Examine the only Reality

"And the world passeth away, and the Covetous Cease thereof. But he that doth the will of God abideth for Eternity."
1 Thes. ii. 17.

It may seem, perhaps, a hard saying, that in this majestic and dazzling world there is only one imperishable reality, and that, a thing most hidden and reserved—there is a will obedient to the will of God. Yet nothing is more certain. It is plain that nothing is truly real which is not eternal. In a certain sense, all things—the most shadowy and fleeting, the frost, the cold, the snow, and fogs of heaven—are real; every light which falls from the upper air, every reflection of its brightness towards heaven again, is a reality. It is a creature of God; and is here in His word, fulfilling
His will. But these things we are wont to take as symbols and parables of unreality, and that because they are changeable and transitory. It is clear, then, that when we speak of realities, we mean things that have in them the form of an abiding life. Things which pass away at last, how long soever they may seem to tarry with us, we call forces and appearances. They have no intrinsic being; for a time they are, and then they are not. Their very being was an accident; they were shadows of a reality, cast for a time into the world, and then withdrawn. In strictness of speech, we can call nothing real which is not eternal.
Now it is in this sense that I have said, the only reality in the world is a will, subject to the will of God: And this we will consider more at large.

I first of all, it is plain that the only reality in this visible world is Man. "For the earth and the works which are in it shall be burned up.

Whatsoever may lie in these awful words, it is clear that they declare this world to be transitory, and its end determined. Of all things that have life without a reasonable soul, the record is more than that they possess.

All visible things are in changing; material forms passing into new combinations, shifting their sameness with their shapes. All things around us, and above us, deep

Beneath, are full of change; they hear, and mingle, and restor, and pass off by some mysterious law of intercommunication, and by that law declare that they are not eternal. In like manner, all the works of men, all the acts of life, are no more than the impressions and characters left by the spirit of man, while subject to the conditions of an earthly state. Kingdoms and politics, and laws, and armies, and mechanical powers, and the achievements of wisdom, and wit, and might, and the infinite maze of human action, from the beginning to the ending of the world's history, what are they all, under the providence of God, but so many fleeting and broken shadows, cast by the ever-
Varying pictures of man's restless spirit?

They are all in time and of time, and
with time shall pass away, save only
their accumulated results, of which we
shall have to speak hereafter. Such for
instance, were the Empires of Sicius,
and Nebuchadnezzar, of Persia, and Greece.

As let us take, as an example, the great
Empire of Rome. For over eight thousand
years what a sleepless movement of human
life swarmed round that wonderful Centre
of the world! how it expanded itself from
a point to be the fulcrum of the whole East!
how that same burning power of thought
and action, brought itself inwardly into
a wondrous facility of ordered and civilised
life, and outwardly, through fleets and legions,
into an irresistible force, breathing in pieces
dep fusing, and reacting the world into
its own nature! And so it brought us
from century to century, as if it would never
that old; and even, from this, was beguiled
to call it the Eternal City. And it bid
fair to be colossal with the world. And
yet of all that majestic phenomenon that
shall remain, when the passion of this
world hath passed away, but the isolated
individual souls which in this world
are lost in its mighty life? The whole
is gone by, like a stately and silen
depart, and its mighty frame resolved
again into its original dust. Nothing
survives but the mass of human life:
and that not blended as before, but
each in a several and apart as if
long lived before God but he away. And so of all the course and history of the world; all is better past or passing away; nothing remains but the record of human life in the book of the terrestrial, and the stream of undying spirits which is ever issuing from among us into the world indeed. And thus it is that all that is real in the world is ever passing out of it; tarrying for a while in the midst of shadows and reflections, and then, as it were, melting out of sight.

