A PLAIN ACCOUNT OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION, AS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT BY THE REVEREND MR. JOHN WESLEY, FROM THE YEAR 1725, TO THE YEAR 1777.

[It is not to be understood, that Mr. Wesley’s sentiments concerning Christian Perfection were in any measure changed after the year 1777. This tract underwent several revisions and enlargements during his life-time: and in every successive edition the date of the most recent revision was specified. The last revision appears to have been made in the year 1777; and since that period, this date has been generally continued on the title-page of the several editions of the pamphlet. -- EDIT.]

1. What I purpose in the following papers is, to give a plain and distinct account of the steps by which I was led, during a course of many years, to embrace the doctrine of Christian perfection. This I owe to the serious part of mankind, those who desire to know all “the truth as it is in Jesus.” And these only are concerned in questions of this kind. To these I would nakedly declare the thing as it is, endeavouring all along to show, from one period to another, both what I thought, and why I thought so.

2. In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age, I met with Bishop Taylor’s “Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying.” In reading several parts of this book, I was exceedingly affected; that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts, and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced, there was no medium; but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil.

Can any serious person doubt of this, or find a medium between serving God and serving the devil?

3. In the year 1726, I met with Kempis’s “Christian’s Pattern.” The nature and extent of inward religion, the religion of the heart, now appeared to me in a stronger light than ever it had done before.

I saw, that giving even all my life to God (supposing it possible to do this, and go no farther would profit me nothing, unless I gave my heart, yea, all my heart, to him.

I saw, that “simplicity of intention, and purity of affection,” one design in all we speak or do, and one desire ruling all our tempers, are indeed “the wings of the soul,” without which she can never ascend to the mount of God.

4. A year or two after, Mr. Law’s “Christian Perfection” and “Serious Call” were put into my hands. These convinced me, more than ever, of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined, through his grace, (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible of;) to be all-devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my substance Will any considerate man say, that this is carrying matter too far? Or that anything less is due to Him who has given himself for us, than to give him ourselves, all we have, and all we are?

5. In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion. Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having “the mind which was in Christ,” and of “walking as Christ also walked;” even of having, not some part only, but all the mind which was in him; and of walking as he walked, not only in many or in most respects, but in all things. And this was the light, wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as an uniform following of Christ, an entire inward and outward conformity to our Master. Nor was I afraid of anything more, than of bending this rule to the experience of myself; or of other men; of allowing myself in any the least disconformity to our grand Exemplar.

6. On January 1, 1733, I preached before the University in St. Mary’s church, on “the Circumcision of the Heart;” an account of which I gave in these words: “It is that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed’ holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin ‘from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit;’ and, by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus the being so renewed in the image of our mind,’ as to be ‘perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.’” (Vol. V., p. 203.) In the same sermon I observed, “Love is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment.” It is not only the first and great command, but all the commandments in one. ‘Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise,’ they are all comprised in this one word, love. In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness: The royal law of heaven and earth is this, ‘Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.’ The one perfect good shall be your one ultimate end.
One thing shall ye desire for its own sake, -- the fruition of Him who is all in all. One happiness shall ye propose to your souls, even an union with Him that made them, the having ‘fellowship with the Father and the Son,’ the being `joined to the Lord in one spirit.’ One design ye are to pursue to the end of time, -- the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity. Desire other things so far as they tend to this; love the creature, as it leads to the Creator. But in every step you take, be this the glorious point that terminates your view. Let every affection, and thought and word, and action, be subordinate to this. Whatever ye desire or fear, whatever ye seek or shun, whatever ye think speak, or do, be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole end, as well as source, of your being.” (Ibid., pp. 207, 208.)

I concluded in these words: “Here is the sum of the perfect law, the circumcision of the heart. Let the spirit return to God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections. -- Other sacrifices from us he would not, but the living sacrifice of the heart hath he chosen. Let it be continually offered up to God through Christ, in flames of holy love. And let no creature be suffered to share with him; for he is a jealous God. His throne will he not divide with another; he will reign without a rival. Be no design, no desire admitted there, but what has Him for its ultimate object. This is the way wherein those children of God once walked, who being dead still speak to us: ‘Desire not to live but to praise his name; let all your thoughts, words, and works tend to his glory.’ ‘Let your soul be filled with so entire a love to Him that you may love nothing but for his sake.’ ‘Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all you actions.’ For then, and not till then, is that `mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus,’ when in every motion of our heart, in every word of our tongue, in every work of our hands, we ‘pursue nothing but in relation to him, and in subordination to his pleasure;’ when we too neither think, nor speak, nor act, to fulfil `our own will, but the will of Him that sent us;’ when, `whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do,’ we do it all `to the glory of God.’” (Ibid., p. 211.)

