

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 XVII.

THE PROMISES OF THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL RECONCILED.

In the following chapter, the arguments of Sophists, who would destroy or impair the doctrine of Justification by Faith, are reduced to two classes. The former is general, the latter special, and contains some arguments peculiar to itself. I. The first class, which is general, and in a manner contains the foundation of all the arguments, draws an argument from the promises of the law. This is considered from sec. 1-3. II. The second class following from the former, and containing special proofs. An argument drawn from the history of Cornelius explained, sec. 4, 5. III. A full exposition of those passages of Scripture which represent God as showing mercy and favour to the cultivators of righteousness, sec. 6. IV. A third argument from the passages which distinguish good works by the name of righteousness, and declare that men are justified by them, sec. 7, 8. V. The adversaries of justification by faith placed in a dilemma. Their partial righteousness refuted, sec. 9, 10. VI. A fourth argument, setting the Apostle James in opposition to Paul, considered, sec. 11, 12. VII. Answer to a fifth argument, that, according to Paul, not the hearers but the doers of the law are justified, sec. 13. VIII. Consideration of a sixth argument, drawn from those passages in which believers boldly submit their righteousness to the judgment of God, and ask him to decide according to it, sec. 14. IX. Examination of the last argument, drawn from passages which ascribe righteousness and life to the ways of believers, sec. 15.

Sections.

1. Brief summary of Chapters xv. and xvi. Why justification is denied to works. Argument of opponents founded on the promises of the law. The substance of this argument. Answer. Those who would be justified before God must be exempted from the power of the law. How this is done.
2. Confirmation of the answer *ab impossibili*, and from the testimony of an Apostle and of David.
3. Answer to the objection, by showing why these promises were given. Refutation of the sophistical distinction between the *intrinsic* value of works, and their value *ex pacto*.
4. Argument from the history of Cornelius. Answer, by distinguishing between two kinds of acceptance. Former kind. Sophistical objection refuted.

5. Latter kind. Plain from this distinction that Cornelius was accepted freely before his good works could be accepted. Similar explanations to be given of the passage in which God is represented as merciful and propitious to the cultivators of righteousness.
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8. Answer to the second part of the argument, viz., that man is justified by works. Works of no avail by themselves; we are justified by faith only. This kind of righteousness defined. Whence the value set on good works.
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12. Another paralogism on the word *justify*. Paul speaks of the cause, James of the effects, of justification. Sum of the discussion.
13. Argument founded on Rom. ii. 13 Answer, explaining the Apostle’s meaning. Another argument, containing a *reductio ad impossibili*. Why Paul used the argument.
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15. Last argument from those passages which ascribe righteousness and life to the ways of believers. Answer. This proceeds from the paternal kindness of God. What meant by the perfection of saints.

1. LET us now consider the other arguments which Satan by his satellites invents to destroy or impair the doctrine of Justification by Faith. I think we have already put it out of the power of our calumniators to treat us as if we were the enemies of good works—justification being denied to works, not in order that no good works may be done, or that those which are done may be denied to be good; but only that we may not trust or glory in them, or ascribe salvation to them. Our only confidence and boasting, our only anchor of salvation is, that Christ the Son of God is ours, and that we are in him sons of God and heirs of the heavenly kingdom, being called, not by our worth, but the kindness of God, to the hope of eternal blessedness. But since, as has been said, they assail us with other engines, let us now proceed to demolish them also. First, they recur to the legal promises which the Lord proclaimed to the observers of the law, and they ask us whether we hold them to be null or effectual. Since it were absurd and ridiculous to say they are null, they take it for granted that they have some efficacy. Hence they infer that we are not justified by faith only. For the

Lord thus speaks: “Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers; and he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee,” (Deut. vii. 12, 13.) Again, “If ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever,” (Jer. vii. 5-7.) It were to no purpose to quote a thousand similar passages, which, as they are not different in meaning, are to be explained on the same principle. In substance, Moses declares that in the law is set down “a blessing and a curse,” life and death, (Deut. xi. 26;) and hence they argue, either that that blessing is become inactive and unfruitful, or that justification is not by faith only. We have already shown,* that if we cleave to the law we are devoid of every blessing, and have nothing but the curse denounced on all transgressors. The Lord does not promise any thing except to the perfect observers of the law; and none such are any where to be found. The result, therefore, is, that the whole human race is convicted by the law, and exposed to the wrath and curse of God: to be saved from this they must escape from the power of the law, and be as it were brought out of bondage into freedom,—not that carnal freedom which indisposes us for the observance of the law, tends to licentiousness, and allows our passions to wanton unrestrained with loosened reins; but that spiritual freedom which consoles and raises up the alarmed and smitten conscience, proclaiming its freedom from the curse and condemnation under which it was formerly held bound. This freedom from subjection to the law, this manumission, if I may so express it, we obtain when by faith we apprehend the mercy of God in Christ, and are thereby assured of the pardon of sins, with a consciousness of which the law stung and tortured us.