2. Again, as the only reality in the world is man, so the only reality in man is his spiritual life. By this I do not exclude his animal being, but expressly include it, as the less is included in the greater. In like manner as when
we speak of a spiritual body, we mean not a spirit only, but a body under the conditions of the spirit; is by the spiritual life is incarnate the living man made new by the power of the Holy Ghost. Before his regeneration through the Spirit, he was dead in the flesh: he was a part of this dying world, which is to pass away; unknown changes await his, and after the last visible change, there was no destiny revealed. No man not all that the mind "Thou shalt surely die," may mean in the state of the dead. But the regenerate man is translated from death to life; he to receive partakes of immortality, and is again eternal. I am speaking, then, of that spiritual life which is in all that are born again.
And I say that this alone is intrinsically eternal, forasmuch as it is an Aesopic gift of the Divine Presence, and is the One, Only, and True, and abiding reality. Now the truth of this will be made to appear, if we consider the following points. First, that of what is called the life of man—that is, of his living acts and energies—the greatest part is altogether separable from his Spiritual life, and is therefore altogether transient and passing. Such, for instance, as all his deeds, ever-returning to the limitation of this bodily life; all the honors which we are compelled to pay to the conditions of our earthly state, and the wants of our human nature. It matters not
What is the particular form of all this living: whether a man be a tiller of the Earth, or a keeper of flocks, or a merchant, or a pleader, or an elector as a maker of laws, he is laboriously serving the necessities of our earthly condition; and though a faithful man may turn away or all of these callings into a service of spiritual obedience, yet they may be. Each one, and all for the most part, all of them, fulfill without a thought of the inner life by the almost mechanical powers of the reason and the will. Now all this which makes up the greatest part of the life of most men is little
Better than mere contact with this perish-
ing world. Except when incorporated
with the spiritual life, it has no at-
mixture of permanence, as in the sense
we have defined, of reality. It is a
mere shadow, transient and fleeting.
All the sweat of the brow, all the bold
enterprises, all the skillful address, all
the thundering oratory, all the science
of government, and all the toil by
which these were earned, and all
the wealth or greatness by which they
are waited on, where are they all
when a man comes to die, or when
he must fall down before God to take
a dean? They are as utterly abolished
as if they were all acted in a masque,
as done in a former life. How strangely, how awfully eternal and unreal do all these things appear, when we are on our knees beneath the eternal eye! And so, again, to take another instance.

Even that which seems above all to enter into the very core of our spiritual life,—I mean the cultivation of mind, refinement, the excitement of intellectual forces, the acquirement of learning and science,—which things seem to us to form the distinguishing mark and cast to the characters of men,

how altogether separable are these things also from the spiritual being? They are often found in men of the unholiest passions. The yielding
offer, the most impure sensualist, 
the man to follow the spiritual life 
seems absolutely quenched, oftentimes 
for more largely possesses these magical 
gifts of our intellectual nature than 
the most devoted of God's servants. They 
are but partial developments of his 
reasonable life; altogether unsanctified, 
in no way related to the spiritual 
being; earthly and therefore but 
shadows of the celestial gifts of the 
hallowed and illuminated reason.

How most men of learning and self- 
cultivation, if they would but look 
 keenly and truly into themselves, 
would be ever-striving to see how 
little unity there is between their
Intellectual and their spiritual powers, how unreal is all they are living in. And, unless taken up into the spiritual life, and thereby consecrated, how hollow and perishable is all the toil and fruit of their daily labours. If any proof of this were wanting, let keep only see such as in times of stress, or fear, or anxiety, or pain, above all in a season of death. It seems then as if all but a little of their whole being were suddenly abolished. All their powers and energies, and acquirements, are as remote and alien from their present needs, as so many broad acres, or stately houses, or costly remains. They all
Ad'ven seen splendid unrealities, which
have done little more than dazzle and
draw off the eyes of the lower spirit from
that which alone is eternal.
And, besides this, remember that nothing
of all we have and are in this world,
save only our spiritual life, and that
which is impressed upon it, and
blessed with it, shall we carry into
the world hereafter. Then as in fact
of this world's entangled history, so
is it of the life of each several man.
Though all things shall be remembered
in the judgment, and though all that
he has been, done or spoken shall
have left some stamp for good or
ill upon his immortal spirit, yet
What a putting off of this lower life shall there be at that day! "Every man's work shall be manifest: for the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire: and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." Of all these rememberest thou the days of this busy life, of all its deeds, and achievements, and possessions, how shall a remainder shall be found after that fiery trial has done its work! How shall the work
Say, and stumble", and all the unrealities of act, and word, and thought, and self-persuasion, and empty imagination, and conventional formalities, and personal observances, he burned up; and nothing else, that searching test but the powers of our spiritual life! And if all the regenerate is thus, that high gift was given, none shall pass through that piercing trial into God's kingdom, but only they in whom there shall be found a well obedient to the will of God. They that have held a regenerate nature are condemned already with the world, and must perish with the world, for the world persecute away, and the consequence thereof. But
So that with the will of God, abide it for them.

From what has been said, let this one broad inference suffice, that the aim of our life ought to be to partake of this eternal obedience. Nothing else is worth our living for. Not have been each one of us born again. Obeying as his obedient, we must be real or unreal, indissoluble or perishable.