It may be observed, this sermon was composed the first of all my writings which have been published. This was the view of religion I then had, which even then I scrupled not to term perfection. This is the view I have of it now, without any material addition or diminution. And what is there here, which any man of understanding, who believes the Bible, can object to? What can he deny, without flatly contradicting the Scripture? What retrench, without taking from the word of God?

7. In the same sentiment did my brother and I remain (with all those young gentlemen in derision termed Methodists) till we embarked for America, in the latter end of 1735. It was the next year, while I was at Savannah, that I wrote the following lines: -- Is there a thing beneath the sun,

That strives with thee my heart to share?
Ah! tear it thence, and reign alone,
The Lord of every motion there!

In the beginning of the year 1738, as I was returning from thence, the cry of my heart was, O grant that nothing in my soul

May dwell, but thy pure love alone!
O may thy love possess me whole,
My joy, my treasure, and my crown!
Strange fires far from my heart remove;
My every act, word, thought, be love!

I never heard that any one objected to this. And indeed who can object? Is not this the language, not only of every believer, but of every one that is truly awakened? But what have I wrote, to this day, which is either stronger or plainer?

8. In August following, I had a long conversation with Arvid Gradin, in Germany. After he had given me an account of his experience, I desired him to give me, in writing, a definition of “the full assurance of faith,” which he did in the following words: --

Requies in sanguine Christi; firma fiducia in Deum, et persuasio de gratia divina; tranquillitas mentis summa, atque serenitas et pax; cum absinta omnis desiderii carnalis, et cessatione peccatorum etiam internorum.
“Repose in the blood of Christ; a firm confidence in God, and persuasion of his favour; the highest tranquillity, serenity, and peace of mind, with a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and a cessation of all, even inward sins.”

This was the first account I ever heard from any living man, of what I had before learned myself from the oracles of God, and had been praying for, (with the little company of my friends,) and expecting, for several years.

9. In 1739, my brother and I published a volume of “Hymns and Sacred Poems.” In many of these we declared our sentiments strongly and explicitly. So, page 24, --

> Turn the fall stream of nature’s tide;  
> Let all our actions tend  
> To thee, their source; thy love the guide,  
> Thy glory be the end.  
> Earth then a scale to heaven shall be;  
> Sense shall point out the road;  
> The creatures all shall lead to thee,  
> And all we taste be God.

Again, --

> Lord, arm me with thy Spirit’s might,  
> Since I am call’d by thy great name:  
> In thee my wand’ring thoughts unite,  
> Of all my works be thou the aim:  
> Thy love attend me all my days,  
> And my sole business be thy praise.

(Page 122.)

Again, --

> Eager for thee I ask and pant,  
> So strong the principle divine,  
> Carries me out with sweet constraint,  
> Till all my hallow’d soul be thine;  
> Plunged in the Godhead’s deepest sea,  
> And lost in thine immensity!

(Page 125.)

Once more, --

> Heavenly Adam, life divine,  
> Change my nature into thine;  
> Move and spread throughout my soul,  
> Actuate and fill the whole.

(Page 153.)

It would be easy to cite many more passages to the same effect. But these are sufficient to show, beyond contradiction, what our sentiments then were.

10. The first tract I ever wrote expressly on this subject was published in the latter end of this year.

That none might be prejudiced before they read it, I gave it the indifferent title of “The Character of a Methodist.” In this I described a perfect Christian, placing in the front, “Not as though I had already attained.” Part of it I subjoin without any alteration: --

“A Methodist is one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul, which is continually crying, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee.’ My God and my all! ‘Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.’ He is therefore happy in God; yea, always happy, as having in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life, and over-flowing his soul with peace and joy. Perfect
love living now cast out fear, he rejoices evermore. Yea, his joy is full, and all his bones cry out, `Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten me again unto a living hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for me.' “And he, who hath this hope, thus full of immortality, in everything giveth thanks, as knowing this (whatsoever it is) is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning him. From him therefore he cheerfully receives all, saying, `Good is the will of the Lord;' and whether he giveth or taketh away, equally blessing the name of the Lord. Whether in ease or pain, whether in sickness or health, whether in life or death, he giveth thanks from the ground of the heart to Him who orders it for good; into whose hands he hath wholly committed his body and soul, ‘as into the hands of a faithful Creator.’ He is therefore anxiously ´careful for nothing,’ as having `cast all his care on Him that careth for him;' and `in all things' resting on him, after ‘making’ his ´request known to him with thanksgiving.’