2. For this reason, the promises offered in the law would all be null and ineffectual, did not God in his goodness send the gospel to our aid, since the condition on which they depend, and under which only they are to be performed, viz., the fulfilment of the law, will never be accomplished. Still, however, the aid which the Lord gives consists not in leaving part of justification to be obtained by works, and in supplying part out of his indulgence, but in giving us Christ as in himself alone the fulfilment of righteousness. For the Apostle, after premising that he and the other Jews, aware that “a man is not justified by the works of the law,” had “believed in Jesus

* See Book II. chap. vii. sec. 2-8, 15; chap. viii. sec. 3; chap. xi. sec. 8; Book III. chap. xix. sec. 2.

Christ,” adds as the reason, not that they might be assisted to make up the sum of righteousness, by faith in Christ, but that they “might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law,” (Gal. ii. 16.) If believers withdraw from the law to faith, that in the latter they may find the justification which they see is not in the former, they certainly disclaim justification by the law. Therefore, whoso will, let him amplify the rewards which are said to await the observer of the law, provided he at the same time understand, that, owing to our depravity, we derive no benefit from them until we have obtained another righteousness by faith. Thus David, after making mention of the reward which the Lord has prepared for his servants, (Ps. xxv. almost throughout,) immediately descends to an acknowledgment of sins, by which the reward is made void. In Psalm xix., also, he loudly extols the benefits of the law; but immediately exclaims, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults,” (Ps. xix. 12.) This passage perfectly accords with the former, when, after saying, “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies,” he adds, “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity: for it is great,” (Ps. xxv. 10, 11.) Thus, too, we ought to acknowledge that the favour of God is offered to us in the law, provided by our works we can deserve it; but that it never actually reaches us through any such desert.

3. What then? Were the promises given that they might vanish away without fruit? I lately declared that this is not my opinion. I say, indeed, that their efficacy does not extend to us so long as they have respect to the merit of works, and, therefore, that, considered in themselves, they are in some sense abolished. Hence the Apostle shows, that the celebrated promise, “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them,” (Levit. xviii. 5; Ezek. xx. 10,) will, if we stop at it, be of no avail, and will profit us not a whit more than if it were not given, being inaccessible even to the holiest servants of God, who are all far from fulfilling the law, being encompassed with many infirmities. But when the gospel promises are substituted, promises which announce the free pardon of sins, the result is not only that our persons are accepted of God, but his favour also is shown to our works, and that not only in respect that the Lord is pleased with them, but also because he visits them with the blessings which were due by agreement to the observance of his law. I admit, therefore, that the works of the faithful are rewarded with the promises which God gave in his law to the cultivators of righteousness and holiness; but in this reward we should always attend to the cause which procures favour to works. This cause, then, appears to be threefold. First, God turning his eye away from the works of his servants which merit reproach more than praise, embraces them in Christ, and by the intervention of faith alone

reconciles them to himself without the aid of works. Secondly, the works not being estimated by their own worth, he, by his fatherly kindness and indulgence, honours so far as to give them some degree of value. Thirdly, he extends his pardon to them, not imputing the imperfection by which they are all polluted, and would deserve to be regarded as vices rather than virtues. Hence it appears how much Sophists* were deluded in thinking they admirably escaped all absurdities when they said, that works are able to merit salvation, not from their intrinsic worth, but according to agreement, the Lord having, in his liberality, set this high value upon them. But, meanwhile, they observed not how far the works which they insisted on regarding as meritorious must be from fulfilling the condition of the promises, were they not preceded by a justification founded on faith alone, and on forgiveness of sins—a forgiveness necessary to cleanse even good works from their stains. Accordingly, of the three causes of divine liberality to which it is owing that good works are accepted, they attended only to one: the other two, though the principal causes, they suppressed.