And therefore our first care must needs be, to watch against whatever may turn the obedience of our will away from God. By the counsel of actual life, I need say nothing; I am speaking only of those who believe the regenerate will do as prevails as to make them, in the main, try
The will of God. The temptations which keep alive the disobedience of the will are such as these: Strong desires after petty ease in life, worldly foresight, carelessly-drawn schemes of action, over-carefulness in the work of our calling, the indulgence of choosing and willing for the future a soft life, ease of ease, and the like. How are these strengthened the actions of our own will, and make us impatient of laws. If events fail out otherwise than we desire, we grow restless and impatient. As if we do not carry ourselves in openurance to the will of God, but submit with suffrances and a choking heart. All this is because we have taken things in some other way; we have been forecasing and taking counsel
of our own wishes, and measuring things by their supposed bearing upon ourselves. And our will has become so insensible to its choice, that we forget the omnipotence of God in His own world. Now we are all tempted to this fault by nature; and even after we have so far yielded ourselves as to obey His laws in the main tenor of our life, these linger beneath a strong lust (Spiritual Aridity) in the heart; and we are then презиряя and stimulating it in secret. Our calling in life presents a thousand little provocations to our will. And these explains our bitter disappointments, insommerate griefs, irritable tempers, jealous feelings. It have been
unposing laws on the course of our destinies, taking the rule of God's Kingdom out of His hands, Deep surrounding ourselves with an unreal world of hopes and fears, and choices, Deep yearnings of our own, and God has touched it with His hand, and it has started deeper and deeper away. These states of our interior life are very subtle. There is perhaps hardly any man who is so totally free from them, as to be altogether real and simple. For the most part, men choose, in thought, what they like best, and then will that it should come to pass, and then persuade themselves that it is to be so. And live in the persuasion, and "WALK IN A VAIN SHADOW, And Acquaint yourselves in Vain." They
are out of harmony with the movement of the Diesterweg, and become hollow and visionary. And that, too, is the most commonplace manner of life. The most unimaginative, unpostical, matter-of-fact men are often just as unreal as the most heated and romantic-only in another way; as, for instance, they wear out a whole life with a concentration of every thought which is useful and sadceasing, in striving after some object such as high place, or great wealth, or hereditary name, which for them is as remote and unreal as the philosopher's stone, or the elixir of life. In truth, whatsoever lies on either side of the line, as beyond the limits, which the will of God...
has drawn about this lot in this world, is for us as if it did not exist; and all our thoughts, actions, labours, and toils after it, are mere unrealities, and must come to nothing. Most certain it is, that in every case there will be found a large admixture of this labour, this vain; and perhaps the largest measure of our earnestness, and energy, and of the powers of life are simply thrown away. Now the first check upon this is, to understand what God will us to be, and then to abandon everything else, as if it did not exist so much as spirit in the world. What we are to a revelation of His will towards us. Our lot is a reality; the truths of our calling are real, so long as they are done as a service of obedience. Within these bounds there
is nothing which does not bear upon
Stoicism.
And this teaches us that we must do
more than only watch against the alc-
IFICATIONS of our own will. Obedience to
the will of God is a work of direct and
simple consciousness. It is to be wrought
in us by its own self-confirming power.
It is by doing the will of God; by recog-
izing it in all the changes of life; by reading
in the course of this troubled world the
expression of the Divine Mind; by bowing
ourselves down before it, under whatever
false it may reveal itself; by yielding
ourselves in gladness and calm to the
And suffer it, Counting it a holy discipline.
And a loving correction of our own
selfishness. And by praying for us
to stay His hand till this need of self
he abolished from our regenerate being, by these means it is that we are changed from the shadow of a fleeting life to the shining realities of the eternal world, being made partakers of the will of God. But to such a life of submission much self-neglect is needed. We cannot pass to it at once, but approach it only by the laws of a slow-advancing growth. These are days of very adverse to the subjugation of the individual will. They are too "external and stimulating. From our religious life to drawn into the spirit and fear of an endless activity. But, in the service of God, there must be something behind a life of action; there must be the stationary energies of a devout spirit. Our life is too continually outward, our visible, and sent up to the heavenly grace.
We are not enough at large, and alone, with God. And hence it strangely comes to pass, that we esteem visible things to be real, and invisible things to be imaginary; we look upon the kingdoms of the earth, and worldly powers, and the acts of law and legislation, and the business of traders and merchants, as realities; but the Church and the priesthood, and offices of worship, and daily holiness, and charity, and the offering of incense, and a life of contemplation, as shadows. But these alone are the springs of an abiding life. This pourous tissue, stately world must have its say, and then be dissolved, "as a dream of them that awake." We live in the midst of it, till it bewilders and stirs us,
And we do it haphazard; and when we turn from it to things mundane, they are too pure and subtle for our deadened senses. There is no cure for this; but to be more alone with life. Solitude and silence are full of reality. We must draw more into our own hearts, and converse more with them. Never do we so put off the paint and Masquerade of life, as when we are alone under the eye which looks in secret. A man must be either very bold or very blind, that will still keep up the play and artifice of his common bearing. I do not speak of Hypocrites: there is no man that is not in some measure twofold; and that twofold because there is no man who is willing to be known by his fellow-men as he knows himself; and as soon
known him beside, but Gap only. To see
only a part of each other, but Gap sees all.
Our partial views is, if not misled with
mutuality, yet misleading, because we
perfect, we know only half the riddle,
and we are led astray in guessing
at the rest. But all things are upset
And open to his eyes, to whom our speech
is. Our very helplessness makes us
real. His eyes holds in check the
iniquities of our being; And by the
habitual suppression of solitude with Gap,
they are treated with horror. In
the world all any long, there is an
influence playing upon us, which draws
our characters to the surface, and these
fits them, leaving our hearts hollow
and inanimate. The works of our being
Even the most sacred offices, have a tendency to become an unconscious faculty, and to leave themselves from the powers of the will. The best course is, to withdraw themselves from the region of the conscience. Now, nothing but self-discipline writer can keep up the integrity of our whole nature. And the more difficult this is, by reason of a man's overburdened life of daily duties. Here, the more absolutely useful is it for his safety. Fearful thought! We were born alone, and alone we must die; and yet through all our life, too, as it were, flee from loneliness, which is alike the beginning and the ending of our earthly transit! Does not this seem to say that we are never at ease, but when we can lose the consciousness of what
the are, in the noise and show of the world. All that we can do, when we find ourselves groaning artificial and expected, to go apart, where none but God sees us, and sail down as dust and nothingness before Him, and plead with Him against ourselves, and pray Him to abolish in us all that is not real and abiding.