For indeed he ´prays without ceasing;' at all times the language of his heart is this, ´Unto thee is my mouth, though without a voice; and my silence speaketh unto thee.’ His heart is lifted up to God at all times, and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord.

Whether he lie down, or rise up, ´God is in all his thoughts:' He walks with God continually; having the loving eye of his soul fixed on him, and everywhere ´seeing Him that is invisible.' “And loving God, he ´loves his neighbour as himself;' he loves every man as his own soul. He loves his enemies, yea, and the enemies of God. And if it be not in his power to ´do good to them that hate' him, yet he ceases not to ´pray for them,' though they spurn his love, and still ´despite. Fully use him, and persecute him.'

For he is ´pure in heart.’ Love has purified his heart from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper. It has cleansed him from pride, whereof ´only cometh contention;' and he hath now ´put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.' And indeed all possible ground for contention, on his part, is cut off. For none can take from him what he desires, seeing he ´loves not the world, nor any of the things of the world;' but ´all his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name.’

Agreeable to this his one desire, is this one design of his life; namely, ´to do, not his own will, but the will of Him that sent him.’ His one intention at all times and in all places is, not to please himself, but Him whom his soul loveth. He hath a single eye; and because his ´eye is single, his whole body is full of light. The whole is light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth enlighten the house.’ God reigns alone; all that is in the soul is ´holiness to the Lord.’ There is not a motion in his heart but is according to his will. Every thought that arises points to him, and is in ´obedience to the law of Christ.’

“And the tree is known by its fruits. For, as he loves God, so he ´keeps his commandments;' not only some, or most of them, but all, from the least to the greatest. He is not content to ´keep the whole law and offend in one point,’ but has iii all points ´a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man.’ Whatever God has forbidden, he avoids; whatever God has enjoined, he does. He runs the way of God’s commandments,’ now He hath set his heart at liberty. It is his glory and joy so to do; it is his daily crown of rejoicing, to ´do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven.’ “All the commandments of God he accordingly keeps, and that with all his might; for his obedience is in proportion to his love, the source from whence it flows. And therefore, loving God with all his heart, he serves him with all his strength; he continually presents his soul and ´body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God;' entirely and without reserve devoting himself, all he has, all he is, to his glory. All the talents he has, he constantly employs according to his Master’s will; every power and faculty of his soul, every member of his body.

“By consequence, ´whatsoever he doeth, it is all to the glory of God.’ In all his employments of every kind, he not only aims at this, which is implied in having a single eye, but actually attains it; his business and his refreshments, as well as his prayers, all serve to this great end. Whether he ´sit in the house, or walk by the way,’ whether he lie down, or rise up, he is promoting, in all he speaks or does, the one business of his life. Whether he put on his apparel, or labour, or eat and drink, or divert himself from too wasting labour, it all tends to advance the glory of God, by peace and good-will among men. His one invariable rule is this: ‘Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, even the Father, through him.’ “Nor do the customs of the world at all hinder his ´running the race which is set before him.’ He cannot therefore ´lay up treasures upon earth,’ no more than he can take fire into his bosom. He cannot speak evil of
his neighbour, any more than he can lie either for God or man. He cannot utter an unkind word of any one; for love keeps the door of his lips. He cannot `speak idle words; no corrupt conversation’ ever `comes out of his mouth;’ as is all that is not `good to the use of edifying,’ not fit to `minister grace to the hearers.’ But `whosoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are’ justly `of good report,’ he thinks, speaks, and acts, `adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.’"

These are the very words wherein I largely declared, for the first time, my sentiments of Christian perfection. And is it not easy to see, (1.) That this is the very point at which I aimed all along from the year 1725; and more determinately from the year 1730, when I began to be homo unius libri, “a man of one book,” regarding none, comparatively, but the Bible? Is it not easy to see, (2.) That this is the very same doctrine which I believe and teach at this day; not adding one point, either to that inward or outward holiness which I maintained eight-and-thirty years ago? And it is the same which, by the grace of God, I have continued to teach from that time till now; as will appear to every impartial person from the extracts subjoined below.

11. I do not know that any writer has made any objection against that tract to this day; and for some time, I did not find much opposition upon the head, at least, not from serious persons. But after a time, a cry arose, and, what a little surprised me, among religions men, who affirmed, not that I stated perfection wrong, but that “there is no perfection on earth;” nay, and fell vehemently on my brother and me for affirming the contrary. We scarce expected so rough an attack from these; especially as we were clear on justification by faith, and careful to ascribe the whole of salvation to the mere grace of God. But what most surprised us, was, that we were said to “dishonour Christ,” by asserting that he “saveth to the uttermost;” by maintaining he will reign in our hearts alone, and subdue all things to himself.