4. They quote the saying of Peter as given by Luke in the Acts, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him,” (Acts x. 34, 35.) And hence they infer, as a thing which seems to them beyond a doubt, that if man by right conduct procures the favour of God, his obtaining salvation is not entirely the gift of God. Nay, that when God in his mercy assists the sinner, he is inclined to mercy by works. There is no way of reconciling the passages of Scripture, unless you observe that man’s acceptance with God is twofold. As man is by nature, God finds nothing in him w^hich can incline him to mercy, except merely his wretchedness. If it is clear then that man, when God first interposes for him, is naked and destitute of all good, and, on the other hand, loaded and filled with all kinds of evil,—for what quality, pray, shall we say that he is worthy of the heavenly kingdom? Where God thus clearly displays free mercy, have done with that empty imagination of merit. Another passage in the same book, viz., where Cornelius hears from the lips of an angel, “Thy prayer and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God,” (Acts x. 4,) is miserably wrested to prove that man is prepared by the study of good works to receive the favour of God. Cornelius being endued with true wisdom, in other words, with the fear of God, must have been enlightened by the Spirit of wisdom, and being an observer of righteousness, must have been sanctified by the same Spirit; righteousness being, as the Apostle testifies, one of the most certain fruits of the Spirit, (Gal. v. 5.) Therefore, all those qualities by which he is said to have pleased God he owed to divine grace: so far was he from preparing

* French, “Les Sophistes de Sorbonne;”—the Sophists of Sorbonne.

himself by his own strength to receive it. Indeed, not a syllable of Scripture can be produced which does not accord with the doctrine, that the only reason why God receives man into his favour is, because he sees that he is in every respect lost when left to himself; lost, if he does not display his mercy in delivering him. We now see that in thus accepting, God looks not to the righteousness of the individual, but merely manifests the divine goodness towards miserable sinners, who are altogether undeserving of this great mercy.

5. But after the Lord has withdrawn the sinner from the abyss of perdition, and set him apart for himself by means of adoption, having begotten him again and formed him to newness of life, he embraces him as a new creature, and bestows the gifts of his Spirit, This is the acceptance to which Peter refers, and by which believers after their calling are approved by God even in respect of works; for the Lord cannot but love and delight in the good qualities which he produces in" them by means of his Spirit. But we must always bear in mind, that the only way in which men are accepted of God in respect of works is, that whatever good works he has conferred upon those whom he admits to favour, he by an increase of liberality honours with his acceptance. For whence their good works, but just that the Lord having chosen them as vessels of honour, is pleased to adorn them with true purity? And how are their actions deemed good as if there was no deficiency in them, but just that their merciful Father indulgently pardons the spots and blemishes which adhere to them? In one word, the only meaning of acceptance in this passage is, that God accepts and takes pleasure in his children, in whom he sees the traces and lineaments of his own countenance. We have elsewhere said, that regeneration is a renewal of the divine image in us. Since God, therefore, whenever he beholds his own face, justly loves it and holds it in honour, the life of believers, when formed to holiness and justice, is said, not without cause, to be pleasing to him. But because believers, while encompassed with mortal flesh, are still sinners, and their good works only begun savour of the corruption of the flesh, God cannot be propitious either to their persons or their works, unless he embraces them more in Christ than in themselves. In this way are we to understand the passages in which God declares that he is clement and merciful to the cultivators of righteousness. Moses said to the Israelites, "Know, therefore, that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations." These words afterwards became a common form of expression among the people. Thus Solomon in his prayer at the dedication says, "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart," (1 Kings viii. 23.) The same words are re-

peated by Nehemiah, (Neh. i. 5.) As the Lord in all covenants of mercy stipulates on his part for integrity and holiness of life in his servants, (Deut. xxix. 18,) lest his goodness might be held in derision, or any one, puffed up with exultation in it, might speak flatteringly to his soul while walking in the depravity of his heart, so he is pleased that in this way those whom he admits to communion in the covenant should be kept to their duty. Still, however, the covenant was gratuitous at first, and such it ever remains. Accordingly, while David declares, "according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me," yet does he not omit the fountain to which I have referred; "he delivered me, because he delighted in me," (2 Sam. xxii. 20, 21.) In commending the goodness of his cause, he derogates in no respect from the free mercy which takes precedence of all the gifts of which it is the origin.