We have the more need of this secret discipline of self, because we have few aids and helps of a secondary sort. They are not many who have the blessing of being subject to any preceding to any rule out of themselves, by which the detail of their life is ordered. More to thereby thrown upon the energy of the individual will. The need of laws.
imposed discipline, which shall bear upon the actions of our inner nature, so wonderfully attested by the yearnings of thoughtful minds at this time. On every side one hears them painfully striving to free themselves from the bondage of unmeaning and artificial habits, and to find some basis on which they may rest the full weight of their living powers. This has grown upon them, more and more, ever since the current of the world turned aside from the path of the Christian Church. The once energetic, resolute, and mighty, the more learned,tolerant, and self-trusting it has become, the more hollow is it and empty. 'The world passes away, and the consciousness thereof.' It is confronted at its own perpetual...
changes: it seems that none of its schemes abide; that it daily grows more weary of toiling, and more transient is its toils. And why, but because it has divorced itself from the Church of the living God, and is resolving again into the incoherencies of its fallen state? All men are conscious of this: then they that cannot explain the cause. They feel, when they are buried in the world, that there is something within them, something which exercised and corroded them; they feel that the leaning of their worldly toil is away from God; that they are moving in another direction; that their returns to Him are by a terrible effort. And, as it were, against
a stream. They feel, too, that their daily
life is a hindrance to a life of devotion.
It is distracting and unfortunate; it eats
too much leisure, and repays with a
perpetual weariness. All the day long
they are conscious that they have fallen
under the dominion of a power which is
not at ease with God. They crave after
something through which they may submit
themselves to the realities of the Eternal
world. And for this bread was the visible
Church ordained. To meet the yearnings
of our baffled hearts, it stands in the
Earth as a symbol of the Everlasting;
Under the Veil of its Material Sacraments
Are the Powers of an Eternally Life; its Unity,
And its Order Are the Expressions of Heavenly
Things, its worship, of an eternal homage. Blessed are they that dwell within its hallowed precinct, shielded from the lies and spells of the world, living in plainness, even in poverty; hid from the song of men, in solitude and silence, walking with God.