12. I think it was in the latter end of the year 1740, that I had a conversation with Dr. Gibson, then Bishop of London, at Whitehall. He asked me what I meant by perfection. I told him without any disguise or reserve. When I ceased speaking, he said, “Mr. Wesley, if this be all you mean, publish it to all the world. If any one then can confute what you say, he may have free leave.” I answered, “My Lord, I will;” and accordingly wrote and published the sermon on Christian perfection.

In this I endeavoured to show, (1.) In what sense Christians are not, (2.) In what sense they are, perfect.

(1.) In what sense they are not. They are not perfect in knowledge. They are not free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake. We are no more to expect any living man to be infallible, than to be omniscient. They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination. Such in another kind are impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behaviour. From such infirmities as these none are perfectly freed till their spirits return to God; neither can we expect till then to be wholly freed from temptation; for `the servant is not above his master.’ But neither in this sense is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase.

(2.) In what sense then are they perfect? Observe, we are not now speaking of babes in Christ, but adult Christians. But even babes in Christ are so far perfect as not to commit sin. This St. John affirms expressly; and it cannot be disproved by the examples of the Old Testament. For what, if the holiest of the ancient Jews did sometimes commit sin? We cannot infer from hence, that `all Christians do and must commit sin as long as they live.’

“But does not the Scripture say, `A just man sinneth seven times a day?’ It does not. Indeed it says, `A just man falleth seven times.’ But this is quite another thing; for, First, the words, a day, are not in the text. Secondly, here is no mention of falling into sin at all. What is here mentioned, is, falling into temporal affliction.

“But elsewhere Solomon says, `There is no man that sinneth not.’ Doubtless thus it was in the days of Solomon; yea, and from Solomon to Christ there was then no man that sinned not. But whatever was the case of those under the law, we may safely affirm, with St. John, that, since the gospel was given, `he that is born of God sinneth not.’

“The privileges of Christians are in nowise to be measured by what the Old Testament records concerning those who were under the Jewish dispensation; seeing the fulness of time is now come, the Holy Ghost is now given, the great salvation of God is now brought to men by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is now set up on earth, concerning which the Spirit of God declared of old time, (so far is David from being the pattern or
standard of Christian perfection,) `He that is feeble among them, at that day, shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as the angel of the Lord before them.’ (Zech. 12:8.)

`But the Apostles themselves committed sin; Peter by dissembling, Paul by his sharp contention with Barnabas. Suppose they did, will you argue thus: `If two of the Apostles once committed sin, then all other Christians, in all ages, do and must commit sin as long as they live ?’ Nay, God forbid we should thus speak. No necessity of sin was laid upon them; the grace of God was surely sufficient for them. And it is sufficient for us at this day.

“But St. James says, `In many things we offend all.’ True; but who are the persons here spoken of? Why, those `many masters’ or teachers whom God had not sent; not the Apostle himself, nor any real Christian. That in the word we, used by a figure of speech, common in all other as well as the inspired writings, the Apostle could not possibly include himself, or any other true believer, appears, First, from the ninth verse, `Therewith bless we God, and therewith curse we men.’ Surely not we Apostles! Not we believers! Secondly, from the words preceding the text: `My brethren, be not many masters,’ or teachers, `knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all.’ We! Who? Not the Apostles nor true believers, but they who were to `receive the greater condemnation,’ because of those many offences. Nay, Thirdly, the verse itself proves, that `we offend all,’ cannot be spoken either of all men or all Christians. For in it immediately follows the mention of a man who `offends not,’ as the we first mentioned did; from whom therefore he is professedly contradistinguished, and pronounced a `perfect man.’ “But St. John himself says, `If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves;’ and, `If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.’ “I answer, (1.) The tenth verse fixes the sense of the eighth: `If we say we have no sin,’ in the former, being explained by, `If we say we have not sinned,’ in the latter, verse. (2.) The point under consideration is not, whether we have or have not sinned heretofore; and neither of these verses asserts that we do sin, or commit sin now. (3.) The ninth verse explains both the eighth and tenth: `If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ As if he had said, `I have before affirmed, The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.’ And no man can say, `I need it not; I have no sin to be cleansed, from.’ If we say, we have no sin, that `we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves,’ and make God a liar: But `if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just,’ not only `to forgive us our sins,’ but also `to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,’ that we may `go and sin no more.’ In conformity, therefore, both to the doctrine of St. John, and the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion: A Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit sin.

