

THE CHURCHES:
A HISTORY AND AN ARGUMENT

IN FOUR PARTS

BY HENRY DUNN

"What strange magic lies concealed in the word Church?" -- Robert Hall

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PREFACE

I PROPOSE in the following pages to inquire into the history and authority of that supposed visible 'Divine Society' known as the Church, or the Churches, which, under diverse forms, has, since the Apostolic age, claimed to represent Christianity upon the earth.

With ecclesiastical abuses, or with the imperfections attached to everything handled by mortals, I shall not meddle, The object of my inquiry is not to promote the reformation or removal of any wrong, whether recognized or unrecognized; not to ascertain what form of Church government should be regarded as most consonant to Scripture, or most admirable in working; but whether *any* ecclesiastical organization whatever has been ordained by God; whether the Post -- Apostolic Church, the Roman, the Reformed, the various Fellowships that have sprung up in countries where religious freedom has been secured, are not, one and all, of *human* origin, and therefore to be judged, modified, or removed as freely as other institutions.

I have been led to consider this subject by various considerations.

I. I have long been convinced that, whatever may have been the value of Church organizations in former days, or whatever may be their worth now, they have, to some extent at least, taken a place in men's esteem which properly belongs to Christ only. The late Dean Alford writing on this subject says,

"I speak for the Christian body to which I myself belong when I say I much fear our faith in our Church system, in our Creeds and Formularies and Sacraments, yea, and in the written word, is a *more real* and a stronger thing than our faith in the living present Person of our Divine Lord." If this opinion be well founded, and if it holds as true of other bodies as of the Episcopal Church, which can scarcely be doubted, it is surely time to ask whether or no institutions which thus come between the soul and its Redeemer are Divine in character.

II. I am equally satisfied that a great deal of that *passive resistance* to truth, which now unhappily characterizes so many amongst us, may be traced to deep seated and not altogether inexcusable prejudices against what is commonly regarded as *the representative of Christ* upon the earth, viz., the conflicting Societies, Churches, or Sects which, under professional guidance, divide the land, and are mixed up with a multitude of petty ambitions and purely secular interests.

III. I am also strongly inclined to believe that the *hatred and active opposition* of large classes all over Europe to the Christian faith, is, -- after allowing all that may be required for the natural enmity of the human heart -- mainly occasioned by the superstitions, the tyranny, and the priest craft which has so often marked the proceedings of Churches berth on the Continent and elsewhere.

IV. I see, or think I see, indications in the air of a coming tempest, before which the so called 'Bark of St. Peter' will be driven and founder; while smaller barks, the many 'little ships' which, though standing afar off, stud the lake on which she floats, will suffer shipwreck in her company; their crews, it may be hoped, meanwhile, 'some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship, escaping safe to land.' If this prognostic be a true one, -- if the vessels in which we have embarked are indeed likely before long to go to pieces, what can we do better than accept the situation, and *teach every man to swim?*

In short, it is because I believe that things present with us, and things to come, alike point to a time when Christians will want, not so much ecclesiastical patronage and instruction, as patience and courage to stand alone with Christ -- to learn front Him the lessons that He is perpetually imparting through the experiences of life, -- by its joys, its sorrows, and its inevitable loneliness, -- that I think it not merely expedient but imperative to inquire whether or no the Churches in which we have all sought shelter are or are not Divinely

ordained for our protection? -- whether, 'The Master' being in them, we may smile at storms, or whether the time is not at hand when each of us will do well individually to leave them and come to Christ upon the waves, even though it be in weakness, and in fear, and with the cry, 'Lord, save me, or I perish?'

BLACKHEATH,
May, 1872.

PART THE FIRST

THE CHURCH REGARDED IN ITS ORIGIN.

DEFINITIONS.

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I. THE MYSTICAL BODY.

III. THE EARTHLY ECCLESIA.

IV. THE COMMUNITIES OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE.

DEFINITIONS

i.

"THE visible Church of Christ is *a congregation* of faithful men in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."

"The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies and authority in Controversies of Faith: and yet it is not lawful for the Church to obtain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation." -- *Articles xix. xx. Church of England.*

ii.

"THE visible Church consists of all those Throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." -- *Confession of Faith, Ch. xxv.*

"The visible Church is a *Society* made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children."

"The visible Church hath the privilege of being under God's special care and Government; of being protected and preserved in all ages notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies; and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the gospel; testifying that whosoever believes in him shall be saved and excluding none that will come unto him." -- *Catechism of the Westminster Assembly.*

iii.

"THE Congregational churches hold it to be the will of Christ that true believers should voluntarily assemble together to observe religious ordinances, to promote mutual edification and holiness, to perpetuate and propagate the Gospel in the world, and to advance the glory and worship of God through Jesus Christ; and that each society of believers having these objects in view in its formation, is properly a Christian Church."

"They believe that no such persons should be received as members of Christian Churches, but such as make a credible profession of Christianity, are living according to its precepts, and attest a willingness to be subject to its discipline."

"The power of admission into any Christian Church, and rejection from it they believe to be vested in the Church itself, and to be exercised only through the medium of its own officers." -- *Declaration of the Faith, Church Order, and Discipline of the Congregational or Independent Dissenters.*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

AMONG the proposed canons laid before the recent Council at Rome were several which anathematized *all who deny* that the Church has received from the Lord Jesus Christ a certain and immutable form of constitution, incapable of adaptation to changing times and circumstances; *all who affirm* that it is composed of various and dispersed societies, forming collectively a universal Church: *all who hold* the true Church of Christ, out of which no one can be saved, is any other than the Holy Roman Apostolic Church.

Protestant communities, however conflicting may be their views, unite in denouncing claims so exclusive and intolerant as those which are here set forth. But what, it may be asked, do they think of such as run thus: -- "If any man say that the religion of Christ may be properly observed and exercised by individuals separately, *without relation to any society*, let him be anathema;" or, again, "If any man say that the Church of the Divine promises is not an external and visible society, but is entirely internal and invisible, let him be anathema?"

I do not suppose that any class of Protestant Christians would join in the declaration that he who denies the existence of an outward organized society called the Church is accursed; but I very much question whether any one of them, from the highest Anglican or Lutheran down to the Plymouth Brother, would do other than maintain that while a man denying the Divine origin of *all Churches* might be saved, he was yet in a dangerous case, and likely to suffer irreparable loss.

I suppose this because, amid the widest differences as to Church organization and government, all alike seem to hold that the Church in one form or other is ordained of God. I suppose most, if not all of them, maintain that "from the very beginning Divine truth has been enshrined in a human Society," and that it is now embodied in "a spiritual kingdom bound together by spiritual bonds;" that "God has provided for the whole earth becoming peopled by an organized society, and that He has furnished this society with all means needed for its enduring continuous life:" that He has, in fact, "once for all established the channels of grace in a living society which He animates evermore."

It is into the truth and value of this assumption that I propose to inquire. I wish to ascertain what evidence we have -- if any can be found -- that the Lord Jesus ever instituted any Church or society of the kind referred to; that He taught anything which should lead us to conclude that the Divine life cannot be properly sustained by *individuals* who seek to obey and serve Him without relation to any organization calling itself a Church?

Supposing it to be admitted, as it must be by every devout reader of Scripture, that the Church, which is 'the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who filleth all in all,' is a great and blessed reality; that, *regarded as invisible*, it embraces all, living or dead, who have ever lived in the faith and fear of God; and that, *considered as visible*, it consists of all who in whatever part of the world, may at any given time be living upon the earth as professed believers in Christ, and who are showing by their fruits the reality of their profession; -- admitting, I say, this, the question still remains, Where is the evidence that these persons are bound to constitute themselves into a society or series of societies called the Church; that in this character alone can Christianity properly be said to have a continuous existence, or to form a spiritual kingdom; that to some branch of this world -- embracing association every believer is bound as a loyal subject of Christ to belong?

The question is not whether the first Christians did or did not associate for united worship, common instruction, and mutual support, -- *that* no one can doubt. It is not whether or no common sense does not suggest that in all ages it will be found expedient that those who accept the person and teachings of the Savior shall, in religious communion, recognize their brotherhood, and in one form or other unite to strengthen each other's hands, to share each other's burdens, and to withstand the evil influences by which they are surrounded, for this, too, scarcely admits of dispute. The question is, whether or no Christ and His apostles founded a society, or number of societies, to some one of which every true Christian ought to belong; to whose teaching and discipline he is more or less bound to submit; in whose efforts for the evangelizing of the community he is called upon to share; and in whose arrangements for public worship he is under obligation in one form or other to take a part?

The inquiry is not one that can be disposed of in few words; it involves considerations of the deepest import; it lies at the root of Christ's idea of Christianity; its examination will be found to embrace the history of Christian progress from the beginning; will bring into relief the most essential questions at issue between the Church of Rome and Protestant communities, and will enable us to decide not so much *what form* the church of the future may be expected to take, as the more important one whether or no *any church of the future* will be found compatible with that general breaking up of traditional beliefs and dispersion of elements in human life, which, having held together since the downfall of the Roman empire, are now so obviously in solution.

In my opinion many 'signs of the times' lead to the expectation that some such result as that I have foreshadowed is not very distant. The opinions of some of the deepest and soundest thinkers of the present day turn in that direction.

One of the latest utterances of an eminent German theologian, recently deceased (Rothe), is thus reported: -- "The conversion," he said, "of the nations to Christ *tarries* until Christianity is stripped of its ecclesiastical mantle." These were the words of a man who, whatever may be our differences with him, desired "to gather and not to scatter; to build and not to pull down."

That he was wrong in imagining that churches -- understanding by that term organized associations for religious purposes, of an aggressive as well as protective character -- can exist without a creed of some kind, expressed or understood, I entertain no doubt; and it scarcely admits of dispute, that so long as these societies exist, they will, and must have their most vital beliefs in common. What should be included under the head of a vital belief is another question, into which it is not needful here to enter.

The more important inquiry is, Will *ecclesiastical bodies* of any kind long exist? and further, if in legal phrase they should "cease and determine" what results would follow? There are those and they cannot be despised -- who believe that the tide now setting in all over the world against ecclesiastical establishments is but the beginning of the end; that the accomplishment of the object desired -- the complete severance of churches from the State, and their consequent independence of Governments -- will, before many years are over, be followed by results at present but little anticipated; that the love of power inherent in all who imagine themselves authorized to sway the spirits of their fellow-men on earth by considerations bearing on the world to come, will manifest itself in unexpected forms; and that a reaction, probably in the direction of a thorough spiritual despotism, followed by an infidelity that will demand the suppression of all ecclesiastical associations, is sure, sooner or later, to follow.

On the probability of these predictions being verified I offer no opinion, since it could have no value; but it may not be amiss to suggest that, apart from these views altogether, it can scarcely be denied that churches of all kinds are *just now on their trial*. Among the more active-minded and thoughtful, professional ministrations are at present but lightly esteemed; oratory of any kind is indeed run after, as it always will be; but ordinary sermons are more frequently spoken of with contempt than respect; creeds are fast losing, if

they have not already lost, their old power, and discipline, where it is attempted, being no longer a reality, has become practically inoperative.

What the end of all this is to be, does not yet appear. One thing only may confidently be expected, viz., that in future men will be thrown much more on themselves, or rather on the Divine teacher and guide within them, than they have hitherto been; individual convictions will, as a rule, have to take the place of church authority and Christian life may be expected to manifest itself rather in social than in congregational forms. To some extent it is already doing so. The various societies of a benevolent character which now cluster around churches, and form the pillars of their strength, hang very loosely on the ecclesiastical principle. The action they take, is not, as a rule, church action; it is simply that of a body of Christian men who have combined in order to accomplish some good object in common.

Whether this state of things is an evil or a good may be settled by others. I am dealing only with *the fact*, and I refer to it for the purpose of expressing my conviction that before long that which obtains in benevolent effort will be found to characterize theological movements. Men will meet together to edify one another even as they now meet together to do good. They may associate as they now do for the purpose, among other things, of spreading their views among the community, but this will not be their primary object; their first thought will be *enlargement in the truth through the moral elevation of their own characters*; the social will override the congregational, and the vitality of a belief will be tested rather by its binding power than by its supposed agreement with existing confessions.

Out of this state of things will probably spring results now vainly and darkly groped after by organizations like the *Protestantenverein* of Germany; charity will supersede authority, and souls will be held captive by what Dr. Newman, in his better days, acknowledged to be apostolic, -- the tie which binds through the regenerate affections of human nature," The Church of Christ will then appear, not in the form of one or of innumerable organized societies; still less in that of a corporation surrounded by privileges and bristling with authority; but in the lives of hood men, taught by the Spirit of God, having a oneness of hope and aim incapable of being perceived in any other way than by their obvious unselfishness and unworldliness. Then may we hope to find out the true relation in which spiritual men stand to that part of society which is not yet distinctively Christian.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTICAL BODY

THE CHURCH, rightly viewed, is the Mystical Body of Christ. It is the entire congregation of believers whether now on earth, or in the invisible world. It embraces all who have ever lived in the faith and fear of God, of whatever name, age, or country. It is therefore of necessity immeasurable by man, and invisible to the human eye.

VISIBLE CHRISTIANITY, as existing or established at any given time in this or that country, is another and a very different thing. *This*, which commonly takes the shape of one or more institutes for the support and propagation of what is believed to be the Truth, is 'the earth bringing forth fruit of herself,' and, as such, is influenced from age to age by the operations of the ordinary laws of the moral world.

A *portion* of the mystical body of Christ may be, and probably is, embodied in nearly every form of visible Christianity; but this portion is known only to God, and is supernaturally sustained; it alone is exempt from ordinary laws and is imperishable. 'The parables which relate to the 'seed of the Kingdom,' refer, for the most part, to visible Christianity. The promises belong only to the Body that is invisible.

Such is the Church which the Apostles have presented to us in the most dignified and attractive forms. It is, although invisible to mortal eye, the spiritual and holy Temple; the chosen dwelling-place of the Most High; the Spouse of the Redeemer; the Bride, 'holy and without blemish;' the 'Flock that the Lord has purchased with His own blood;' the Body of Christ, -- 'the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.'

Viewed in this aspect, -- the only one in which glorious things are spoken of it, -- the Church comes before us simply as a spiritual calling; a body that is ever changing, -- always departing and always being reproduced, invisible and yet visible; *visible* to the extent that the Divine Life is manifested in individuals; invisible to the extent in which it embraces men and women whose true characters will never be known until 'the day shall declare it.' It lives by faith and not by sight; it is sustained by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every one of its members; it is kept in being, generation after generation, by a perpetual effluence from God.

This Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, cannot therefore be an *organized* body, nor can it consist of various organizations. ONE, indeed, it is, but its unity consists in sameness of privilege and of relationship to Christ, not in discipline or organization of any kind. *As a fact* it exists at this day to a great extent without intercommunication. It is influential, but its influence is like that of light, -- subtle and incomprehensible; it assimilates and it transforms, but it does not force into any inflexible mould. It is THE ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC CHURCH, only because it has One Head, and One Law, and breathes one spirit.

It has been said that an outward and visible form is inseparable from the idea of a living and growing body which the Church is; that its members can only know each other through organizations. But this is not the fact. It is not needful to recognize men in the flesh in order to have oneness with them; to feel that we have the same afflictions and the same comforts; that we are fellow-pilgrims; that we have common sympathies; that we are all 'cheating the wilderness of its weariness' by the same songs that have gladdened the righteous in all ages.

How different this kind of communion is from that which belongs, or ever can belong, to any outward society that in this dispensation is likely to exist, it is needless to say. No envying and no strife are there; no

'weak and beggarly elements;' no hypocrites, and no self-deceived; no error, no imperfection, no sin. The idea of such a Church is simply that of a spiritual, and, therefore, invisible society, "holding the truth in its integrity, living in fellowship with the glorified Redeemer, and reflecting upon the world the light of His holiness."

When, it may well be asked, was this ever done by an organization? *When*, it may also be asked was it not done by individual believers? They, and they only, 'unknown and yet well known,' have always been the 'lights of the world' and 'the salt of the earth.' By them only, as the true Church of Christ, has 'the manifold wisdom of God been made known unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places.' This, and this only, is the great spiritual body constituted in Christ which the angels contemplate, and which is to them as Stier puts it, the yeatron thv doxhz ton yeon.

It is necessary to keep these things in mind whenever we read or speak of the Church or of Churches, and especially when we peruse what is recorded in Scripture regarding the Christian Fellowships of the Apostolic age. Failing to do so we shall be almost sure to *transfer* what is proper to that scattered flock known only to God, to the particular societies which existed in primitive times, and which were called in a *limited and conventional sense* 'Churches,' the word simply meaning assemblies. We are the more likely to do this because the Apostolic Epistles are commonly addressed to the societies of believers then existing in a particular city or district, with or without their 'Bishops and Deacons.'

It has been said by some that this particularity of address indicates that God deals only with a *visible Church*; that the Christian body, when organized as a visible society is a "Sacramental medium between Heaven and Earth;" that it is an institution established by God himself, and endowed with supernatural privileges in order that *as a Corporate Body* it might represent the Lord upon the earth, realize before the world the new duties and relations Christianity brings to light, and be a perpetual witness of the Covenant made with man through Christ. Nay more, that this Corporate Body is empowered to furnish prepared minds with "supernatural aids" adequate to their spiritual renewal. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and what are commonly called "Means of Grace," are supposed to be of this character.

But nothing of the sort appears in the New Testament. There the Holy Spirit is said to dwell in the heart of the individual believer (1 Cor. 6:19), and in the body of believers in all parts of the world regarded as a whole (2 Cor. 12:27), *but never in any organization*. Each Christian separately, in his individual capacity, is bidden by his personal example in the world, to show forth the character of Christ. He is to be to 'those that are without' what salt is to that which is corrupting, a preserving element. The body of believers, each member in his own sphere, is to sway men for good by what has been termed "an indefinable, immeasurable effluence of assimilative virtue." Only the individual *can* exhibit the Lord Christ as the ideal of humanity, the image of the invisible God. And for this reason. An organized society, when regarded as a body corporate can have no moral character and therefore no spiritual endowments. It may insist on uniformity, but it cannot command unity, which implies unanimity, -- the result of agreement in individual convictions arising out of a common and pervading influence over the minds of all.

I repeat, -- the only Church with which any man can have true spiritual communion is the invisible one. It is in fellowship with that alone that we feel our solitariness and peculiar miseries alleviated. It is in union with it, and not with any organization that we perceive the same afflictions to be ours that have been the lot of the good in all ages; that we are but one of a mighty company cheering each other by common sympathies, and having one hope, one heart, one song. Hence it is that a good man, to whatever so called Church he may belong, really holds communion with other Christians, *not* in proportion to their agreement with him in opinion; not because they may happen to worship within the same walls; not because, belonging to the same society they commune together at the table of the Lord; but because, and in proportion as he discerns the likeness of Christ to be developed in the person to whom he is drawn by spiritual affinity.

This, -- the invisible, -- is the Church which ever growing and advancing in silence and secrecy, 'without noise of hammer or axe or any tool of iron' is known only by its fruits. This alone is the Church which Christ is building, and against which 'the gates of Hell shall not prevail.' Organizations, supposed to be Divine have, one after another perished and will perish. This alone, resting on 'the Rock of Ages' can never fail, for *'the Lord knoweth them that are His.'*

Who can say that it would not have been well for the cause of Christianity had no other Church ever been recognized; if no lying words had ever proclaimed 'the Temple of the Lord are these'; if man and his devices had never been confounded with that which is Divine; if the world had never seen any embodiment of Christian Truth other than that which is presented by a Christ-like spirit striving, however imperfectly, to realize the image of the Master? Yet from Christians generally all this seems to be hidden. He who suggests such a possibility can only be to them as 'one that dreameth.' *Where*, say they, in this case would be the witness to the world? Where the one-ness which the world is to see and to believe?

I might retort, -- 'What is the worth of that witness which for eighteen hundred years organized churches as such have furnished to the unbeliever? Where and when has that unity been manifested *by them* which the world was to recognize, and before which it was to bow?' But retort of this kind does no good. In the chapters that are to follow I shall endeavor to answer these questions calmly and seriously; merely observing now that whether we study the history of the Ancient Church, of the Empire Church, of National Churches, or of the Churches of the Denominations, we meet everywhere with overwhelming evidence that any society which necessarily comprehends, as all human churches must do, the spiritual and the unspiritual, the deceived and the sincere, can never, when regarded as a whole, be a witness for God, the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, or the visible depository of truth and goodness.

But more. Were it otherwise, -- were it possible to collect men who should be all saints, and all therefore in the highest sense children of God, -- *these too*, if formed into an association and presented to the world as an organized body, would fail to witness; they could only be misunderstood. All that was earthly about them, -- their defects, their weaknesses, their outward form, the machinery they might employ, their various philanthropic efforts, wise or unwise, these would be seen and known. But the life that moved the whole would be unknown; nor would it be possible for the ungodly to recognize in such a body anything essentially different from other associations which, formed for good ends, are always liable to be perverted to bad ones, and to be deformed by pride, ambition, or worldliness -- *'The world knoweth us not.'*

CHAPTER III

THE EARTHLY ECCLESIA

I HAVE already said that, properly speaking, the only true Church on earth at any given time is that portion of the Mystical Body of Christ which may be then living, whether the members of this believing host be known to each other or not; whether they unite in one or various fellowships; or whether, -- as some *unwisely* did in Apostolic times, they 'forsake the assembling of themselves together,' and so fail to 'exhort' and 'edify' one another.

I firmly maintain that intercommunion or reciprocal action of any kind does not make believers a Church. If they never saw each other's faces in the flesh they would still be the Church, -- a Brotherhood and a unity; and this simply because, in the absence of any outward bond of union, each would be allied by one spirit to the same Head, and all would be one in Christ Jesus.

Nevertheless, it is as certain as anything recorded in Scripture can be, that societies of believers meeting together for worship and instruction existed during the lifetime of the Apostles. Neither is there any question as to these organizations having been formed under the direction of the inspired guides of the Christian community. The Pastoral Epistles of St. Paul are full of instructions for their governance. What we wish therefore to ascertain is not whether Churches, so called, existed in the Apostolic age, nor yet how they were governed, but *in what sense* they were called 'Churches,' and to what extent they were intended to be models for our imitation?

The question we want settled may be put thus: -- Does the testimony of Scripture lead us to suppose that Christ and His Apostles established, or at least laid the foundation of a society or series of societies *intended for permanence*, and more or less corresponding to what are now known as Churches? Did they, so far as we can gather from the Sacred Record, contemplate the existence in the future, either of one organized body, or of various organizations, in which the Spirit of God would emphatically dwell; to which the rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper should peculiarly belong; and in connection with which an agency for the preaching of the Gospel, provision for the edification of the Body of Christ, regulations for order and discipline, with facilities for the recognition of truth and the discouragement of error should always be found?

Almost all Christians, whatever may have been their name, have, for ages, rested in the assurance that such a society *has* been established, and that union with it, in one form or other, is one of the first of Christian obligations. Modern Christians believe this as firmly as their fathers did. Their differences relate only to *the kind of organization* supposed to be necessary to the constitution of a rightly ordered Church, and to the question whether or no any given body of men can rightly put forward a claim to exercise, directly or indirectly, supervision or control over other persons or Churches in their ecclesiastical affairs?

I have undertaken to investigate the evidence on which this all but universal belief in Churches rests, chiefly because it becomes more and more evident every day, that future religious controversies will ultimately be found to center in one, viz., CHURCH or No CHURCH; that everything else will be found to turn on this question, involving, as it does, the paramount authority or otherwise of the New Testament over all the judgments and decisions of men; the fact that Private judgment, as the correlative of Personal Responsibility, is not only a right but *a duty*; the recognition or non-recognition of a voice, human, yet claiming to be Divine, which offers to share the perils of decision regarding truth, and to guide the perplexed in paths of peace and safety.

Of course it will be said that all consistent Protestants, while holding to the Divine appointment of Churches, fully allow the paramount authority of Scripture; that they all recognize the right of Private Judgment in its interpretation; and that many of them utterly repudiate the pretence that it is possible to share with any individual the responsibility which attaches to decision as to what is truth.

But who does not know that *influence*, calmly and quietly brought to bear under the sanction of those who are dearest to us, sets all professions of freedom aside, and is far more powerful in controlling the mind than even the exercise of compulsion could be. And who can fail to recognize the force of that influence in the fact that, *as a rule*, -- for the exceptions are few, -- one generation follows another in its adherence to church forms, almost as regularly in the smallest sect as in the Church of Rome itself. Trained, from earliest childhood, to regard a particular church as the truest embodiment of Christianity; taught to honor its ministry, to attend its services, and to accept its theology as of Divine authority, the child, if influenced at all by religious considerations, almost invariably treads in the footsteps of the parent, and helps to perpetuate truths, errors, traditions and prejudices, with equal and indiscriminating zeal.

It may perhaps be replied that this is the result, not of Church organization, but of that natural and divinely ordained influence which a parent is bound to exercise over his of[spring]. Such however is not the fact. The influence in question is Ecclesiastical; in the first instance commonly acting on the child *through* the parent: in later life through habit, through social connections of various kinds, and above all through the force of that mental inertia in regard to spiritual truth, which has been by Church influences, year after year, formed and fostered. When we ask therefore, in relation to these institutions, 'What saith the Scripture?' we ask a question which, in the case of the great majority of religious professors, has never been made a subject of consideration.

The word 'Ecclesia' is, as we all know, used in the New Testament in different senses. It designates in one instance a tumultuous assembly, where we are told the 'Ecclesia' was confused (Acts 29:32-40). It is applied in another place to the body of Israelites in the desert, where Moses is spoken of as 'he who was in the Church in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38). In many other instances it stands for the assemblies of the Christians of a given town or city, whether meeting together in one place or several (Acts 11:22; 1 Cor. 16:19). In this sense it embraces the various fellowships established by Apostolic direction either in Judea or among the Gentiles (Rom. 16:4; 1 Cor. 8:17). These assemblies, whether consisting of many or few, are sometimes addressed as companies of 'saints,' since they are 'called' to be such, and profess to be holy notwithstanding the presence among them of unsanctified persons; but as *organized bodies* they are never spoken of as the Temples of God or as Christ's witnesses.

Nor is this done in relation to *particular sections* of such assemblies; for no reference whatever can be found in the New Testament corresponding to the distinction now made between the Church and the Congregation, -- the worshippers and the communicants. The outward organization is always assumed to be but 'a shadow of good things to come;' the Body, known only to the Lord, is Christ. '*He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom.*'

It is also worthy of notice that in some instances a pious family or a few friends assembling in a private house is called a Church (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:5). In short, we have only to substitute the phrase 'assembly of believers,' in almost all cases where the word 'Church' occurs, in order to see how independent the term is of any form of organization whatever.

Two instances in which the 'Ecclesia' is referred to in the New Testament, seem to deserve special notice. The first occurs in Matthew's Gospel (xvi, i8), where our Lord says to Simon, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.' As Protestants, we very properly reject the notion that Peter was *individually* the 'rock;' but we are not equally consistent when we suppose that the 'Church' which Christ tells us He was

about to found was an organized society. It is plain enough that Jesus speaks here of all who should believe in Him irrespective of any organization. This might be inferred from the fact that the basis of union is one with which no ecclesiastical body since the Apostles' time has ever been content, -- the confession simply being 'Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.' *

The *second* instance is found in the same Gospel (Matt. 18:17), where Christ says that if a man neglect to 'hear the Church,' he is to be regarded as 'a heathen man and a publican.' Here one naturally asks '*What Church?*' and the reply is obvious. Clearly that 'assembly' which alone existed at the time the words were uttered, -- the one that was composed almost exclusively of the Apostles, -- men endowed not only with miraculous power against unclean spirits, but able both to smite and to heal, to bind and to loose, to forgive and to retain sin; men permitted to say, without blame, 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us' (Acts 15:28; 1 Cor. 5:4, 5).

Such is the testimony of Scripture regarding the use of the word 'Ecclesia,' and, so far as I can see, it is plain from it that nowhere does 'Church or Churches' express what we now understand by that term, viz., a community of persons, gathered by God, in order that, as a *unity*, -- in whatever way that unity may be manifested, it should become 'a pillar and ground of the truth;' that the term does not designate the divinely appointed agency "for maintaining and teaching the doctrines as well as for cherishing and diffusing the spirit of the Gospel;" that it is not intended to mark out and make known "a body instituted by God Himself, to which men, as men, are invited to belong, and to which no one can refuse to belong without abandoning his own human privileges, and denying the privileges of his fellow-men."

In the inspired testimony I can see nothing which should lead me to conclude that the primitive communities were other than temporary expedients, such as any one seeking to plant Christianity in a heathen land would naturally, if not necessarily resort to, as a means of strengthening the weak, of instructing the ignorant, and of keeping together the scattered.

But I can find nothing whatever that should lead us to suppose that these fellowships were *intended* to be models for all time; that they were *adapted* to altogether different circumstances; that they were *meant* to develop into a hierarchy charged with an obligation to subdue the world; or that they are even *represented* by assemblies which are based on distinctive doctrines, and which, at one and the same time, manifest to the world the points on which Christians differ, and propagate in the Christian community such particular views of truth as are held by those who maintain them to be important and distinctive. Had the early churches been intended to endure I cannot but think that an Apostolate would have been continued. But it is admitted by almost all Protestants at least, that "the apostles had no successors in their office. They stand alone as the divinely inspired teachers, legislators, and rulers in Christ's Church. They stand alone as men appointed and commissioned by Christ Himself and not by man: whereas all Christian ministers since their time, of whatsoever order or degree, have been fallible men, and have been appointed and commissioned by man, -- by the authority of the particular Church in which they were to minister. It is impossible, with any show of reason or truth, to draw the line at any one place in the history of the Church after the apostles had been withdrawn, and to say, before this the Church was divinely preserved from error, -- after this it was fallible and erred. Nor can the *nearness* of the early Church to the Apostles' time be with any effect pleaded in behalf of its authority For it is not being *near* to truth and wisdom that makes men true and wise." **

* It will no doubt be observed that in this brief review of the texts in which the word 'Ecclesia' is found, all notice of its use in the Apocalypse has been omitted. This has been done advisedly; because it is at least uncertain whether the seven Epistles are literally letters to existing fellowships. It is for many reasons *exceedingly unlikely* that if they were so, they should be found in a book avowedly symbolic, and relating for the most part to a distant future. It is far more probable, from the structure of these compositions; from the correspondence between the names of the churches and their characteristics; and especially from the apparent impossibility of finding in the early Christian Communities any person or office corresponding to 'the Angel of the Church,' that these messages, are like the rest of the book, *prophetic*. This view has been taken by Commentators of high standing.

** Dr. Jacob on 'Ecclesiastical Polity,' pp. 27, 28.

That the word ' Church,' as used by the writers of the New Testament, designates such associations of believers for common worship and mutual instruction as *then* existed; that these brotherhoods were formed under Apostolic sanction; that they consisted of persons who were united by a common faith in Christ; and that they answered important ends in the establishment of that faith among men is not questioned. But that these fellowships, *when regarded as a whole*, were supposed to constitute the visible Church of Christ; that the term implies a divinely constituted organization, possibly admitting of modification under changing circumstances, but essentially imperishable; that it indicates an institution *against* which 'the gates of Hell ' shall never prevail, in which the Holy Spirit will perpetually preside, and to which special privileges and special obligations belong, is emphatically denied. To suppose, as many do, that the taking of the Lord's Supper together constituted the first Christian Church, or that they were organized for the purpose of communion in it, is to forget that the command 'Hear the Church ' was issued at a time when no organization of the Christian body existed, and when the future institution of the Lord's Supper was not even dreamt of by the disciples.