6. Here, by the way, it is of importance to observe how those forms of expression differ from legal promises. By legal promises, I mean not those which lie scattered in the books of Moses, (for there many Evangelical promises occur,) but those which properly belong to the legal dispensation. All such promises, by whatever name they may be called, are made under the condition that the reward is to be paid on the things commanded being done. But when it is said that the Lord keeps a covenant of mercy with those who love him, the 'words rather demonstrate what kind of servants those are who have sincerely entered into the covenant, than express the reason why the Lord blesses them. The nature of the demonstration is this: As the end for which God bestows upon us the gift of eternal life is, that he may be loved, feared, and worshipped by us, so the end of all the promises of mercy contained in Scripture justly is, that we may reverence and serve their author. Therefore, 'whenever we hear that he does good to those that observe his law, let us remember that the sons of God are designated by the duty which they ought perpetually to observe, that his reason for adopting us is, that we may reverence him as a father. Hence, if we would not deprive ourselves of the privilege of adoption, we must always strive in the direction of our calling. On the other hand, however, let us remember, that the completion of the Divine mercy depends not on the works of believers, but that God himself fulfils the promise of salvation to those who by right conduct correspond to their calling, because he recognises the true badges of sons in those only who are directed to good by his Spirit. To this we may refer what is said of the members of the Church, "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart," &c., (Ps. xv. 1, 2.) Again, in Isaiah, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously," &c., (Isa. xxxiii. 14, 15.) For the thing described is not the

strength with which believers can stand before the Lord, but the manner in which our most merciful Father introduces them into his fellowship, and defends and confirms them therein. For as he detests sin and loves righteousness, so those whom he unites to himself he purifies by his Spirit, that he may render them conformable to himself and to his kingdom. Therefore, if it be asked, What is the first cause which gives the saints free access to the kingdom of God, and a firm and permanent footing in it? the answer is easy. The Lord in his mercy once adopted and ever defends them. But if the question relates to the manner, we must descend to regeneration, and the fruits of it, as enumerated in the fifteenth Psalm.

7. There seems much more difficulty in those passages which distinguish good works by the name of righteousness, and declare that man is justified by them. The passages of the former class are very numerous, as when the observance of the commandments is termed justification or righteousness. Of the other classes we have a description in the words of Moses, "It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments," (Deut. vi. 25.) But if you object, that it is a legal promise, which, having an impossible condition annexed to it, proves nothing, there are other passages to which the same answer cannot be made; for instance, "If the man be poor," "thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down:" "and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the Lord thy God," (Deut. xxiv. 13.) Likewise the words of the prophet, "Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore," (Psal. cvi. 30, 31.) Accordingly, the Pharisees of our day think they have here full scope for exultation.* For, as we say, that when justification by faith is established, justification by works falls; they argue on the same principle, If there is a justification by works, it is false to say that we are justified by faith only. When I grant that the precepts of the law are termed righteousness, I do nothing strange: for they are so in reality. I must, however, inform the reader, that the Hebrew word [omitted] has been rendered by the Septuagint, not very appropriately, *δικαιωματα*, *justifications*, instead of *edicts*.† But I readily give up any dispute as to the word. Nor do I deny that the Law of God contains a perfect righteousness. For although we are debtors to do all the things which it enjoins, and, therefore, even after a full obedience, are unprofitable servants; yet, as the Lord has deigned to give it the name of righteousness, it is not ours to take from it what he has given. We readily admit, therefore, that the perfect obedience of the law is righteousness, and the observance of any precept a part of righteousness,

* French, "de crier contre nous en cest endroit;"—here to raise an outcry against us.

† French, "Edits ou Statuts;"—Edicts or Statutes.

the whole substance of righteousness being contained in the remaining parts. But we deny that any such righteousness ever exists. Hence we discard the righteousness of the law, not as being in itself maimed and defective, but because of the weakness of our flesh it nowhere appears. But then Scripture does not merely call the precepts of the law righteousness, it also gives this name to the works of the saints: as when it states that Zacharias and his wife “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,” (Luke i. 6.) Surely when it thus speaks, it estimates works more according to the nature of the law than their own proper character. And here, again, I must repeat the observation which I lately made, that the law is not to be ascertained from a careless translation of the Greek interpreter. Still, as Luke chose not to make any change on the received version, I will not contend for this. The things contained in the law God enjoined upon man for righteousness, but that righteousness we attain not unless by observing the whole law: every transgression whatever destroys it. While, therefore, the law commands nothing but righteousness, if we look to itself, every one of its precepts is righteousness: if we look to the men by whom they are performed, being transgressors in many things, they by no means merit the praise of righteousness for one work, and that a work which, through the imperfection adhering to it, is always in some respect vicious.*

8. I come to the second class, (sec. 1, 7, ad init.,) in which the chief difficulty lies. Paul finds nothing stronger to prove justification by faith than that which is written of Abraham, he “believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness,” (Rom. iv. 3; Gal. iii. 6.) Therefore, when it is said that the achievement of Phinehas “was counted unto him for righteousness,” (Psal. cvi. 30, 31,) we may argue that what Paul contends for respecting faith applies also to works. Our opponents, accordingly, as if the point were proved, set it down that though we are not justified without faith, it is not by faith only; that our justification is completed by works. Here I beseech believers, as they know that the true standard of righteousness must be derived from Scripture alone, to consider with me seriously and religiously, how Scripture can be fairly reconciled with that view. Paul,