“This is the glorious privilege of every Christian, yea, though he be but a babe in Christ. But it is only of grown Christians it can be affirmed, they are in such a sense perfect, as, Secondly, to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers. First, from evil or sinful thoughts. Indeed, whence should they spring? `Out of the heart of man,’ if at all, `proceed evil thoughts.’ If, therefore, the heart be no longer evil, then evil thoughts no longer proceed out of it: For `a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit.’

“And as they are freed from evil thoughts, so likewise from evil tempers. Every one of these can say, with St. Paul, `I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;’ -- words that manifestly describe a deliverance from inward as well as from outward sin. This is expressed both negatively, `I live not,’ my evil nature, the body of sin, is destroyed; and positively, `Christ liveth in me,’ and therefore all that is holy, and just, and good. Indeed, both these, `Christ liveth in me,’ and, `I live not,’ are inseparably connected. For what communion hath light with darkness, or Christ with Belial?

“He, therefore, who liveth in these Christians hath `purified their hearts by faith;’ insomuch that every one that has Christ in him, `the hope of glory, purifieth himself even as he is pure.’ He is purified from pride; for Christ was lowly in heart: He is pure from desire and self-will; for Christ desired only to do the will of his Father: And he is pure from anger, in the common sense of the word; for Christ `was meek and gentle. I say, in the common sense of the word; for he is angry at sin, while he is grieved for the sinner. He feels a displacency at every offence against God, but only tender compassion to the offender.

“Thus doth Jesus save his people from their sins, not only from outward sins, but from the sins of their hearts. `True,’ say some, `but not till death, not in this world.’ Nay, St. John says, `Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because, as he is, so are we in this world.’ The Apostle here, beyond all contradiction, speaks of himself and other living Christians, of whom he flatly affirms, that, not only at or after death, but `in this world,’ they are `as their Master.’
Exactly agreeable to this are his words in the first chapter: `God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' And again: `If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Now, it is evident, the Apostle here speaks of a deliverance wrought in this world: For he saith not, The blood of Christ will cleanse, (at the hour of death, or in the day of judgment,) but it `cleanseth,' at the time present, us living Christians `from all sin.' And it is equally evident, that if any sin remain, we are not cleansed from `all' sin. If any unrighteousness remain in the soul, it is not cleansed from `all, unrighteousness. Neither let any say that this relates to justification only, or the cleansing us from the guilt of sin: First, because this is confounding together what the Apostle clearly distinguishes, w ho mentions, first, `to forgive us our sins, and then `to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Secondly, because this is asserting justification by works, in the strongest sense possible; it is making all inward, as well as all outward, holiness, necessarily previous to justification. For if the cleansing here spoken of is no other than the cleansing us from the guilt of sin, then we are not cleansed from guilt, that is, not justified, unless on condition of walking `in the light, as he is in the light.' It remains, then, that Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; that they are now in such a sense perfect, as not to commit sin, and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers.

It could not be, but that a discourse of this kind, which directly contradicted the favourite opinion of many, who were esteemed by others, and possibly esteemed themselves, some of the best of Christians, (whereas, if these things were so, they were not Christians at all,) should give no small offence. Many answers or animadversions, therefore, were expected; but I was agreeably disappointed. I do not know that any appeared; so I went quietly on my way.

13. Not long after, I think in the spring, 1741, we published a second volume of Hymns. As the doctrine was still much misunderstood, and consequently misrepresented, I judged it needful to explain yet farther upon the head; which was done in the preface to it as follows: -- “This great gift of God, the salvation of our souls, is no other than the image of God fresh stamped on our hearts. It is a `renewal of believers in the spirit of their minds, after the likeness of Him that created them.’ God hath now laid `the axe unto the root of the tree, purifying their hearts by faith,’ and `cleansing all the thoughts of their hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.’ Having this hope, that they shall see God as he is, they `purify themselves even as he is pure,’ and are `holy, as he that hath called them is holy, in all manner of conversation.’ Not that they have already attained all that they shall attain, either are already in this sense perfect. But they daily `go on from strength to strength; beholding’ now, `as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.’

“And `where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;’ such liberty `from the law of sin and death,’ as the children of this world will not believe, though a man declare it unto them. `The Son hath made them free’ who are thus `born of God,’ from that great root of sin and bitterness, pride. They feel that all their `sufficiency is of God,’ that it is He alone who `is in all their thoughts,’ and `worketh in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure.’ They feel that `it is not they’ that `speak, but the Spirit of’ their `Father who speaketh’ in them, and that whatsoever is done by their hands, ` the Father who is in them, he doeth the works.’ So that God is to them all in all, and they are nothing in his sight.