What then, it may be said, was the basis of association? Around what did the first Christians gather?

Not certainly around any opinion or set of opinions, or any particular doctrine which distinguished one Christian from another; for at this time differences of view with regard to revealed truth had not arisen. At a later period parties sprang up who favored particular teachers and called themselves after their names, -- one was of Paul and another of Cephas, But these differences were only strongly expressed preferences, leading perhaps to some alienation of feeling, although not occasions of separation. The persons who indulged in them are however sharply rebuked by the Apostle.

Equally certain is it, -- however generally a contrary supposition may be entertained, -- that they did not gather around a rite, -- that of the Lord's Supper. They partook continually of that feast of love without question, and it was obviously held by them in the highest estimation, both as a memorial of the love of their departed Lord, and as a sign of their affection one for another. But the observance of this ordinance was only one object among others for which they assembled. It occupied no peculiar place. It was not, so to speak, "fenced," as something more sacred than prayer or praise. It was a part, but a part only, of their daily service. Nor is there the slightest reason to suppose that the apostles would have refused to commune at the table of the Lord with any individual in whose company they would have prayed or sang praises. For any one *then* to have refused communion with a professing Christian on the ground that he had not given evidence of conversion, would have seemed as strange to the Christian body as it now does to us when any one refuses to unite in prayer with persons of whose regeneration by the Holy Spirit we are not assured.

That such would be the case might naturally be inferred from the circumstances under which the Lord's Supper was first instituted; for it was originally grafted on the Passover, and made, like it, a feast of thanksgiving.

A brief description of that ancient ordinance will help us to understand this.

THE PASSOVER.

It is difficult for us, in this age, vividly to realize the general joy which distinguished a Jewish Passover in the best days of the Hebrew commonwealth; and still harder is it to form any adequate conception of the *domestic happiness* involved in a feast which brought gladness into the heart and home of every faithful Israelite. It was the most eminent of all their festivals; for it was the perpetual memorial of their signal deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and of the favor which God showed them when the avenging angel slew in one night all the firstborn of their oppressors, but passed over the dwellings of Israel.

On this festive occasion it was the custom at Jerusalem for the inhabitants to give the free use of their rooms and furniture to strangers, that all might celebrate the feast, and all feel that they were brethren. The group or family who united in the observance never consisted of more than twenty persons; it was ordinarily ten; our Lord's company consisted of thirteen, viz., Himself and the twelve. These groups were called brotherhoods, and the guests were entitled companions, or friends. Where a family was too small to eat a whole lamb, two families were to join together; and if any household was too poor to purchase a lamb, their neighbors received them as guests.

The company being placed around the table, They mingled a cup of wine with water, over which the master of the family gave thanks, and then drank it off. The thanksgiving for the wine was to this effect, -- "Blessed be Thou, O Lord, who hast created the fruit of the vine;" and for the day as follows: -- "Blessed be Thou for this good day, and for this holy convocation., which Thou hast given us for Joy and rejoicing ! Blessed be Thou, O Lord, who hast sanctified Israel and the times."

They then washed their hands, after which the table was furnished. The father of the family next took a small piece of salad, and having blessed God or creating the fruit of the ground, he ate it, as also did the other guests; after which all the dishes were removed from the table, that the children might inquire and be instructed in the nature of the feast (Exod. 12:25, 26). Then replacing the supper, they explained the import of the bitter herbs and the paschal lamb, and, over the second cup of wine, repeated the hundred and thirteenth (Psa. 113) and hundred and fourteenth psalms (Psa. 114), with a eucharistic prayer.

The hands were now again washed, accompanied by an ejaculatory prayer: after which the master of the house proceeded to *bless and break* a cake of the unleavened bread, which he distributed among the guests, reserving half of the cake beneath a napkin for the last morsel. Then they ate the portion of cake which had been distributed, dipping the bread into the sauce. Next they ate the flesh of the peace offerings, and then the flesh of the paschal lamb, which was followed by returning thanks to God, and again washing their hands.

A *third* cup of wine was now filled, over which they blessed God, whence it was called *the cup of blessing*. Lastly, a *fourth* cup of wine was filled, called the cup of the hallel; over it they completed, either by singing or recitation, the great hallel, or hymn of praise, consisting of Psalms 115 to Psa. 118 inclusive, with a prayer, and so concluded the passover.*

Let us note then regarding it, *first*, that it was a *household* feast; for it took place, not in the temple, nor yet in the synagogues -- although at one time there were 480 of these buildings in Jerusalem, to which they might have resorted, -- but in the *homes* of the people. It was not, therefore, a congregational assembly, but a household supper. For its performance, "upper rooms" were generally constructed in Jewish houses, and *here* it was that the Hebrew householder formally acted as the priest of his own house, -- its teacher and its minister, in the highest solemnities of worship. Of this feast it has been well said, that, conducted as it was with music and worship, mingled with cheerful conversation and instruction in the highest truths, "it united the charm of an English Christmas gathering with the holiness of heaven."

* See Horne's "Critical introduction," who abridges from Lightfoot and others,

Such was the Passover generally. But it *might*, and doubtless was sometimes, taken amid tears, and clouded by the sadness of recent or expected calamity. Beloved members of the household might then be dying or recently dead; misfortune might have swept away all the worldly prospects of the family; or approaching ruin might be but too clearly casting its shadows before.

Something of this sort doubtless hovered over that upper room in which Jesus and His disciples met for the last time to celebrate the feast. He had told them He was about to be delivered into the hands of sinners; he had signified who it was that should betray Him; He had warned Peter that before morning he would deny Him thrice ; and their hearts were troubled.

But a new signification had now been given both to the bread and wine; for 'as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; *this* is My body, which is given for you,' -- obviously intending that they should understand Him to say, 'This *represents* My body given for you,' for *the bread* was not given for them, but *Christ himself*. After the same manner also 'He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament [or covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins ;' or, as St. Luke records it, 'This cup *is the New Testament* [or covenant] in My blood, which is shed *for you*' (comp. Matt. 26:27, 28, and Luke 22:19-20.)

To these words, according to Luke, He added, after taking the bread, 'This do in remembrance of Me;' and according to St. Paul, who received it by special revelation, after taking the wine, 'This do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do spew the Lord's death *till He come*' (1 Cor. 11:26).

That thirty years after this affecting scene the Christian passover consisted of a social meal, partaken, if not in common, at least in one room, by rich and poor, there seems to be little doubt, from St. Paul's rebuke of the abuses which had crept into the Corinthian church in connection with it. What we *now* understand by the term, "the Lord's Supper," viz., the symbolical breaking of bread and drinking of wine, *then* probably took place at the close of a festival which seems to have been intended to correspond in many respects with the Jewish passover.

When or by what authority such a feast was appointed is by no means clear; but it probably arose out of the old and delightful associations which the Jewish converts cherished in connection with the passover festival, -- Nothing would seem to them more natural than to institute such an *agape*, or love feast, and to connect it with the commemoration of the great sacrifice. Neander, speaking of this time, says, "The holy supper continued to be connected with the common meal, in which all, as members of one family, joined, as in the primitive Jewish Church, and agreeably to its first institution."

The error of the Corinthians was twofold: *first*, they had converted that which was essentially a household feast into a public one. Hence the apostle says, 'When ye come together *unto one place*, this is not to eat,' or -- as the margin reads -- ' ye *cannot* eat the Lord's supper. Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in,' -- habitations where, as of old, ye may meet in groups or companies? *Secondly*, they had ceased to regard the spirit of the feast, which, like the Jewish passover, had been evidently intended to develop the true brotherhood of the redeemed family; since, to avoid baying their poorer brethren at their own houses, they had transferred the feast to the church, where, *in little companies*, the rich with the rich, and the poor with the poor, they, *in professed union*, but in real separation, ate and drank. In this they followed an ancient custom of the Greeks, * who were in the habit of holding entertainments at which each one brought his food with him, and consumed it alone.

* The prominent Grecian character and constitution of the Corinthian church is manifest in many particulars. (See Neander.)

What! says the indignant apostle, 'despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?' i.e., that have no houses, or, as it reads in the margin, 'them that are poor?' As a natural result, that which the apostle so condemns took place; every one took *his own* supper, and while one (the poor man) was hungry, having little or nothing to supply his table, the other (the rich man) was 'drunken,' i.e., luxurious and self-indulgent. The whole thing had become *unreal*, -- a mockery, and, *like all unreal things in Christian profession*, it was hateful in the sight of God.

When or how the social feast was given up does not appear. But that, in process of time, it was abandoned seems clear, the symbolic breaking of bread and drinking of wine being again reverted to *as the appointed mode* of showing forth the death of the Redeemer. I say 'reverted to,' because there is nothing to show that any feast corresponding to that of the passover was ever divinely appointed; and there is no reason to believe that it was the practice of the *first* Christians to do more than eat and drink together in token of their love to one another, and to their common Lord.

The point which seems quite clear is, that the ordinance was *at first* household rather than congregational in character; that it was a feast of love, consecrating *the home* of the believer, rather than a rite administered to hundreds at once, strangers for the most part to each other, or at best having little sympathy beyond that which may be supposed to be generated by publicly worshipping the same Lord within the same building, and listening to the teaching of the same minister.

Further, if it be held that the first Christians gathered together merely or chiefly that they might commune in the Holy Supper, it is necessary to assume that the words of the Lord Jesus recorded in the sixth chapter of John were without meaning *until* the Supper was instituted; that before this ordinance was appointed the disciples of the Lord could neither eat His flesh nor drink His blood; that, in fact, He only *became* 'the bread of life' after He had suffered.

Nothing of this kind, however, can be gathered from the text. His words are, 'I *am* the bread of life.' 'Except ye eat' (now and evermore) 'the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.' And if it be said, how could this be done? the Lord himself shall supply the answer.' The flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.' As the living father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.' 'My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him that sent These words, spoken *before* the institution of the ordinance, at once show the figurative use of the phrases which imply feeding, and they cast light on what Jesus intended to teach when He spake of eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

In the only instance where Christ, so to speak, *anticipated* a blessing that was to be bestowed at a later period, we are expressly told that such was the case. The Evangelist, after narrating how Jesus had declared Himself to be 'living water,' adds, 'This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified' (John 7:39).

If then the first Christians did not gather around either a doctrine or a rite, what *was* the bond of union? Obviously a *Person*, -- the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Whoever recognized in Jesus the true Messiah, -- whoever believed that He was the Son of God, the sent of the Father, became by that act a member of the Christian family. He was not admitted into that family after examination or inquiry, by vote, or by any other act of the body; he was *born into it*, by being born from above. He became a brother as the necessary consequence of that teaching by the power of which he had discerned in Jesus the Head and Ruler of the kingdom of God.

He was baptized, of course, if either a Jew or a heathen; for all persons coming out of either Judaism or heathenism submitted to a rite which involved the open profession of the faith; which carried with it the

risks attendant upon that profession; and which introduced the baptized, so to speak, into the worship of God as revealed by Christ, viz., as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

And here it may be well to say a few words on the origin of this rite.

BAPTISM

The first notice we have in the sacred record of water -- baptism is found in connection with the preaching of John, and some have therefore hastily concluded that such a rite was until then unknown, -- that it dates from that time.

This conclusion, however, is not even a probable one, since it is extremely unlikely that scribes and Pharisees, 'all Judea and Jerusalem,' would have come out to be baptized of John, had they not been familiar with such a custom, Still less would they have said to him, 'Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ, neither Elias, nor that prophet?' for the question implies a belief that Messiah or Elias would, when they came, baptize with authority.

Our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus also clearly indicates that as 'a master in Israel' the ruler ought to have been acquainted, not only with a new birth, but also with a water -- baptism. And so he was; for the new birth was spoken of by the prophets in connection with the kingdom, and baptism was practiced when proselytes were received.

Ancient Jewish writers distinctly and expressly state that every convert to the faith of their nation was received by baptism* as a proselyte, and in that act regarded as newly born. "The Gentile," says Maimonides, "that is made a proselyte, and the servant that is made free, behold, he is like a child new born." It is, however, worth notice that baptism never took the place of circumcision. The Jewish proselyte was both baptized and circumcised.

Knowing these things, Nicodemus ought not to have been surprised to hear that secret disciples could not be accepted; that he must dare the ignominy of a public profession, and so be born not of the Spirit only, but of water. Yet no one can be surprised that as a ruler he should stumble at the very thought of being placed on a level with a heathen proselyte. The baptism referred to was of course that of John, which was also that of our Lord and his disciples. Christian baptism was not at that time instituted.

Regarding baptism, then, as of Jewish origin, the question naturally arises, what did this rite signify when practiced in Israel? Evidently this, -- that the convert was, so to speak, 'born again;' that he had entered upon a new life and upon new relations. The same thing was implied in the baptism of John. It was a public avowal of belief in a coming Messiah, and the profession of a desire and intention to forsake sin, and to enter upon a new life.

Sometimes, however, baptism among the Jews signified a separation for service. Aaron was on this account washed or baptized in the presence of the people by Moses as a part of his consecration to office. After this act and that of anointing had been performed, Aaron was officially recognized by God, -- 'The glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle ' (Lev. 8:6; Exod. 11:34).

* For authorities as to this and some other statements, see Smith's Dictionary, Vol. III., p. lxxxv., Appendix. Also Vol. II., art. 'Proselytes.'

The baptism of Jesus was probably of this character. In it He 'fulfilled all righteousness,' not only by thus setting His seal, as it were, to the ministry of John, but also by this public consecration of Himself to His work, in the way and at the time recognized by Jewish law, viz., at thirty years of age, the period before which it was enjoined by the law no priest should commence his ministry (Num. 4:3). As soon as this act was performed, the recognition of it followed in a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

As I have already observed, after the death of John, his baptism seems to have been continued by the disciples, and probably did not cease till Pentecost. The later baptism of the apostles, although in one sense a fuller development of that of the Forerunner, was in another sense altogether distinct. The former baptized 'with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on Him which should come after him.' The latter was a profession of belief in a Christ that had come and been rejected. The one thing the two baptisms had in common was that in each case the performance of the act signified an open and avowed committal of the man who was baptized to all the consequences which might follow so public a declaration.

With these baptisms, however, the ordinary washings' of the Jews, as the appointed purifications for uncleanness under the Mosaic law, must on no account be confounded. The purpose of these ablutions was altogether different. The baptism of a Jewish proselyte did not cleanse him from pollution, nor did it render ceremonial washings unnecessary. With these daily ablutions baptism had no connection beyond that natural association of ideas which arises in the mind from the circumstance that physical pollution is removed by the application of water. The many figurative references made in the Psalms and the prophets to cleansing the heart or washing the hands in innocence do not refer to baptism, but to the lustrations of the Levitical economy.

That the application of water, as a Christian ordinance, whether by immersion or otherwise, symbolically represents the necessity of cleansing can scarcely be doubted. The meaning of the symbol, however, is not the meaning of the act. The act is not performed for the sake of the symbol; the symbol, on the contrary, is subservient to the act. What we want to know is, the signification of the act itself.

In vain do we look for anything in it that suggests the idea of a 'seal' or 'federal rite' of any kind. We see no indication on the one hand of any fresh assurance that God is true, or, on the other, any 'sign' that man has now affixed his 'seal' to the covenant of God. These things may exist in the imaginations of controversialists, but they are not found in the word of God.

What we do find is that the act was regarded as the avowed and open committal of the man who was baptized, to all the consequences which might follow so public a declaration of the new faith he had professed. And we find nothing else.

The baptism of households, whether consisting of young children or slaves, accompanied that of the head of the house, simply because the family was then absolutely under his control. When he became a Christian, heathenism and all its observances vanished from the household. The independence of individuals was out of the question.

The heathen proselyte, in submission to this rite, abandoned his idolatry, and exposed himself to all the dangers that at any hour might arise from this forsaking of his national faith, and from the transfer of his spiritual allegiance which that act implied. The Jew who submitted to the baptism of the disciples, by so doing committed himself in like manner to the teaching of Christ, and laid himself open to the scorn of those who mocked at the message.

It was this which kept Nicodemus back from baptism. He was clearly among those (chief rulers) who believed in the Messiah, but 'because of the Pharisees did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God' (John 12:42-43). It was on this account that our Lord insisted on the outward avowal as well as the inward change. It was not enough to be 'born of the Spirit;' he must be born 'of water' also. If he refused this test -- the badge of his discipleship, -- he must be content to rank with 'the Pharisees and Lawyers,' who 'rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him,' i.e., of John (Luke 7:30).

I cannot find a single passage in which baptism is regarded in any other light. The reference of Peter to the salvation of Noah as figurative of baptism (1 Pet. 3:20-23) teaches the same lesson. It was the faith in God, and open disregard of the scorn of an ungodly world, implied in entrance into the ark, which saved Noah and his family; and baptism, in like manner, saves those who, imitating his example, act, although under different circumstances, on the same lofty principles.

The baptisms of the New Testament, without one exception, support this view.

If, therefore, I am asked what our Lord means when He says, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;' or what is the distinction drawn by St. Paul between the 'washing of regeneration,' and 'renewal of the Holy Ghost' (Titus 3:5) or what is implied by the declaration, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved' (Mark 16:16); my reply is, 'Let Scripture be its own interpreter.' St. Paul says to the Romans, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved' (Rom. 10:9); here evidently implying by 'confession' that public avowal by baptism which was the appointed way of making it.

In the Epistle to Titus he says, 'We are saved by 'the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Ghost' (Tit. 3:5), by which he evidently means by the Word and by the Spirit. Water is not uncommonly used in Scripture for 'the word' (see Eph. 5:26, and 1 Pet. 1:23), and in this very passage it is doubtless so used. Observe, also, that it is regeneration that washes, not the washing (baptism) that regenerates. 'Ye are clean.' says the Lord to His disciples, 'through the word which I have spoken unto you' (John 15:3).

The reference to Noah by St. Peter (1 Pet. 3:21) points, as I have already shown, in the same direction; for while the Deluge itself actually saved no man, the faith in God, which enabled both Noah and his family to despise a scoffing world, as certainly did. So the water in baptism never saved anybody; but the faith which, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, leads a man to renounce all worldly good by submitting to the rite, has in it the efficacy required. Further, as the preservation of Noah from the flood was a figure of Christ's salvation, so baptism is 'a like figure,' but nothing more.

The condition of the early converts, either from Heathenism or Judaism to Christianity, will be better understood if we think of the consequences that were now to follow the baptism of a Jew or a Hindu. So long as a Jew in the present day is content to be a Christian in heart only, making no public profession of the change, he is not subjected to persecution. So long as a young Hindu, enlightened by the instructions of a Christian school, satisfies himself with a kind of esoteric Christianity, no one will reproach or interfere with him. But if either of these parties submits to be baptized, the penalty is one of the heaviest that can be inflicted. It is the loss of parental love, -- of all family affection, -- of any property that may be coming to him in that direction, -- of trade, -- of social respect, -- of everything, in short, that man holds dear. Confession by baptism is, therefore, for such essential.

But it by no means follows that it is equally essential in cases where, as in all baptisms among Christians, no such results are connected with its administration, -- where, therefore, it does not and cannot mean the same thing. In the case of a Jew or a heathen, baptism is into a name hitherto denied or scorned. In that of a Christian it is nothing of the sort, -- being either the supposed dedication of a child to God by its parent, or

the public expression by an adult, of a hope and belief that he or she has been quickened into 'newness of life in Christ Jesus.'

Jewish believers seem to have retained more than one kind of baptism, for St. Paul (if he was the author of the epistle), in writing to the Hebrews, speaks of the doctrine of baptisms (Heb. 6:2); while to the Ephesians he says, there is 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Eph. 4:5). It has indeed been doubted whether baptism implies in all cases the application of water; whether, for instance, the disciples of Apollos, who were baptized by Paul at Ephesus, were not baptized by laying his hands upon them (Acts 19:5-6). Nothing else is referred to in the account we have of the transaction. It is worth notice also that wherever baptism is spoken of in the New Testament as 'into Christ,' or 'into His death' (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), water is not mentioned, and that perhaps the outward rite is not referred to. In the same epistle (Rom. 13:14) he bids the Romans 'put on Christ,' which is only saying in other words, 'Be baptized into Christ;' and yet the application of water is not supposed.

Further, wherever baptism with the Holy Ghost is spoken of (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16), the gift -- that of the impartation of miraculous powers -- comes either direct from Heaven or by the laying on of the Apostles' hands. Water is not employed. The essence of the rite of water baptism, is public avowal of belief in God, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It may be performed by any one, and is never considered essential to salvation (Gal. 5:6). As a man could be 'circumcised with the circumcision made without hands' (Col. 2:11), so it is implied he may be 'buried with Christ in baptism' without the application of water.

After this somewhat long digression, which could not well be avoided, it is only necessary to say that, as we shall see in the next chapter, not the least indication can be found that any change as to the terms of communion took place when the Gospel extended; when the Gentiles submitted themselves to the Messiah of the Jews; when Jesus was seen to be not the Redeemer of the Jew only, but of the whole world. The only tie that bound together the few and Gentile was family relationship, -- a relationship created by God only, not of man, but of the Spirit.

These Gentile believers considered themselves, and very justly, to be now, like the Jews, in a peculiar sense the 'sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty,' and family union was the result of to relationship. They knew further, and they acted accordingly, that as human families consist of individuals of all ages, of various knowledge, and of diverse characters, so the family of which Christ is the Head, must comprise persons of all measures of spiritual growth and intelligence, capacity and conduct; they felt too, that "as their measures of capacity, knowledge, faithfulness or love, had brined no element in their reception by God, so they could not properly form any element in their reception of each other." They saw clearly enough that "no correspondence in thought, feeling, or practice, could form any proper part of the basis of their fellowship, and hence they never attempted to make any assignable measure either of doctrine or practice in the individual, essential to union with the body." This we shall see more clearly when we come to consider the early Christian communities.

As I have already said, the object of fellowship was neither to preserve doctrine nor to observe a rite. It was simply to advance righteousness in the community, and to promote growth both in knowledge and in all practical goodness. And this was sought to be accomplished, not by judging one another, and exercising a petty inquisitorial discipline; but by educating one another, -- by mutual conversation and instruction; by seeking the enlargement of persons who had come out of Judaism, -- a narrow and exclusive system; by encouraging candor, charity, and a holy life; by the creation of a standard of right and wrong distinct from, and vastly higher than, any by which the outside world was governed.

Such, regarded as a whole, were the churches founded by the apostles, and, viewed in combination, they constituted in great measure the earthly Ecclesia. I say 'in great measure,' because it must never be forgotten

that there were persons -- few or many -- who neglected the assembling of themselves together, who were nevertheless members of the visible Church.

It will be said, I doubt not, that if what has been stated be the truth, and the whole truth, no reason can be given for the organization, which, it is admitted, prevailed in apostolic times. But this is not the case. Many things combined to render it desirable that the early Christians should be formed into communities, which do not exist now. In certain stages of religious development many things may be highly beneficial which at another and a later period may be injurious.

It was needful that the first believers should be separated from Jews as well as from heathen, or they would have fallen back under the force of the social influences by which they were surrounded. It was needful that they should be instructed orally or in writing by apostolic men, or by persons qualified to act as their representatives, or they could never have drawn the lines between Christianity and Judaism which were essential to Christian growth. It was needful that they should be gathered together in assemblies, in order that they might receive as a body from the apostles, when distant from them, counsels, guidance, and authoritative decisions, without which everything would have been in uncertainty.

None of these reasons exist now. We have, what they had not, the New Testament to direct us under all difficulties. They had to be instructed, not only as to the great facts on which Christianity is based, but as to the doctrines of the New Covenant. We have no one upon earth able to impart anything beyond what is written, or competent to give any authoritative decision on matters respecting which we may be in doubt.

The mere fact that the first Christians were bound to 'submit' themselves to the persons set over them by the apostles, and to 'obey' them as spiritual guides, alone proves that there was a specialty in their case which does not exist now; while the kindred fact that no sooner was apostolic control withdrawn than they fell into evils which rapidly changed the whole character of Christianity, shows how essential it was that, in the first instance, they should be thus dealt with. But how it can be inferred that because, God at the first established societies for a given end wider inspired guidance, therefore He perpetuated such societies when that guidance was withdrawn; when the apostolic instructions were in writing; when revelation had been completed; when supernatural gifts had ceased; when teachers could have access to no source of authority or instruction, other or different from that which was open to all the it hearers, it is not easy to see.

Plenty of reasons may be found for holding that believers should still meet together; that they should unite in a common worship; that they should manifest brotherly love; and that they should watch over one another for good. But not one reason can be found for insisting that such assemblages have any claim whatever to occupy ground different from that which is occupied by other institutions established for good ends, or that they should claim, as they all do, a Divine original and a Divine sanction.

Can it be pretended that modern Christians with the New Testament in their hands have any need to be taught by man what God requires of them if it be so, where are the qualified and duly commissioned instructors? It is simply extravagant and unreal, in our present divided and distracted state, to make believe that such persons exist. Spiritually, and as between individuals, few or many, the widest distinctions unquestionably prevail, but these are not represented by any organization, nor is it possible that they should be.

I must not, however, close this chapter without observing that it has been supposed by some that the intended permanence of primitive Church organization is implied in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the various gifts are enumerated which Christ gave to His people when He ascended; that St. Paul there contemplates the Christian Church as through all ages "an assemblage of musical instruments, attuned by the breath, and swept by the hand of God;" that each of the gifts there enumerated is to be looked

for in the individual believer "only in the place he occupies in the organization of the Church;" that this "furnishes the law and the limit of what we have a right to expect."

This view, of course, proceeds on the assumption -- and it is nothing more -- that the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost "took up his permanent residence in the visible Church, as the Body of Christ;" that the chrisms in question here all given potentially from the moment when the likeness of cloven tongues of fire rested on each of the Apostles as they were sitting ;" that "by the laying on of their hands" the same Holy Ghost was "to be bestowed in various distribution upon others."

But where is the evidence of all this? It overlooks the fact that at the day of Pentecost they were 'all with one accord in one place;' that the tongues of fire sat, not upon the Apostles only, but upon each of them,' the number was about a hundred and twenty; that 'they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.' It assumes that these gifts are perpetuated, and consequently that the Apostolate has been reconstituted amongst us.

Further, so far as the Epistle to the Ephesians s concerned, nothing connects the exercise of the promised gifts with any Church order. The Epistle itself is written 'to the saints that are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus,' without any reference to their organization. The portion in question makes no reference to anything but 'growing up into Christ, which is the Head;' and from whom alone 'the whole body (i.e., of Christ) fitly joined together (in a common love), and compacted by that which every joint supplieth (vital energy from the Head), maketh increase of the body unto the building of itself up in love.'

These gifts -- such of them especially as were adapted for the edification of religious assemblies, enabling their possessor to explain and to enforce with fervid words the lessons of Scripture -- were probably bestowed for the express purpose of supplying what must at first have been a pressing want, -- sound instruction, and fervent but enlightened prayers in the newly gathered Christian congregations. It must, in the first instance, often have been difficult to find competent men to teach, and the difficulty was in all probability met by this providential supply of spiritually gifted persons.

The points to be regarded are,

- i. That the early Christians did not become a church by their association. They were a church from the first, and would have been a church had they never organized at all.
- ii. That when they did combine in fellowships, they were not united by a common adhesion to any particular doctrine or set of doctrines, since at their formation no material differences of opinion seem to have existed.
- iii. That they were not gathered around a rite, -- the Lord's Supper; for although this ordinance was usually observed when they met together, there is no evidence whatever that it formed, in any sense, the bond of their union.
- iv. That they assembled only as a redeemed family, and around the head of that family, the Lord Jesus Christ. A person, therefore, and not either a rite or a doctrine, was the tie that kept them together.

In the next chapter I shall have occasion to notice what is recorded regarding the growth and multiplication of these communities.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMMUNITIES OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

A.D. 33-96

REGARDING Pentecost as the birthday of Christianity properly so called, and commencing our investigations there, the first thing that presents itself to our notice is the election by lot of an Apostle in the place of Judas, and the consequent recognition of the twelve as the authorized Fathers and Founders of the Christian community.

Respecting the nature of the office held by the Apostles there can be no question. They were at once the inspired Teachers and Evangelists, and the authorized and miraculously endowed rulers and governors of the entire flock of Christ. In the exercise of these functions they were above all human control; for they justified their claims and enforced their authority, not by mere appeals to the dignity of the office with which they had been invested, but by the exercise of direct miraculous powers brought to bear upon offenders.

The second appointment mentioned is that of Deacons, -- 'seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,' chosen, it would appear, by the body of disciples, but appointed to office by the Apostles; that office being the daily distribution of alms to the necessitous.

These deacons both preach and administer ordinances; for Philip baptizes the Eunuch, evidently without the slightest idea that he was doing anything irregular; and in the great persecution that arose after the death of Stephen, not the deacons only, but 'they that were scattered abroad' -- all classes of believers, 'went everywhere preaching the word.' So far as the Jewish Communities are concerned, no other appointments seem at first to have been made.

The absence of any detailed information as to the modes of worship adopted by these believers, or as to the nature of their organization, would seem to indicate that they continued Jews long after they became Christians. We know that they 'assembled daily with one accord in the Temple,' and there is every reason to suppose that when they met separately it was in the 'upper rooms' which they had been accustomed to frequent.

The conversion of St. Paul, and the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers, by the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles, introduces us to a wider field of observation, and brings under our inspection the working of Christian institutions under different, and in some respects less favorable circumstances.

And here the first thing noticeable is that Peter, the appointed minister to Cornelius, having witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit on him and other Gentiles, and having consequently justified their claim to baptism, does not administer the rite himself, but simply commands them to be baptized. The question naturally arises, would he have done this, had he regarded the rite as conferring any spiritual benefit, or, in fact, as being anything; beyond that public avowal of a change of sentiment and position which, in the case of proselytes, it had always been regarded as indicating under the Jewish economy? A direct gift was conferred by the laying on of the Apostles' hands, and therefore we never hear of any one laying hands on another on their account. No spiritual gift followed baptism, and therefore it was quite unimportant who performed the ceremony.

The next thing we observe is, the formation of Christian assemblies out of Judea, these being for most part of a mixed character, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles. Antioch is first brought under our notice. In this city Paul and Barnabas main for a whole year, assembling themselves with the believers, and teaching much people. Here the disciples are first called Christians; but, with the exception of a pleasing manifestation of brotherly love to their Jewish brethren, we hear nothing of their proceedings as a body. It is worth notice, however, that they send their alms for distribution, not to the Apostles, but by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, to the Elders at Jerusalem. Such officers must therefore by this time have been appointed; unless we are to suppose and it is a natural supposition -- that those who had been elders among the Jews before their conversion to Christianity still retained that position among their brethren.