* The French here adds the two following sentences:—“Nostre response donc est, que quand les œuvres des saints sont nommées justice, cela ne vient point de leurs merites: mais entant qu’elles tendent à la justice que Dieu nous a commandee, laquelle est nulle, si elle n’est parfaite. Or elle ne se trouve parfaite en nul homme de monde; pourtant faut conclure, q’une bonne oeuvre de soy ne merite pas le nom de justice.”—Our reply then is, that when the works of the saints are called righteousness, it is not owing to their merits, but is in so far as they tend to the righteousness which God has commanded, and which is null if it be not perfect. Now it is not found perfect in any man in the world. Hence we must conclude, that no good work merits in itself the name of righteousness.

knowing that justification by faith was the refuge of those who wanted righteousness of their own, confidently infers, that all who are justified by faith are excluded from the righteousness of works. But as it is clear that this justification is common to all believers, he with equal confidence infers that no man is justified by works; nay, more, that justification is without any help from works. But it is one thing to determine what power works have in themselves, and another to determine what place they are to hold after justification by faith has been established. If a price is to be put upon works according to their own worth, we hold that they are unfit to appear in the presence of God: that man, accordingly, has no works in which he can glory before God, and that hence, deprived of all aid from works, he is justified by faith alone. Justification, moreover, we thus define: The sinner being admitted into communion with Christ is, for his sake, reconciled to God; when purged by his blood he obtains the remission of sins, and clothed with righteousness, just as if it were his own, stands secure before the judgment-seat of heaven. Forgiveness of sins being previously given, the good works which follow have a value different from their merit, because whatever is imperfect in them is covered by the perfection of Christ, and all their blemishes and pollutions are wiped away by his purity, so as never to come under the cognisance of the divine tribunal. The guilt of all transgressions, by which men are prevented from offering God an acceptable service, being thus effaced, and the imperfection which is wont to sully even good works being buried, the good works which are done by believers are deemed righteous, or, which is the same thing, are imputed for righteousness.

9. Now, should any one state this to me as an objection to justification by faith, I would first ask him, Whether a man is deemed righteous for one holy work or two, while in all the other acts of his life he is a transgressor of the law? This were, indeed, more than absurd. I would next, ask, Whether he is deemed righteous on account of many good works if he is guilty of transgression in some one part? Even this he will not venture to maintain in opposition to the authority of the law, which pronounces, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them," (Deut. xxvii. 26.) I would go still farther and ask, Whether there be any work which may not justly be convicted of impurity or imperfection? How, then, will it appear to that eye before which even the heavens are not clean, and angels are chargeable with folly? (Job iv. 18.) Thus he will be forced to confess that no good work exists that is not defiled, both by contrary transgression and also by its own corruption, so that it cannot be honoured as righteousness. But if it is certainly owing to justification by faith that works, otherwise impure, unclean, defective, unworthy of the sight, not to say of the love of God, are imputed for righteousness, why do they by boasting of this impu-

tation aim at the destruction of that justification, but for which the boast were vain? Are they desirous of having a viper's birth? To this their ungodly language tends. They cannot deny that justification by faith is the beginning, the foundation, the cause, the subject, the substance, of works of righteousness, and yet they conclude that justification is not by faith, because good works are counted for righteousness. Let us have done then with this frivolity, and confess the fact as it stands; if any righteousness which works are supposed to possess depends on justification by faith, this doctrine is not only not impaired, but on the contrary confirmed, its power being thereby more brightly displayed. Nor let us suppose, that after free justification works are commended, as if they afterwards succeeded to the office of justifying, or shared the office with faith. For did not justification by faith always remain entire, the impurity of works would be disclosed. There is nothing absurd in the doctrine, that though man is justified by faith, he is himself not only not righteous, but the righteousness attributed to his works is beyond their own deserts.

