyed, by subsequent sins, so that it could not stand the scrutiny of God, or be imputed to us for righteousness. In short, whenever we treat of the righteousness of works, we must look not to the legal work but to the command. Therefore, when righteousness is sought by the Law, it is in vain to produce one or two single works; we must show an uninterrupted obedience. God does not (as many foolishly imagine) impute that forgiveness of sins, once for all, as righteousness; so that having obtained the pardon of our past life we may afterwards seek righteousness in the Law. This were only to mock and delude us by the entertainment of false hopes. For since perfection is altogether unattainable by us, so long as we are clothed with flesh, and the Law denounces death and judgment against all who have not yielded a perfect righteousness, there will always be ground to accuse and convict us unless the mercy of God interpose, and ever and anon absolve us by the constant remission of sins. Wherefore the statement with which we set out is always true, If we are estimated by our own worthiness, in every thing that we think or devise, with all our studies and endeavours we deserve death and destruction.

11. We must strongly insist on these two things: That no believer ever performed one work which, if tested by the strict judgment of God, could

escape condemnation; and, moreover, that were this granted to be possible, (though it is not,) yet the act being vitiated and polluted by the sins of which it is certain that the author of it is guilty, it is deprived of its merit. This is the cardinal point of the present discussion. There is no controversy between us and the sounder Schoolmen as to the beginning of justification.* They admit that the sinner, freely delivered from condemnation, obtains justification, and that by forgiveness of sins; but under the term justification they comprehend the renovation by which the Spirit forms us anew to the obedience of the Law; and in describing the righteousness of the regenerate man, maintain that being once reconciled to God by means of Christ, he is afterwards deemed righteous by his good works, and is accepted in consideration of them. The Lord, on the contrary, declares, that he imputed Abraham's faith for righteousness, (Rom. iv. 3,) not at the time when he was still a worshipper of idols, but after he had been many years distinguished for holiness. Abraham had long served God with a pure heart, and performed that obedience of the Law which a mortal man is able to perform: yet his righteousness still consisted in faith. Hence we infer, according to the reasoning of Paul, that it was *not of works*. In like manner, when the prophet says, "The just shall live by his faith," (Hab. ii. 4,) he is not speaking of the wicked and profane, whom the Lord justifies by converting them to the faith: his discourse is directed to believers, and life is promised to them by faith. Paul also removes every doubt, when in confirmation of this sentiment he quotes the words of David, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," (Ps. xxxii. 1.) It is certain that David is not speaking of the ungodly, but of believers such as he himself was, because he was giving utterance to the feelings of his own mind. Therefore we must have this blessedness not once only, but must hold it fast during our whole lives. Moreover, the message of free reconciliation with God is not promulgated for one or two days, but is declared to be perpetual in the Church, (2 Cor. v. 18, 19.) Hence believers have not even to the end of life any other righteousness than that which is there described. Christ ever remains a Mediator to reconcile the Father to us, and there is a perpetual efficacy in his death, viz., ablution, satisfaction, expiation; in short, perfect obedience, by which all our iniquities are covered. In

* The following sentence is added in the French:—"Il est bien vray que le poure monde a esté seduit jusques la, de penser que l'homme se preparast de soy-mesme pour estre justifié de Dieu: et que ce blaspheme a regne communement tant en predications qu'aux escoles; comme encore aujourd'hui il est soustenue de ceux qui veulent maintenir toutes les abominations de la Papaute."—It is very true that the poor world has been seduced hitherto, to think that man could of himself prepare to be justified by God, and that this blasphemy has commonly reigned both in sermons and schools, as it is still in the present day asserted by those who would maintain all the abominations of the Papacy.

the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul says not that the beginning of salvation is of grace, but “by grace are ye saved,” “not of works, lest any man should boast,” (Eph. ii. 8, 9.)