The office of Elder among the Jews was first established by Moses, and its duties were of a mixed character, partly secular and partly religious. The elder watched over the conduct of the different members of the synagogue; exercised discipline took part in reading the Scriptures, and sometimes prayed in public worship; but he was not, like the Priest, separated from the employments of ordinary life. The duty of pronouncing a discourse on the Word might, as a rule, appertain to one who had the gift of preaching; yet the fact that the ministry was so open that strangers coming in, like Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia, -- were invited to address the assembly, shows that the right to do so was by no means restricted.

At Salamis we find the travelers preaching the Word of God in the synagogue of the Jews; and at Antioch in Pisidia, as we have seen, the rulers of the synagogue specially invited them, as strangers, to give a word of exhortation. The Gentiles too, in their turn, now beseech that the same word may be addressed to them; and the next Sabbath almost the whole city come together to hear the Word of God.

Hitherto, the preaching of the Gospel by St. Paul had formed a part of the ordinary synagogue service; and, generally speaking, he seems to have been heard, not only with patience, but with considerable acceptance. Now persecution commences, and he and his companions flee into Lycaonia, where they still preach, but probably in the open air, and without any of the ordinary Accompaniments of worship.

Returning again to Lystra, Iconiurn and Antioch, we find them, apparently for the first time, organizing. They ordain elders in every Christian assembly, commending them in prayer to the Lord on whom they believed. There is not anything to indicate that these persons were separated from secular employments. They would certainly seem to be chosen on account of their fitness to rule, to fulfill duties more or less corresponding to those of the Jewish elder.

At Thessalonica Paul is again in the synagogue, and there, for three Sabbath days, he reasoned out of the Scriptures. But again he is obliged to fly. At Berea, for a time, the Jews hear him patiently, and many, after searching the Scriptures avow their belief; but the scene terminates as before in flight. At Athens he preaches on Mars Hill. At Corinth he is once more in the synagogue, but, again encountering opposition, he retires to the house of a devout man, where he remains for eighteen months, teaching the Word of God among them, and supporting himself by his occupation as a tent-maker.

At Ephesus he remains nearly three years. Three months of this time he spent in the synagogue, and the rest in 'disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus,' supporting himself during the whole time, so far as appears, by the labor of his hands. At Troas we find him in an upper room, breaking bread with the disciples, preaching to them, and continuing his speech until midnight; and then we have his touching farewell to the Ephesian elders.

Here, if anywhere, we should expect to see the official character of the pastors fully recognized. And so it is. As representatives of the Apostles, teaching wide author ify that which could not have been acquired in any other way, they were to be 'obeyed.' The hearers were to 'submit' themselves to these instructors.

To Timothy, his friend and fellow -- Evangelist, who, like himself appears to have exercised the functions of an Episcopos or inspector, Paul gives rules for the choice of both elders and deacons, and reminds him of the peculiarity of his own position as one respecting whom prophecies had gone before, and to whom some special gift had been imparted by divinely endowed persons; and here, or the first time, we have a distinct recognition, not only of the abstract right of persons entirely devoted to the service of the brethren to be supported by them, but a direction to see that this right was admitted and equitably administered.

It is in these Pastoral Epistles that we find our chief materials for forming a judgment on the nature and extent of the organization which characterized the primitive fellowships. In them we have the nearest approach that is found in the New Testament to what may be regarded by some as Ecclesiasticism. In order to ascertain as accurately as we can what that Ecclesiasticism, -- if it may be so called, -- really amounted to, we must consider St. Paul's words very carefully.

He speaks of the office of a Bishop. What does he mean by that term? Dean Alford shall answer. He says, "It is merely laying a trap for misunderstanding to render the word at this time of the Church's history, 'the office of a Bishop,' -- the ἐπίσκοποι of the New Testament have officially nothing in common with our Bishops. The word should be rendered 'Overseers.' The identity of the Bishop and Presbyter in Apostolic times is evident from Titus 1:5, 7."

The 'house of God' is then referred to, which we are told is 'the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.' What does the Apostle here mean by 'the house of God?' Clearly not all ecclesiastical edifice, for that could not be a pillar or ground of truth. As certainly not any given fellowship, for these were many and scattered, and no one had the pre-eminence. He can only refer to the great body of believers considered as a whole, and without reference to any organization. They form the household of God; they are "the element in which, and the medium by which the truth is conserved and upheld." It was in moving among these believers as an overseer that Timothy was to behave himself wisely; regulating their assemblies; dealing gently with their teachers; warning all of coming evils; guarding all against superstition, and instructing all how to conduct themselves in the various ranks of life which God in His providence had allotted to them.

That a discipline was exercised in these Churches is unquestionable.

The evils that at a later period sprang up at Corinth, and what we are told as to the way in which the Apostle Paul dealt with them, is evidence of this. Too much, however, has been made of the instance. It is by no means surprising that he should severely rebuke so frightful a perversion of the memorial of redeeming love; that he should bid the Corinthians examine themselves before the partook of it, lest they should only eat and drink judgment to themselves; that they should be directed carefully to discern its spiritual intent and meaning; or that for the sins they had committed in relation to it, some of them should have been brought under that mysterious and supernatural discipline which could only be administered by an Apostle, which is called by Paul his 'rod,' and which is brought forward as an evidence of his Apostleship.

The mistake is to imagine that what the Apostle said or did on this occasion indicates that the Lord's Supper is distinguished from other religious acts by any peculiar sanctity. The same course could no doubt have been pursued by him had any other Divine ordinance been abused and perverted in like manner.

So with regard to errors in doctrine. The 'heresies' referred to by the Apostles are separatist principles within the Christian community, involving violations of love. The men who at Corinth ate 'every one before another,' not caring for their poorer brethren, were heretics. The heresies recorded in the Epistle to the Galatians had no more to do with Church fellowship than the idolatries, murders, or other works of the flesh therein enumerated. The 'damnable heresies' spoken of by Peter, in like manner, relate not to fellowships, but to teaching and conduct. The sum of the whole is, that 'heretics' and 'heresy' are developments of evil which

affect Christians as Christians, and whether associated or not. To 'depart' from such persons does not mean merely to exclude them from communion, but to separate from their companionship anywhere and everywhere.

That this was the case appears further from the nature of the discipline by which the Apostolic fellowships were regulated. As there was no rule or condition of admission to these fellowships, so there was none of exclusion beyond that which belongs to every association of human beings for whatever purpose they may come together, viz., the right to separate from any who corrupt their fellows or bring reproach on the body.

Is that so strange an occurrence? Do no brethren in our merely human families become outcasts, make themselves outcasts by their folly and sin? Are no fathers obliged to withdraw alike their countenance and the shelter of their homes from children, who neglect or despise what is justly expected from them? are not such proceedings frequently necessary to the preservation of the virtue of the rest, to the peace and happiness of the entire household? We know it is so.

Such, and such only, was the character of the discipline under which the first Christians primarily assembled. Bad and corrupting conduct necessitated reproof, and, if that were disregarded, exclusion. But, whether retained outwardly or not, the brother was a brother still, the constant object of love and of prayer; and the door was always open by which he might return if his mind changed and 'die came to himself.'

It is now only needful to inquire whether any, and if any, what changes took place at a somewhat later period, in consequence of the extension of Christianity. The Apostolic epistles carry us on through a period during which many and great changes must have taken place.

To note one instance only, The children of the first converts must, in that time, have grown up to manhood, and in turn have become themselves parents, All these would of course be educated and trained in the Christian faith, What we want to know then is, whether, in consequence of the introduction of this new element, any alteration took place in the mode of admission to Christian fellowship; whether any condition was now laid down as essential to communion; whether any examination was instituted as to the supposed regeneration of the candidate; whether any candidature at all was involved; or whether the children of the converts, if they professed to be Christians, united with their parents, at home or in the public assembly, in the supper of the Lord as naturally as they united with them in prayer. There is nothing in the sacred record to indicate that it was otherwise.

So far as appears from Scripture, baptism had now ceased to be a term of communion. Indeed it may well be doubted whether the children of believers were ever baptized at all, either as infants, or on a personal profession of faith. Not a single reference to such an act is to be found either in the Gospels or in the Epistles, while more than one indication to the contrary may be discovered.

On the supposition that baptism was a term of admission to communion, not merely for converts from heathenism, but for persons born and brought up in Christianity, it is, to say the least of it, most extraordinary that not a single instance of such baptism is on record at all; that St. Paul, who had from God a special revelation regarding the Lord's Supper, had no message whatever in relation to baptism; and finally, that in writing to the Corinthians respecting the position of the infant children of converts where one parent only was a Christian, he should have said 'now are they holy,' not through baptism, but by birth (1 Cor. 7:14). If the infant children of converts to the faith had been usually baptized at the time Paul wrote thus, he could scarcely have failed to say, 'Your children are baptized, therefore are they holy.' The absence of a single scriptural example in point seems to me conclusive on this matter. I say, 'in point,' because the case of the three thousand at Pentecost, that of Cornelius, that of the Jailer, or that of the Ethiopian Eunuch, are not so; all these being instances of baptism on conversion, either from Judaism or Heathenism, and involving therefore a new revelation of God.

Nor is, I think, the expression of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 6:3) to be regarded as without significance, although I do not find any argument on it, 'Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death.' May he not mean by 'as many as' (ὡς ἅνθρωποι) all that have been baptized? May he not imply -- if water -- baptism is at all referred to -- that all of them had not thus expressed their faith? The phrase is by no means an unusual one, and it invariably signifies, certain persons, as distinguished from others. (See Matt. 14:36; John 1:12; Rom. 2:12; Gal. 3:27; Gal. 6:12; Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:15; Rev. 2:24.)

Mr. Robert Haldane remarks on this passage, in his usual dogmatic manner: -- " This does not imply that any of those to whom the Apostle wrote were not baptized, for there could be no room for such a possibility."

But why not? The Apostle was writing about thirty years after the first preaching of the Gospel, and during that time a new generation must have sprung up who, having been born into the Christian Church, could not with any propriety be baptized into it. From these, whether many or few, the Apostle distinguishes those who, like himself, had been by water and not by birth brought to know and worship God as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

It may indeed be said, 'Were these baptized persons then alone buried with Christ,' and were they only called upon to 'walk in newness of life?' If this should be urged, the reply is obvious. The Apostle is here addressing, as he frequently does, a particular class, and he appeals therefore to their peculiar circumstances. He is addressing men who had once lived in sin (Rom. 6:2); who had served sin (Rom. 6:6); who had been the slaves of sin (Rom. 6:17, 20); who had yielded their members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity (Rom. 6:19). It is of these he asks, "what fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" It is these that by their baptism had symbolically buried their old life in Christ. The text, as given, could not apply to the children of believers of whom some at least, must, in all probability have formed part of the Roman Church. There is not, so far as I can see, a syllable in the New Testament which encourages the belief that persons born and brought up in the Christian Faith were ever baptized into it.

We must now endeavor to trace such indications of decay and departure from primitive truth and simplicity as present themselves in Scripture, for, explain the matter as we may, -- it is impossible to doubt from what is there stated, that towards the close of the Apostolic period some such decay had set in.

In attempting the investigation it will soon be perceived that one important deviation from Apostolic teaching lay at the root of all subsequent proceedings.

That the earliest Christian assemblies had Elders over them who fulfilled the duties of Pastor and Teacher has already been shown. That these men shared the obligation to exhort and edify the brethren with other gifted persons is plain, notwithstanding the circumstance that they alone taught with authority. That in the absence of any written document, these Pastors or Elders were the depositories of Apostolic truth cannot be doubted. That they were a body of self-sacrificing men, willing, whenever it was expedient to do so, to work for their own support; men unstained by worldly ambition, love of power, or any desire beyond that of fulfilling the obligations that had been devolved upon -- that by an authority they dare not question, is abundantly evident from all that we read of them in the New Testament. They sprang, so far as appears, out of the particular fellowships over which they presided, and in no respect differed from their brethren except by the possession of peculiar moral and spiritual qualifications for office. They were simply the best men each little community could produce, and they were sustained, when it was needful, by the free -- will offerings of the brethren. None of them are spoken of as teaching error, or as living in any manner unworthy of their profession.

Towards the close of the Apostolic period another class of men come upon the scene, -- a class, the very existence of which alone proves that a new element had been introduced. John, in writing to 'the Elect Lady,' warns her against receiving into her house, or bidding God -- speed to teachers whose deeds were 'evil,' and who denied 'that Christ was come in the flesh,' -- men who were probably tainted by Gentile philosophy, and who endeavored to separate the Incarnation from any historical manifestation of it.

Some of these persons, like Diotrephes, loving to have the 'pre-eminence,' evidently denied and resisted Apostolic authority.

Our first inquiry, therefore, must relate to the creation of these men. We must endeavor to ascertain how they were first called into existence; how it came to pass that at so early a period a ministry was recognized differing in so many important respects from the primitive one?

May not the following considerations throw some light on the matter?

We learn from the sacred record that at a very early period many rich persons had become Christians, and it is but fair to suppose that these rich men were better educated and had a higher culture than the majority of the believers; that their tastes would be sooner offended by any indications of ignorance or vulgarity; that they would be rather impatient under exhortations which, however spiritual, might have little to recommend them of an intellectual character. Be that as it may, it is plain, from the warnings and advices that were found in the Epistles, that this element was a dangerous one.

Paul writes to Timothy warning him that men who will be rich 'fall into dangerous temptations, and into 'hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition;' that 'the love of money is the root of all evil;' and that it is needful to charge such 'not to be high-minded,' or to trust in their wealth. St. James bids the rich man 'rejoice when he is made low,' and rebukes the want of faith which the brethren manifested when they paid special respect to those who came to their assemblies wearing gold rings and in goodly apparel. He speaks of such as prone to oppress the poor, and to 'blaspheme the worthy name' by which they were called, exclaiming with righteous indignation, 'Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for the miseries that shall come upon you; your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten; our gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.' It is clear enough at this very early period, not only that many rich men professed to be Christians, but also that some of them abused their wealth and brought reproach upon the name of Christ.

The next thing observable is that philosophers, so called, -- men who had gained their living by teaching the heathen philosophy, were also in communion with the brethren, and, as was natural, were trying to turn their gifts and acquirements to account. These, although sincere in their profession, were doubtless often needy, or ambitious men; and being favored by the rich on account of their higher culture, they were, there is reason to suppose, not unfrequently chosen as the teachers and rulers of the Christian communities. It is only needful to put these two things together, -- the rich man willing to pay the teacher he preferred, and the converted heathen philosopher anxious to continue his occupation in the new sphere to which he had been introduced, to perceive at once how wide a door was opened for the promotion of inferior interests; how facilities would immediately present themselves for obtaining money; how the desire of influence in the one class, uniting with the desire of gain in the other, would combine to bring about a state of things favorable to many forms of evil, and sure to end in the corruption of that simple faith to which the first disciples had been called.

Dr. Jacob, speaking of this time as one in which there would be great difficulty in finding men fit for the ministry, observes, "There was, however, at this period, in many of the towns throughout the Roman empire, a class of men prepared by Divine providence, and better fitted than all others for supplying this need of the Gentile Churches."

"Educated and thinking men among the Greeks and Romans had for some time felt the hollowness and worthlessness of their old religions; and the dispersion of the Jews in 'every nation under heaven,' with the Greek translation of their Scriptures, had brought to the conviction of such men that there was a higher and purer knowledge of God to be obtained than was afforded by their own poetical but effete mythology. Now such men were usually those who most readily and heartily welcomed the Gospel doctrines which the Apostles proclaimed. They had (those of them at east who had been 'Proselytes of the Gate') the religious knowledge of the Jews without their narrow-mindedness, formality, and often prejudices." How naturally this would lead to the selection of those who had been teachers of heathen philosophy, and how sure such a choice was, however earnest and sincere the men, to end in a professional ministry, need scarcely be suggested.

St. Paul appears to have foreseen this state of things, -- nay, partly to have observed it, -- and he utters a warning voice which, had it been attended to, would have arrested, if not prevented the mischief that was now rapidly gathering. 'The mystery of iniquity,' he says, 'doth already work.' * 'We are not as many which corrupt the word,' ** or as Archbishop Trench reads the text, "make a traffic of the word.' 'I know that after my departure shall grievous (or rather burdensome) wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.' *** 'Beware lest any man spoil you,' or, as it should be, 'I make booty of you,' 'through philosophy.' **** 'Withdraw thyself,' he writes to Timothy, 'from men of corrupt minds who suppose that gain is godliness,' or, according to Dr. Trench, 'that godliness is lucre, -- a means of getting gain.' ***** 'The time will come when they (Christians) will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.' *****

Peter utters a similar note when speaking of such men, he says, 'Through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandize of you; ' ***** while Jude exclaims, 'Woe unto them, for they have run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.' ***** It is surely not needful to go further in order to discover how the seeds of decay were first sown; how corruptions originated in the primitive assemblies; how a channel was unconsciously being dug in which evil things were sure to flow, as they did flow, until they eventually overran the entire field of Christian effort.

Such a system once begun was indeed sure to spread. It had many charms, and seemed to offer many facilities for the advancement of truth. It is by no means necessary to suppose that these teachers were generally, or even often, insincere men. It may fairly be assumed, on the contrary, that they were, as a rule, earnest Christians, w I really desirous of the advancement of the faith. A professional ministry is, as we all know, often a very faithful one. The men of whom I am speaking, in all probability, thought that they were called to the work they had undertaken by the Holy Spirit, -- a call supposed to be recognized then, as it is now, by the possession of certain gifts, accompanied by a strong desire to exercise them in the furtherance of the Gospel. The people who chose these teachers believed without doubt that in so doing they were led by wisdom from above.

* 2 Thess. 2:3, 7.
** 2 Cor. 2:17.
*** Acts 20:29.
**** Col. 2:8.
***** 1 Tim. 6:5.
***** 2 Tim 4:3.
***** 2 Pct. 2:3.
***** Jude 11.

But the error into which they had fallen was not the less serious on that account. They had recognized a principle sure in its ultimate operation to be fatal to spirituality. That principle was not the payment of ministerial services, for this had been long done under Apostolic guidance. It was the silencing of the Spirit in their assemblies by the bringing in of religious teachers who should supersede humbler brethren. It was the choice of men for religious service, not so much on account of their eminent piety, their mature wisdom, their meekness and unworldliness, as on account of their energy and intellectual gifts. It was the gradual abandonment to these men of all spiritual instruction, and of all power in the community.

These early Christians, like ourselves, had indulged a not unnatural or unusual desire to be instructed by persons who could clothe their thoughts in pleasing language, illustrate them by lively imagery, and enforce them by glowing eloquence. They had come to persuade themselves that these gifts and acquirements were intimately connected with, if not essential to the spread of the faith; that it was the design of God by the sanctification of these endowments to enlarge the boundaries of the Redeemer's Kingdom; to make Christianity, in short, a great power in the earth, strong to contend, first for freedom, and then for supremacy.

So matters in all probability stood when Jerusalem fell under the sword of the Roman, an event that must have profoundly influenced the fortunes of the new Faith. For by this time the Apostles had nearly all departed; supernatural gifts had either ceased or were rapidly dying away; miracles of healing were confined to the few remaining men to whom an Apostle had laid hands; and everything seemed to justify the apprehension that unless Christ speedily returned to earth, or some other miraculous interposition intervened, Christianity might die out with the existing generation.

The gravity of the crisis which marked the last cm of the first century has been well noted both by Dr. Jacob and Professor Lightfoot. The growing dissensions, says Dr. Jacob, "between the Jewish and Gentile Christians; the destruction of Jerusalem, with the entire breaking up of the Church in that city, which had been the source and center, the strength and example of the Christian body; the appearance of the heresy, with its delusive, pernicious, and widely spreading doctrines; the impending and already commenced collision of Christianity with the power of the Roman Empire, which was to test the faith and patience and courage of the churches with a fiery trial, -- all created a pressing need of some organization to meet the accumulating dangers of the time, and to cement together the diverse elements of Christian society thus threatened with dissolution. The establishment of episcopacy saved the Church, whatever mischiefs were afterwards wrought by the abuse and perversion of the system. *

Professor Lightfoot, adopting the view of Rothe, observes, "With the overthrow of Jerusalem the visible center of the Church was removed. The keystone of the fabric was withdrawn, and the whole edifice threatened with ruin. There was a crying need for some organization which should cement together the diverse elements of Christian Society and preserve it from disintegration. Out of this need the Catholic Church arose. The magnitude of the change effected during this period may be measured by the difference in the constitution and conception of the Christian Church as presented in the Pastoral Epistles of St. Paul and the letters of St. Ignatius respectively."

* 'The Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament,' p. 80.

This great work, he goes on to say, "must be ascribed to the surviving Apostles." * The conclusion he, draws from the silence of history as to this change having really been made by them is indeed remarkable. It is expressed in these words, -- " If we hear nothing more of the Apostles' missionary labors [after the fall of Jerusalem] it is because they had organized a united Church, to which they had transferred the work of Evangelization." Certain incidental notices in Eusebius, a fragment of Irenaus, and a peculiar interpretation of a passage in Clement of Rome, are assumed to justify the conclusion "that immediately after the fall of Jerusalem council of the Apostles and first teachers of the Gospel was held to deliberate on the crisis, and to frame measures for the well-being of the Church." The Professor confesses however -- for the integrity of his spirit is always manifest -- that the notices in Eusebius "will not bear the weight of the inference built upon them; that the genuineness of the fragment from Irenaeus is doubtful; and that the passage in Clement is not correctly interpreted. All that can be said with certainty is, that "during the historical blank which extends over half a century after the fall of Jerusalem, Episcopacy was matured and the Catholic Church consolidated." **

The change that had by this time taken place is still more distinctly perceivable in the direction given to Christians to 'try the spirits,' and not to believe every one who professed to speak by inspiration of God. This exaltation of the witness within or everything else; of what may be termed 'the verifying faculty,' -- the 'unction of the Holy One,' -- the 'anointing,' which they had received and which abode in them, -- over all ecclesiastical assumptions, is very remarkable. It indicates that circumstances now rendered it inexpedient that Christians should simply be bidden, as they had once been, to 'obey' them that had the rule over them and to 'submit' themselves. The ancient Pastor, the God -- selected brother, would seem to have largely disappeared, and instead of him had come up Preachers or Evangelists, that were not always trustworthy; men whose instructions, at the best, were to be received with great caution.

It may perhaps be said, that without this new order of teachers the Gospel could not have extended. Let us ask therefore how far its capacity for extension had been proved before these men made their appearance on the scene? And here it will be needful to bear in mind that the first believers never acted on the world in ,in associated capacity; that they had no organization whatever for Missionary ends; that they never made collections for the support of Evangelists or other agents employed in spreading abroad the truths of the Gospel.

The Apostles and their companions, although in one instance set apart for their work by others (Acts 13:2), were not the agents or representatives of believers. They were under the direction of God alone, and received no instructions from any other quarter. In the exceptional case referred to, the Church at Antioch simply obeyed the Holy Spirit in separating Paul and Barnabas to the work God had called them to perform; and this was done, in all probability, that it might be made manifest to the brethren that in setting out on this Missionary journey neither Paul nor his companion was indulging any wish or will of his own.

At an earlier period, viz., after the persecution that arose about Stephen, when the believers were 'scattered abroad,' and 'went everywhere preaching the word,' no combined action is to be seen. The Apostles remained in Jerusalem apparently unmolested, but nothing appears that would lead us to suppose for a moment that they directed the movements, or did anything for the support of the fugitives. Everything -- so far as we have any information on the matter -- was individual. The altered ones appear to have passed from city to city, and from house to house, trusting that God would incline their Jewish friends to show them hospitality, and availing themselves of every suitable opportunity for making known in private conversations, the words and deeds of Jesus, and the validity of his claim to be their Messiah.

* St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, p. 199.

** Ibid., pp. 202-205.

This individuality of action is the more surprising because the Apostles had, and were the only persons who ever had, a Catholic commission, and were as such Rulers. This they had because their commission was to found the early communities, and not to represent them; to be a legislative rather than an executive body; because they were inspired with something to reveal, and gifted with something to impart, which no other than they have ever had. Nothing, however, can be clearer -- explain the matter as we may -- than that the body of believers, as a whole, never had a common meeting-point; nor was there any place, unless it was Jerusalem, to which they would naturally be drawn by a common affection. They were not represented at any center or general assembly by chosen individuals, or by any delegation through whom they could act with a common will in furtherance of a common object.

In the primitive age each one, according to his capacity, taught his neighbor what he himself believed, and wherever this is done there will be little need of official teaching; for it must always be remembered that a modern minister is but the expositor of a book which is not necessarily clearer to him than to his hearers. He can only expound according to his own natural and spiritual perceptions of the significance of the text. Indeed, as has been well said, "Mutual teaching and help in every way would seem to be of the very essence of Christian communion." For a Christian assembly was not intended to be a body consisting of teachers and taught, rulers and ruled; not one in which there should be a head of gold and feet of clay; but rather one "fitly joined together and compacted through every joint." Such were the primitive 'Churches' in Apostolic times.

What we want to know is, whether any good was effected in this state of solution, if it may be so called; without organization for aggressive purposes; without collections in money; without recognized cults; without plans of operation; without even that painful sense of responsibility in relation to 'those that are without' which we regard as essential to piety?

The reply is found in the Gospel narrative. Each member worked for God, that is clear; but they did so as individuals, each asking of God, 'What wouldest Thou have me to do?' and not as an organized body systematically and under direction. Further, the individuals who thus wrought are, for the most part, specially endowed by God for that purpose. After the resurrection all the Disciples were bidden to wait for the promise before they went forth as Witnesses; to wait until they individually received the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon them. Without this Divine equipment no one stirred.

For results we must listen to Paul. He tells us that the seed of Divine truth which until Pentecost had been deposited exclusively in Judea, was then sown in all the world (Col. 1:6-23; Rom. 10:18). The work had been accomplished without organization; by the few and not by any united effort; by disinterested laborers acting for the most part on their own individual responsibility and unassisted. "Before the death of the last surviving inspired teacher Christianity had struck its roots deep into the soil of every country between the Euphrates and the Atlantic Ocean. Within the same period the Apostolic writings and gospels, sufficiently discerned from among spurious compositions, had come into all hands, and constituted in all churches the admitted authority and ultimate rule of Christian faith and practice."

Pliny, writing only thirty or forty years after the fall of Jerusalem, tells the emperor that "the temples are almost deserted; that the sacred victims scarcely find any purchasers, and that the superstition, as he considered it, had not only infected the cities, but had even spread itself into the villages and the open country of Pontus and Bithynia.*

* Plin, Epist., 10, 97.

Into the causes of this rapid spread of the new faith it is not necessary here to enter, beyond observing that it must mainly be traced to the force of truth taught in simplicity, and exemplified in holy lives.

But another question arises, viz., 'What style of character was produced by this individual action? Thrown so largely on their own resources, relying chiefly on mutual exhortation and instruction, what sort of persons did the first Christians become?' This inquiry will perhaps best be answered by noticing first what Paul says of the most faulty of the primitive fellowships, that of Corinth; and then what Pliny says of those who lived at a later period.

The Apostle, as we know, had been compelled to rebuke the Corinthians very sharply for what seems to us unpardonable laxity. How do they take his severe handling? They 'sorrowed after a godly sort.' 'In all things,' says their censor, 'ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.' He adds, when speaking of them as a whole, 'Ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence' (2 Cor. 8:7). Pliny writes, "The Christians assemble upon a certain stated day, before it is light, to sing alternately among themselves hymns to Christ as to a God, binding themselves by oath not to be guilty of any wickedness; not to steal, or to rob; not to commit adultery, nor break their with when plighted; nor to deny the deposits in their hands whenever called upon to restore them." They simply paid divine worship to their God and Savior Jesus Christ, and then pledged themselves before God and each other not to follow the habits and practices of the world in which their lot was cast.

The probability is, as Mr. Isaac Taylor has well put it, that "during that fresh morning hour of the Church, there belonged to the followers of Christ generally, a fullness of faith in the realities of the unseen world, such as in later ages has been reached only by a very few eminent and meditative individuals; the thousand then felt a persuasion which now is felt only by the two or three." It was to the production of this Christ-like character in the converts, rather than to the extension of Christianity, that the Apostles chiefly looked as the great reward of their labors. It may well be questioned whether they had any expectation that Christianity, except in witness, would make much way before the return of the Lord. It is evident enough that amid expectations of the second Advent, and not of the world's conversion, the Apostles and their immediate converts suffered and died. They evidently believed that Christ was then very near. They died supposing that 'the end of all things' was at hand; for 'the times and the seasons' were as completely concealed from them as they are from us.

As to the nearness of the Redeemer's return they were in one sense unquestionably mistaken, for much had to intervene which they little suspected. But in another sense they were right; for Christ is always 'at hand' in the same sense that death is always at hand. He may come to us at any moment. His coming may be deferred for many years. In the one case as in the other it behooves us to be always ready, since we know not what an hour may bring forth.

What we learn from the accounts we have of the proceedings of the primitive Christians is, first, that during the age of the Apostles, in the absence of any organization for aggressive purposes, the Gospel spread more rapidly and in greater purity than it has done at any subsequent period of the Church's history; and secondly, that while unassisted by what we understand as Public Worship, while repudiating all our modern Church ideas about Clergy, Sacraments, and such like, the early assemblies created and developed characters as noble as any the world has ever yet seen.

The points to be borne in mind as gathered from this chapter, and to be connected with those enumerated at the close of the first, are, --

i. That no, so-called, 'terms of communion' were laid down by the Apostles when, as time advanced and the children of the first converts were brought in, a new element was introduced into the Christian communities. Whether among Jews or Gentiles the original basis was retained, and no distinction whatever drawn between the Lord's Supper and other religious acts.

ii. That no evidence can be adduced to show that persons born and brought up in the Christian faith were baptized either as infants or on a profession of their faith. They were not, by that act, introduced to the worship of God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. They were evidently born into that name, and became by birth members of the Christian family.

iii. That for the regulation of their assemblies no terms either of admission or of exclusion were laid down, beyond those which regulate all families, viz., the power of separating from any member thereof whose conduct is corrupting and brings reproach upon the household,

iv. That the original Pastors of the Churches, however appointed, are always spoken of as persons to be submitted to and obeyed. It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that they were regarded, to some extent at least, as representatives of the Apostles, having received special gifts qualifying them to teach orally and with authority whatever was needful to the infant Church.

v. That in the absence of any organization for aggressive purposes the Gospel spread with unparalleled rapidity, and that prior to the supersession of Mutual instruction by a professional ministry some of the noblest characters the world has yet seen were formed and perfected.

vi. That towards the close of the Apostolic era these primitive Elders were, to some extent, Superseded by a more cultivated class of persons drawn chiefly from the ranks of the better educated men who had abandoned heathenism and embraced Christianity, and that in consequence of this change, believers were now charged for the first time to 'try the spirits.'

vii. That indications of decay and of departure from Primitive truth and simplicity -- predicted both by Paul and Peter -- now first begin to show themselves, and occasion the solemn warnings given in the Epistles of St. John.

PART THE SECOND

THE CHURCH CONSIDERED IN ITS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT.