10. In this way we can admit not only that there is a partial righteousness in works, (as our adversaries maintain,) but that they are approved by God as if they were absolutely perfect. If we remember on what foundation this is rested, every difficulty will be solved. The first time when a work begins to be acceptable is when it is received with pardon. And whence pardon, but just because God looks upon us and all that belongs to us as in Christ? Therefore, as we ourselves when ingrafted into Christ appear righteous before God, because our iniquities are covered with his innocence; so our works are, and are deemed righteous, because every thing otherwise defective in them being buried by the purity of Christ is not imputed. Thus we may justly say, that not only ourselves, but our works also, are justified by faith alone. Now, if that righteousness of works, whatever it be, depends on faith and free justification, and is produced by it, it ought to be included under it and, so to speak, made subordinate to it, as the effect to its cause; so far is it from being entitled to be set up to impair or destroy the doctrine of justification.† Thus Paul, to prove that our blessedness depends not on our works, but on the mercy of God, makes special use of the words of David, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered;"

* French, "Voudrions nous faire une lignee serpentine, que les enfans meurtrissent leur mere?"—Would we have a viperish progeny, where the children murder the parent?

† The whole sentence in French stands thus:—"Or si cette justice des œuvres telle quelle procede de la foy et de la justification gratuite, il ne faut pas qu'on la prenne pour destruire ou obscurcir la grace dont elle depend; mais plustost doit estre enclose en icelie, comme le fruit à l'arbre."—Now, if this righteousness of works, such as it is, proceeds from faith and free justification, it must not be employed to destroy or obscure the grace on which it depends, but should rather be included in it, like the fruit in the tree.

“Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.” Should any one here obtrude the numberless passages in which blessedness seems to be attributed to works, as, “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord“ He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,” and “that endureth temptation;” “Blessed are they that keep judgment,” that are “pure in heart,” “meek,” “merciful,” &c.,* they cannot make out that Paul’s doctrine is not true. For seeing that the qualities thus extolled never all so exist in man as to obtain for him the approbation of God, it follows, that man is always miserable until he is exempted from misery by the pardon of his sins. Since, then, all the kinds of blessedness extolled in the Scripture are vain, so that man derives no benefit from them until he obtains blessedness by the forgiveness of sins, a forgiveness which makes way for them, it follows that this is not only the chief and highest, but the only blessedness, unless you are prepared to maintain that it is impaired by things which owe their entire existence to it. There is much less to trouble us in the name of *righteous* which is usually given to believers. I admit that they are so called from the holiness of their lives, but as they rather exert themselves in the study of righteousness than fulfil righteousness itself, any degree of it which they possess must yield to justification by faith, to which it is owing that it is what it is.

11. But they say that we have a still more serious business with James, who in express terms opposes us. For he asks, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works?” and adds, “You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only,” (James ii. 21, 24.) What then? Will they engage Paul in a quarrel with James? If they hold James to be a servant of Christ, his sentiments must be understood as not dissenting from Christ speaking by the mouth of Paul. By the mouth of Paul the Spirit declares that Abraham obtained justification by faith, not by works; we also teach that all are justified by faith without the works of the law. By James the same Spirit declares that both Abraham’s justification and ours consists of works, and not of faith only. It is certain that the Spirit cannot be at variance with himself. Where, then, will be the agreement? It is enough for our opponents, provided they can tear up that justification by faith which we regard as fixed by the deepest roots:† to restore peace to the conscience is to them a matter of no great concern. Hence you may see, that though they indeed carp at the doctrine of justification by faith, they meanwhile point out no goal of righteousness at which the conscience may rest. Let them triumph then as they will, so long as the only victory they can boast of is,

* Rom. iv. 7; Ps. xxxii. 1, 2; cxii. 1; Prov. xiv. 21; Ps. i. 1; cvi. 3; cxix. 11; Matth. v. 3.

† French, “Il suffit a nos adversaires s’ils peuvent deraciner la justice de foy, laquelle nous voulons estre plantee au profond du cœur.”—It is enough for our opponents if they can root up justification by faith, which we desire to be planted at the bottom of the heart.