12. The subterfuges by which the Schoolmen here endeavour to escape will not disentangle them. They say that good works are not of such intrinsic worth as to be sufficient to procure justification, but it is owing to accepting grace that they have this effect. Then because they are forced to confess that here the righteousness of works is always imperfect, they grant that so long as we are in this life we stand in need of the forgiveness of sin in order to supply the deficiency of works, but that the faults which are committed are compensated by works of supererogation. I answer, that the grace which they call accepting, is nothing else than the free goodness with which the Father embraces us in Christ when he clothes us with the innocence of Christ, and accepts it as ours, so that in consideration of it he regards us as holy, pure, and innocent. For the righteousness of Christ (as it alone is perfect, so it alone can stand the scrutiny of God) must be sisted for us, and as a surety represent us judicially. Provided with this righteousness, we constantly obtain the remission of sins through faith. Our imperfection and impurity, covered with this purity, are not imputed, but are as it were buried, so as not to come under judgment until the hour arrive when the old man being destroyed, and plainly extinguished in us, the divine goodness shall receive us into beatific peace with the new Adam, there to await the day of the Lord, on which, being clothed with incorruptible bodies, we shall be translated to the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

13. If these things are so, it is certain that our works cannot in themselves make us agreeable and acceptable to God, and even cannot please God, except in so far as being covered with the righteousness of Christ we thereby please him, and obtain forgiveness of sins. God has not promised life as the reward of certain works, but only declares, “which if a man do, he shall live in them,” (Lev. xviii. 5,) denouncing the well-known curse against all who do not continue in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them. In this way is completely refuted the fiction of a partial righteousness, the only righteousness acknowledged in heaven being the perfect observance of the Law. There is nothing more solid in their dogma of compensation by means of works of supererogation. For must they not always return to the proposition which has already been disproved, viz., that he who observes the Law in part is so far justified by works? This, which no man of sound judgment will concede to them, they are not ashamed to take for granted. The Lord having so often declared that he recognises no justification by works unless they be works by which the Law is perfectly fulfilled,—how perverse is it, while we are devoid of such works, to endeavour to secure some ground of glorying to ourselves; that’ is, not to

yield it entirely to God, by boasting of some kind of fragments of works, and trying to supply the deficiency by other satisfactions? Satisfactions have already been so completely disposed of, that we ought never again even to dream of them. Here all I say is, that those who thus trifle with sin do not at all consider how execrable it is in the sight of God; if they did, they would assuredly understand, that all the righteousness of men collected into one heap would be inadequate to compensate for a single sin. For we see that by one sin man was so cast off and forsaken by God, that he at the same time lost all power of recovering salvation. He was, therefore, deprived of the power of giving satisfaction. Those who flatter themselves with this idea will never satisfy God, who cannot possibly accept or be pleased with anything that proceeds from his enemies. But all to whom he imputes sin are enemies, and, therefore, our sins must be covered and forgiven before the Lord has respect to any of our works. From this it follows, that the forgiveness of sins is gratuitous, and this forgiveness is wickedly insulted by those who introduce the idea of satisfaction. Let us, therefore, after the example of the Apostle, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,” “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ,” (Philip. iii. 13, 14.)

14. How can boasting in works of supererogation agree with the command given to us: “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do?” (Luke xvii. 10.) To *say* or speak in the presence of God is not to feign or lie, but to declare what we hold as certain. Our Lord, therefore, enjoins us sincerely to feel and consider with ourselves that we do not perform gratuitous duties, but pay him service which is due. And truly. For the obligations of service under which we lie are so numerous, that we cannot discharge them though all our thoughts and members were devoted to the observance of the Law; and, therefore, when he says, “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you,” it is just as if he had said, that all the righteousness of men would not amount to one of these things. Seeing, then, that every one is very far distant from that goal, how can we presume to boast of having accumulated more than is due? It cannot be objected that a person, though failing in some measure in what is necessary, may yet in intention go beyond what is necessary. For it must ever be held, that in whatever pertains to the worship of God, or to charity, nothing can ever be thought of that is not comprehended under the Law. But if it is part of the Law, let us not boast of voluntary liberality in matters of necessary obligation.