CHAP. I. THE VISIBLE CHRISTIANITY OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

I. THE VISIBLE CHRISTIANITY OF THE THIRD CENTURY.

III. THE EMPIRE CHURCH.

CHAPTER I

THE VISIBLE CHRISTIANITY OF THE SECOND CENTURY (A.D. 96-180).

Of this period we know very little. It has been well styled "the dark period of Church history." Dean Stanley speaks of it as not so much a period for ecclesiastical history as for ecclesiastical conjecture. "A fragment here, an allegory there; romances of unknown authorship; a handful of letters of which the genuineness of every portion is contested inch by inch." These, he says, are the "scanty materials out of which the early Church must be reproduced." This chasm once cleared, "we find ourselves approaching the point where the story of the Church once more becomes history, -- becomes the history not of an isolated community, or of isolated individuals, but of an organized society incorporated with the political systems of the world."

In the chasm to which the Dean points, lies concealed the root of all subsequent Church ideas. He speaks of it as hiding from us the processes by which greatest change that Christianity has ever undergone was produced; "the change from what Christianity was, as we see it in the New Testament, to what it became in the next century, and as to a certain extent we have seen it ever since. No other change, he says, "equally momentous has in later years affected its fortunes, yet none has ever been so silent and secret. The stream in that most critical moment of its passage from the everlasting hills to the plain below is lost to our view at the very point where we are most anxious to watch it: we may hear its struggles under the over-arching rocks; we may catch its spray on the boughs that overlap its course; but the torrent itself we see not, or see only by imperfect glimpses." *

Is it then of any use to attempt the discovery of what is professedly so obscure? Is anything to be gained by inquiry when the conclusions at which we can arrive must, from the very nature of the case, be more or less conjectural?

I think there is. Two things at least are clear. One is that immediately after the death of the Apostles certain views regarding the ministry, and certain deviations from primitive truth and simplicity, began to take root in the Christian community. The other is, that when these views had extended, and by lapse of time had produced the results they were intended to accomplish, the whole character of Christianity is found to be changed; the difference being, that which obtains between "Christianity as we see it in the New Testament, and Christianity as we see it in the next century, and as we have seen it ever since." Can it then be either unwise or improper to inquire whether or no any connection subsists between these two great facts? whether they do or do not stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect?

Any conclusion that can be arrived at will be, it is admitted, more or less conjectural; but where demonstration is impossible the highest probability is surely not without its value. It cannot, under any circumstances, be otherwise than interesting to endeavor to ascertain to what extent the admitted transformation, within a hundred years of the death of the Apostles, of the simple Christian assemblies brought before us in the Gospels and Epistles, into the Great United Society which ultimately subdued the Empire, was occasioned by views regarding the nature, powers, ordinances, and government of the Christian Church which, whether right or wrong, grew up in the Christian community as time advanced, and the voice of inspiration ceased to be heard.

* Introductory Lecture on the Study of Ecclesiastical History.

The second century had now opened, and it is not difficult to conceive what must have been the condition of Christianity at this time. Its professors had multiplied. Many of them were persons of wealth, and some had rank in the Roman Empire. They were no longer an uncultivated body of men. The educated as well as the ignorant were to be found among the Christians. Some of them were men of distinguished talent, known to be such by the adherents of the faith they had abandoned. As a consequence, the social influence of Christianity was every day becoming greater. They naturally desired that this influence should be deepened and extended.

When, therefore, the question arose -- What is to be done? what course should the Church take in the new era on which it has entered? the answer to it would have to be given not by the Christian body generally; not by the few humble but holy men who here or there still presided over small assemblies of believers; but by a body of persons now professionally devoted to the spread of the Gospel; a body enjoying the confidence of the wealthy; separated from and raised above the commonalty by the possession of higher talent, greater information, and more extended influence; by men, in short, who were fitted to be ruling spirits, and among whom a not unnatural esprit de corps had by this time sprung up.

It would of course be a mistake to suppose that any question such as that I have imagined would, for many years, be formally put in any representative assembly, or that it would meet anywhere with a direct and categorical answer. It would rather suggest itself, as many such questions do, first of all to a few far-seeing minds, not perhaps for many years becoming general, or leading to the conviction that, in some form or other, it would have to receive an answer.

At what time or place the question was at length formally discussed; how an answer was obtained; when it was first decided that united action was essential; that an aggressive movement in some combined form was called for; that the extension of Christianity by appropriate agencies was the one thing needful, it is impossible to say. We can only deal with the fact that, before the second century was far advanced, the question had received a practical solution in the existence of a great institution, known then and ever since as THE CHURCH; an institution claiming an exclusive right to teach, to administer ordinances, and to exercise discipline; an institution whose action on Paganism was like that of a disciplined army; -- steady, systematic, and I fear it must be added, scrupulous. The one object ever in view was the extension of Christianity; if possible in its more spiritual aspects, if not by an outward profession, the value of which would depend of course on a variety of circumstances.

Episcopacy had by this time been established. An interesting account of the successive advances which it made in the second and third centuries, is given by Professor Lightfoot in the treatise on the Christian ministry appended to his edition of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and is briefly summarized by Dr. Jacob.

"The development of the Episcopal authority was marked by three distinct stages of progress, which were connected respectively with the names of Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Cyprian. In the time of Ignatius the bishop, then only prisms inter pares among his co-presbyters, was regarded as a center of unity; in the time of Irenaeus he was looked upon as the depositary of primitive truth; and with Cyprian, the bishop was the absolute vicegerent of Christ in things spiritual in the Church." * Tertullian is the first Christian author by whom the Church ministry is directly asserted to be a priesthood. By the time of Cyprian an undisguised sacerdotalism was maintained.

* Eccl. Polity of the New Test., p. 82.

The means adopted to effect the desired extension were often such as would have been repudiated by apostolic men; but their use was the inevitable result of the assumption, now universally made, that God had committed to the Church the conversion of the world.

Among these means the most prominent, and probably the most mischievous, was the new character now given to Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Church being organized as a unity under the control of a professional ministry, it seemed essential to its security and advancement that a mode of admission into its pale should be instituted, one that was at once simple, outward, and applicable to all. Baptism immediately presented itself as suitable for this purpose, being a rite already well known, and constantly practiced in the case of converts from Judaism or Heathenism. The extension to all of this simple ordinance seemed the most natural thing in the world. Whatever therefore might be the age or circumstances of persons desiring admission into the Church either for themselves or their children, baptism was henceforth made the door of entrance. The benefits bestowed on the recipient by the act were later discoveries. The observance once established, it was not difficult to find reasons for it, to imagine or to invent theories in defense of it, plausible enough to silence objectors and to awaken desire for participation in its advantages.

In accordance with this procedure and confirmatory of its having been adopted, we now find for the first time a direct reference to the baptism of Infants. Irenaeus, says Neander, "is the first Father of the Church in whom we find any allusion to infant baptism." Origen, who wrote about fifty years later, says distinctly, "Because by the sacrament of baptism the corruption of their birth is removed, infants are baptized." * There is no reason whatever to suppose that baptism was administered to any child born of Christian parents until that rite was made the door of admission into the Church.

The terms of entrance having been settled, a second ordinance was needed to sustain the connection, and the Lord's Supper was appropriated for this purpose. It was therefore separated from other acts of worship, declared to be more sacred than any other religious act, and placed under the control of the clergy of that period, by whom alone it was said could be properly administered. Here again, contemporary history justifies what has been advanced. Justin Martyr, who presented his apology about A.D. 148 is the first who talks of the consecration "of the elements, and of an administrator," which very soon led to the notion that the assistance of a priest was essential. Other perversions quickly followed. Irenaeus speaks of "offering a sacrifice, and maintains that the Eucharist is a sacrifice in a sense opposed to those who contended that all sacrifices had ceased."

The changes in question were doubtless made, in the first instance, as matters of order only, and simply with a view of thereby perfecting the organization of the Church. The theories followed. The superstitions that ultimately clustered about both ordinances were all of later growth; but they were the inevitable consequences of the course now taken, -- the necessary fruits of the tree now first planted.

Still, something more was needed before the Church could be regarded as properly equipped for that career of conquest to which it was believed she was called. ABLE LEADERS were essential, and the Christians were not long in finding what they wanted. One by one, men distinguished by their learning, their powers of speech, or their administrative skill bowed before the Crucified. These abandoning their old connections, threw themselves heart and soul into a movement which they now perceived was sure eventually to triumph; since it supplied wants that heathenism could not touch, and was capable of entering into and ennobling all the institutions of human society. So it came to pass, that as soon as they were needed, leaders sprang up who were both able and willing to devote everything they possessed to the advancement of the Christian religion.

* Homil. in Lucam xiv., quoted by Dr. Halley.

The all important question is, 'Were these proceedings of God or of man?' Was the process now going on, simply the designed and healthy development of principles and practices that had received Apostolic sanction? If it were so, it is certainly very remarkable that throughout the Apostolic Epistles no reference should be made to the future existence of any great Christian organization; no instructions given as to its order; no summary of doctrines presented as its basis; no creed or formulary prepared for its use; that, after the departure of the Apostles, nothing is left beyond prophetic intimations of approaching corruption and decay.

On the answer given to the question proposed turns consequences the most momentous, -- nothing short indeed of the character of our modern Christianity. It involves in every shape the inquiry, 'Did the Apostles believe themselves, and teach their converts, that Christ, in their simple assemblies, had foreshadowed an organized body -- which, in one form or other, was, as an aggressive power, to continue through the ages; to claim promises of blessing peculiar to itself, and to subdue the world?' Was it the fact that in the triumph of this great organization the Lord would, behold His own triumph, would 'see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied'?

Paul certainly had not taught this, but on the contrary, had rather encouraged the expectation of an early, if not immediate return of the Lord. This expectation however seemed to have ended in disappointment, and the thought therefore might naturally suggest itself, Had it not been a false one? Was not the 'coming' to be spiritual? Might not much that had been said about it be considered as figurative rather than literal? It is probably amid thoughts like these that a doctrine which had once been unquestioned, gradually assumed the character of a doubtful opinion, and, excepting among a few, very soon all but disappeared as heretical and tending to fanaticism. The belief that the Church on earth was the promised 'Kingdom of God' took the place of the discarded hope, and all the energies of the Christian body became centered in the endeavor to secure its triumph.

It may be said, -- 'What else could have been concluded?' To what other judgment could Christians have arrived than that on them rested the future of Christianity? Was not the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jewish people evidence it to be resisted, that Christianity was intended take the place of Judaism, -- the difference simply being that whilst the one was confined to a single nation, the other was to be world wide blessing? What could be more certain than that in due time Rome would become what Jerusalem had been, -- the center of revealed truth, and the light of the world? And if this was the design of God, why should it be thought surprising that the few only, as in Judea, should be spiritual, that the mass should, for a time at least, be Christians chiefly in name?

The command remained in force, -- 'Preach the Gospel to every creature.' Hoax could this be done without organization; without an order of men dedicated to the work; without the adaptation to Christian ends of rites, ceremonies, and customs that had long been perverted to evil purposes?

Here and there a voice might be raised in favor of primitive simplicity and primitive spirituality, but it would be drowned at once in cries for the conversion of the nations; in reasonings on the absurdity of supposing that such a work could ever be effected by individual effort; in exclamations on the cruelty of leaving the heathen to perish in their sins; and in thanksgivings that God had provided for them an Ark by merely stepping into which their salvation might be secured.

Of what avail was it then to suggest, that Christianity, as it came from God, was, from first to last, a supernatural thing; that the call it made was not national, but individual; that Christ had always spoken of His people as a 'little flock;' that His Kingdom was not of this world; that only after the Resurrection would every knee bow to Him; that it was folly, and worse than folly, to ignore all this in endeavors to extend a

nominal Christianity which could bring no glory to God, but which was sure to re-act upon themselves and to lower the standards both of faith and practice?

That expostulations of this character were not wanting can scarcely be doubted; that if made they were disregarded is certain. The rulers of the Church were bent upon accomplishing a task which charmed as much by its difficulty as by its magnitude; which excited the imagination by the grandeur of its possible results; which secured the perpetuity of an Institution destined, as they believed, one day to establish the Kingdom of God upon the earth, and which exalted an order of men of whom Christ Himself had said 'Lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.'

How were these glorious words intended to be interpreted and applied? Surely in this way : -- Christ's promise is to be with His ministers to the end of time. As such, "it involves a direct, -- not to say supernatural, -- controlling and emanative influence, resident with a visible community, preserving its legitimate functionaries from all serious error, and enabling them so to adapt the institutions of the Lord to the changing circumstances of every age, that what the Church may decree at any time is to be submitted to as if uttered from Heaven, and is not less binding on the conscience than so many texts of Scripture." *

Never surely were words more strained for a purpose than these have been. In considering them the first question is, 'To whom were they addressed?' From the context it would plainly appear to 'the eleven.' But this conclusion is objected to by many, first, on the ground that the mountain in Galilee was the mount of ascension, and that Jesus was there seen 'by five hundred brethren at once;' and next on account of the supposed improbability that, after what had taken place at Jerusalem, any of the eleven should have doubted. Such critics therefore hold that the words in question must have been spoken to 'the five hundred.'

I do not see the force of this reasoning. That the command to 'Preach the Gospel to every creature' applies in spirit to every believer, and that the promise of Christ's continued presence with all who are engaged in His work is implied, I do not doubt; but that the words now under consideration were spoken only to the Apostles seems to me certain. It is no valid objection to this view to say that it was impossible they could preach the Gospel to all creation, since it is equally impossible for us to do so now; nor has it ever been otherwise.

The spirit of the charge to the Apostles unquestionably is 'No longer confine the call to Judea.' Preach the glad tidings 'as a witness among all nations;' and the spirit of the promise made to them is, 'I will be with you to protect you in the work I have given you to do.' A similar promise had been made both to Jeremiah and to Zerubbabel with this meaning exclusively.

It was signally fulfilled in the experience of the founders of Christianity when, at the persecution which followed the death of Stephen, all the believers were scattered abroad except the Apostles, and it was realized both by Paul and other members of the Sacred College until their continuance on earth was no longer needful.

* Taylor's "Ancient Christianity, vol. H., p. 38.

The writings of the Fathers of this period throw but little light on the state of the Christian community; but that little clearly indicates the rapid growth of ecclesiastical notions altogether foreign the spirit of Apostolic teaching. They make it perfectly plain that the change, which took place during the first hundred years after the death of the Apostles, represents the difference between Christianity regarded as a Life, and the Church regarded as an organization; between the manifestation of the Spirit of God in renewed individuals, and the manifestation of a combined and aggressive spirit on the part of men who were not of the world as it then was; that it involved the knitting together under leaders, of societies that had hitherto been to a great extent independent of each other; that it implied the gradual advancement of injurious processes which were apparently in operation during the life-time of the Apostles.

The Epistles of Ignatius (circ. A.D. 107) -- which are however now generally discredited, -- abound in statements which, if they were to be depended upon, would prove how vast was the difference between Christianity at this period, and that which belonged to it in the Apostolic age. He speaks of the Bishop as being "in the place of God," and the Presbyters as standing in the place of the Apostles, He says, "he that honors the Bishop shall be honored of God, but he that does anything without his knowledge ministers to the Devil," -- and such like.

Irena us, whose writings are trustworthy, and who died about the close of the century, "first of all defines the idea of the Church as subsisting under a determinate form of constitution, and then puts down the communion of the Holy Spirit as something derived from and imparted by the Church, exclaiming, Ubi ecclesia ibi et Spiritus Dei." He afterwards adds, "Et ubi Spiritus Dei illic ecclesia." It is only, he says, "at the breast of the Church that man can be nursed to life. He cannot partake of the Holy Spirit who takes not refuge in the Church. He who separates himself from the Church renounces the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." *

Justin Martyr, who was put to death about twenty years before Irenaeus, indicates how early and how deeply the Church had become infected with notions about Baptism which at a later date developed into a sort of magical rite, when he seemingly identifies Regeneration and Baptism. Speaking of the catechumens, he says, "They are led by to the water, and are regenerated by the same process of regeneration by which we were ourselves regenerated; for they then receive the laver in the name of God the Father and Master of the Universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost. For Christ says, 'Except ye be born again ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.'" **

Clement of Alexandria -- who is honorably distinguished by the endeavors he made to stem the extravagant notions regarding celibacy which c then prevailing, and who, says Mr. Isaac Taylor, "very nearly approaches a Protestant style of remonstrance against the then spreading fanaticism," *** -- reveals to us the moral effects which were produced by what was going on." I know not how it is," he says, " that with the place they (the converts) change their habits and their manners, just as it is said of the polypus that it changes its color according to the nature of the rock to which it clings. As soon as they leave the Church they lay aside the spiritual demeanor which they there put on, and become like the multitude with whom they live." ****

* Meander, "Eccl. Hist.," vol. i., p. 291; Bohn's edition.

** Quoted by Sadler, "Church Doctrine, Bible Truth," p. 313

*** Ancient Christianity," vol. i., p. 113.

**** Neander, "Eccl. Hist.," vol. i., p. 401.

It is a very sad admission, but one that we are obliged to make, that the Christianity of the age immediately following the death of the Apostles was not Apostolic. The difference does not reach to the mere amount of diversity of usage, or of a shade of feeling; it involves nothing less than the substitution of one principle of virtue and piety for another. The scheme of religious sentiments had shifted its foundations; a different standard of good and evil had come to be appealed to; the commandments of God were displaced without scruple by the whims of man; so that within so short a period as a hundred years, by yielding to heathen opinions and practices regarding the virtue of celibacy, the very institute which Paul solemnly commended was impiously spoken of as degrading." *

Such was the Christianity of the century. Such were the firstfruits of ecclesiastical organization.

The point to be observed in this chapter is the or; -- in of that great institution which, with its two leading ordinances, has ever since been known as THE CHURCH, whether regarded as a unity, or considered as existing in various forms, -- Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, or Puritan; whether centered in Rome, embodied in the institutions of a nation, r manifested in countless fellowships independent or otherwise of each other, and purely sustained by the voluntary offerings of the faithful.

If this origin be admitted -- and I do not see how can be denied -- all claim to Divine authority in Churches, whether put forward by Pope or Patriarch; all pretensions to Apostolicity, whether made by synod or by sect, fall to the ground. The institution, wherever, or in whatever form it may be found, is purely human and must be judged accordingly. It may be very useful. It may suppose itself to have received evident and abundant marks of the Divine approval. Its existence to this hour may or may not be a blessing, -- may or may not be justified on the ground of a high expediency. That is another question, and must be dealt with separately. But it cannot claim any Divine authority or approval, beyond or above that which pertains to every human institution established for good ends. By its fruits it must be judged. By its practical value to mankind it must stand or fall.

The theory, so often maintained, that the Fathers of the second and third century, or even later, were either inspired or semi-inspired; that they received, as successors of the Apostles, a measure of wisdom and grace sufficiently large to enable them to found the Church, and therefore that they have a right to the authority that is so freely accorded to the Apostles, would of course put the matter on a different footing if it were capable of support. But this is impossible. The theory is, after all, nothing but a theory, invented to meet the supposed necessities of the case, but in no degree whatever based on any evidence that can be discovered either in Scripture or in their own lives and writings.

Let those then who attach, as they have a perfect right to do, an almost unlimited amount of credence to what they regard as the decisions of the Church, or 'Mother Church,' be honest enough to admit that they do so, not on Apostolic testimony, but on the supposed transmission of Apostolic gifts to successors who, in the second century, laid the foundations of the great organized society they so ardently admire and so profoundly reverence.

* "Ancient Christianity," vol. i., p. 109.

And let those who disclaim this ground, and refuse altogether to admit that any claim can be advanced for the post-Apostolic Fathers, different from, or greater than, that which may rightfully be made on behalf of any diligent and qualified student of Scripture, cease also from the assertion, utterly baseless, that their fellowships, if not patterns of the Apostolic, are at least established on principles which justify them in talking and writing as if they were more or less Divine in character, and therefore had a claim on Christians for support, the neglect of which involves disloyalty to the Lord himself.

Let all men on this great subject be honest and fearless. Let them be content that the institutions they so much regard should stand or fall simply on their merits; that the traditions to which they have given birth, whether ecclesiastical or theological, should submit to be tested and judged by Scripture alone; and in reviewing the history of ecclesiastical associations in every age, let them desire above all things that their minds should be kept free from prejudice, their eyes unblinded by interest, and their hearts open to receive in all candor and charity whatever may be suggested as likely to contribute to a true understanding of the matter.

CHAPTER II

THE VISIBLE CHRISTIANITY OF THE THIRD CENTURY (A.D. 180-325).

THE third century has been well characterized "the era of struggle," since it was the period during which the Church and the Pagan Empire came into direct conflict.

During the previous century, viz., from about A.D. 96 to A.D. 180, or from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus, Christianity had advanced with rapid strides. By its promulgation "a visible and hopeful impression had been made upon the sentiments and practices of perhaps half of the community in all countries around the Mediterranean." *

With some signal exceptions this had been accomplished without serious opposition. The policy of the Roman Emperors had, for many years, permitted the Christians to enjoy comparative liberty, and they had improved the opportunity. Every thing was favorable to them. It was a time of general prosperity; a time when, according to Gibbon, the vast extent of the Roman Empire was, as a rule, "governed by absolute power under the guidance of virtue and wisdom."

Still, so far as Christians were concerned, happiness was by no means unmixed. The persecution in Bithynia, about A.D. 107, in which it is supposed Ignatius was martyred, and that under Marcus Aurelius, which took place about A.D. 165, when Polycarp and Justin were put to death, are sufficient evidence that the enmity of opposers was neither concealed nor inactive. But it was not till the third century that a conflict could properly be said to have commenced. Before that time the Christians had simply endured their sufferings with a sort of passive sadness; they now began to look upon persecution as a warfare, which, however disastrous for a time, was sure eventually to terminate in their favor.

Years had rolled on, and multitudes had grown up, -- some born of Christian parents, and some the children of thoughtful heathen, -- who, although not, in any high sense of the word, believers in Christ, or apparently 'born from above,' were yet more or less under the influence of Christianity, more or less saved from the slough of pollution by which they were surrounded. As this large and increasing class multiplied, the hope sprang up that in due time the Church would witness the triumph of its faith; and the conviction widened and deepened that the able men who presided over ecclesiastical affairs, seeing clearly the rottenness of the existing paganism, were right in insisting that it was the duty of believers, as a united body, actively to oppose prevailing forms of thought, and to propagate at all hazards opinions which, when sufficiently advanced, would be sure to overthrow the existing order of things.

That true spiritual work cannot be well done in combination, -- since combined forces can only act through a machinery which always materializes religion, promotes formalism, and discourages individuality, -- was either unconsidered or disregarded. It was enough to know that out of the bosom of the Church issued, from time to time, persons who by the strength of their faith and the purity of their lives wrought wonders. It was not perceived that this was the case only in so far as the Spirit of God in the individual counteracted, and triumphed over, the corporate evils of a system.

* "Ancient Christianity," vol. ii., p. 34.

The new faith had, in the first instance, pervaded society like light, spreading itself by quiet and almost unperceived influences; it had next, by gradual transformation, become a great moral force, capable when skillfully wielded, of acting on opponents with subduing power; it was now a well organized body, strong for conflict, inured to suffering, and obedient to leaders, -- in every sense of the word a Church militant, ready to flaunt the banner of defiance in the face of all enemies, and prepared, whether at the Forum, in the Marketplace, before Civil Courts, or amid the cries of the Theatre to contend, and, if needful, to die for the truths it declared and embodied.

I have said, in the preceding chapter, that the change which took place in the character of Christianity during the first hundred years after the death of the Apostles, represents the difference between Christianity regarded as a Life, and the Church regarded as an Institution. I believe this change was brought about to a great extent by evictions from Apostolic teaching as to the Mission of the Comforter. This will be seen more distinctly if it is remembered that the grand peculiarity of the Gospel, as it was first presented to mankind, consisted in its proclamation of the good news that Christ had risen indeed, and that, in accordance with His promise, the Holy Ghost was now taking up His abode in the heart of every faithful follower of the Lamb, as the Spirit of light, of love, of purity, and of gladness.

The earliest believers experienced this blessing. By that Divine indwelling they were disposed heartily to receive, and earnestly to cherish, all those great truths which at once form the basis and sustain the superstructure of the religious life. Through it they were united to Christ, and being kept in immediate and constant contact with their Lord, were preserved from doubt, and filled with 'joy and peace in believing.'

But scarcely a century rolls away after the death of the Apostles before we discover that all this is altered. We wake up as it were from a dream, and find to our amazement that the doctrine of the indwelling Spirit in every believer has, to a great extent, departed; that man has taken the place of God; that the law of liberty has been superseded by the claims of an outward and authoritative Church; that all the conditions of human responsibility in relation to the attainment of Divine Truth have been changed; that Jewish, and in some instances Pagan ideas, have supplanted Christian ones; that the light and liberty of the Gospel have suddenly disappeared amid the shadows and ordinances of the earlier dispensation.

Tertullian, who lived at the commencement of the third century, furnishes us with a true picture of the opinions of his time, when, replying to the question wherefore it is that the Lord hath sent the Comforter, he says, "What is this administration of the Comforter unless it consist in such things as these, that matters of discipline be ordered, that the Scriptures be opened, that the mind of the Church be restored, and that it should be advanced towards what is better?"

His argument is that the Lord has sent the comforter in order that the Christian scheme may from time to time be adapted to the incessant opposite agency of the Devil; that as the feebleness of human nature could not at once receive the whole truth, it might by degrees, through the agency of the Church, be directed and regulated. "Look at the natural world," he says, "and see the plant gradually ripening to its fruit, first a mere grain, then boughs and branches, till the tree is complete. And so in religion, for it is the same God of nature and of religion; at first in its rudiments only, -- nature surmising something concerning God; then by the law and the prophets advanced to its infant State; then by the Gospel it reached the heats of youth; and now by the Comforter is molded to its maturity."

On this passage Mr. Isaac Taylor asks, "Is Tertullian's doctrine, -- his fundamental Church axiom, a good one? Is it true or not that Christianity, as revealed and verbally expressed in the canonical writings, is a mere sketch or rough draft of that mature truth which, by little and little, was to be granted to the Church through the medium of its doctors and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? If so, then is there anywhere else we

can look for the progressive expansion of this ever-growing truth but to the Church of Rome; or, if we like it better, the Greek Church? Where is the tree to be found laden with its fruit but where the plant was set? At this rate Protestantism, under whatever pretext, is nothing better than a multifarious blasphemy, and a high sin against the Holy Ghost." *

The root of the error lies in the belief, still cherished by Protestants as well as by Romanists, that the Spirit of God is present in the Church as an organization, whatever that organization may be, -- in a sense higher than that in which He is present in the heart of the individual. The inference is, that because Christ has said that where two or three are met together in His name He will be with them, therefore we are bound to believe that He is present in the Christian assembly in some intensified form. Such a conclusion, however, is altogether unauthorized. There is no reason whatever to suppose that, as a fact, Christ is in any higher or other sense present in the large assembly than in the lonely closet of the believer.

That Churches, of whatever name, hold to this special presence among them, when regarded in their collective capacity, is certain, since in ecclesiastical matters they all maintain that the individual ought to bow to the decision of an assembly, on the ground that Christ is peculiarly present in such assemblies, and that they are guided to their conclusions by the Spirit of God. And yet the thoughtful observer cannot conceal from himself that each and all of these bodies are as such destitute of moral character; that they are but associations of individuals united for the purpose of pursuing a common end in connection with common views. It matters not how good that end may be. The members assembled are human, and selfish aims are always liable to intermingle. Hence the ever-recurring complaint that ecclesiastical assemblies are anything but free from craft, ambition, uncharitableness, and self seeking.

Nor should such a charge either excite surprise or be regarded as obviously unfounded; for as a great fact in human experience, there is commonly more self-deception in a crowd than in solitude; more vanity and ambition in a class than in any separate member of it; more worldliness in an ecclesiastical council than in the closet of the priest when the door is shut; and probably far more hardness of heart and deadness of conscience, more delusion and deceit, in the meeting of a propaganda, than was ever found in the individual experience of any separate member of it. How much all this evil is aggravated by the persuasion that 'where two or three are gathered together' for the promotion of any object supposed to be pleasing to God, special light is vouchsafed to the majority, is best known to those who have been persecuted for their dissent.

The doctrine of Church development under the supposed guidance of the Comforter, whatever opinion may be formed respecting it, must however, of course, in the last resort, like everything else, be 'judged by its fruits.' What these fruits were in the early Church we have no difficulty in ascertaining. By the time of Cyprian, who lived about the middle of the third century, the Bishops considered themselves to be invested with a rank and character similar to those of the high Priest among the Jews, while the Presbyters were regarded as representing the Priests, and the Deacons the Levites; the Lord's Supper was converted into a sacrifice; decrees of councils were enforced as laws; the grossest superstitions were practiced; monkery, and every other form of fanaticism, prevailed; and Apostolic principles and practices were all but universally disregarded.

"Christ," says Cyprian, "communicated to the Apostles, and the Apostles to the Bishops, by ordination, the power of the Holy Ghost. By the succession of Bishops this power, from whence all religious acts receive their efficacy, is handed down to all time. Whoever, therefore, breaks off his external connection with this outward organization puts himself thereby out of communion with that Divine life, and out of the way of salvation. No one by himself alone, through belief in the Savior, has any share in the Divine life that flows from Him." **

* "Ancient Christianity," vol. i., p. 96.

** Neander's "Eccl. Hist.," VOL i., p. 293.

A class of persons, probably laymen, seem to have opposed themselves to Cyprian on this point, and appealed to the promise of Christ as recorded by Matthew (Matt. 18:20), arguing therefrom that every association of true believers was a Church. But Cyprian, sustained by the Christian opinion of his day, styled them 'corrupters of the Gospel,' and maintained that it was not possible to agree with any individual who does not agree with the body of the Church itself and the whole brotherhood.

Intimately connected with the tone of ecclesiastical assumption which now prevailed was the aim put forward from time to time to the possession of supernatural powers. The age of miracles had passed away; but ecclesiastics were willing to believe that a certain degree of miraculous power still lingered amongst them. They continued, therefore, to claim not only Apostolic rule, but Apostolic power, and this to such an extent that it has been asserted the miracles of the third century were more numerous than those of the first.

The circumstance that all supernatural gifts were withdrawn at a given period does not seem to have been regarded. Had they recollected that supernatural endowments had always been bestowed exclusively by the Apostles; that no one who had received the power of healing disease from them could communicate the endowment to a third person; that Philip's experience in Samaria had demonstrated this limitation, -- they would have seen that no supernatural gift could -- if Scripture was to be regarded -- by any possibility be enjoyed beyond the last man on whom the latest of the Apostles had laid hands.

But it is to be feared they did not wish to see this; for the recognition of such a limitation would have carried with it consequences fatal to all their pretensions. Was it not clear that if Philip, who wrought such wonderful miracles in Samaria that 'there was great joy in the city,' could not communicate his gifts to a single convert, but had to wait till Peter and John came down and laid hands on them, the more spiritual gifts bestowed on Timothy and others must, in like manner, be incapable of transmission? And if it were so, did not the whole fabric on which ecclesiastical power rested necessarily crumble and fall? The mere fact that gifts of tongues, miracles of healing, and all inspired teaching had actually ceased, showed but too clearly that the Apostolic succession they boasted of was but a dream.