They are freed from self-will, as desiring nothing but the holy and perfect will of God; not supplies in want, not ease in pain, [This is too strong. Our Lord himself desired ease in pain.’ He asked’ for it, only with resignation: “Not as I will,” I desire, “but as thou wilt.”] nor life, or death, or any creature; but continually crying in their Inmost soul, `Father, thy will be done.’ They are freed from evil thoughts, so that they cannot enter into them, no, not for a moment. Aforetime, when an evil thought came in, they hooked up, and it vanished away. But now it does not come in, there being no room for this, in a soul which is full of God. They are free from wanderings in prayer. Whenevery they pour out their hearts in a more immediate manner before God, they have no thought of anything past, [This is far too strong. See the sermon “On Wandering Thoughts.”] or absent, or to come, but of God alone. In times past, they had wandering thoughts darted in, which yet fled away hide smoke; but now that smoke does not rise at all. They have no fear or doubt, either as to their state in genera], or as to any particular action. [Frequently this is the case; but only for a time.] The `unction from the Holy One’ teacheth them every hour what they shall do, and what they shall speak; [For a time it may be so; but not always.] nor therefore have they any need to reason concerning it. [Sometimes they have no need; at other times they have.]
They are in one sense freed from temptations; for though numberless temptations fly about them, yet they trouble them not. [Sometimes they do not; at other times they do, and that grievously.] At all times their souls are even and calm, their hearts are steadfast and unmovable. Their peace, flowing as a river, `passeth all understanding,' and they `rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' For they `are sealed by the Spirit unto the day of redemption,' having the witness in themselves, that `there is laid up for' them a `crown of righteousness which the Lord will give’ them `in that day.' [Not all who are saved from sin; many of them have not attained it yet.]

Not that every one is a child of the devil, till he is thus renewed in love: On the contrary, whoever has a sure confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven,’ he is a child of God, and, if he abide in him, an heir of all the promises. Neither ought he in anywise to cast away his confidence, or to deny the faith he has received, because it is weak, or because it is tried with fire,’ so that his soul is `in heaviness through manifold temptations.’ ‘Neither dare we affirm, as some have done, that all this salvation is given at once. There is indeed an instantaneous, as well as a gradual, work of God in his children; and there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received, in one moment, either a clear sense of the forgiveness of their sins, or the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit. But we do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person’s receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart.

Indeed, how God may work, we cannot tell; but the general manner wherein he does work is this: Those who once trusted in themselves that they were righteous, that they were rich, and increased in goods, and had need of nothing, are, by the Spirit of God applying his word, convinced that they are poor and naked. All the things that they have done are brought to their remembrance and set in array before them, so that they see the wrath of God hanging over their heads, and feel that they deserve the damnation of hell. In their trouble they cry unto the Lord, and he shows them, that he hath taken away their sins, and opens the kingdom of heaven in their hearts, righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.’ Sorrow and pain are fled away, and sin has no more dominion over’ them. Knowing they are justified freely through faith in his blood, they have peace with God through Jesus Christ;’ they ‘rejoice in hope of the glory of God,’ and ‘the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts.’

“In this peace they remain for days, or weeks, or months, and commonly suppose they shall not know war any more; till some of their old enemies, their bosom sins, or the sin which did most easily beset them, (perhaps anger or desire,) assault them again, and thrust sore at them, that they may fall.

Then arises fear, that they shall not endure to the end; and often doubt, whether God has not forgotten them, or whether they did not deceive themselves in thinking their sins were forgiven.

Under these clouds, especially if they reason with the devil, they go mourning all the day long. But it is seldom long before their Lord answers for himself, sending them the Holy Ghost to comfort them, to bear witness continually with their spirits that they are’ the children of God. Then they are indeed meek and gentle and teachable, even as a little child. And now first do they see the ground of their heart; [Is it not astonishing, that while this book is extant, which was published four-and-twenty years ago, any one should face me down, that this is a new doctrine, and what I never taught before? -- [This note was first published in the year 1765 EDIT.] which God before would not disclose unto them, lest the soul should fail before him, and the spirit which he had made.