15. On this subject, they causelessly allege the boast of Paul, that among the Corinthians he spontaneously renounced a right which, if he had

otherwise chosen, he might have exercised, (1 Cor. ix. 15;) thus not only paying what he owed them in duty, but gratuitously bestowing upon them more than duty required. They ought to have attended to the reason there expressed, that his object was to avoid giving offence to the weak. For wicked and deceitful workmen employed this pretence of kindness that they might procure favour to their pernicious dogmas, and excite hatred against the Gospel, so that it was necessary for Paul either to peril the doctrine of Christ, or to thwart their schemes. Now, if it is a matter of indifference to a Christian man whether or not he cause a scandal when it is in his power to avoid it, then I admit that the Apostle performed a work of supererogation to his Master; but if the thing which he did was justly required in a prudent minister of the Gospel, then I say he did what he was bound to do. In short, even when no such reason appears, yet the saying of Chrysostom is always true, that everything which we have is held on the same condition as the private property of slaves; it is always due to our Master. Christ does not disguise this in the parable; for he asks in regard to the master who, on return from his labour, requires his servant to gird himself and serve him, "Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not," (Luke xvii. 9.) But possibly the servant was more industrious than the master would have ventured to exact. Be it so: still he did nothing to which his condition as a servant did not bind him, because his utmost ability is his master's. I say nothing as to the kind of supererogations on which these men would plume themselves before God. They are frivolities which he never commanded, which he approves not, and will not accept when they come to give in their account. The only sense in which we admit works of supererogation is that expressed by the prophet, when he says, "Who hath required this at your hand?" (Isaiah i. 12.) But let them remember what is elsewhere said of them: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" (Isaiah lv. 2.) It is, indeed, an easy matter for these indolent Rabbins to carry on such discussions sitting in their soft chairs under the shade; but when the Supreme Judge shall sit on his tribunal, all these blustering dogmas will behave to disappear.* This, this I say, was the true question: not what we can fable and talk in schools and corners, but what ground of defence we can produce at his judgment-seat.

16. In this matter the minds of men must be specially guarded against two pestiferous dogmas, viz., against putting any confidence in the righteousness of works, or ascribing any glory to them. From all such confidence the Scriptures uniformly dissuade us when they declare that our

* French, "Tout ce qu'ils auront determine ne profitera gueres, ains s'evanouira comme fume;"—All their decisions will scarcely avail them, but will vanish like smoke.

righteousness is offensive in the sight of God unless it derives a sweet odour from the purity of Christ: that it can have no other effect than to excite the divine vengeance unless sustained by his indulgent mercy. Accordingly, the only thing they leave to us is to deprecate our Judge with that confession of David: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no living be justified,” (Psalm cxliii. 2.) And when Job says, “If I be wicked, woe unto me: and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head,” (Job x. 15.) Although he refers to that spotless righteousness of God, before which even angels are not clean, he however shows, that when brought to the bar of God, all that mortals can do is to stand dumb. He does not merely mean that he chooses rather to give way spontaneously than to risk a contest with the divine severity, but that he was not conscious of possessing any righteousness that would not fall the very first moment it was brought into the presence of God. Confidence being banished, all glorying must necessarily cease. For who can attribute any merit of righteousness to works, which instead of giving confidence, only make us tremble in the presence of God? We must, therefore, come to what Isaiah invites us: “In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory,” (Isaiah xlv. 25;) for it is most true, as he elsewhere says, that we are “the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified,” (Isaiah lxi. 3.) Our soul, therefore, will not be duly purified until it ceases to have any confidence, or feel any exultation in works. Foolish men are puffed up to this false and lying confidence by the erroneous idea that the cause of their salvation is in works.

17. But if we attend to the four kinds of causes which philosophers bring under our view in regard to effects, we shall find that not one of them is applicable to works as a cause of salvation. The efficient cause of our eternal salvation the Scripture uniformly proclaims to be the mercy and free love of the heavenly Father towards us; the material cause to be Christ, with the obedience by which he purchased righteousness for us; and what can the formal or instrumental cause be but faith? John includes the three in one sentence when he says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” (John iii. 16.) The Apostle, moreover, declares that the final cause is the demonstration of the divine righteousness and the praise of his goodness. There also he distinctly mentions the other three causes; for he thus speaks to the Romans: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace,” (Rom. iii. 23, 24.) You have here the head and primary source—God has embraced us with free mercy. The next words are, “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;” this is as it were the material cause by which righteousness is procured for us. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith.” Faith is thus the instrumental cause by which righteousness is applied to us.