The same want of conscientiousness which was manifested in relation to miracles was not seldom shown in other ways. Exaggerations of all kinds were allowed, and the most unchristian tempers indulged. What can be more distressing than to hear Tertullian, who is styled by Cyprian the doctor and guide of all the Western Churches, addressing the heathen in language like this? -- "How shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many magistrates, who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in fiercer fires than they ever kindled against the Christians; so many sage philosophers blushing in red-hot flames with their deluded scholars!" -- and such like. The character of Christianity must have changed greatly before such a mode of address could have been adopted or approved.

Truth, charity, simplicity, -- everything, in short, was sacrificed to secure the power and aggrandizement of a society which it was believed was destined to overthrow the established religion of the Empire; which needed, therefore, a form of policy likely to secure the appointment of the most energetic men to office; which sanctified ambition by the dedication of its gains to the service of the Church; and which clothed those who became leaders with power to expose and to expel rebellious members.

Thus it was that step by step "the Church assumed a new form and acquired gigantic strength, while Prelates, backed by superstitions of all kinds, imperceptibly changed the language of exhortation into that of command, and supplied by declamatory rhetoric what might be deficient in reason." The Bishops became the Vicegerents of Christ, and the arts of the most ambitious statesmen were united to the virtues of saints and martyrs. Money poured into the coffers of the Church; estates were bestowed upon it; and the disposal of the wealth thus acquired soon fell altogether into the hands of the clergy. The penalty of excommunication was

always in reserve for offenders, and a spiritual tyranny was consummated which far exceeded in its reach the most despotic power that the monarchs of the earth had ever wielded.

The belief that the Empire would ere long fall before the Church deepened as the changes in question went on. Origen, who died about the middle of the century, A.D. 254, avows his belief that if Christians were only consistent, if they would but act in accordance with their profession, "all other religions would cease from the earth, and Christianity alone be supreme;" which, says he, "is one day destined to have the supremacy."

Neander, remarking on this statement, observes, "The feature in Origen's assertion which evinces the change that during the course of this century the progress of history had worked in the mode of thinking among Christians, and in their anticipations of the future development of God's Kingdom, was the confident expectation that Christianity, working outward from within, would overcome and suppress every other religion, and gain the dominion of the world. Such an anticipation was foreign to the thoughts of the earlier teachers of the Church. They could not think otherwise of the Pagan state than as a power incessantly hostile to Christianity, and they only expected the triumph of the Church as the result of a supernatural interposition at the second coming of Christ." *

As a means of insuring the triumph now so confidently anticipated, great importance was of course attached to the unity of the Church, by which was always understood outward and visible unity, -- a unity so complete, and so obvious to all, that the remotest member could feel the oneness. The consciousness of being a member of a body so united was felt to be in itself a source of strength to every individual. The mere fact of its existence they said could not but exercise a strong influence over the heathen, who, knowing none but political and earthly bonds of union, had no idea of a spiritual tie which should bind men together as members of the same heavenly community.

Great therefore was the grief and indignation that was excited when, in consequence of the arrogant tone now assumed by the rulers of the Christian community, who everywhere laid down the law with little or no regard to individual convictions, they saw one and another separating themselves from the great body, and openly advocating views which the Church disallowed. To such an extent was this now done that the enemies of the faith taunted the Christians with their diversities, declaring, and not without reason, that those who professed to be one were really separated into parties mutually attacking and refuting each other, and retaining little in common but their name.

To these sects the leaders of the Christian community gave no quarter, caring little for the circumstance that in putting down what they regarded as a one-sided and merely subjective element they exalted the outward, crushed the religious consciousness of the individual, and made the external Church not merely the primary, but the only medium of communion with Christ. The consequence was that "the spiritual life which ought to have formed itself in all alike outwardly from within, was transferred to a communion, and was supposed to be brought about by means of a determinate outward organism of certain visible forces. As a consequence of this change the inner and the outward, the invisible and the visible, inseparably blended together." **

But this spiritual decadence was little regarded so long as the visible corporation which had now for nearly two centuries claimed to be the organ and authorized depository of religious truth could maintain its outward unity and justify its pretensions. And this it was now doing. It was obviously gaining ground in a strife which could not have been carried on at all without organization, without leaders, or without submission on the part of the people to their clergy. The cost was not reckoned, since it consisted not merely in blood or tears, but in simplicity, in spirituality, in all that makes Christianity worth fighting for.

* " Eccl. Hist.," vol. i., p. 179.

** "Eccl. Hist.," p. 290

We say now, "What have we to do with the 'tremendous sacrifice' of the mass, with the adoration of the mother of God, with prayers for the dead or with prayers to them, or with the intercession of saints, or with holy water, holy oil, holy vestments, and crossing of the forehead, -- with the worship of images, pictures, and relics, -- with penance, purgatory, and auricular confession, indulgences and works of supererogation, -- with monkery and celibacy, or with lying miracles? The modern Christian, Bible in hand, throws off these follies and abominations as a man might rend from his shoulders a fool's checkered coat that had been forced upon him. But, in doing so, draw little does he ordinarily recollect that he is treating with contempt the sense, practice, and persuasion of the Christian community almost from the first, -- that these things obtained the approval in long succession of the Fathers, Doctors, and Rulers of the Ancient Church, -- of confessors, and of martyrs?" *

With such facts before us as the first-fruits of Church organization, of what use is it to say that "Christianity tends to and demands this sort of cohesion; that where there is no organization there is no Christianity; that where organization is imperfect or casual, there Christianity is feeble or factitious; that if there be good reason for securing any order, or for instituting any government on religious grounds, there is the same reason for effecting the most perfect order, and for establishing the most finished system of government possible"?

Far be it from me to dispute the greatness of the debt we owe to the believers of the second and third centuries. Church organization and its consequences might deeply injure, but it could not stamp out the heavenly life in the Christian body. In thousands that life manifested itself in a patience and humility we might well covet; in sacrifices, compared to which ours are not worthy to be mentioned; and especially in a courage and endurance unparalleled when they were called to protect and to preserve the sacred writings. It would be folly to dispute facts so patent as these are; but it is greater folly to attribute the faith and virtue of these sufferers to anything but that work of God on the heart which is independent of all Church agencies. It is unreasonable to say that Christianity would not have permeated the Empire, perhaps even at an earlier time, had the visible corporation never been brought into existence; had Christianity remained in that state of solution which seems to have originally belonged to it; had the communion of Christians, instead of being the result of organizing the Christianity of a given town or district, been left to manifest itself, as it always will, in spontaneous association. To deny either the vitality or the diffusive power of individual Christianity is to deny the intercourse of God with the individual soul; to confound Church order with Christianity itself; and to attribute to preachers what is really the result of the work of the Spirit and the study of the written Word.

But to proceed. The terrific persecution under Diocletian and Galerius which commenced towards the close of the century disclosed, as no previous persecution had done, the great strength of the Christian party, and proved how impossible it had become to root out the superstition. This critical and trying period, says Neander, brought to light both good and evil in the great body of Christians. An imperial order had been issued for the suppression of the Scriptures, and by it all Christians who concealed or retained them were made liable to the torture in judicial investigations. The effect of this in every part of the Roman world was overwhelming. Some yielded and gave up their copies, which were immediately committed to the flames in the public market-place; but the greater part challenged the Pagan magistrates to do their office, and courted martyrdom with a fanatic zeal.

* "Spiritual Despotism," pp. 326, 7.

Struck with the reports he received that all his bloody proceedings had done no material injury to the Christian cause, Galerius at length put an end to the sanguinary conflict by a remarkable edict, which declared that "it had been the intention of the Emperors to bring back the Christians to the religion of their fathers; but as the majority of them, in spite of every measure to the contrary, persevered in their opinions, the Emperors had resolved to extend to them their wonted clemency." The fact was that Christianity had become too strong to be put down. Quiet but significant allusions to the physical force and to the organized power of the Christians were not unfrequently made by their apologists, and indications of alarm appeared from time to time in the Imperial cabinet. "The two powers," writes Mr. Isaac Taylor, "were balancing and mutually measuring their strength; and if the conversion of the Court itself had not occurred when it did, nothing else seemed so likely to happen as an open collision and a general conflict. How far this was foreseen by Constantine, and how far a regard to it might affect his decision, we must not surmise; but it may be conjectured that he embraced the unconquerable doctrine, and bowed to the triumphant Cross only in time to prevent a universal convulsion, and perhaps an overthrow of the Pagan ascendancy." *

The victory was indeed gained, but at what a price! "The chiefs of Christianity had long been accumulating wealth, and drawing to themselves judicial powers which extended into almost every sphere of life. A great spiritual tyranny had been created. The Bishop's daily employment had become, in the larger sees, more secular than spiritual, and he was seen oftener and listened to more eagerly on the bench dividing inheritances than in the pulpit teaching piety." ** The unyielding despotism which subsequently was made coherent in the Papacy "had developed every one of its essential principles before the time of that political revolution which gave to the Christian body the aids of Imperial patronage." *** The Church had become essentially despotic, the Clergy having subdued the people by making them believe that the Priest had irresponsible control over certain awful elements indispensable to salvation. Who could resist men whose special function it was, not only to preserve truth and morals in this life, but also to dispose of souls in the eternal state?

And so it came to pass that when, after two centuries of strife and persecution, the open profession of Christianity became lawful in the Roman Empire, all power was immediately vested in a sacerdotal class; and temples and altars, sacramental mysteries and scholastic refinements, alike attested the growth of a priesthood which, having first appropriated to itself every function in the Church, subsequently through the Church subjugated the world. For it should never be forgotten that "the Christian hierarchy was completely organized and established in the minds of men before the great revolutions which, under Constantine, legalized Christianity, and under Theodosius and his successors identified the Church and State. The strength of the sacerdotal power was consolidated before it came into inevitable collision, or had to dispute its indefinable limits with the civil authority. Mankind was now submitted to a double dominion -- the civil supremacy of the Emperor and his subordinate magistrates, and that of the Bishop with his inferior priesthood." ****

Such was the Church of the third century. The noticeable fact is that by the close of it primitive Christianity had all but totally disappeared, and in its place had come up the notion that in the Church, now a hierarchy, a species of theocracy, with its Urim and Thummim, still existed for the people of God. The proof deemed absolutely conclusive was, that under this supposed direction, by forces at once moral and immoral, spiritual and yet carnal, the fabric of idolatry had been overthrown, and that Christianity reigned in its stead.

* "Spiritual Despotism," p. 232.

** Ibid., p. 273.

*** Ibid., p. 234.

**** Milman's "History of Latin Christianity."

The cost at which the victory had been achieved might be summed up in the statement that "at a time not more remote from the Apostolic age than we of this generation are from the times of Barrow, Tillotson, Taylor, and Baxter, all the elements of the abuses of the twelfth century were in existence; and not the elements only, but most of those abuses in a ripened -- nay, in a putrescent condition." *

The fruit being of this character, we may well ask, What was the tree? and where is the evidence that a plant so deadly was ever planted by the Divine hand?

* "Ancient Christianity," vol. i., p. 72.

CHAPTER III

THE EMPIRE CHURCH (A.D. 323-1500).

BY the Empire Church I here understand the Church as it existed from the time of Constantine to the Reformation; for during the whole of that time, amid many changes, it maintained a moral ascendancy over every other form of power. Practically -- whatever the theory might be -- the Church, for a thousand years, dominated the State.

The first public act that calls for notice after the establishment of Christianity is the meeting of the Council of Nice, or rather of Nicea, in Asia Minor. The Council, which took place A.D. 325, has been most graphically depicted by Dean Stanley in his 'Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church,' and the picture throws a strong light on the condition of things at this period. The assembly included, of course, many who had suffered in the Pagan persecutions. "It consisted of Arians as well as orthodox; of the learned and the illiterate; of courtiers and peasants; of old and young; of aged bishops on the verge of the grave, and of beardless deacons just entering on their office."

"The Emperor was scarcely seated before he found himself overwhelmed with letters containing charges, often of gross licentiousness, made by bishops against bishops, all which he wisely burnt. He himself, though a semi-pagan, and subsequently the murderer of his son, his nephew, and his wife, was received by this Christian assembly as an angel of God, and was often a preacher to applauding thousands." What, one cannot but ask, must that Christian assembly have been which regarded such a man as an inspired oracle, and an apostle of Christian wisdom?

The effects of the great change which had by this time taken place in the character of Christianity were now manifesting themselves in ways at once striking and painful. The chief controversies in the Council turned on "the ineffable relations of the Godhead before the remotest beginnings of time," and "these discussions were parodied in the pagan theatres. The passions of men in the disputation were roused to fury, and sailors, millers, and travelers sang the disputed doctrines at their occupations and on their journeys."

The cause of this depraved state of public feeling was obvious enough. The Church, rather than the individual, had become the living witness of the Divine power of Christianity. It alone was the school of Christian experience, -- the voice that was to sound through the ages, of instruction, of doctrine, and of reproof. Its calling was to subdue the world; its authority was to regulate everything. The fullness of time had to all appearance arrived, Christ had come again, and, through the Church He had planted, "all the threads of human development, which had hitherto been kept apart, were to be brought together and interwoven into one web." That was the theory. The practical design was to attempt the re-establishment of the theocracy on a grand scale.

For this Christianity appeared to be singularly adapted. It was capable of entering into and harmonizing with all the existing institutions of human society. It announced itself as a power equal to the regeneration of the world. And if, in accomplishing this great purpose, it might have sometimes to accommodate itself to existing prejudices more than the holiness of Christianity allowed, the necessity might be lamented, but could not be escaped.

The Clergy had long claimed to be a body corresponding to the Priests and Levites of the Jewish economy. They now, as conquerors, found it by no means difficult to adapt this order to the forms of social life in the Roman Empire, since in it every institution was based on religious customs. To the Roman, paganism was a

power of religious faith, and a means which the wisdom of lawgivers employed for training and leading the multitude. Christianity was believed to be more powerful than heathenism, both as an educating and controlling influence; and the attempt to prove that it was so, combined, with other causes, to encourage compromises and adaptations which, intended to Christianize paganism, really paganized Christianity.

Aided, as it was supposed, by the adaptations in question, the war against paganism was now carried on more vigorously than ever, and, as time advanced, both towns and villages yielded to the new force, and became, nominally at least, Christian. To many this result appeared almost miraculous. It does so still to multitudes who ought to know better. There are those amongst us who yet see in that event the second coming of Christ. These tell us that "when the Thessalonians were led to believe that the day of Christ was 'at hand,' -- even at the door, the prophecies which led them astray found their fulfillment when Christianity ascended the throne of the Caesars." That, say they, "was the predicted reality which the enthusiasm of so many had led them to misinterpret; for the same dispensation of grace which gave Rome to Christ will give Him all lands at length."

I hope I do not think lightly of the overthrow of Paganism in the Roman empire; I am very thankful for it; but I am far from seeing in that downfall a great work of the Spirit of God. I cannot close my eyes to the fact that, whatever blessings followed in its train, it was in truth but the subjections of the world to priestly power through the agency of a debased and corrupting Christianity.

On this head the testimony of Dean Milman is striking. He says, "As the village, the town, the city, or the province became in outward form and profession Christian, practical heathenism retired, to work more silently and imperceptibly into the Christian system; Christian morality became more and more divorced from Christian faith; heresy soon became almost the only crime; and in the desire to make an impression on the general tone and character of society, exaggerations of all kinds sprang into existence; religion became a mere engine of terror; and the moral elevation of each individual by truths which, rightly imparted, promote energy and self-reliance, fill a man with noble thoughts and masculine virtues, making him at once a worshipper of Christ and a follower of all righteousness, was lost sight of in the eager desire to bring all mankind within the pale of the Church, however debasing or debilitating the process by which it might be accomplished."

I, for one, cannot believe that the agency by which such a transformation was effected could be Divine. I am the less inclined to think that such was the case because -- allowing for all that might be advanced in the way of apology on the ground of prevailing ignorance -- no attempt was ever made at a later time to lead men out of the pupilage under which it was supposed they had at first been necessarily placed. On the contrary, everything was vested in, perpetuity in a clerical class, and everything confined to the sole direction of ecclesiastics.

Perhaps it was found impossible to alter things. Once thoroughly embarked in a wrong course nothing is more difficult than retrogression. The clergy would naturally be unwilling to give up the power they had so painfully and laboriously acquired; the people wished them to retain it. The practices of the Primitive Church -- so at least they thought -- had, in the first instance, been departed from only as a matter of dire necessity; but was it not now becoming evident that these very necessities had, under the guidance of Providence, drifted the Church into the exact position it was intended she should ultimately occupy? The Apostles had indeed planted, but others had watered; and so the Church had become a full-grown and completely developed tree, under the shadow of which the nations were now willing to repose. Was it not a fact that the Christianity of the age, whatever might be its defects, was, in their lands, gradually subduing the earth? Who was to take the responsibility of even seeming to check for a moment so glorious a work, one on which the Divine blessing was so evidently resting? Thus in all probability they reasoned.

But here and there some one might ask himself this question, -- Was not direct intercourse between Christ and the believer now intercepted? Was not the Church, in fact, taking His place? If all spiritual benefits were to be received only through the Church, was there no danger that this institution would soon come to be regarded as the real Savior of them that believe?

If such a possibility ever suggested itself, the answer was ready. It might be so but for one circumstance. The Church had in its hand a medium through which Christ himself was brought into immediate and actual contact with each individual man, and the sacrament of the Holy Supper was that medium.

In this belief they were content to rest. What could the Clergy do but thankfully accept the new position that God had given them, and divide the land, and occupy the temples of idolatry, and turn their evil endowments to holier and nobler purposes, and control thought, and purify morals, and govern the world in accordance with the laws of Christ? Did they not say in the joy of their hearts, 'Behold in all this the fulfillment of prophecy! Christ told us that He would found a Kingdom. Is it not rapidly developing amongst us? The City of God, the New Jerusalem, is it not even now rising before our eyes?'

So they thought; but God had determined otherwise; for corruption had reached its height in the Roman empire, and the Goths were at hand. 'The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.' But still the Church, with all its faults, floated on the waters; and when the flood subsided, there it stood, the only refuge for the weary, the only protector for the poor and oppressed, the only power capable of controlling the ruffianism by which it was surrounded, the only conservative element amid wreck and anarchy.

The philosophic historian of the Middle Ages, reviewing the condition of the West after the coming in of the Goths, observes, "Such is the complex reciprocation of good and evil in the dispensations of Providence, that we may assert, with only an apparent paradox, that had religion been more pure it would have been less permanent, and that Christianity has been preserved by means of its corruptions. The papal supremacy, monastic institutions, and the use of a Latin liturgy, are all justly disapproved; yet all these, under Divine guidance, conspired to preserve the Church from extinction in that long night which succeeded the irruptions of the northern nations. The supremacy of the Pope kept up that intercourse between the nations of Europe which, under existing circumstances, was essential to their mutual profession of the Christian faith; the monastery was the only place in which the treasures of Divine truth were stored; and the Latin language was the closed casket in which they were preserved. Had the Scriptures been translated out of Latin when that language ceased to be intelligible, its sacred truths would, humanly speaking, have been lost for ever amid the barbarous dialects which then prevailed."

Yet who will venture on this ground to extenuate the system from which these incidental benefits happily sprung? Admitting, as all must do, the force of Mr. Hallam's remarks, and regarding them, as they doubtless were intended to be regarded, as illustrative of the great truth that God is continually bringing good out of evil, and overruling the perversity and wickedness of men for the accomplishment of His own great and gracious purposes, the question still returns, How was the world brought into this state? Why was it that the Roman empire, instead of being strengthened and invigorated by its conversion to Christianity, was but weakened and emasculated by the change? How came it to pass that, instead of presenting in its new character a firm and unbroken front to the barbarian invaders, it fell before them almost as helplessly as the trees of the forest fall before the stroke of the Woodman?

There can be but one answer. The religion that subdued the Roman empire and obtained the supremacy over paganism was not, properly speaking, Christianity. It had little or nothing Apostolic about it. It was a religion in which the chief truths that had been taught by Paul, and Peter, and John, if not absolutely denied, were so overlaid by superstitious ceremonies, and so darkened by materialism, that little or nothing was left on which the foundation of a manly character could be based. It was a Christianity at once superstitious and

fanatical; the offspring, not of Apostolic teaching, but of the cloister; not of intelligence, but of imbecility. What wonder that such a faith should only have enslaved its votaries, undermined patriotism, and sapped instead of strengthening all the virtues on which the security of a nation reposes?

I am not ignorant that political and natural causes, manifold in character, combined to bring about that general degeneracy which marked the decline of the Roman empire at the period of which we speak. But I cannot honestly refuse to admit that one chief element of ruin was to be found in the so -- called Christianity of the day; opposed, as it certainly was, to all manly energy, and transferring, as it did, the influence formerly exercised by able statesmen and great soldiers to a crowd of ignorant priests and monks, utterly unfit to wield it with the slightest advantage to the community.

But even this evil, great as it unquestionably was, would have been of comparatively little moment, had the people who called themselves Christians illustrated by their virtues the religion they professed. The reverse was unhappily the case. Priestcraft had not only destroyed public spirit, it had inaugurated a period of all but universal profligacy, -- a profligacy so deep and wide-spread that a process little short of extermination was required in order to remedy the wrong.

There is something frightful in the thought that a CHURCH SYSTEM should have so worked, -- with such a deadly force, that it had actually become necessary, for the preservation of the faith itself, that a flood of rude and undisciplined barbarians should overflow Europe, to supply the community with the elements of a new moral life, and to purge the Church of its grosser impurities. Yet so it was; the very hordes that overran the land knew it and felt it. Like the Saracen in the East, the Goth, as he pressed westward, strengthened himself under the conviction that he was sent of God to punish the enormities he beheld.

And what a punishment it was! Darkness and desolation, followed by calamities so great that, by the tenth century, the impression had become all but universal that the end of the world was at hand; a superstition so abject that, when an eclipse of the sun or moon happened to be visible, the cities were deserted, and their miserable inhabitants fled for refuge to caverns and rocks; a despair so hopeless, that temples, palaces, and noble edifices, both public and private, were suffered to decay or literally pulled down, under the impression that the final dissolution of all things was at hand.

Yet the system survived. Strong in the veneration which still prevailed for "usages, ceremonies, sentiments, and opinions which had sprung up, nobody knew how, in the earliest times, and which had obtained the approval in long succession of every leading and accomplished mind, -- of all the fathers, doctors, and rulers of the church, -- of confessors and martyrs," -- the spiritual world, as represented by the hierarchy, remained unchanged. Clericalism only struck its roots deeper and deeper into the soil, developing and strengthening its power over the soul of man. Spiritual blessings, of whatever kind, still flowed only through material channels, and these were exclusively in the hands of the clergy. The priest, the bread, the wine, the water, all in their turn were made conduits of grace. Man was everywhere, the Holy Spirit nowhere. At length every thought and feeling connected with religion gradually sank to the level of the age, and teachers and taught became alike coarse, rude, and brutal. Child -- worship and Madonna -- worship came to be regarded as the most appropriate methods of honoring the Redeemer. The Crucifixion, instead of being viewed with grief and shame as the most atrocious crime ever perpetrated on the earth, was contemplated with a sort of tragic satisfaction; meditations on 'the manger' and 'the tree' superseded thoughts of the resurrection and ascension; and the kingly reign of Christ, stripped of all its glory, was exhibited to mankind as manifested in the overthrow of the old idolatry, in the subjection of the Gothic hordes, and in the majesty of mitred priests.

That in the bosom of the community, thus raised from its low estate to sit among princes, there were not a few men of whom the world was not worthy, it would be ungenerous to deny; but that these were so numerous as to give a character to the whole it would be altogether delusive to assume. The Church, in all periods of its history, has always presented itself in two distinct aspects, really diverse, although apparently

one. Viewed outwardly, it comes before us as a great united ecclesiastical corporation, claiming a right to enforce its own dogmas; to dominate, morally at least, in all public affairs; and, as the kingdom of God upon earth, to demand sometimes superior, and at other times subordinate authority in the government of the world. Examined internally, we perceive that it includes a body of persons, for the most part unknown to fame, or, if known, only as outcasts and persecuted ones, corresponding in character to those we have already recognized as Apostolic believers.

The corpus -- whatever might be the character of those who composed it -- when thus elevated, naturally sought to secure its own advancement and permanent ascendancy. The Clergy availed themselves alike of the power they had gained, and of the influence they continued to exercise over the spirits of men, to enrich and endow their various establishments. They did this by means of donations obtained from kings and nobles for the most part as free gifts -- so far as that term may be applied to lands or moneys bestowed at the hour of death in the hope of securing blessing in the life to come. One country after another was in due time divided into parishes; and ecclesiastical buildings, sustained by endowments obtained from the dying, became at once centers of light and refuges for the oppressed.

Popery was but the natural and necessary development of the kind of Christianity that overthrew paganism. In some respects it was an improvement upon it, "inasmuch as it created and employed a force counteractive of the evils which that system had generated. The Popes, by creating a power exterior to the system, and assuming to be independent of it by virtue of the special authority vested in the successors of Peter, became salutary checks to the abounding profligacy which marked the Roman empire after it had become Christian."*

The world was now in the hands of the Church. Kings and emperors might in turn succeed each other, and with more or less vigor sway their temporal scepters; but the only real authority was the spiritual; an authority, as has been well said, "often veiling its high pretensions under the language of adulation and servility, as it did its persecutions in prayers of charity and piety, but at the same time 'binding kings in chains, and nobles in links of iron,' -- in chains indeed of unearthly temper, and links of iron that no hand was seen to forge, but against which sinews of flesh could not avail." **

The people, during all this time depraved and degraded, scorned moral restraint, and too frequently exhibited features of the darkest and most repulsive character.

Here we must pause. With the further history of the Papal power; with the various attempts that were made by Reformers before the Reformation to correct abuses; with the determination that was manifested by the ecclesiastical body to crush every indication of a rising spirit of inquiry; with the tyrannical, cruel, and oppressive proceedings through which that end was obtained, we have here nothing to do. Suffice it to say that, strong in the supposed possession of "Divine certainty and Divine discernment," the Church rested in an assumed infallibility, and boasted an unchangeableness which was proof against improvement.

Our object, it must be borne in mind, has simply been to watch the processes under which what was said to be "the administration of the Comforter" advanced to maturity. We have, it is granted, but glanced at its course for upwards of a thousand years, during which development proceeded without let or hindrance. But to what conclusion are we brought? Judging by its fruits, are we not obliged to pronounce it 'an evil tree'? Would it not be little short of blasphemy to pretend that anything so poisonous was of God's planting? Yet to this day we assume that for at least three centuries it was so; and we are zealous in affirming our relationship to it, as if this were our glory.

* Taylor's " Ancient Christianity."

** Bampton Lectures, by the late Dr. Hampden, Bishop of Hereford.

PART THE THIRD

CHURCHES VIEWED IN THEIR MODERN RELATIONS.

CHAP. I. THE REFORMATION.

I. NATIONAL CHURCHES.

III. ANGLICANISM.

IV. PRESBYTERIANISM.

V. CONGREGATIONALISM.

VI. BRETHRENISM.

VII. MODERN ROMANISM

CHAPTER I

THE REFORMATION.

THE Reformation was, without doubt, a revolt against the Church; but it was only against the Church as it then existed, -- against Papal usurpations and abounding corruption -- not against Church authority as such, nor yet against clerical claims. Luther believed as implicitly as any of his opponents that Christ had established the Church, that its organization was of God, and that it put forth a rightful claim to the obedience of men so long as the demand made did not conflict with the higher allegiance due to truth as revealed in Holy Scripture. He wished to prune the ecclesiastical tree, not to cut it down or to cast it aside.

To a certain extent, the proceedings of Luther and his coadjutors emancipated the human mind from the trammels of ecclesiastical rule, but only within limits, for if the Reformation closed the Confessional, it exalted the Pulpit, and the thunders of the one not unfrequently more than compensated for the absence of the other. It is probable that neither Pope nor Prelate ever exercised half the moral power that was wielded by Luther in Germany, by Calvin at Geneva, and by Knox in Scotland.

The history of the Reformation is a familiar one. It has been often traced, sometimes with exultation, sometimes with sadness. It was at best a checkered scene, and its progress and immediate results were alternately calculated to excite high hopes and to occasion painful despondency. In all its essential elements it was a revolt against Priestcraft, but it was not a revolt against Priests. On the contrary, the Clergy were from the first among its most active promoters, and to the last they guided and directed its movements.

The one thing perfected and completed by the Reformers was separation from the Papacy. The rest was a compromise; sometimes with monarchs, sometimes with clericalism, and sometimes with one another. Idolatries, superstitious frauds, monkery, celibacy, Mariolatry, purgatory, -- all these fed, like birds of night, before an open Bible and a free Gospel, but clericalism and ecclesiastical power remained.

It has been said, with quiet irony, by Count Agnor de Gasparin, that the Reformers, in order to sustain their position, invented the modern minister of the Gospel, "a priest, but without celibacy and without specific sanctity; an elder, plus consecration and the renouncing of secular employments; for he certainly does not belong to the apostolic era, nor to that of the Fathers, nor yet to medieval times." Whether invented or not, he is assuredly the product of the Reformation.

As the movement advanced the struggle varied in its character. Civil liberty, reform of abuses, and theological considerations without number, ultimately became involved in the dispute. But amid all, the reformers clung as closely to the Church idea as their predecessors had done; and this notwithstanding it compelled them -- in spite of their boast that Scripture was the only authority -- to fall back upon creeds and confessions, and to supersede the theological system they had overturned by another quite as absolute. It was in this spirit that Calvin exclaimed, "He who makes himself master of the method which I have pursued will surely understand what he should seek for in Scripture."

Of the Reformation theology it has been truly said, "The logical framework was, in all its well ordered parts, clothed with the living garment of the Divine word; but in such a way that it is even now often difficult to disentangle the two. Calvin, for instance, with all the theologians of his century, and of the succeeding centuries as well, does not quote Scripture merely in support of his views, so that you can first see his view distinctly, and then the supposed Scriptural warrant for it; but he everywhere so blends his own reasonings and statements of Scripture that it is often very difficult to say where you have a human reasoner and where

the Divine teacher. He applies Biblical language, moreover as all his compeers did, with comparatively little regard to its historical connection, taking a statement at random from any book of the Old or of the New Testament, as bearing with equally conclusive force upon his argument. The result of this is to exhibit; the outline of his system as representing, in all its successive evolutions, a strikingly Scriptural aspect." *

How delusive, and yet how natural all this was, they only can understand who have reflected on the effects produced by centuries of traditional thought on religious subjects. Even in our own day, few seem able on certain subjects to trust themselves simply with God's word, and perhaps it is not too much to say that most men would still rather suffer any measure of bondage in the things of religion, than dwell in individual responsibility before God for every action, thought, and affection.

It may perhaps be said, How could a bondage like that which has just been described ever be reconciled with that freedom of thought which it was the boast of the Reformers to have inaugurated? How could submission to authority, of any kind, be made to accord with the admitted right of every man to study the Scriptures for Himself, and to exercise private judgment in reference to its teachings?