Now they see all the hidden abominations there, the depths of pride, self-will, and hell; yet leaving the witness in themselves, ‘Thou art an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ, even in the midst of this fiery trial;’ which continually heightens both the strong sense they then have of their inability to help themselves, and the inexpressible hunger they feel after a full renewal in his image, in ‘righteousness and true holiness.’ Then God is mindful of the desire of them that fear him, and gives them a single eye, and a pure heart; he stamps upon them his own image and superscription; He createth them anew in Christ Jesus; he cometh unto them with his Son and blessed Spirit, and, fixing his abode in their souls, bringeth them into the ‘rest which remaineth for the people of God.’” Here I cannot but remark, (1.) That this is the strongest account we ever gave of Christian perfection; indeed too strong in more than one particular, as is observed in the notes annexed. (2.) That there is nothing which we have since advanced upon the subject, either in verse or prose, which is not either directly or indirectly contained in this preface. So that whether our present doctrine be right or wrong, it is however the
same which we taught from the beginning.

14. I need not give additional proofs of this, by multiplying quotations from the volume itself. It may suffice, to cite part of one hymn only the last in that volume: -- Lord, I believe a rest remains,

To all thy people known;
A rest where pure enjoyment reigns,
And thou art loved alone;
A rest where all our soul's desire
Is fix'd on things above;
Where doubt and pain and fear expire,
Cast out by perfect love.
From every evil motion freed,
(The Son hath made us free,)
On all the powers of hell we tread,
In glorious liberty.
Safe in the way of life, above
Death, earth, and hell we rise;
We find, when perfected in love,
Our long-sought paradise.
O that I now the rest might know,
Believe, and enter in!
Now, Saviour, now the power bestow,
And let me cease from sin!
Remove this hardness from my heart,
This unbelief remove:
To me the rest of faith impart,
The sabbath of thy love.
Come, O my Saviour, come away
Into my soul descend!
No longer from thy creature stay,
My author and my end.
The bliss thou hast for me prepared,
No longer be delay'd:
Come, my exceeding great reward,
For whom I first was made.
Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
And seal me thine abode!
Let all I am in thee be lost:
Let all be lost in God!

Can anything be more clear, than, (1.) That here also is as full and high a salvation as we have ever spoken of? (2.) That this is spoken of as receivable by mere faith, and as hindered only by unbelief? (3.) That this faith, and consequently the salvation which it brings, is spoken of as given in an instant? (4.) That it is supposed that instant may be now? That we need not stay another moment? That “now,” the very “now, is the accepted time? Now is the day of’ this full “salvation?” And, Lastly, that, if any speak otherwise, he is the person that brings new doctrine among us?

15. About a year after, namely, in the year 1742, we published another volume of Hymns. The dispute being now at the height, we spoke upon the head more largely than ever before. Accordingly abundance of the hymns in this volume treat expressly on this subject. And so does the preface, which, as it is short, it may not be amiss to insert entire: --

(1.) Perhaps the general prejudice against Christian perfection may chiefly arise from a misapprehension of the nature of it. We willingly allow, and continually declare, there is no such perfection in this life, as implies either
a dispensation from doing good, and attending all the ordinances of God, or a freedom from ignorance, mistake, temptation, and a thousand infirmities necessarily connected with flesh and blood.

(2.) First. We not only allow, but earnestly contend, that there is no perfection in this life, which implies any dispensation from attending all the ordinances of God, or from doing good unto all men while we have time, though "especially unto the household of faith." We believe, that not only the babes in Christ, who have newly found redemption in his blood, but those also who are "grown up into perfect men," are indissolubly obliged, as often as they have opportunity, "to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of Him," and to "search the Scriptures;" by fasting, as well as temperance, to "keep their bodies under, and bring them into subjection;" and, above all, to pour out their souls in prayer, both secretly, and in the great congregation.

(3.) We Secondly believe, that there is no such perfection in this life, as implies an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, or mistake, in things not essential to salvation, or from manifold temptations, or from numberless infirmities, wherewith the corruptible body more or less presses down the soul. We cannot find any ground in Scripture to suppose, that any inhabitant of a house of clay is wholly exempt either from bodily infirmities, or from ignorance of many things; or to imagine any is incapable of mistake, or falling into divers temptations.

(4.) But whom then do you mean by "one that is perfect?" We mean one in whom is "the mind which was in Christ," and who so "walketh as Christ also walked;" a man "that hath clean hands and a pure heart," or that is "cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit;" one in whom is "no occasion of stumbling;" and who, accordingly, "does not commit sin." To declare this a little more particularly: We understand by that scriptural expression, "a perfect man," one in whom God hath fulfilled his faithful word, "From all your filthiness and from all your idols I will cleanse you: I will also save you from all your uncleannesses." We understand hereby, one whom God hath "sanctified throughout in body, soul, and spirit;" one who "walketh in the light as He is in the light, in whom is no darkness at all; the blood of Jesus Christ his Son having cleansed him from all sin."