that they have deprived righteousness of all its certainty. This miserable victory they will indeed obtain when the light of truth is extinguished, and the Lord permits them to darken it with their lies. But wherever the truth of God stands they cannot prevail. I deny, then, that the passage of James which they are constantly holding up before us as if it were the shield of Achilles, gives them the slightest countenance. To make this plain, let us first attend to the scope of the Apostle, and then show wherein their hallucination consists. As at that time (and the evil has existed in the Church ever since) there were many who, while they gave manifest proof of their infidelity, by neglecting and omitting all the works peculiar to believers, ceased not falsely to glory in the name of faith. James here dissipates their vain confidence. His intention therefore is, not to derogate in any degree from the power of true faith, but to show how absurdly these triflers laid claim only to the empty name, and resting satisfied with it, felt secure in unrestrained indulgence in vice. This state of matters being understood, it will be easy to see where the error of our opponents lies. They fall into a double paralogism, the one in the term *faith*, the other in the term *justifying*. The Apostle, in giving the name of *faith* to an empty opinion altogether differing from true faith, makes a concession which derogates in no respect from his case. This he demonstrates at the outset by the words, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?" (James ii. 14.) He says not, "If a man *have* faith without works," but "if he say that he has." This becomes still clearer when a little after he derides this faith as worse than that of devils, and at last when he calls it "dead." You may easily ascertain his meaning by the explanation, "Thou believest that there is one God." Surely if all which is contained in that faith is a belief in the existence of God, there is no wonder that it does not justify. The denial of such a power to it cannot be supposed to derogate in any degree from Christian faith, which is of a very different description. For how does true faith justify unless by uniting us to Christ, so that being made one with him, we may be admitted to a participation in his righteousness? It does not justify because it forms an idea of the divine existence, but because it reclines with confidence on the divine mercy.

12. We have not made good our point until we dispose of the other paralogism: since James places a part of justification in works. If you would make James consistent with the other Scriptures and with himself, you must give the word *justify*, as used by him, a different meaning from what it has with Paul. In the sense of Paul we are said to be justified when the remembrance of our unrighteousness is obliterated, and we are counted righteous. Had James had the same meaning it would have been absurd for him to quote the words of Moses, "Abraham believed God," &c. The context runs thus: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered

Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.” If it is absurd to say that the effect was prior to its cause, either Moses falsely declares in that passage that Abraham’s faith was imputed for righteousness, or Abraham, by his obedience in offering up Isaac, did not merit righteousness. Before the existence of Ishmael, who was a grown youth at the birth of Isaac, Abraham was justified by his faith. How then can we say that he obtained justification by an obedience which followed long after? Wherefore, either James erroneously inverts the proper order, (this it were impious to suppose,) or he meant not to say that he was justified, as if he deserved to be deemed just. What then? It appears certain that he is speaking of the manifestation, not of the imputation of righteousness, as if he had said, Those who are justified by true faith prove their justification by obedience and good works, not by a bare and imaginary semblance of faith. In one word, he is not discussing the mode of justification, but requiring that the justification of believers shall be operative. And as Paul contends that men are justified without the aid of works, so James will not allow any to be regarded as justified who are destitute of good works. Due attention to the scope will thus disentangle every doubt; for the error of our opponents lies chiefly in this, that they think James is defining the mode of justification, whereas his only object is to destroy the depraved security of those who vainly pretended faith as an excuse for their contempt of good works. Therefore, let them twist the words of James as they may, they will never extract out of them more than the two propositions: That an empty phantom of faith does not justify, and that the believer, not contented with such an imagination, manifests his justification by good works.

13. They gain nothing by quoting from Paul to the same effect, that “not the hearers of the law⁷ are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified,” (Rom. ii. 13.) I am unwilling to evade the difficulty by the solution of Ambrose, that Paul spoke thus because faith in Christ is the fulfilment of the law. This I regard as a mere subterfuge, and one too for which there is no occasion, as the explanation is perfectly obvious. The Apostle’s object is to suppress the absurd confidence of the Jews, who gave out that they alone had a knowledge of the law, though at the very time they were its greatest despisers. That they might not plume themselves so much on a bare acquaintance with the law, he reminds them that when justification is sought by the law, the thing required is not the knowledge but the observance of it. We certainly mean not to dispute that the righteousness of the law consists in works, and not only so, but that justification consists in the dignity and merits of works. But this proves not that we are justified by works unless they can produce some one who has fulfilled the law. That

Paul had no other meaning is abundantly obvious from the context. After charging Jews and Gentiles in common with unrighteousness, he descends to particulars, and says, that “as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law,” referring to the Gentiles, and that “as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law,” referring to the Jews. Moreover, as they, winking at their transgressions, boasted merely of the law, he adds most appropriately, that the law was passed with the view of justifying not those who only heard it, but those only who obeyed it; as if he had said, Do you seek righteousness in the law? do not bring forward the mere hearing of it, which is in itself of little weight, but bring works by which you may show that the law has not been given to you in vain. Since in these they were all deficient, it followed that they had no ground of boasting in the law. Paul’s meaning, therefore, rather leads to an opposite argument. The righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works; but no man can boast of fulfilling the law by works, and, therefore, there is no righteousness by the law.