The harmonizing agency was supposed to be found first in the pulpit, by means of which religious thought was to be formed and guided; secondly, in the sacraments, by exclusion from which Church order and authority were to be preserved; and thirdly, in the supposition that the teaching of the Holy Spirit to the individual Christian would always be found to correspond with the teaching of the Church. Under these blessed influences, they said, difficulties of interpretation will vanish; truth will reveal herself in all her simplicity; error will speedily disappear, and unity in all important matters will prevail among the true children of God; the teachers and the taught will mutually sustain each other; the law of the Church will be the law of love; and its decisions against heresy will be enforced by a power irresistible as that of home, but undeformed by cruelty or wrong.

Such was the theory. But events did not justify the expectations founded upon it. The anticipated unity soon proved to be a dream. Energetic and strong-willed men, differing widely in opinion, alike laid claim to the teaching of the Spirit, and on that ground, each in turn urged the impossibility of changing or modifying views which were to him as inspirations from above.

When Luther and Melancthon took one side, and Carlstadt and Zwingle another, who was to judge between there? The Church? They and their followers constituted the only Church they could recognize; for both counted Rome as antichrist, and neither would bow to the Fathers, excepting in so far as the voice of the Fathers seemed to them to coincide with the voice of the written Word. They could not do otherwise while occupying the position they did. To have yielded their opinions to those of Cyprian, or Jerome, or Chrysostom, would have been to set up a tribunal fatal to their pretensions as Reformers.

What then remained? Truth compels the reply that nothing remained but separations, heart-burnings, alienations, bitterness, wrath, clamor, -- these were the fruits, the inevitable fruits of the views they had taken of the Church. It can never be otherwise. If the doctrine be maintained that the Holy Spirit abides in ecclesiastical organizations of whatever form, that of the Spirit's indwelling in every believer roust he abandoned. The attempt to hold the two in combination can only result, as it always has done, in secession and the formation of fresh churches, until every petty sect becomes, in its own opinion, when organized, an all but infallible body.

* 'The Leaders of the Reformation,' by Principal Tulloch.

The immediate consequence of this attempt to unite clericalism with individualism was disastrous. The Reformation very soon ceased to advance, and its principles have never since triumphed. There can be little doubt that Europe would speedily have been compelled to return to the ancient fold, had not the emancipated nations one after another seen it expedient to secure their freedom in the will, only way then possible, viz., by the transference of the power hitherto exercised by the Pope to their respective monarchs.

"Thus we arrive at the origin and reason of religious establishments. The State, finding itself everywhere embraced by a body of ecclesiastics, protesting against Rome, but having no other shepherd, determined to bring this organization into subjection to itself. With this end in view, and none other, it despoiled whatever continued steadfast in its attachment to the Pope; suppressed such institutions as were deemed injurious to the community, reformed abuses, modified creeds, and, by various devices, made it the interest of the clerical body to be subservient to secular power. Hitherto the Church in all ecclesiastical matters had been over the State; now the State placed itself over the Church, -- the lay element dominating the clerical.

But in all these transactions it is impossible to discover any evidence that the institution thus handled was a Divine one. What might have been the result, had the Reformers been enlightened enough or bold enough to cast aside all Church organizations as resting upon a delusion; had they given up all claim to rule over others; had they recognized no authority higher or beyond that of the Spirit of God dwelling in the heart of each individual believer; had they left the Divine life in man to manifest itself tunder that holy, guidance alone; had they possessed faith enough to believe that Christian fellowship would soon show itself independent of mechanism, and Christian faithfulness to the unbeliever find better channels for usefulness than any of official appointment; had they refused to admit the reality of official sanctities, of priestly offices, of sacred edifices, and of sacramental benefits, had they taken this course, it is impossible to say what might have been the result; but it is at least unquestionable that they would have delivered the world front sorrows and stumbling-blocks innumerable, and have saved the assemblies of the faithful from the inroads of a formalism which it now seems impossible to shake off.

As it is, after three centuries of free inquiry, deliberate reflection, and Biblical intelligence, we are still embarrassed by human deductions without number, under the influence of which it is scarcely possible to read the Bible as a little child, or to draw the living water pure and fresh from the fountain; while multitudes amongst us seem as far as ever from ridding themselves of superstitions which sprang up in the second and third centuries, which the Romish Church inherited and expanded, and which the Reformers either neglected or were disinclined to root up.

CHAPTER II

NATIONAL CHURCHES.

NATIONAL Churches are, as we have seen, the political result of the Reformation. In them, or at least in most of them, we have Romanism stripped of its grosser corruptions and superstitions, deprived of its pretended power to control conscience, and limited in all its proceedings by the operation of law.

To ecclesiastical bodies, when they become national, the State acts as 'a unifying head.' They may be Episcopal or otherwise, spiritual or unspiritual, rationalistic or evangelical, their claim is the same; since the command for conformity to them rests, not on the ground of what is taught, but on the fact of appointment by the nation' An established Church asks for submission simply as a national institution. It is, say its consistent defenders, part and parcel of that Divinely appointed system of things under which obedience is required to 'the powers that be' for conscience' sake; it being assumed that religious establishments, like other things, are ordained of God for the common weal.

It is not, according to this theory, supposed that the State, whether represented by Monarch or Parliament, has attempted to decide the question, 'What is Truth?' or that, having voluntarily undertaken the evangelization of the community, it has for that purpose selected one form of faith out of many for endowment. That is not the history of any Religious Establishment under the sun. In every case, the State, having first found itself surrounded by a network of ecclesiasticism, and in danger of being subjected thereby either to an alien spiritual rule or to the overpowering sway of priestly influences, has felt it necessary in order to secure independence, first to break off by force all connection with a foreign potentate, and then to endow, or to secure existing endowments, on conditions which involve lay patronage and more or less of State control.

Thus established, it has generally been considered advisable to discourage the growth of rival bodies; sometimes by the actual persecution of Nonconformists, and sometimes by simply withholding from such dissentients privileges or advantages granted to those who have conformed to the conditions of State aid. Hence it comes to pass that, in the case of National Churches the duty of adhesion should be made to rest rather on loyalty to the State than on loyalty to truth. The question, 'What is truth?' does not, properly speaking come under consideration. That point is supposed to be already settled, not indeed by Parliament, but by the Church itself, which, because it embodied at the time of its establishment the all but universal belief of the people, was by Parliament exalted to pre-eminence in the State, subject to conditions.

In consenting to occupy this position the Church idea, as embodied in the writings of the Fathers, is more or less abandoned. The claim to supremacy is given up, and a certain amount of subserviency yielded or submitted to. Ceasing to be a ruler in spiritual things, the Church necessarily becomes a subject, and soon takes the form of a great National Institute for the civilization and evangelization of the people, by means of a resident clergyman in every parish, charged with the duty of directing public worship, of administering sacraments, of performing the rites of marriage, and of burying the dead.

If, therefore, the question be put, 'On what principle is an Englishman, as such, bound to belong to the National Church?' the answer should be, Because it is a National Institution; because its claims rest on the same basis as that of all civil authority; because, like magistracy, it is assumed to be an ordinance of God intended to discourage evildoers, and to strengthen those that be good.

The Church that is thus elevated and endowed, when regarded apart from the State, may tell a very different tale. It may claim to be a branch of the one true Catholic Church of Christ; to enjoy an uninterrupted succession from the apostles; to be a depository of the truth for all nations; to be in reality almost everything that Rome falsely pretends to be; and, regarding its alliance with the State to be only a blessed, or perchance an unblest accident, it may insist on obedience, not as due to man, but as due to God; not for law's sake, but for Christ's sake only. This makes no difference. The obligation to adhere to its communion if it be an obligation at all -- must arise out of a man's birth and training, his loyalty, his love of country, or his patriotic regard to its institutions; it must therefore have its foundation in civil authority, or be non-existent.

To the man who has been spiritually awakened under the ministrations of its clergy, whether originally united to its communion or not, the mere circumstance of national establishment will not be felt as important. To him the main question will be the accordance or otherwise of what is taught from its pulpits with Holy Scripture; the harmony or otherwise of its ecclesiastical pretensions with that liberty wherewith Christ has made him free. And if he finds, as he must find, that National Churches demand submission to creeds of the most scholastic character; claim authority in controversies of faith, and power to decree rites and ceremonies; call themselves witnesses and keepers of Holy Writ, and declare that whosoever, through his private judgment, doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church ought to be rebuked openly, he will regard himself at liberty to admit or reject these claims, according to the measure of spiritual light and life to which he has attained.

No one pretends to find Divine authority for modern National Churches. Whatever may be in any particular case their merits or demerits as Institutions, their spiritual character must always be independent of their establishment. Nor is this in the least affected by the admission -- which may be cheerfully made -- that the English National Church, whatever evils it may occasion, is a great national blessing, so far as everything relating to the Christian civilization of the country is concerned. The man must be deeply prejudiced who cannot allow that, viewed in this aspect, it is greatly to the advantage of the state, greatly to the advantage of the poor, greatly promotive of morality, decency, and social refinement, that an educated man, not dependent on the people for support, should reside in every parish, and bring the influence of his culture to bear on the ignorant and rude population by which he is often surrounded. As the channel of much beneficence; as the link that frequently connects the higher with the lower ranks of society; as a visitor among the poor; as a religious teacher, however slight may be his capacity; as a friend at the bedside of the sick and the dying; as a supporter of schools and other agencies for the improvement of those around him, there can be no doubt on the mind of any unprejudiced man that, allowing for human defects, a parochial clergyman may be, and in thousands of cases actually is one of the greatest blessings by which a country can be enriched.

Increasing secession, and modern progress, have in these latter days, as we all know, brought with them fierce disputes as to the justice or injustice of any religious establishment whatsoever, and touch bitterness has thereby been occasioned. The contest, according to some, is all-important, since they say "it relates to the Headship of the Church of Christ; to the respective rights of the English monarch and the King of kings; to religious liberty; to the claims of conscience, and to the means as by which it is the Divine will that truth should be propagated."

All parties seem to me content to fight on this unreal ground. One maintains that the nation, as such, is bound to teach that particular form of faith which its rulers believe to be the true one. Another, that it ought to subsidize all prevailing forms of religious profession. A third, that it should endow what appears to be the religion of the majority. A fourth, that it is bound to give no substantial aid to any party, but that it should content itself with such general support of the Christian faith as it can render, by insisting upon abstinence from work on Sunday. A fifth, that it should in no way whatever even recognize Christianity, but hold out in all respects an equal hand to believers and unbelievers. I call this unreal ground, because in each case it

ignores altogether the origin and reason of National Establishments, and introduces an element to which these institutions have, as such, no relation.

Those who attack National Churches have no right to talk as if they were fighting the battles of the Lord; as if the case were one of conscience; as if envy, or jealousy, or any other evil passion could not possibly mingle in the fray; as if the attackers did not find their chief support in that passion for equality which, rather than the love of liberty, characterizes modern democracy; as if the only substantial argument against religious establishments as they now exist did not bear, I will not say equally, but remotely, on all hereditary privileges and possessions. The right of the Crown to bestow confiscated estates on English nobles can scarcely be supported, except on grounds which apply equally to the estates bestowed upon the Church. For though the claim of the State to withdraw Church endowments at pleasure rests solely on its supposed right to divert or to resume corporate property whenever its use becomes mischievous, the exercise of that right, except in very extreme cases, is clearly dangerous.

On the other hand, those who defend existing institutions have no better right to assert that they are contending only for the authority of God in the land; that the Christian faith is partly dependent on the patronage of monarchs, or that its advance in the world is in any measure bound up with pecuniary endowments. Still less should they assume that love of power and position, of rank and of territorial sway, have nothing whatever to do with the zeal which is manifested on behalf of Establishments. But they have a right to maintain, if they think so, that the retention of these institutions is sound policy; to affirm that ecclesiastical endowments cannot be touched without shaking the foundations on which all property is based, and to say that if these institutions perish, Republican frenzy will speedily swallow up both the Peerage and the Crown. Some of these assertions may not indeed be very firmly believed in, even by those who urge them, but they are legitimate considerations, which, in their turn, ought to be again taken for what they are worth.

The golden rule for legislators, in religion, is without doubt, 'Protect and let alone.' But the question cannot be evaded, 'What are they to let alone?' Not surely everything that goes under the name of religion, nor yet all proceedings that are carried on for the purpose of promoting it. Legislators are bound to let alone only those things which lie between God and the individual soul; only those things which oblige us to say, 'Whether it is better to obey God or man, judge ye.' They are bound to protect every man in his right to hold and to teach whatever he believes to be the truth, but no more.

The evils that arise from either opposing or supporting on religious grounds any measure which is really political, are many and serious. Young men on both sides are thereby misled as to the true character of the Church of God. The one class soon comes to identify religion with a given ecclesiastical organization, the other to associate it with civil freedom and modern progress. Both more or less -- yet perhaps unconsciously -- speak and act as if the kingdom of God were, after all, of this world as -- much as of the next; that it consists in the advancement and triumph of Christianized sentiments, and that it is inseparable from some framework or other of human devising.

Grant this, and the crimes of past days, such as so-called religious wars; the cruelties of the Inquisition; persecutions, papal and Protestant, and tyrannies innumerable, may then fairly be laid to the charge of religion. For if it be true that the Church of Christ must of necessity be identified with one or more forms of ecclesiastical polity, then it must also be more or less responsible for the errors or the wickedness that men have fallen into in the defense of these things. Only as it is seen by all, that in the past as well as in the present, whatever strife, conflict, cruelty, or injustice has been wrought in the name of Christianity, the Church of God, properly so termed, has had nothing whatever to do with it; that all such proceedings are absolutely abhorrent to Christ; that the true Ecclesia is a Divine thing, having essentially no affinity whatever either with ecclesiastical bodies or with ecclesiastical organizations, -- only I say, as these things

come to be thoroughly understood by men generally, and not merely admitted in controversy, will infidelity be deprived of its most effective weapon.

One other question remains which can scarcely be entered upon here, viz., how far nations, as such, are bound in some form or other to provide for a public recognition of God in their collective capacity?

That bodies of men, when regarded as a whole, can lay claim to any moral or spiritual character, Or can even be said to have a conscience, I have already denied, But it cannot be disputed that notwithstanding this inherent deficiency, two organizations have always been recognized by God as unities -- the family and the nation. Into each of these a man enters not by choice, but by birth. He is born an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a German, just as he is born a brother or a son, and by that birth incurs obligations which he cannot lawfully evade. A nation too, like a family, whatever may be the beliefs or the conduct of the individuals composing it, cannot but have distinguishing characteristics. It is either Heathen, Mohammedan, or Christian; it is Protestant or Catholic. On the recognition of this fact its institutions are commonly based. The question therefore is a very fair one, whether, being what it is, the nation is not bound to adopt some one form of worship by means of which it may express, according to circumstances, national penitence or national thanksgiving.

So long as a people, or at least the great majority of them, agree in their religious opinions, little or no difficulty is found in accomplishing this purpose. Where they extensively differ, as in England and in America, it is not so easy, without an apparent interference with conscientious convictions, to express in any common form the national sentiment. But if the obligation to do so exist at all, it is obvious that it cannot be set aside by this or any other accidental circumstance. Differences in judgment may render it highly expedient to alter the mode in which national feeling may be expressed, but so long as any form of united action is possible the duty itself remains, and ought to be regarded. Families and nations being alike Divine organizations, the recognition of God in each is rightfully demanded, whatever may be the opinions or the character of individual members.

Whatever, therefore, may become of the national establishment of religion, as it now exists amongst us -- and the opinion is becoming general that its days are numbered, -- it is clear to many of us, at least, that in some form or other God must continue to be publicly recognized. The opportunity for effecting this purpose through the agency of a church has probably gone by for ever, since there is little probability that what may be termed the Broad Church scheme will ever be generally accepted; or that, to borrow the words of Mr. Stopford Brooke, "the national Parliament and the body of the national clergy will become analogous." The English people have never been favorable to any proposals for unity which imply the inclusion of persons by the exclusion of principles. But it is by no means so certain that a similar objection would be made to the retention by the respective parishes of their parochial edifices, or to the appointment of a clergy, qualified by learning and character to benefit the community, but independent of church influences; a clergy -- if they may be so called -- whose duty it should be to read the Scriptures in public impressively, and to lead the devotions of a congregation by means of a common liturgy.

In such a case, sermons and sacraments -- everything, in short, which belongs to 'what is now commonly understood as a church -- would be a supplementary provision, made not by the State, but by each denomination according to its wants and wishes. The duty of the parochial incumbent would further be to marry or to bury free of cost wherever such services were required; to mediate generally between the poor and their superiors; to superintend public education; to continue the many trifling but not unimportant services now rendered to the laboring community by the clergy of the Church of England; and, finally, to retain in every parish throughout the kingdom what has been termed "the germ of civilization" -- to form in the remotest village a nucleus round which the capabilities of the place might crystallize and brighten. *

* See Coleridge 'On the Constitution of the Church and State according to the idea of each.'

CHAPTER III

ANGLICANISM.

IN stating, as I now propose to do very briefly, the views held by English Protestants in relation to the Church, its powers and its ordinances, I shall have nothing to do with controversy. My object is not to argue in favor of, or in opposition to any one of them, but to state, as briefly and as clearly as I can, in what relation they stand to the Church idea, what position they occupy when simply regarded as ecclesiastical bodies.

Since the Reformation two great forms of Church thought have, in the main, divided the ANGLICAN body. Perhaps the opinions respectively indicated thereby cannot be better expressed than in the terms under which they are popularly known, -- that of 'High' and 'Low' Church doctrine.

The High Churchman (properly the Anglican) is one who holds that the Church of Christ consists of all baptized persons, whatever may be the degree of their spiritual attainments, however faint and feeble the pulsation of their souls, however inconsistent in many respects their outward conversation. All these, so long as they do not openly apostatize, or live in flagrant defiance of the Divine law, he regards as persons potentially if not actually 'saints,' -- children of God and in Christ; many of them indeed living far below their privileges, and needing most obviously the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit, yet still to be dealt with as members of the family, and not to be regarded in any other character than that of imperfect Christians. This view of the Church, and of what constitutes a Christian, lies at the base of the High Churchman's theory, and modifies, if it does not create and control, his entire interpretation of Holy Writ.

A Low Churchman (or Evangelical), properly so called, is one who adopts a theory in relation both to the Church and Christianity of a character all but diametrically opposed to that of the Anglican. Dean Hook says somewhere that "it is a mistake to call these persons Low Churchmen." They are, he maintains "no-churchmen, although they have not actually quitted the Church."

To the Low Churchman -- and he is hence denominated Evangelical -- the true Church of Christ is a purely spiritual thing, limited indeed for the most part to the baptized with water, but extending to those who have been baptized only with the Holy Ghost. As a spiritual body he cannot allow that this Church is capable, in any Scriptural sense, of being supposed to include those who are merely Christians in name. To him 'the body of Christ' consists, not of any outward communion, however apostolic, but of all persons, in all parts of the earth, who, by the grace of God, have been called out and separated from a world lying in wickedness, by being made partakers of a new nature; a change made manifest in one form or other by evidences of spiritual life which mark such out, as it were, by the finger of God the living among the dead.

A third party, known as Broad Churchmen, form a not unimportant section of the Anglican community; but as in ecclesiastical matters these thinkers rank in some instances with the 'High' and in others with the 'Low,' it is not necessary here to refer to them further.

I do not of course pretend to have described accurately, in the few words I have used, the views either of every High Churchman or of every Low one. Each party has its 'Scribes,' its periodical and other writers, who exaggerate its opinions and envenom its literature; its 'Pharisees,' who look with extreme contempt on all who separate from them; its 'Sadduces,' more or less paralyzed by unbelief; its 'Herodians' who habitually subordinate the spiritual to the temporal; and its 'Essenes,' who seek in solitude and asceticism the

perfection of their nature; but fair and moderate men will I think admit the, general truthfulness of the portraiture.

All these sections alike assume, as they suppose on Scriptural authority, that Christ committed the guidance and governance of His Church first to the Apostles, and then through them to a succession of men -- a succession stretching through all ages, -- who were to be officially separated from others for the work of the priesthood; and by whom, in subjection one to another, according to an appointed order, believers, in all parts of the world, were to be, through all time, taught, disciplined, and sustained. All alike hold that, in harmony with this idea, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted. The first, to regenerate the newly born child, and so to prepare the soil as it were for the reception in future years of the good seed of the word. The second, to renew day by day the worthy partaker thereof with spiritual life and strength in Christ Jesus; both ordinances more or less deriving their efficacy from administration according to the appointed order.

Nevertheless, differences are many and great. The Evangelical but rarely advocates the doctrine of Apostolic succession, for he does not like to admit that God would allow the authority of His ministers to flow through a channel so impure as that of Rome. He shrinks too from holding in any bare and definite form the dogma of baptismal regeneration, for he cannot altogether reconcile it with the necessity of personal conversion. The Anglican, on the contrary, believing that "God saves men, not merely by working in them individual personal religion, but by joining them together in a Church or community," * and that the members of the Church are always assumed to be partakers of the Covenant of Grace, feels no such difficulty.

The Evangelical denies that participation in the Lord's Supper is of any advantage to the unspiritual, and regards the Holy Communion rather as a privilege to be enjoyed by the believer, than as a means of grace to the unconverted. The Anglican holds that the Clergy, being 'stewards' of God's 'mysteries,' in some transcendental sense dispense to all communicants 'the body and blood of Christ,' and that by then in this way as joints and bands having nourishment, ministered and knit together, the 'Church increaseth with the increase of God.' These words, we are told, "are the words of inauguration, not of a system of opinions, but of a Divine organism; not of a mere religion, but of a Kingdom of Grace." **

The right of interpreting Scripture is by the Anglican claimed for the Church alone. Christ, says he, "after His ascension explained the meaning of the written Word by His Spirit in His Apostles. And when, after their departure, heresies arose, He declared its true meaning by Creeds and Confessions of Faith received by His Church universal, to which He has promised His presence even to the end of the world. They who separate the Church from the bible forfeit the blessings of both." ***

* Sadler's 'Church Doctrine and Bible Truth.'

** Ibid

*** Sadler's 'Church Doctrine and Bible Truth.'

The Evangelical claims for himself and allows to others a much greater amount of freedom. This arises out of the vast importance he attaches to Preaching. Growth in the Divine life, like the original quickening of the soul, he considers a special work of God's Holy Spirit acting on each individual, chiefly through the preaching of the Gospel. He might not be willing to allow that sacraments occupy in his mind a secondary place, but without doubt religious instruction holds the first place. With him it is not the Church that leads to the production of the individual Christian, but individual Christians that constitute the Church. How far he would agree with the Anglican in affirming that the Clergy have "power from God to dispense officially certain benefits to the faithful; in some cases by word of mouth, as in Absolution or benediction; in other cases by laying on of hands, as in Confirmation and Ordination," * I cannot venture to say. But it is worth notice that the Rev. Charles Simeon, the Father and Founder of that section, thus expresses himself, -- " In pronouncing the Benediction I do not do it as a finale but I feel that I am actually dispensing peace from God, and by God's command. Men should think of us as speaking as 'the oracles of God.' It is not the Priest, but the Priestly Office that performs Divine service."

The principles, or rather, the inferences on which Anglican Church views are based, have been in substance thus stated by the Prebendary of Wells: --

i. The Covenant of God having always been made with believers, there must therefore always be some outward and visible organization representing that unity.

ii. Christ speaks of Himself as the Vine, and His people as the branches; therefore the existence of an ecclesiastical polity is supposed.

iii. Paul says, 'We are one body in Christ,' therefore Christ does not recognize individual units considered apart from Church organization.

iv. The Apostles, in some sense or other; remitted sins; therefore the absolution of a rightly ordained Minister does the same thing.

v. Nothing that relates to the conveyance of grace can change; therefore the doctrine of the sacraments -- regeneration by Baptism, and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist -- must find their explanation in the words of Christ to Nicodemus, and in His address to the Jews at Capernaum. The fact that neither of these ordinances was in existence at the periods referred to, is considered as of no moment. **

The ruling assumption, however, is that the Fathers of the second and third centuries partook -- to the degree at least that was needful for the emergency -- of the inspiration that was vouchsafed to the twelve; that the example given us by them ought therefore to be followed; that what the Apostles planted they watered; that God blessed both alike, and to each gave increase; that it is therefore our duty to accept the teachings of the second as of the first century, with humility and deference.

On the authority thus accepted it is then maintained that Christ regarded the Church as organized for perpetuity; that the Apostles and their coadjutors had inspired successors; that the Spirit of God, through the early Fathers, expanded and developed the Church clement; that these Fathers were to the Christian world of their clay what the Apostles were to the Christians after Pentecost, -- the expounders of a teaching hitherto partially veiled, because men were at the time of its utterance not able to bear its full meaning.

* Sadler, p. 191.

** A summary of various statements in Sadler's 'Church Doctrine,' chap. xiii., &c., pp. 342-350.

Nor does Mr. Sadler stand alone in following a line of thought that is, to ordinary minds at least, somewhat singular. The late Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge draws conclusions quite as marvelous when he seeks, and imagines he discovers, even in Patriarchal times, Church practices not dissimilar to our own. "Even in Patriarchal times," says Mr. Blunt, "we may discover PLACES for worship, PRIESTS to conduct the worship, TITHES paid to these priests, ROBES wherein the Priests ministered at the worship, FORMS connected with that worship, and SEASONS set apart for it."

And how is all this made out? Thus. To do things 'before the Lord' indicates spots consecrated to the Divine service; therefore the Patriarchs had places of worship. The firstborn was by right of birth a Priest; therefore Priesthood is perpetual. Tithes were paid by Abraham to Melchizidek; therefore they should be paid everywhere to the end of time. Rebekah 'took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which was in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son' when he went in to Isaac to receive his blessing; therefore "she clothed him with the sacerdotal robes of the firstborn, even as 'the coat of many colors' which Jacob made for Joseph was a sacerdotal garment. Jacob consecrates the foundation of a place of worship with oil; therefore forms are appointed. God ordained a Sabbath; therefore the Church should have her seasons.

"Such," says Mr Blunt, "is the structure that appears to me to unfold itself, if we do but bring together the scattered materials of which it is composed -- the place of worship, the priest to minister, the tithes to support him, the sacerdotal dress, the ceremonial forms, the appointed seasons for holy things, preachers, prophets, a code of laws, sacrifices, sacraments, types, and a Messiah in prospect, as leading a feature of the whole scheme as he is now in retrospect of a scheme which has succeeded it." * This is the line of argument adopted in substance by an able and good man, finding what he is pleased to call " undesigned coincidences in Scripture."

Well may it be asked, Have such modes of treating Scripture had nothing to do with the abounding of modern skepticism? Is it not a sign of the times that, on this very ground -- the clerical habit of assuming, in ecclesiastical matters, what ought to be proved -- secular newspapers silently infer that this is the fashion in which call so-called. Divine truth is supported and enforced?

Bishop Wilson, in his "Maxims of Piety and Morality" -- a book in many respects worthy of the place assigned to it by Mr. Matthew Arnold, -- strikingly illustrates the confusing effect of Church claim; when held in connection with true and humble piety, This good man, in one place, tells us, speaking simply as a Christian, that "the Gospel represents the Church as a people who should take up the Cross, renounce the world, and all worldly maxims and policies, -- who should despise the pomp, the wealth, and pleasures of the world." And again, that the rank attached to ecclesiastical office is a burden to a good man. "It is the love of State," he says, "that makes it thought necessary to the Episcopal dignity."

But in other places, writing as a Churchman, he says of what he is pleased to regard as Divine Ordinances, "God can dispense with them, and save a soul without them, but He will not save those who despise them;" of Public Worship, "We can receive no influence from the Head, except we are members of the body, and join in those outward actions, the sacraments and prayers, by which we have communion with Christ;" of Churches. "Though a man's being in the Church is no certain mark of salvation, yet his being out of it is too sure a proof that he is in the way of inevitable misery;" and of Ministers, "Sins committed against these have a peculiar guilt in them, for they that despise them dishonor Him that sends them, even Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost."

* Blunt's "Coincidences," pp. 5-15.

Such is Anglicanism. Dr. Jacob sums up its present position thus: -- " The more moderate and less deeply imbued portion of the High Church or Anglo-Catholic school, who do not denounce the English Reformation as a blunder and a crime, desire still, with a consciousness more or less indistinct, to draw as near as they can, in doctrine and in practice, to the model of the Church as existed before the supposed commencement of the Papacy; -- or at any rate they entertain a great reverence for the Nicene period, as if the true Christian system had then reached its perfection, and as if the doctrines and practices then in force were in some way or other binding upon Christians now. Yes, and even with some who do not by any means belong to the High Church school there may be found a vague feeling that the Nicene period enjoys a kind of authority in the Church of England beyond that of any other time. And all the while there is frequently a profound ignorance of what the Church system at that time really was, and of the extent to which it had departed from the simplicity of the Apostolic age and truth."

"As long as the Church of the third and fourth centuries is regarded with especial reverence, and its authority over us is even partially admitted, it will be possible for our clergy, who desire to reproduce its system, to draw through it quite close to Romanism, without being self-convicted of unfaithfulness or dishonesty, -- but, on the contrary, having many pleas wherewith to satisfy their own consciences, and to excuse, if not to justify their proceedings. Such Anglo-Catholics often seem to feel that they need not go over to Rome, because they can thus make a Rome for themselves, where they are, without the painfulness and scandal of a secession." *

And all this is done in the vain hope of ultimately securing thereby the outward and visible unity of Christendom. When shall we learn that the mystical union between Christ and the Church, and the coherence of all the members under the one Head, can never be perceived till the voice is heard, 'The marriage of the Lamb is come;' can never be seen till it is granted to 'the Bride' to be 'arrayed in fine linen, clean and white;' that till then our life in Him is necessarily a hidden life, and any attempt to make it visible can only end in failure?

* "The Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament," pp. 22-25.

CHAPTER IV

PRESBYTERIANISM.

AS it is no part of my purpose to discuss different forms of church government, I shall not feel it necessary here to enter upon any of the points which are involved in the long controversy maintained by the Presbyterians against Episcopacy. I simply wish to ascertain what may be termed their church principles. These have recently been set forth in a book entitled "The Church of Christ: a Treatise on the Nature, Power, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church," by the late Dr. Bannerman, Professor of Apologetics and Pastoral Theology, New College, Edinburgh. I know not where to look for a better authority.

Dr. Bannerman commences his treatise by making some important admissions. The word 'Church,' he says, signifies "in its primary and widest sense the whom; body of the faithful, whether in heaven or earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Savior." This is the Church invisible, and so far, if we except the Roman Catholics, little difference of opinion will be found. The Romanist says, "The visible church is first, then comes the invisible. Schleiermacher puts the difference thus: -- "Protestantism makes the relation of the individual to the Church dependent upon his relation to Christ; Catholicism makes the relation of the individual to Christ dependent upon his relation to the Church."

Dr. Bannerman distinctly allows that such texts as 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church' (Matt. 16:28), and 'Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it' (Eph. 5:25-27); such as speak of the Church as the bride or spouse of Christ, as 'the temple of the Holy Ghost,' as 'a spiritual house,' as 'an habitation of God through the Spirit,' and as 'the body of Christ,' belong only to the invisible church, to "a society which can be recognized by no features visible to the outward eye."