(5.) This man can now testify to all mankind, 'I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' He is "holy as God who called' him 'is holy," both in heart and "in all manner of conversation." He "loveth the Lord his God with all his heart," and serveth him "with all his strength." He "loveth his neighbour," every man, "as himself;" yea, "as Christ loveth us;" them, in particular, that "despitefully use him and persecute him, because they know not the Son, neither the Father." Indeed his soul is all love, filled with "bowels of mercies, kindness, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering." And his life agreeeth thereto, full of "the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labour of love." 'And whatsoever' he "doeth either in word or deed," he "doeth it all in the name," in the love and power, "of the Lord Jesus." In a word, he doeth 'the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven.'

(6.) This it is to be a perfect man, to be "sanctified throughout;" even "to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God," (to use Archbishop Usher's words,) "as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ." In every thought of our hearts, in every word of our tongues, in every work of our hands, to "show forth his praise, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." O that both we, and all who seek the Lord Jesus in sincerity, may thus "be made perfect in one!" This is the doctrine which we preached from the beginning, and which we preach at this day.

Indeed, by viewing it in every point of light, and comparing it again and again with the word of God on the one hand, and the experience of the children of God on the other, we saw farther into the nature and properties of Christian perfection. But still there is no contrariety at all between our first and our last sentiments. Our first conception of it was, It is to have "the mind which was in Christ," and to "walk as He walked;" to have all the mind that was in Him, and always to walk as he walked: In other words, to be inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life. And we have the same conception of it now, without either addition or diminution.

16. The hymns concerning it in this volume are too numerous to transcribe. I shall only cite a part of three: --

Saviour from sin, I wait to prove
That Jesus is thy healing name;
To lose, when perfected in love,
Whate’er I have, or can, or am;
I stay me on thy faithful word,
“The servant shall be as his Lord.”
Answer that gracious end in me
For which thy precious life was given;
Redeem from all iniquity,
Restore, and make me meet for heaven.
Unless thou purge my every stain,
Thy suffering and my faith is vain.
Didst thou not die, that I might live,
No longer to myself but thee?
Might body, soul, and spirit give
To Him who gave himself for me?
Come then, my Master and my God,
Take the dear purchase of thy blood.
Thy own peculiar servant claim,
For thy own truth and mercy’s sake;
Hallow in me thy glorious name;
Me for thine own this moment take;
And change and throughly purify;
Thine only may I live and die. (Page 80.)
Chose from the world, if now I stand,
Adorn’d with righteousness divine;
If, brought into the promised land,
I justly call the Saviour mine;
The sanctifying Spirit pour,
To quench my thirst and wash me clean,
Now, Saviour let the gracious shower
Descend, and make me pure from sin.
Purge me from every sinful blot:
My idols all be cast aside:
Cleanse me from every evil thought,
From all the filth of self and pride.
The hatred of the carnal mind
Out of my flesh at once remove:
Give me a tender heart, resign’d,
And pure, and fall of faith and love.
O that I now, from sin released,
Thy word might to the utmost prove,
Enter into thy promised rest;
The Canaan of thy perfect love!
Now let me gain perfection’s height!
Now let me into nothing fall;
Be less than nothing in my sight,
And feel that Christ is all in all. (Page 258.)
Lord, I believe, thy work of grace
Is perfect in the soul;
His heart is pure who sees thy face,
His spirit is made whole.
From every sickness, by thy word,
From every foul disease,
Saved, and to perfect health restored,
To perfect holiness:
He walks in glorious liberty,
To sin entirely dead:
The Truth, the Son hath made him free,
And he is free indeed.
Throughout his soul thy glories shine,
His soul is all renew’d,
And deck’d in righteousness divine,
And clothed and fill’d with God.
This is the rest, the life, the peace,
Which all thy people prove;
Love is the bond of perfectness,
And all their soul is love.
O joyful sound of gospel grace!
Christ shall in me appear;
I, even I, shall see his face,
I shall be holy here!
He visits now the house of clay,
He shakes his future home; --
O would’st thou, Lord, on this glad day,
Into thy temple come!
Come, O my God, thyself reveal,
Fill all this mighty void;
Thou only canst my spirit fill:
Come, O my God, my God!
Fulfil, fulfil my large desires,
Large as infinity!
Give, give me all my soul requires,
All, all that is in thee!

(Page 298.)

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