14. They now betake themselves to those passages in which believers boldly submit their righteousness to the judgment of God, and wish to be judged accordingly; as in the following passages: “Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me.” Again, “Hear the right, O Lord“ Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing.” Again, “The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God.” “I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity.” Again, “Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity;” “I have not sat with vain persons; neither will I go in with dissemblers;” “Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men; in whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity.”* I have already spoken of the confidence which the saints seem to derive simply from works. The passages now quoted will not occasion much difficulty, if we attend to their xxxxxxxx, their connection, or (as it is commonly called) special circumstances. These are of two kinds; for those who use them have no wish that their whole life should be brought to trial, so that they may be acquitted or condemned according to its tenor; all they wish is, that a decision should be given on the particular case; and even here the righteousness which they claim is not with reference to the divine perfection, but only by comparison with the wicked and profane. When the ques-

* Ps. vii. 9; xvii. 1; xviii. 20; xxvi. 1, 9, 10. Farther on, see Chap. xiv. s. 18 Chap. xx. s. 10.

tion relates to justification, the thing required is not that the individual have a good ground of acquittal in regard to some particular matter, but that his whole life be in accordance with righteousness. But when the saints implore the divine justice in vindication of their innocence, they do not present themselves as free from fault, and in every respect blameless, but while placing their confidence of salvation in the divine goodness only, and trusting that he will vindicate his poor when they are afflicted contrary to justice and equity, they truly commit to him the cause in which the innocent are oppressed. And when they sist themselves with their adversaries at the tribunal of God, they pretend not to an innocence corresponding to the divine purity were inquiry strictly made, but knowing that in comparison of the malice, dishonesty, craft, and iniquity of their enemies, their sincerity, justice, simplicity, and purity, are ascertained and approved by God, they dread not to call upon him to judge between them. Thus when David said to Saul, “The Lord render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness,” (1 Sam. xxvi. 23,) he meant not that the Lord should examine and reward every one according to his deserts, but he took the Lord to witness how great his innocence was in comparison of Saul’s injustice. Paul, too, when he indulges in the boast, “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward,” (2 Cor. i. 12,) means not to call for the scrutiny of God, but compelled by the calumnies of the wicked he appeals, in contradiction of all their slanders, to his faith and probity, which he knew that God had indulgently accepted. For we see how he elsewhere says, “I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified,” (1 Cor. iv. 4;) in other words, he was aware that the divine judgment far transcended the blind estimate of man. Therefore, however believers may, in defending their integrity against the hypocrisy of the ungodly, appeal to God as their witness and judge, still when the question is with God alone, they all with one mouth exclaim, “If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” Again, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” Distrusting their own works, they gladly exclaim, “Thy loving-kindness is better than life,” (Ps. cxxx. 3; cxliii. 2; lxiii. 3.)

15. There are other passages not unlike those quoted above, at which some may still demur. Solomon says, “The just man walketh in his integrity,” (Prov. xx. 7.) Again, “In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death,” (Prov. xii. 28.) For this reason Ezekiel says, He that “hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live,” (Ezek. xviii. 9, 21; xxxiii. 15.) None of these declarations do we deny or obscure. But let one of the sons

of Adam come forward with such integrity. If there is none, they must perish from the presence of God, or betake themselves to the asylum of mercy. Still we deny not that the integrity of believers, though partial and imperfect, is a step to immortality. How so, but just that the works of those whom the Lord has assumed into the covenant of grace, he tries not by their merit, but embraces with paternal indulgence. By this we understand not with the Schoolmen, that works derive their value from accepting grace. For their meaning is, that works otherwise unfit to obtain salvation in terms of law, are made fit for such a purpose by the divine acceptance. On the other hand, I maintain that these works being sullied both by other transgressions and by their own deficiencies, have no other value than this, that the Lord indulgently pardons them; in other words, that the righteousness which he bestows on man is gratuitous. Here they unseasonably obtrude those passages in which the Apostle prays for all perfection to believers, "To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father," (1 Thess. iii. 13, and elsewhere.) These words were strongly urged by the Celestines of old, in maintaining the perfection of holiness in the present life. To this we deem it sufficient briefly to reply with Augustine, that the goal to which all the pious ought to aspire is, to appear in the presence of God without spot and blemish; but as the course of the present life is at best nothing more than progress, we shall never reach the goal until we have laid aside the body of sin, and been completely united to the Lord. If any one choose to give the name of perfection to the saints, I shall not obstinately quarrel with him, provided he defines this perfection in the words of Augustine, "When we speak of the perfect virtue of the saints, part of this perfection consists in the recognition of our imperfection both in truth and in humility," (August, ad Bonif. Lib. iii. c. 7.)