But now comes the assertion that in addition to this invisible church there is a visible one; the two not identical, but related; the invisible being spiritually united to Christ, the visible only externally. This visible church, he says (quoting the confession of faith, chap. xxv. 2), "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, the house and Family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."

What a singular conclusion! A society which, as he states elsewhere, "stands not in an inward and saving relationship to Christ, but in an outward relationship only, involving no more than the promise and enjoyment of outward privileges," is nevertheless 'the kingdom of Christ,' the house of God,' a society "out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." For those assertions it is needless to say no Scriptural authority can be found.

It is not easy to discover what spiritual benefits, "real and important," a man can by any possibility derive from union to a society which, it is admitted, can confer no blessing that is other than external and temporal. These benefits are spoken of as consisting in participation of "Church ordinances," and as involving "an outward covenant relation to Christ;" but how either the one or the other can be of a spiritual value, if only "outward and temporal" does not appear.

The assertion is made again and again that this visible church is "a society framed by Divine appointment;" that to join it is "to confess Christ before men;" that communion in its ordinances is not a matter of choice, but of express command;" that "a solitary Christian is a contradiction in terms," -- nay, worse, that he is "an

anomaly standing out against the express institution of God, who has made provision in outward ordinances for the union and edification of believers."

Christ, says the Professor, "did not wait for the historical development of the Christian society, or leave His disciples to organize for themselves its system of government, and office-bearers, and laws." These all exist "in virtue of the appointment of the Divine Head." The proof offered is, that He promised when 'two or three met together in His name He would be in the midst of them to bless them;' that He commanded His disciples to 'confess' Him before men; that He appointed certain public ordinances, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper; and that " He commissioned the first office-bearers in His Church." "In all this," it is triumphantly added, "is evinced or implied the positive institution of a society by Christ himself, having from Him a Divine authority." It seems difficult to conceive of any reasoning less conclusive, and now comes the question, " What is the place and office assigned to this visible Church in the world?"

The reply given is, It is to be a "standing; and outward witness for Christ on the earth." Its ordinances are a public testimony for Christ. Its authority is the authority of Christ. It is, along with the Spirit, "a perpetual witness on behalf of a Savior." The Church's outward ordinances are the avenues through which the Spirit of God more powerfully reaches the spirit of man;" the outward provision of teaching; and ordinance, and administration in the Christian society, is the ordinary and accustomed channel through which the deep and mysterious tide of Divine and supernatural power flows to the members from God;" the Church itself is, "in an especial and supernatural manner, the residence of the Holy Ghost; and in the right and faithful use of its ordinances the spirit of man meets with the Spirit of God, and finds a blessing." So it is affirmed; but on what authority it is useless to inquire.

That which follows but too clearly intimates the effect that is produced, even on the best of men, such astounding assumptions. "The ministers of the Gospel, -- the messengers of the Cross," says Dr. Bannerman, "arrogate to themselves the title to enter into every human dwelling where a sinner is to be found, -- seeking admittance in the name of the Savior of sinners, that they may negotiate -- with the inhabitant in behalf of their Master, however sternly the door may be closed against them -- by jealousy of their errand, or hatred to their cause."

"It has been," he goes on to say, "the eloquent boast of freedom in our country that every man's house is his castle; and that, be it but a straw built shed, open to every breath of heaven, yet fenced about by the protection and sanction of law, there even the king cannot and dare not enter. But where the king cannot enter, there the missionary of Christ claims to be admitted; and with a higher warrant in his hand than that of human law bids the gates be lifted up, that with the Gospel he may enter in." Well may it be added, "Can claims and pretensions so essentially exclusive and aggressive, which belong from its very nature to Christianity, owned and conceded by a State constituted on the principle of entire and equal indifference to truth and falsehood?"

This extraordinary claim, be it observed, is put forward not by a Romanist; nor yet on behalf of any body of men established by the State; but by one occupying the chair of a College for Presbyterian ministers supported by voluntary subscriptions Such is but the natural result of its being supposed by any human society that it is an appointed vicegerent of God.

That the position assumed does not materially differ from that of the Roman Catholic is further evident from such passages as the following: -- "An individual man, with the Bible in his hand, and interpreting the Bible for himself, will, under the blessing of God, find in the private perusal of the inspired volume what will build up his own soul in spiritual wisdom and understanding. But the private perusal of the Word is not to be compared as an instrument of influence and spiritual power to the public preaching of the Word by the Church, as the ordinance of God appointed for that end." And again, "The preaching of the Gospel and the

testimony against error and in favor of the truth by the Church are authoritative and binding, because the Church is the ordinance of God, warranted and commissioned so to preach and so to testify."

The view taken by Presbyterians of sacraments, as set forth in the Assembly's Larger Catechism, is not very different from that adopted by Anglicans. "A sacrament," it is there said, "is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his Church to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of His mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another, and to distinguish them from those that are without." "Baptism" is declared to be "a sacrament of the New Testament wherein Christ bath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into Himself, of remission of sins by His blood, and regeneration by His Spirit.

"The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of the New Testament wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, His death is showed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon His body and blood." Further, "Christ bath appointed the ministers of His word in the administration of this sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to set apart the bread and wine from common use, by the word of institution, thanksgiving, and prayer; to take and break the bread, and to give both the bread and the wine to the communicants."

These assertions are supposed to be proved by Scripture, inasmuch as certain texts are appended thereto, but anything more inconclusive than these Scriptural references it is difficult to conceive of.

It is not easy to say what is precisely meant by the term 'sacrament.' In the Tridentine Catechism a sacrament is defined to be "a sensible thing, which, by Divine appointment, hath the power of causing, as well as of signifying, holiness and righteousness ("Catech. Trident.," Part ii., n. 10). In the Heidelberg Catechism, generally adopted by the Calvinists of Germany, it is "a holy visible sign and seal," a seal in the sense of "an assurance to the person who worthily receives it of the blessings of the covenant of grace." In the Larger Catechism of the Church of Scotland it is "a holy ordinance, instituted by Christ, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those within the covenant of grace the benefits of His mediation," &c. In the twenty-fifth Article of the Church of England it is not only "a badge or token of Christian men's profession, but rather a certain sure witness, and effectual sign of grace and God's good-will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in Him." Mr. Watson, one of the most eminent of Wesleyan theological writers, considers it "a federal rite and confirming seal." Many, if not most of the Nonconformist divines, regard it in this light.

The word sacramentum etymologically denotes anything sacred. It was understood at a very early period to imply any sacred obligation: but more specifically, the oath of the soldiers in swearing allegiance to their commander. In the Vulgate, and elsewhere, the word "sacrament" is used as a translation of the Greek term *mysterion*, mystery; for the Greek Christians called the sacred symbols of the faith holy mysteries, while the Latin, called them " sacraments." *

The great Wesleyan body, although not altogether Presbyterian, and differing from that section of the Church very widely on some doctrinal points, such as Election, sympathizes with the Free Church of Scotland in the views generally taken by that body regarding Sacraments and Church Authority.

* Dr. Halley's 'Inquiry into the Nature of the Symbolic Institutions of the Christian Religion' contains a full and able discussion of this subject.

The London Quarterly Review, a leading Wesleyan periodical, in an article on Bible Classes (Oct., 1862), asserts that "the Minister -- Wesleyan or other -- is the human guardian and expositor of Scripture;" adding, "In studying the Bible the way of duty is the way of danger. There is no such forlorn and miserable a journey as that of a young man's travels in this track without a guide. Of the Supreme Guide we will not speak but only of the human guide who is appointed for this end. The minister, be he what he may, was sent for this among other purposes, to give directions in all things pertaining to the Bible."

The Presbyterian Free Church of Scotland has (since the disruption) published as one of its "authoritative documents," the Directory, in which the following order is commanded "to be enforced by the Church like her other laws:" The charge and office of interpreting the Holy Scripture is part of the ministerial calling, which none, however otherwise qualified, should take upon him in any place, hit he that is duly called thereunto by God and His kirk." At family worship no person (except the head of the household) should be suffered, without the approval of the Minister and Session, to perform worship hi families; and special care should be taken that each family keep by themselves, not admitting stringers. The reason given, among others is, that such meetings tend "to the prejudice of the public ministry."

Of course it will be said that those regulations are now obsolete; but their retention as embodying the law of the Church of Scotland, and their official recognition and reassertion by a seceding body when abandoning everything in order to render what they regarded as a faithful testimony in favor of "the sole Headship of Christ in His Church," is a striking proof of the unwillingness of ecclesiastics to give up even the shadow of their long-lost supremacy.

The regulations in question were first framed in the year 1647. Their object then was to put down meetings which had lingered among the people from the times of the Reformation; meetings which the General Assembly admit had been productive of good "effects and fruit in the times of corruption and trouble," yet were "to be disapproved" when God had blessed them with peace and purity of the Gospel This was the kind of clerical reaction which now triumphed everywhere, and under the influence of which an effective stop was soon put to the progress of the reforming movement altogether. For since that time and let Christians mark well the fact -- the Reformation has not advanced one step in any country in Europe.

CHAPTER V

CONGREGATIONALISM.

CONGREGATIONALISM -- in theory at least -- professes to abjure what are called, 'Church Principles.' A Church of Christ, says one of its most popular authorities, is "a number of professing Christians united to each other by their own voluntary consent; having their proper officers; meeting in one place for the observance of religious ordinances; and who are independent of all other control than the authority of Christ expressed in His word." *

Another, -- of perhaps greater weight -- observes, "The earliest idea of a Christian Church is that of a brotherhood for the maintenance and diffusion of religious convictions . . . The Church comes before us at the beginning as a sympathetic consociation for maintaining and teaching, the doctrines, as well as for cherishing and diffusing the spirit of the Gospel." **

A third maintains that the true basis of a Church is "the development and realization of the Divine Life in persons who have passed into the Kingdom of God." The idea of a church, he says, "requires that it should be constituted of regenerate men for the purpose of united worship and spiritual Communion." ***

These conceptions of a church somewhat vary, but the difference is probably apparent rather than real. All alike stand in direct and absolute contrast to that idea of 'the Church' which is entertained by those who advocate the principles of Anglicanism. Whatever courtesy may seem to require of us when speaking of any man's ecclesiastical position, it is impossible to avoid perceiving that the Anglican and the Nonconformist of necessity stand in Church matters irreconcilably apart, and that, as a fact, the one unavoidably unchurches the other. And yet in some points these antagonists are agreed. Each claims for his own church Divine authority; each on that ground maintains that adherence to the visible church is proof of loyalty to Christ; each lays the foundation of fellowship on a basis of dogma; and each puts forth pretensions which, if not justified by Scripture, are injurious to spiritual freedom.

In relation to the Divine authority of churches generally Mr. James puts the matter thus:-- "If the question be asked of any one, 'Why are you a Church member?' the first answer must be, 'Because Jesus Christ has commanded it.' The true ground of Church membership is the authority of our Divine Lord. It is not only a privilege which He has permitted us to enjoy, but a duty which He has commanded us to perform. If we were unable to perceive its advantages it would still be our duty to comply with it. If a believer remains without visible connection with some Christian Society he is guilty of direct disobedience against his rightful Lord."

* The late Rev. J. A. James, of Birmingham, of Church Fellowship.

** 'Ecclesia,' edited by Dr. Reynolds, Art., i., by Dr. Stoughton.

*** 'Contemp. Rev.,' July, 1870, art. by the Rev. R. W. Dale.

Mr. Dale certainly is not behind others in claiming for Congregational Churches the highest of all authority. In his latest pamphlet * he says, "We are fully persuaded that the Church constitution in which we are set is cast in the apostolic and primitive mould, and not one day nor hour younger in the nature and form of it than the first Church of the New Testament. . . . We have exaggerated and misinterpreted the great Protestant principle that religion is an affair that lies altogether between man and his Maker. . . . It seems to be supposed that we can pray to God just as devoutly when we are alone as when we are worshipping with our Christian brethren that the solitary reading of the holy Scriptures and of good books is likely to do us quite as much good as listening to most sermons," &c., &c. Christ declared that He is specially present *in some mysterious and wonderful way* where two or three are gathered together in His name. . . . The Church is a supernatural society, and exists for supernatural purposes; and it is in relation to these that its polity must be judged. . . . It is true that in the New Testament very wonderful prerogatives are attributed to every regenerate man, but it is difficult to understand how it is possible to resist the impression that the great inheritance of wisdom, strength, and joy, which is ours in Christ belongs to *the Church* rather than to individual Christians."

If it be asked, to *what Church* do these attributes belong? the answer is prompt. "According to the spirit and idiom of apostolic thought, what is affirmed of the universal Church appears to be affirmed of *every organized assembly of Christian men* Ubi ecclesia ibi Christus -- Christ is the Head of the Church; where the Church is, there Christ is. The prayers of the Church will be answered, because Christ himself is in the assembly that offers the prayers; and when the Church excludes an obstinate and impenitent brother, *the exclusion has a supernatural validity because Christ is a party to the act* Though we are ignorant of all that is meant by the confirm: Soon in heaven of the sentence by which a man is excluded from the Church on earth, the words of Christ make it perfectly certain that excommunication inflicts a terrible penalty on sin The declaration, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,' carries with it the assurance that when the excommunicated are denied a place at the table of Christ, the denial is the expression of the will of Christ. He refuses to receive them as His guests. He no longer recognizes them as His friends." **

Dr. Stoughton says, "How can men belong to *a body instituted by God Himself*, and claim their own privileges and those of others without faith in that institution as a *Divine* one, and as resting on Divinely revealed principles?"

Mr. Dale refuses to admit that these churches *rest on a basis of dogma*, although he allows that "Nonconformists themselves have often declared that it is their special function to maintain the true theology of the Reformation." He says, "Such statements have been sufficiently common, both in popular meetings and ecclesiastical assemblies." This being admitted, and Dr. Stoughton's remark being kept in view, who, speaking of such a Church, asks, "How can they form a Christian body of men at all, without having to some extent the same opinion respecting His doctrine?" I do not see that the supposition that these churches rest on a doctrinal basis ceases to be a true one because they are "not mere theological schools," or because "they have a surer and deeper foundation than the Westminster Confession."

* 'The Idea of the Church in Relation to Modern Congregationalism.'

** The italics in these passages are my own, and the extracts are necessarily dissevered from their context. I do not, however, think that the intent of the writer is in the slightest degree mistaken or misrepresented.

Dr. Allon, some few years ago, when speaking from the Chair of the Congregational Union, distinctly claimed for churches the right to regulate the active efforts of those who belong to them in their endeavors to benefit others. He says, "Every worker should be in subjection to the Church to which he belongs." The Church that claims this power may be self created, -- that apparently matters little. It may not be worthy of the name of a fabric; but if it be only an ecclesiastical splinter, being organized, it is a Church, and as such to be obeyed. The obedience required may be more or less absolute, -- more or less limited in reach; but as far as it goes it is obedience. This, of course, can only be claimed on the ground taken by Dr. Stoughton, -- that the institution itself, however sometimes caricatured, is a Divine one.

There are those who hold that, allowing for human infirmity and for the existence of evils and imperfections which attach to everything of man's handling, Congregational Churches, Men properly organized, are copies of those which flourished under Apostolic rule; but by far the greater number contend only for their conformity to what may be regarded as the great general principles laid down in Scripture regarding Church fellowship.

Nonconformists generally admit the principle that in Church matters, as in all other things of a religious character, the Scriptures are our sole guide; but they do so under reservation. The prevailing notion amongst them is that "precept is binding, but precedent is not;" that the Scriptural model is without doubt what we ought to imitate, provided, of course, that due allowance be made for altered circumstances."

Before, however, it can be admitted that these churches are either copies of, or approximations to, the Apostolic Church as it existed when Peter, James, and John were upon earth, as we see it in the Acts of the Apostles, or as we infer it must have been from the character and teaching of the epistles, it is needful to consider not so much the points in which these fellowships may be supposed to agree with the Apostolic ones, as those in which they obviously differ. General resemblances between associations formed in past or present times, for whatever purpose, may easily be pointed out, while it may nevertheless be true that differences the most essential really separate the one from the other.

What, then, let us ask, were the peculiarities which specially characterized the communities which are brought before us in the Acts of the Apostles, and addressed as churches in their epistles?

Ten in particular may be noticed.

- i. They were all governed, directly or indirectly, by inspired men; for the Apostles, present or absent, were always with these churches in spirit, taking part in their proceedings, and controlling their decisions (1 Cor. 5:3-4).
- ii. Their purity was guarded by a miraculous discipline (1 Cor. 11:30).
- iii. They were not based on the recognition of any distinctive doctrine or doctrines, but simply on allegiance to a person. Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, might differ in their mode of presenting truth, but to make them in any shape whatever leaders of sects was absolutely forbidden (1 Cor. 1:10-13).
- iv. They laid no exclusive claim to the administration of ordinances. It may not be fair to infer from what Paul says (1 Cor. 11:20) that the public assembly was not the place in which the Lord's Supper was to be eaten; but that it was anything but exclusively so is evident from what is recorded in Acts 2:46, where it is said 'they brake bread from house to house,' or, as the margin reads, 'at home.'
- v. They had no professional clergy of any kind. They had elders, who might or might not be sustained by those to whom they ministered. But these men were selected from the body of believers under Apostolic sanction, not on the ground of their having been previously trained or set apart for the work, but on account

of their possessing certain moral qualifications. To these men gifts were imparted and Apostolic instructions conveyed, so that in consequence of their knowing more than others of the Divine will, they were authorized to demand obedience (1 Cor. 12:4-12; Heb. 13:17).

vi. They recognized no distinction between what is termed in modern phraseology the Church and the Congregation. Attempts have been made to disprove this assertion, but they have not been successful. Heathen strangers might enter a primitive assembly, but they came only as spectators. They formed no 'part of the recognized congregation until they abandoned idolatry and became Christians.

vii. They made no distinction between the Lord's Supper and ordinary worship. Nothing can be found in the New Testament which should even lead us to suppose that the apostles, or first Christians, would have consented to join in prayer or praise with any individual with whom they would have refused to commune in the Supper of the Lord. The abuses which sprang up in the Corinthian Church rendered it necessary that such awful profanation should be summarily put down; but to infer from thence that the rite in question is more sacred than any other spiritual act is mere superstition.

viii. The members of these churches -- many of them at least -- enjoyed spiritual gifts, in the exercise of which they sometimes worked miracles of healing, sometimes spake in prophecy, and sometimes uttered thoughts given to them by God, in unknown tongues (1 Cor. 12:28-31; 1 Cor. 14:23-29).

ix. A ministry, open as that of the Synagogue (Acts 13:15), prevailed amongst them. They exhorted one another (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 12:4-12); sometimes they all prophesied (1 Cor. 14:24), and yet all things were directed to be done decently and in order.

x. They were all one, not merely in spirit, but externally. They appeared to be one to those that were without. The letter of Pliny to Trajan indicates that up to that period at least they had kept the commandment (1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Pet. 3:8).

In not one of these particulars do modern churches resemble Apostolic ones. In every one of the points referred to they are, on the contrary, as diverse as possible. Of what avail, then, is it to claim likeness because both may be voluntarily sustained, and both may have officers called bishops or deacons? If this be all in which they resemble each other, it is difficult indeed to see how they can be regarded as in any sense identical.

Present arrangements, as carried out by any given fellowship, or by any body or sect, may or may not be good in the sense of being useful and expedient, or adapted to the wants of modern society; but it is vain to pretend that they have any right to demand the adhesion of Christians on the ground of loyalty to their Lord; that they are parts "of a body instituted by God himself, to which none can refuse to belong without abandoning his own human privileges, and denying the privileges of his fellow-men;" that "they demand faith in their institution as Divine, and as resting on Divinely revealed principles;" that, when regarded as a whole, viz., as a confederation of Christian men, who have entered into combination on the ground that they are essentially one in opinion as to doctrine, they become, in any sense whatever, 'a pillar and ground of the truth.'

Nevertheless the church pretensions that are put forth by these communities are many and great. In relation to the admission of members it is argued that since such persons might to be regenerate, the Church, either by its Ministers, Deacons, or members generally, is bound to form a judgment of the existence of those qualities which are necessary to the enjoyment of communion. The right, therefore, to decide whether a man is or is not regenerate, and consequently whether or no he shall be permitted to commemorate the death of Christ in the way the Lord has appointed, rests, according to this theory, with the fellowship he wishes to join.

The privileges connected with Pastoral oversight and supplication which are supposed to be secured by church membership are thus stated by Mr. James :

"They watch for you said the apostle to the ancient Christians when speaking of their pastors, -- evidently implying that it was a great privilege to be the subject of such inspection. He (the pastor) will consider himself as the guide and shield of the souls committed to his care; a shepherd to provide for their wants; a watchman to observe the approach of their dangers. He will hasten to their bedsides when the sorrows of death encompass them; will disclose to the eye of faith the visions of immortality which irradiate the dark valley itself, and will never cease his solicitude until the portals of heaven have closed upon their disembodied spirits."

"In addition to this," we are told, "the pastor bears the Church in the arms of his affection, and presents them in his prayers before the throne of grace. Like the high priest of the Jews, he approaches the mercy-seat, not with the names of the people merely engraven upon his breastplate, but written upon his heart."

May it not then well be argued, If a Protestant Nonconformist is obliged to join his Church, whatever it may be, at the peril of his soul; if on his doing so depends his right to commemorate the death of the Redeemer in the way He has appointed; if the minister of his Church be to him a 'guide,' a 'shield,' a 'shepherd,' a 'watchman,' and an expounder of Scripture, -- In life his intercessor, and in death all but a viaticum to him, wherein does his position differ from that of a Romanist?

Clearly if Churches are Divine institutions, limitation is difficult, if not impossible.

I ought not to close this chapter, however, without observing how greatly Nonconformist Churches vary in their views of Church matters. In some, the claim to decide on a man's spiritual state is all but nullified by a breadth of view regarding that great change, which is, to say the least of it, extraordinary. Mr. Dale * says of the regenerate man, "His moral habits may be faulty. His knowledge of spiritual truth may be very elementary. There may be little fervor or intensity in his spiritual affections. But the difference between himself and other men is infinite. He has received the holy Ghost and become partaker of the Divine nature."

All this, be it observed, is said of every man who has made "a conscious surrender of himself to Christ." This act of transcendent significance, it is supposed, "secures the gift of that supernatural life which the Lord Jesus Christ came to confer upon the human race." The idea of a Church, he says, "requires that it should be constituted of regenerate men, for the purpose of united worship and free spiritual communion. The true condition of membership is not profession of any human creed, or of any rule of moral discipline, but possession of supernatural life. When an independent church receives a man into membership it acknowledges therefore his regeneration of God."

In another publication Mr. Dale tells us, "That full assurance of faith" of which our fathers were accustomed to speak, "is not to be looked for among those who have not yet been recognized by the Church as regenerate, and who have not yet sat at Christ's table." The recognition having taken place, everything is changed. There is now "free fellowship between himself and those who have received the same spiritual gift. He and they have a common life. He is one not only with God, but with them. In the absence of any mechanical bonds of union, and of all external signs of mutual recognition, and of all acts of common worship, the union is real and indestructible."

* Contemp. Rev., July, 1870, 'Mr. Matthew Arnold and the Nonconformists,' by R. W. Dale.

It will of course be said, if "the idea of a Church requires that it should be constituted of regenerate men for the purpose of united worship," how comes it to pass that, among Nonconformists, worship every Sunday and at every service is thrown open to all comers -- that there is no separate worship of the Church? Again, if "the true condition of membership is not possession of any human creed, or of any rule of moral discipline," what does Denominationalism mean? Why does it exist? Further, if "mechanical bonds," and "external signs," and "common worship" are not essential to union, why are churches formed?

Mr. Dale replies, spiritual life "requires expression to attain all its possibilities of vigor and joy." God "has made the nobler and more gracious forms of spiritual experience and perfection almost as dependent upon the influences and gifts which reach us through our brethren as upon those which come directly from His own hand. Churches exist by virtue of this law."

Is there then, it will naturally be asked, any provision in these fellowships for the brethren edifying one another -- any channel for the communication of the "influences and gifts" spoken of?

The reply is, "As no society can exist without officers, and as the supernatural gifts of the Spirit for the instruction and edification of the Church are conferred on men according to the Divine will, the Church appoints to office those who appear to be Divinely qualified to fulfill the various functions and ministries necessary to the development of its life."

This answer would be satisfactory but for one circumstance, viz., that since as a fact, the Nonconformist churches have but one "spiritual teacher" -- the minister, -- they, it is obvious, can only be edified by his influences and gifts. These, however, are supposed to be more than human. Mr. Dale says, "The supernatural qualifications of ministers come direct from the Holy Ghost, and may be recognized by those in whom the Holy Ghost dwells." The Church, as such, "has the special presence of Christ and the immediate inspiration of the Spirit;" but, so far as appears, the proof given of this Divine possession is found chiefly, if not exclusively, in its ability to recognize the supernatural qualifications of the minister.

One is tempted to ask in all simplicity, what is meant by the ascription of supernatural qualifications to ministers, or of immediate inspiration to churches? Is the inspiration in question at all akin to that enjoyed by apostles and prophets? If not, is it more or less, higher or further reaching, than is enjoyed by every Christian? Is it intellectual, or only moral and spiritual? If the former, how and in what way is it expressed? If the latter, how is it manifested? Is it possible for an organized body to have any moral or spiritual gift? Further, those gifts official, and possessed either by ministers or churches as such, and irrespective of their moral and spiritual condition? Or, finally, is the true explanation akin to that which is given of architectural embellishments and of unwise expressions used in hymns? Regarding these, Mr. Dale says, "Nonconformist churches -- many of them at least -- have spires, and transepts, and chancels, and apses, and windows bright with angels and gorgeous with saints; but it is a mistake to suppose that there is any meaning in it at all." The "hymns in which chapels are called temples," and the phrases used when these buildings are "dedicated to God, His presence being solemnly involved, and the building presented as an offering to Himself, are never meant to be rigidly interpreted."

The main thought of the paper, however, is that "Independency (like Puritanism) is an attempt to give form and expression to a vivid sense of God's nearness to every regenerate soul;" that a true Independent, like the old Puritan, "resents all interference between himself and God;" that "he is one who can speak to God face to face;" that "he has seen God, and is wholly possessed with a sense of the Divine greatness, holiness, and love."

Of what use then, it may be asked, is a Nonconformist church? It does not guide into truth, that is admitted. It does not come between God and the soul, that is asserted. It is supposed to consist only of regenerate men, in order that worship may be united and spiritual; but this end is set aside by the invariable practice of mixed

worship. It assembles because "God has made us largely dependent upon the influences and gifts that reach us through our brethren;" but no channel is provided outside the pulpit in which these influences and gifts can flow and find expression. It is a fellowship which is independent of "all acts of common worship," and of all external signs;" yet it is fellowship in a given religious body which is separated from other Christians, it may be presumed for an end. It is not based on dogma, that is repudiated. It is one in heart and spirit with all true Christians. What is then its basis, and what its object? Is it possible that such questions could be asked about any society that was really "instituted by God himself," and from which, if a man separates, he does so at the peril of his soul, since it is "an act of direct disobedience against his rightful Lord"?

In making the statements lie has, Mr. Dale claims no authority to speak for any one but himself; yet, if he is incompetent to describe Nonconformist churches as they are and if, after comparing his account of them with that of Dr. Stoughton, Dr. Allon, and the late Mr. James of Birmingham, I fail to see them truly, the fault is not mine. It becomes, in such a case, absolutely impossible to know what they are, or what principles are involved in their constitution.

I have only to add that the tendency in modern Nonconformist writers to approach nearer the theories of High Churchmen than their fathers would have done, has been remarked upon as 'hopeful,' by the Guardian in a recent review of 'Ecclesia.' The writer observes, "We certainly trace in it an advance in principle towards Church truth. The constant reference to the Church as an organized and Divinely constituted body, argues some desire of a closer unity than belongs to the bare Congregational theory. And when we examine the opinions put forth, as, for example, in Mr. Dale's essay on 'The Real Presence and the Lord's Supper,' we trace a recognition of some true sacramental efficacy and a repudiation of mere Zwinglianism, which are 'signs of the times.' Everywhere we see growing up a feeling of greater reverence for the corporate life and blessings of a Church, and a sense that it must be something more than a mere agglomeration of individuals kept together by a conscious agreement in Christian belief and Christian life."

The truth of these observations is borne out by a more recent article in the Contemporary Review contributed by the Rev. Henry Allon. He says, "Nonconformists are just beginning freely to incorporate whatever may conduce to the beauty, richness, and effectiveness of their worship, caring but little from what source it comes. Some of them can do with impunity what in Episcopal congregations would be cause of strife or peril, simply because they incur no suspicion."

Again, "The freedom of individual members of a church is necessarily limited by its own standards. It is a contradiction in terms, and an outrage on Common sense, for a man who has voluntarily become a minister or a member of a church, to claim the liberty of revolt from its creeds and ritual; no matter, whether it be an established Episcopal church, or a voluntary Congregational church. The essential condition of membership is substantial agreement. His freedom of theological thought and of ecclesiastical action is necessarily circumscribed by his church standards fairly and reasonably interpreted. If he wish to believe or to act in denial or contradiction of them the only honest course is to relinquish his membership in all other churches (but the Established one) it is justly felt that every vital departure from the substantial sense of clearly defined dogma and prescribed ritual is a moral offence which, so far from being condoned, is only made more serious and injurious by its general concession. It necessarily follows that a Congregational church, while in itself more independent, in its membership is more exacting, than the Established Church. It believes in its dogmas, it is constructed on the basis of a common belief in them." *

* Contemporary Review, June, 1871, Art. v.

And yet we are told continually that Congregationalists have no creeds, no standards, no ritual, and that they enjoy absolute freedom of theological thought! It may be so; but if Dr. Allon's views are those of the body to which he belongs, the liberty granted is precisely that which is allowed by the Roman Catholic on the one hand, and by the Plymouth Brother on the other, -- the liberty of thinking differently from the community at the price of being 'cast out of the Synagogue.'

It is clear enough that Nonconformist churches come behind none others, either in the importance they attach to church ministrations, or in the claims they make. So far as I see, they are at one with Dr. John Henry Newman, when he says that "Religion without a church is as Unnatural as life without food and raiment," or, as it has been put elsewhere, "as a soul without a body."

Nothing, however, that they have said or written has furnished any evidence that Christ established or ordained churches so called; that any intimation can be found in Scripture that it would ever be the duty of later believers to imitate the proceedings of the first Christians; to apply the principles on which they acted to an altogether different state of society; or to attempt without Apostles to do what was done under the guidance of inspired teachers.

This evidence is essential. If it can be produced, all that can be said against churches is of very little value.

Sects, denominations, religious interests, strifes, rivalries, the association of status or money with the Gospel, and a hundred other things, may be frightful stumblingblocks in the way of multitudes but if they arise out of obedience to a Divine command, they must be borne with as ' blessings in disguise.' But woe to us if we have set up these idols on no better authority than Jeroboam had when he established his calves at Bethel and Dan; if we have mistaken the visible for the invisible; if we have practically denied that the Church, like its great Head, is here unseen; that every member of it is but a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth; that its only ministry is the Spirit and the Word; its only baptism the baptism of the Holy Ghost; its only discipline that which is administered by the Lord himself, in ways that the eye of man never can perceive!