He lastly subjoins the final cause when he says, “To declare at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” And to show by the way that this righteousness consists in reconciliation, he says that Christ was “set forth to be a propitiation.” Thus also, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, he tells us that we are received into the favour of God by mere mercy; that this is done by the intervention of Christ; that it is apprehended by faith; the end of all being that the glory of the divine goodness may be fully displayed. When we see that all the parts of our salvation thus exist without us, what ground can we have for glorying or confiding in our works? Neither as to the efficient nor the final cause can the most sworn enemies of divine grace raise any controversy with us unless they would abjure the whole of Scripture. In regard to the material or formal cause they make a gloss, as if they held that our works divide the merit with faith and the righteousness of Christ. But here also Scripture reclaims, simply affirming that Christ is both righteousness and life, and that the blessing of justification is possessed by faith alone.

18. When the saints repeatedly confirm and console themselves with the remembrance of their innocence and integrity, and sometimes even abstain not from proclaiming them, it is done in two ways: either because by comparing their good cause with the bad cause of the ungodly, they thence feel secure of victory, not so much from commendation of their own righteousness, as from the just and merited condemnation of their adversaries; or because, reviewing themselves before God, even without any comparison with others, the purity of their conscience gives them some comfort and security. The former reason will afterwards be considered, (chap. xvii. sec. 14, and chap. xx. sec. 10;) let us now briefly show, in regard to the latter, how it accords with what we have above said, that we can have no confidence in works before the bar of God, that we cannot glory in any opinion of their worth. The accordance lies here, that when the point considered is the constitution and foundation of salvation, believers, without paying any respect to works, direct their eyes to the goodness of God alone. Nor do they turn to it only in the first instance, as to the commencement of blessedness, but rest in it as the completion. Conscience being thus founded, built up, and established, is farther established by the consideration of works, inasmuch as they are proofs of God dwelling and reigning in us. Since, then, this confidence in works has no place unless you have previously fixed your whole confidence on the mercy of God, it should not seem contrary to that on which it depends. Wherefore, when we exclude confidence in works, we merely mean, that the Christian mind must not turn back to the merit of works as an aid to salvation, but must dwell entirely on the free promise of justification. But we forbid no believer to confirm and support this faith by the signs of the divine favour towards him. For if when

we call to mind the gifts which God has bestowed upon us, they are like rays of the divine countenance, by which we are enabled to behold the highest light of his goodness; much more is this the case with the gift of good works, which shows that we have received the Spirit of adoption.

19. When believers therefore feel their faith strengthened by a consciousness of integrity, and entertain sentiments of exultation, it is just because the fruits of their calling convince them that the Lord has admitted them to a place among his children. Accordingly, when Solomon says, “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence,” (Prov. xiv. 26,) and when the saints sometimes beseech the Lord to hear them, because they walked before his face in simplicity and integrity, (Gen. xxiv. 10; 2 Kings xx. 3,) these expressions apply not to laying the foundation of a firm conscience, but are of force only when taken *a posteriori*.^{*} For there is no where such a fear of God as can give full security, and the saints are always conscious that any integrity which they may possess is mingled with many remains of the flesh. But as the fruits of regeneration furnish them with a proof of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, experiencing God to be a Father in a matter of so much moment, they are strengthened in no slight degree to wait for his assistance in all their necessities. Even this they could not do, had they not previously perceived that the goodness of God is sealed to them by nothing but the certainty of the promise. Should they begin to estimate it by their good works, nothing will be weaker or more uncertain; works, when estimated by themselves, no less proving the divine displeasure by their imperfection, than his good-will by their incipient purity. In short, while proclaiming the mercies of the Lord, they never lose sight of his free favour, with all its “breadth and length, and depth and height,” testified by Paul, (Eph. iii. 18;) as if he had said, Whithersoever the believer turns, however loftily he climbs, however far and wide his thoughts extend, he must not go farther than the love of Christ, but must be wholly occupied in meditating upon it, as including in itself all dimensions. Accordingly, he declares that it “passeth knowledge,” that “to know the love of Christ” is to “be filled with all the fulness of God,” (Eph. iii. 19.) In another passage, where he glories that believers are victorious in every contest, he adds the reason, “through him that loved us,” (Bom. viii. 37.)

