

CHAPTER XII

ARTICLE XI.—*Of Justification and Sonship.*—We believe that God, on the sole ground of the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Christ, pardons those who by faith receive Him as their Saviour and Lord, accepts them as righteous and bestows upon them the adoption of sons, with a right to all the privileges therein implied, including a conscious assurance of their sonship.

The Christian is a new creation; and for him, in the vast transition from sin to salvation, all things are become new. In this article, two things that have become new are mentioned, each of which covers a world of new and blessed experiences. (1) A New Standing before God. Sin no longer acts as a barrier. No longer does it fill the soul with guilty fears, keeping it in bondage. The love of God has dealt effectively and finally with sin. Its condemnation is removed. Its power is broken. The conscience is cleansed. Peace is made; peace is inbreathed. All this is God's act. "There is forgiveness with thee." On God's part the forgiveness is infinitely costly. For man, it is absolutely free. The cry of the sinful is "Pardon mine iniquity, for *it is great!*" (How strange a reason!) The answer of God is swift, as though He had been waiting to be gracious, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Now this greatest of all wonders, this profoundest of all experiences, receives in theology the technical term "justification"; and, in a few closely-packed clauses, the article gives the outline of the Reforma-

tion doctrine of Justification by faith, as follows: (a) The ground of our justification, not the good works which we are enabled to do through God's grace assisting us, but the one great work of Christ, including both His "perfect obedience," and His "sacrifice," both of which were for us. (b) Its condition, not anything by which we could supplement the saving work of Christ, but the faith that receives Him as Saviour and Lord. (c) Its nature, twofold. First, "pardon," the removal of the guilt of sin. Second, "Acceptance." God can receive nothing into communion with Himself that is unholy. If He accepts us, it is because our real life is one with Christ. Not by a legal fiction does He accept us as righteous. The righteousness of Christ is genuinely ours, because He Himself is ours, and we His, in a living union. That this is So, was the discovery that Bunyan made, and that turned His darkness into light. "Now Christ was all; all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption." The doctrine is often stated in a hard legal form. It can only be appreciated, when we translate it into terms of personal relationships, and consider the union which exists between our Lord and ourselves, and between Him and the Father. (2) A New Relation to God. Those, who have been thus received and forgiven, stand to God in the relation of sons. It is true that God is our Creator, and we as the highest of His creatures, may not unfittingly be termed sons of God. But that is not the deepest sense of the phrase. Our sins

have separated us from God, and sonship has ceased to have a religious experimental meaning for us. But what we lost, we have regained through Christ, and is now ours in Him. This is the glorious fact, which fills Paul and John with joy and wonder. We who were self-exiled, are now taken into the family. The Father has bestowed on us the tender title of His children, and such we are! We have received the "Spirit of adoption," and from our lips flows the child's name of God, "Abba, Father!" As children of God, there is nothing that it is not ours in Christ. Unsearchable riches are ours. All things are ours. If children, then heirs; Heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Since this is so, it would be incredible, if we were not meant to know it. Sins into which we fall will cloud our souls. Disciplinary fears may beset us. But they who are children of God in Christ have it as their right and duty to live in full "assurance of their sonship."