20. We now see that believers have no such confidence in works as to attribute any merit to them, (since they regard them only as divine gifts, in which they recognise his goodness, and signs of calling, in which they discern their election;) nor such confidence as to derogate in any respect from the free righteousness of Christ; since on this it depends, and without this

^{*} Latin, “a posteriori;” French, “comme enseigne de la vocation de Dieu;”—as a sign of the calling of God.

cannot subsist. The same thing is briefly but elegantly expressed by Augustine when he says, "I do not say to the Lord, Despise not the works of my hands; I have sought the Lord with my hands, and have not been deceived. But I commend not the works of my hands, for I fear that when thou examinest them thou wilt find more faults than merits. This only I say, this ask, this desire, Despise not the works of thy hands. See in me thy work, not mine. If thou seest mine, thou condemnest; if thou seest thine own, thou crownest. Whatever good works I have are of thee," (August, in Ps. cxxxvii.) He gives two reasons For not venturing to boast of his works before God: first, that if he has any good works, he does not see in them any thing of his own; and, secondly, that these works are overwhelmed by a multitude of sins. Whence it is, that the conscience derives from them more fear and alarm than security. Therefore, the only way in which he desires God to look at any work which he may have done aright is, that he may therein see the grace of his calling, and perfect the work which he has begun.

21. Moreover, when Scripture intimates that the good works of believers are causes why the Lord does them good, we must still understand the meaning so as to hold unshaken what has previously been said, viz., that the efficient cause of our salvation is placed in the love of God the Father; the material cause in the obedience of the Son; the instrumental cause in the illumination of the Spirit, that is, in faith; and the final cause in the praise of the divine goodness. In this, however, there is nothing to prevent the Lord from embracing works as inferior causes. But how so? In this way: Those whom in mercy he has destined for the inheritance of eternal life, he, in his ordinary administration, introduces to the possession of it by means of good works. What precedes in the order of administration is called the cause of what follows. For this reason, he sometimes makes eternal life a consequent of works; not because it is to be ascribed to them, but because those whom he has elected he justifies, that he may at length glorify, (Rom. viii. 30;) he makes the prior grace to be a kind of cause, because it is a kind of step to that which follows. But whenever the true cause is to be assigned, he enjoins us not to take refuge in works, but to keep our thoughts entirely fixed on the mercy of God; "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life," (Rom. vi. 23.) Why, as he contrasts life with death, does he not also contrast righteousness with sin? Why, when setting down sin as the cause of death, does he not also set down righteousness as the cause of life? The antithesis which would otherwise be complete is somewhat marred by this variation; but the Apostle employed the comparison to express the fact, that death is due to the deserts of men, but that life was treasured up solely in the mercy of God. In short, by these expressions, the order rather than

the cause is noted.* The Lord adding grace to grace, takes occasion from a former to add a subsequent, so that he may omit no means of enriching his servants. Still, in following out his liberality, he would have us always look to free election as its source and beginning. For although he loves the gifts which he daily bestows upon us, inasmuch as they proceed from that fountain, still our duty is to hold fast by that gratuitous acceptance, which alone can support our souls; and so to connect the gifts of the Spirit, which he afterwards bestows, with their primary cause, as in no degree to detract from it.

* French, “Brief, en toutes ces façons de parler, ou il est fait mention de bonnes œuvres, il n’est pas question de la cause pourquoi Dieu fait bien aux siens, mais seulement de l’ordre qu’il y tient;”—In short, in all those forms of expression in which mention is made of good works, there is no question as to the cause why God does good to his people, but only to the order which he observes in it.