Slow indeed are we to learn, and very unwilling to act on the belief, that the relation of the individual soul to God is a relation, not with any outward organization, but with the truths of the Bible. From the historical facts on which Christianity rests the spiritual life can indeed never be separated. But nowhere are we taught that this hidden life is dependent on any church order, or that a truer and deeper one, a closer fellowship with God, might not be expected if we relied more upon the Divine Teacher, and less on human aids.

CHAPTER VI

BRETHRENISM.

THE revival of a modified Romanism in the English Church, which took place about thirty years ago, marks a new era in the religious life of the country. The form which that movement soon assumed; the talent and energy which it developed; the religious earnestness to which it led; and the disastrous results which it accomplished in compelling the secession of some of the most distinguished ornaments of the Church of England from her pale to that of Rome, have given to it a prominence and a social importance which it is difficult to over-estimate.

It is not so generally known that about the same time, another and very different movement -- outwardly and to the superficial eye unworthy of remark, yet perhaps destined in the end to effect results of the greatest moment commenced in Dublin, and soon after rapidly extended itself on this side of the Channel.

This latter attempt, which subsequently took shape as 'Brethrenism,' excited at the time but little attention; partly because the actors were not persons of any great influence in society, and partly because the whole thing very soon assumed a sectarian form, and disappeared from notice amid the crowd of other religious communities with which it became confounded. The fact, however, of the all but simultaneous commencement of two religious movements, so thoroughly antagonistic in their character as these unquestionably were, is surely worth notice.

Such coincidences are by no means unusual. Events that thus contrast are frequently found to have something like a common origin, since they spring, for the most part, out of circumstances peculiar to the day that gives them birth, and mark the commencement of those great periods of change which, from time to time, break upon the world. It was while Luther was shaking Europe by his thunders, and building up at Augsburg a Protestantism never to be overthrown, that Loyola, in his narrow cell at Paris, was inducing Xavier, Faber, Laynez, Bobadilla, and Rodriguez to form themselves into an association for bringing all men into subjection to Luther's great enemy, the Pope and it is not a mere fancy to imagine that the same starlight night that saw these six young men on the summit of Montmartre take their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to Rome, witnessed the prayers and tears of Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin for the emancipation of the world from the tyranny of that very superstition and priestcraft which Loyola, and his friends were leaguings to support.

Who can trace the subsequent history of the great struggle to which all these parties were so solemnly devoting themselves, without feeling something like dismay at the thought that, after raging for above three centuries, it seems, to human eye, as far as ever from being over -- that it is, in fact, actually reviving afresh, although under conditions which are, as yet, only beginning to take definite form and shape? Whether the mysterious 1,260 years -- if such they be -- which have so long perplexed the students of prophecy, are or are not drawing to a conclusion may, to many, be very uncertain; but none can doubt that everywhere materials are gathering for such a struggle between authority and freedom in church matters as the world has never yet witnessed, a struggle distinguished above all others by its radical character; by its being one of life or death; and by its carrying in its train all the secular and social interests which are bound up, on the one hand, with the maintenance of things as they are, and on the other, with the advancement of knowledge, religion, and liberty.

Of what are commonly termed 'Church Principles' I have already spoken sufficiently. The antagonist ones, adopted by the 'Brethren,' assume that any notion of a 'ministerial transmission of the ministry' is delusive;

that the barrier which once restricted ministry to an order is now broken down; that priesthood is the common privilege of all believers; that the claims set up after the death of the last of the apostles, by persons who regarded themselves as their successors was a fraudulent imposition upon a dark and superstitious age; that the entire subsequent history of the Church is that of one great apostasy.

At first sight it would seem as if the 'Brethren,' in avowing these sentiments, had cast aside everything that is involved in the idea of a church; that they professed to be nothing more than companies of Christians meeting together for mutual edification; that they repudiated altogether the notion that any man or set of men had a right to judge or direct his brother in things pertaining to the spirit; that they relied for the maintenance of purity in their communion on Christian affinity, and were persuaded that if they could create a truly spiritual atmosphere in their assemblies, the godly would be drawn to them, and the worldly be repelled.

That this was their ground of union in the first instance can scarcely be doubted, since the accusation brought against their theory was, that it was "too unworldly and sainted for our polluted atmosphere;" that it was, in short, "a vineyard without a fence." Be that as it may, the abandonment of the original principle, and the adoption in its stead of the church idea, as more in accordance with the opinions of the religious world, was very soon brought about. No practical evils had arisen in consequence of the openness of their communion, but, moved partly by a not unnatural desire to avoid the reproaches of other Christians, and partly by a wish to meet the prejudices of persons brought up under ecclesiastical systems, the good men in question unconsciously removed the keystone of their unity; opened a door of entrance for the very evils, to avoid which they had retired from existing ecclesiastical systems; and furnished a foothold on which ambitious persons speedily planted ladders by which they might ascend to power and influence.

Thus they became a Church; and, as was sure to be the case, were soon known as one of the most intolerant and exclusive of churches. Brother after brother was cast out; sometimes in order to enforce uniformity of opinion, and sometimes to compel the judgment of supposed evil in others. The "gatherings," as they were called, were now supposed to constitute "the assembly of God," and the will of their leaders was too often identified with the decisions of the Holy Ghost.

At length, weary of continual strife, many of their own members declared that 'Brethrenism' was but "Rome in embryo," and the spirit of their proceedings but too like that of the Papists when at the burning of heretics they sang the *Veni Creator Spiritus*. Secession followed secession; rival leaders like rival Popes excommunicated one another; union, where it existed, became one of doctrines and opinions rather than of life and love; and meeting after meeting gradually fell under the rule of the most narrow-minded and bigoted. And so things continue until this day. Not, however, without exceptions. Meetings of 'Brethren' assemble in many places, which more or less abjure the narrow and intolerant views so much favored by others. What proportion these more liberal 'gatherings' bear to the entire body -- if 'Brethrenism' can now be spoken of as a unity I am unable to say. I fear they are the minority.

The lesson given to the world by the movement is a most important one, and full of instruction. It is this:-- that no form of spiritual government, no modification of ecclesiastical principles, no denial of a professional ministry, no recognition of a common right to teach and to administer ordinances, will avail to unite Christians, or to destroy sectarianism, if the church idea is recognized; if men persuade themselves that the associations they have formed are more or less Divine; if they imagine that such bodies have the promise of Divine guidance in the discernment of character if they suppose that God has entrusted to any human being the power of deciding on what conditions a fellow -- sinner shall be permitted to commune at the table of the Lord; if, in short, they conceive that what is called a church is in any respect more or other than a human institution, to be judged as other institutions are judged, and one to which no man is compelled to belong as a part of his obligation to Christ.

CHAPTER VII

MODERN ROMANISM.

RISING from the dust, and seeking to tower above all the forms of Protestantism amongst us, is Modern Romanism. The inheritor and modern representative of the ecclesiastical system of the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church of the nineteenth century, as of old demands supremacy. Its fundamental principle still is, the subjection of the world to ecclesiastical influences. For this end it claims catholicity; enforces, where it is possible, unity; and insists upon its possession of "Divine certainty and Divine discernment." The conception is a magnificent one; dazzling to the imaginative, captivating to the devout, and courting the confidence of all who long to find rest in the bosom of infallibility.

That which has been said of Jesuitism is equally true of modern Romanism in all its branches:-- "It intends nothing that is partial or circumscribed; its very purport is universality; its idol is a vast abstract idea, -- a beautiful conception of spiritual domination, which shall at length supplant all other dominations, and insure peace and order upon the earth."

In the number of her adherents, in the extent of her authority, and in the diversity and grandeur of her claims, the Romish Church yet occupies the first place in history, claiming to be acknowledged, not merely as one among others, but as the one and only universal church; her Head the Vicar of Christ; her teaching Divine and certain; her pale the only place of safety; within it salvation, outside of it utter and irreparable ruin.

The ancient Church, it is said, had to encounter organizations so powerful that "nothing short of an organization incomparably more multifarious in its appliances, more persevering, more cohesive, or rather so closely knitted together that each of its parts depends upon while it strengthens the rest, -- discipline being inseparably united with doctrine, and both with the innermost thoughts and intents of the heart, -- could have withstood the force by which it has been threatened." This organization Rome professes still to maintain, having -- so its advocates affirm, -- in accordance with the purposes of God, ultimately developed into a government which embraces the world, and claims the sovereigns thereof for subjects.

These huge pretensions she rests, in one sense upon Scripture, inasmuch as from the sacred volume she deduces the principles on which her sovereignty is based. But in another, and far more extended sense she builds on the Fathers; on their supposed inspiration; on their wisdom, and on their authority. She is, according to her own account, -- and it is difficult to dispute it, -- the only legitimate successor of the Church of the third and fourth centuries a succession that involves not merely a following in order of time, but in a process of development She admits indeed of no break whatever between the Apostolate of Peter the Fisherman, and the vicariate of the present occupant of the Vatican; between the first council held at Jerusalem, and that which but lately was in session within the walls of Rome.

The pretext that this world-wide Church finds its root in the upper chamber where our Lord partook of His last earthly meal with the Apostles, and its authority in the words of Christ to Cephas, 'the rock' is a mere extravagance; but the claim to occupy a position similar to the one which the Ancient Church sought and ultimately obtained is, on the other hand, consistent with her history. For if Christ and His apostles did either establish or lay the foundations of a Divine Society which should be in all generations 'a pillar and ground of the truth;' if that society was intended to be an organized unity; if to it, as such, special promises were given and special privileges attached; if it, high calling was to subdue the world to Christ, to establish His kingdom upon the earth, and by means of the ecclesiastical to dominate the temporal, it can hardly be questioned that

the claim of the Church of Rome to be that society is capable of being so presented as to carry with it at least a reasonable probability of being well founded.

Whatever therefore may be her errors and corruptions, it must I think be admitted that she is, in spite of them all, the Church of the Fathers, the Church of the Nicene age, and the Church that subdued the Empire. Her later idolatries, her Papal claims, her Mariolatry, and her countless superstitions, grievous as they are, cannot alter the fact that in the nineteenth century she more truly represents the Church of the third and fourth centuries than any other in existence. Nor is it easy to see how, without renouncing what are called 'Church Principles;' without more or less denying Church authority and tradition; without, in fact, giving up the Church idea, it is possible successfully to set aside her claim or to treat her as an impostor.

The Anglican Church seems to allow as much, when she accepts the ordination of Romish Priests as valid, notwithstanding her declaration that the Romish Communion is "so far wide from the nature of a true Church that nothing can be more;" when she founds her own claim to Apostolic descent on the ground of a like succession from the Nicene or Ante-Nicene Fathers. and when she justifies her separation from Rome only on the ground of the retention by that Church of doctrines and observances against which the Reformers protested in vain. Had it been otherwise, -- had the reforms demanded in the sixteenth century been carried out, every consistent Anglican would be obliged to hold that the great secession under Luther and his coadjutors could not have lawfully taken place; for the oneness of the Church as a great spiritual body would then have been preserved, and the unity thus unbroken would have been accounted evidence of the Divine favor, and been regarded as the fulfillment of Christ's prayer, 'That they all may be one.'

No mistake can be greater than to suppose that because Romanists discourage the reading of the Bible by the laity, and have persecuted those who insist upon the right of perusal, therefore Rome abandons the sacred oracles as an authority. She never did so. Of all the disputes which she has professed to decide, probably it would be impossible to find one in which the authority of Scripture was not claimed by both parties as their stronghold. The Fathers, in the midst of the grossest superstitions and the most monstrous sacerdotal claims, continually recommend the study of the Scriptures to all classes; and the great Church leaders invariably appeal to that tribunal as their own. But what does all this avail if the Divine statement may be authoritatively expounded by the human teacher, and the truth of God supplemented by the everlasting 'therefores' which so often are seen to wind, like "wreaths of smoke, from the narrow aperture of a single text."

It may startle some, but it is nevertheless strictly true, that we shall never be free from the danger of return to the communion of Rome, until we learn to look at Popery as an outgrowth of priestcraft and superstition, not incompatible with deep personal piety, with a profound reverence for Scripture, and a sincere and earnest desire for its perusal by all men.

Zealous Protestants are often greatly perplexed when they discover, as they sometimes do, that passing over to Rome has improved the character of the convert; that he or she has become more self-denying than formerly, and far less lofty in the treatment of persons who occupy humble positions. But they need not be stumbled thereby. It is well to recognize the fact that some aspects of Divine truth are better understood among Romanists than they are elsewhere. The self-denial cultivated in that communion may be connected with wrong views regarding asceticism; and the comparatively small importance attached to minor differences of rank may arise out of the undue exaltation of the priesthood; but it is nevertheless true that in their avoidance of our feudal pride, and in their self-abnegation, they are often more Christ-like than ourselves.

The only real preservative against Popery is a firm belief in the indwelling of the Spirit of God in the heart of the individual Christian; a deep conviction that this, the greatest of all blessings, may be enjoyed apart from the transmissive agency of any Church whatever; that it is a gift separable alike from Scripture and

from sacrament; that it is so, simply because it is the action of God on the heart, and not on the intellect; and that, therefore, while it neither slights nor supersedes any appointed means of grace, it is independent of them all. Without this dew of Heaven the soil will be barren, and vain the sowing of the seed; with it, the seed, falling into good ground, will bring forth fruit vigorously and abundantly.

It was because this great truth was neglected in the church of the third and fourth centuries that ancient Christianity became gloomy and ascetic; that fasts, austerities, and flight from the world told of a religion from which individual and domestic purity, and consequently joy, had fled; a religion in which terror had supplanted love, and the liberty with which Christ makes His people free, been exchanged for a law wrapt in purgatorial fires, and clothed in deeper thunders than even those of Sinai.

Upon this backward path do men, earnest and devout, once more invite us to enter, as the only refuge from prevailing restlessness and unbelief. Of such Dante well ways,--

"They chew the end, but cannot part the hoof." *

Would we avoid that snare, we must be 'grounded and settled' in the conviction that no Church was ever intended to come, either as a ruler, interpreter, or expounder between the soul and its Savior; that it is utterly impossible to escape the painful discipline involved in all inquiry after truth, and without which it cannot be attained.

But how on this method, it will be said, can certainty be reached? The reply must be, by spiritual experience alone. It was never intended that it should be reached in any other way. Stumble at the recognition of such a fact as we may, it is clear that some degree of uncertainty in relation to Divine truth appears to have been designed. Mysterious as we may think it, there is a sense in which doubt is intended to attach to the very meaning of statements which are nevertheless important portions of God's message to man. Were it otherwise, the acceptance of truth, being simply a consequence of demonstration, would have no moral character whatever. The spiritual condition of the recipient would in that case not be of the slightest importance; it would have, in fact, no place. Moral considerations have no bearing on the acceptance or rejection of anything that is as indisputable as a problem of Euclid. No folly, therefore, can be greater than that of those who, in the present day, apologize for their neglect of Scripture on the ground that the uncertainty attaching to Biblical interpretation renders the study practically useless. In point of fact, nothing more is needed to prove that Romanism is a falsity than its assumption of infallibility in doctrine.

Speaking generally, and in relation to the whole system of the modern Romanist, the following considerations seem to embody a brief reply to what he is perpetually advancing.

i. There is in the Bible no word saying or leading us to suppose that any spiritual blessing ever was, or ever will be, conveyed to man through material medium. The Spirit can be touched only by that which is spiritual. Material things are not unfrequently regarded in Scripture as symbolizing that which is spiritual, but they are never spoken of as the medium by which any spiritual blessing is communicated. Therefore we may safely decline to accept either the doctrine of transubstantiation, or that of baptismal regeneration.

ii. Nothing in Scripture indicates that any church, or saint, or individual, however exalted, was ever intended either to mediate, or in any way to come between the soul and Christ. Therefore we are obliged to reject Church authority, the mediation of the Virgin, and the intercession of saints.

* 'Purg.' clxvi., Pollock's translation. "In mystical interpretation the chewing of the end signifies the duty of serious meditation on God's word; and the division of the hoof signifies the discerning between good and evil -- between God's institutions and man's inventions."

iii. The Spirit of God, from the very nature of the case, cannot dwell in, or speak through any society or Church, great or small, since bodies -- corporate or otherwise -- have, as such, no personality, therefore no moral character, no faith, and no conscience. It is on this account far more reasonable -- if there be any reason in the matter to believe in the infallibility of the Pope as an individual, than it is in the infallibility of the Church or of General Councils.

iv. If it were possible to find anywhere an infallible interpreter of Scripture, such a teacher would be an unmitigated evil; since recourse to him in difficulty would enable men to evade the great spiritual law, that our right understanding of Divine revelation must always depend on the state of mind in which we search for it; on our truthfulness of spirit; on our candor; on our humility; and on our dependence upon the 'Father of Lights.' Private judgment is but another word for personal responsibility.

v. The kingdom of God cannot be manifested among men except under Christ himself. Therefore until He returns and reigns, (which will not be until the resurrection of the dead takes place), society will never be rightly constituted. Individual saints may, by the grace of God, reach the 'perfection' to which we are called, but society never can. The possibility of such a thing is nowhere assumed in Scripture. Therefore the attempt to realize 'the Kingdom' through the Church of Rome always has been, and always will be, a failure.

When these considerations are fairly met, and shown to be of no weight, it will be time enough to listen to Roman Catholic teaching.

PART THE FOURTH

CHURCHES WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES.

CHAP. I. THE WITNESSING BODY.

II. JUDGED BY FRUITS

III. SUBJECTED TO A TEST.

IV. BEARING ON MODERN SKEPTICISM.

V. THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

VI. THE ARGUMENT FROM JUDAISM.

VII. THE FAMILY A CHURCH.

IX. CONCLUSION

CHAPTER I

THE WITNESSING BODY.

TWO assertions regarding ecclesiasticism are commonly made and accepted as expressing indisputable truth.

The first is that to the Church, as a visible and organized body, -- to its councils and formal decisions, we are indebted for all the evidence we can have regarding the canonicity of the books that now form the New Testament. The second is that the organization of Christianity was, from the first, a necessity, if for no other purpose at least for this, that 'a witness and Keeper of Holy Writ' might always be found; that the very existence of the Church for above 1,800 years, whatever may have been its corruptions, is in itself one of the strongest evidences we can have of the Divine character of Christianity.

Let us look at these assertions, and try to ascertain the worth of the basis on which they rest. We ask then, first, is it or is it not a fact that the books we so justly honor derive their claim to our respect from the circumstance that they were, at an early period, set apart as inspired, by the judgment of the Church or Churches? Dr. Charteris, an unexceptionable witness, has recently presented us with what he calls 'some notes' on that question, * which are worthy of regard not only on account of their fairness, but because they come from one who is by no means disposed to undervalue Church authority.

After stating that we have ample proof that no inspired sanction was ever given to any list of books by the last of the apostles, and reminding us that the Primitive Church was much less concerned with the written records than with the truth as spoken, the Doctor fearlessly asserts that the true test of doctrine in the early Church was the Spirit of God dwelling in each believer; that Paul himself, when writing to those who had been built up by him in the faith, appealed to their own Christian consciousness for confirmation of the truth about which he wrote; and that the Canon itself was originally formed without any formal act of the Church authorizing or defining it. The interests of controversy alone, he says, led at the Reformation to the contents of the Canon being formally defined by authority. This, however, was done, not on the authority of the Church, but on the old ground that the Holy Spirit bore witness to the books then received as the Word of God. "They (the Reformers) all held that every Christian has in himself the power of testing the canonicity of Scripture," and most of them maintained that where this was wanting rejection was justifiable.

Luther, it is well known, carried this principle out to its utmost extent, and Calvin says that those who ask how it is possible to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion by this method "are just as foolish as if they asked how we distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter." All the Reformers held unflinchingly to the self-evidencing character of the Word of God. Calvin admits indeed that "human testimonies are valuable props," but insists that they must be regarded "only as accessories to the primary foundation of our faith which is found in the inner witness of the Spirit." He adds, "It is foolish to attempt to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God, for this is a thing which can only be known by faith."

* 'On Canonicity,' art. ii., Brit. And For. Evan. Review, No. lxxv., Feb., 1871.

** Gal. 3:1-5; 2 Cor. 1:13; 2 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:11; 2 Cor. 11:4; 1 Cor. 11:2.

Dr. Charteris, like a good Churchman as he is, objects to this test that it tends to limit the authority of the Bible to the extent of its correspondence with each man's spiritual experience; that it would not be possible on this basis to keep a Church long together; and that it shuts out the most important branch of the historical evidence, -- the existence of the Church itself, the testimony of Christendom to the Scriptures."

I am not called upon to maintain, nor shall I attempt to do so, that the subjective evidence referral to is all-sufficient, or that historical testimony in favor of what we hold to be the true canon of the New Testament should either be disregarded or treated lightly. It is sufficient to say that so far as this is of any real value, so far as it involves testimony to the convictions of the early Church, it may be obtained quite as readily by those who deny the Divine character of the organizations of the second and third centuries as by those who affirm the contrary.

The writings of the early believers abound in quotations from the books they honored, and testify with one accord to what were then held to be Divinely inspired. So long as these exist we have, in spirit, the witness of the Church, and in a form certainly -- as satisfactory as the decisions of the councils either of Laodicea or Carthage. For these assemblies could do no more than tell us what documents were at that time generally received as genuine. The notion that the Church of the second century selected certain books and rejected others, however generally held, will not bear the slightest examination.

The history of the formation of the canon of Scripture is, without question embarrassed by many difficulties. That of the Old Testament we accept from the Jews. When or how it was formed is unknown, Popular opinion assigned to Ezra and the great synagogue the task of collecting and promulgating the Scriptures as part of their work in organizing the Jewish Church. Doubts, however have been thrown upon this belief. The authority is merely traditional, and it is a tradition which also regards Ezra as having 're-written the whole of the Old Testament from memory, the copies of which had perished by neglect.' Still it is but reasonable to suppose that the people, on their return from exile, would greatly desire an authoritative collection of their sacred books, and that .such .should then be formed is the more likely from the fact that the assistance of prophets could at this time be obtained, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi being contemporary with Ezra and Nehemiah.

'The history of the canon of the New Testament presents a remarkable analogy to that of the Old. The beginnings of both are obscure, from the circumstances under which they arose. Both grew silently under the guidance of an inward instinct, rather than by the force of external authority; both were connected with other religious literature by a series of books which claimed a partial and questionable authority; both gained definiteness in times of persecution.' * In neither case is there any reason whatever to believe that the work was accomplished under special Divine impulse or guidance. But neither the value nor the trustworthiness of the documents is lessened by the absence of inspired authority in their collection.

No argument in favor of the Church as an organization; no plea for its necessity; no evidence of its Divine original, can therefore be even plausibly advanced from anything that institution has ever done to establish the canonicity of the books we hold to as constituting Holy Scripture.

Whether 'a Church' could 'hang together' which recognized the witness of the Holy Spirit in the individual believer as a sufficient testimony to truth may well be doubted; but if it could not exist under such conditions, the conclusion is irresistible that, just in proportion as the Church idea is exalted, the authority of the Holy Spirit in the heart is depressed, -- a conclusion the truth of which all past experience has tended to confirm.

* Art. 'Canon,' in Dr. Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' by the Rev. B. F. Westcott. For quotations from any other previous work of my own, with or without inverted commas, no apology is need.

II. Let us now endeavor to estimate the value of that evidence for Christianity which is supposed to be furnished by the long existence of the Church.

The late Dean of Canterbury, in an article already referred to, observes; "Christianity is one thing, -- the Gospel, or Christian Revelation, is another. The Christian Revelation is the foundation. Christianity is the building raised upon that foundation, and this may, and indeed must be, variously constructed." Now, by what the Dean calls Christianity he obviously means the Church or the Churches, for these constitute the only outward and visible 'building' raised upon Divine Revelation, and alone "vary in worth of material, and in lower of endurance." The great object, he says, of an ordinary Englishman's faith in our day is not so much the glorified Lord in heaven as it is his own Christianity," that is, "The validity of the historical and outward framework by which his faith in Christ is expressed." If such be the case, it can only be because the Church is by so many considered to be the representative of Christ on the earth, and, as such, at once the evidence and the embodiment of Divine Revelation.

It is notorious enough that one main argument in favor of the Church has always been that it constitutes the strongest, perhaps I should say the most tangible evidence of the truth and power of the Christian religion. The continued existence of such a society for nearly two thousand years; the power of endurance it has manifested; the triumphs it has achieved, and the influence it has exercised, form, it is supposed, proof all but demonstrative that Christianity is of God. In what other way, it has been triumphantly asked, has Christ since His Ascension ever been manifested to the world? Withdraw this representative of the Lord from the earth, and no outward and visible sign remains of His presence, either in past or present times. This great Society alone embodies the principles, illustrates the character, and breathes the spirit of the Redeemer.

The Romanist indeed, thoroughly believing this to be the case with his own Church, not unnaturally considers it to be as sacred as its Heavenly Lord. It is in his eye, when under the headship of the Papacy, absolutely identified with Him. It is, he assures us, 'the Body of Christ,' the 'fullness of Him that filleth all in all.' The Anglican, in like manner, looking back through the long vista of years, delights in associating the Church of the present day with that of the Nicene age, fondly tracing it through centuries of corruption to what he regards as the fountain-head of truth, and in its voice, as expressed by Fathers and Confessors of old, rejoices to think he hears the accents of the Master. Others, hanging more loosely on the past, dwell rather on that which is than on that which has been; not less satisfied than the Romanist or the Anglican that the Church, when organized under Divine direction, is 'the Bride of the Lamb.' These are commonly content to hold that the degree in which oneness with the: Redeemer is manifested varies with the condition of the earthly tabernacle in which the Divine presence is made known and felt; that the Church -- or rather, that branch of it which they recognize -- is the representative of Christ only in so far as it truly exhibits spiritual life, and proves its Divinity by the practice of good work and the defense of Godly doctrine.

In all these cases, however, Christ is supposed to be represented on earth by organized bodies of Christians more or less bearing His image. Individual believers, it is said, however numerous, it scattered abroad cannot be the Church, for only as Christians are organized, and so capable of collective action, can Christianity be recognized in the World, or act with any prospect of success on society at large. God makes Himself known, it is argued, in this form, and in none other. The life of the individual Christian all admit is a secret thing, it is a life 'hid with Christ in God,' and therefore incapable of being known and esteemed by the unspiritual. The life of a Church, on the contrary, is a public thing, -- a life capable recognition whether by its virtues or its faults.

The question I wish to raise is, what reason have we to suppose that this is the case? The inquiry may be put thus:-- Is Christ honored when any Church stands forth and practically says to all men, Behold in me, if not all that can be seen of your Divine Redeemer, at least more than can be discerned anywhere else? Rome is perhaps the only Church under the sun that would venture to say this: With what justice let the spiritual condition of Roman Catholic countries proclaim. Yet that such is the Divine Order, such the appointed

condition under which Truth and Goodness are to advance in the world, seems hitherto to have been the universal belief of Christians. As Vincent of Lirin would have expressed it. "Everywhere, always, and by all has this doctrine been received."

Must we then bow and be silent? I think not, -- and for the following reasons: --

1. Because Scripture distinctly teaches that whatever is moral and spiritual is personal because the Holy Spirit Himself is revealed to us not as an influence, but as a Person; because His purifying action, however extended, is on individual hearts only, whether they be many or few. But a Church, regarded as an organized body, lacks this personality. Consisting, as it must, of a number of individuals, whether clerical or lay, its responsibility when it acts is of necessity a divided one. Compromise, or yielding to others, is in such cases inevitable, -- a course which, however expedient in worldly matters, is inconsistent with the responsibility which is involved in acting as Christ's representative.

2. Because a Church, under such conditions, is often obliged to manifest but a low form of Christianity. The end it has in view may be pure and good, but the conditions under which it is obliged to act open a door by which inferior motives, selfish aims, and personal interests, not unfrequently come in and bias its decisions. In no other way can we account for the circumstance that, however excellent the individuals may be of which any given Council is composed, such assemblies, justly or unjustly, are always charged with craft, ambition, and self-seeking.

3. Because, in every revelation that God has made to man, an individual -- oftentimes a very obscure one -- rather than an ecclesiastical body has been selected as the channel of communication. Everywhere in Scripture it is the single man, the Prophet or the Apostle, that is the teacher. He may be willing or unwilling, -- it matters not; by him, and by him alone, 'the burden of the Lord' must be born, and messages delivered, not unfrequently in spite of the resistance and threats both of Priests and Rulers.

4. Because the character of Christ -- when thoroughly exhibited and in all its aspects -- is, like that of the Christian, incapable of any outward representation by means of which it can be rendered intelligible to the world at large. Some one is reported to have said, 'I never saw a Christian;' to which it might have been replied, 'Very likely.' A Christian is not to be seen, but to be known by his fruits. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' The true life of such a man is a hidden one. His motives commonly lie beyond ordinary observation, because they are higher and purer than men generally can estimate. Yet is he not altogether unrecognizable. He is, like his Master, at once 'known and unknown;' he is a 'light in the world,' though the world observes him not; he is like 'salt,' purifying it while unperceived.

So is it with the Church. As long as it is an invisible influence, felt without being seen, and like the pressure of the atmosphere, an unconscious pressure, because felt on all sides alike, it is powerful for good without irritating the evil. The moment it becomes an organized power, and in that character visible to all men, it is shorn of more than half its strength; for then it becomes the object of criticism, and is soon discovered to be, like other human things, obviously defective; often worldly and ambitious; sometimes selfish and mean; and always stained by the inconsistencies of false professors. As such, although it cannot represent Christ, it can, and too often does, grievously misrepresent Him; sometimes, as has been already observed, by the conduct of those who are Christians only in name, but more frequently by its setting before mankind only certain aspects of the faith.

These, of course, vary at different periods. In one age the Church stands forth as the liberator of the serf; in another as the great opponent of the tyrannies of feudalism; in a third, under other conditions of society, as the guardian of liberty. In our own day it is conspicuous for its benevolence, and has come to be regarded almost exclusively as a great Philanthropic institution. It is in this aspect especially that the world honors it,

but in so doing mistakes altogether its true character, and insists that it should stand foremost in the march of modern progress. If this is not done, the world soon comes to consider the Christianity of the New Testament inadequate to meet the requirements of the age, and demands either that it should be remodeled, or make way for something higher and better.

For this reason, then, that an organized Church misrepresents Christianity, and can do no other, I am compelled to regard it as at least highly improbable that Christ ever intended that He should be made manifest to the world in no other way than by the holy walk of individual believers acting under the control and guidance of the ever-blessed Paraclete, the Monitor and Comforter of man.

But this is not all. The pretensions of the Church to be Christ's representative have, in some directions, greatly weakened the entire body of Christian evidence. Men hear continually that Christ has delegated His authority to successors of the Apostles, who can actually trace along the page of history the unbroken line that ends in the mighty Twelve and their mightier Master: and they naturally ask how it comes to pass that none of those who profess to be thus signally endowed are, so far as man can judge, different from others; that none of them are gifted with power, as Paul and Peter were, to inflict punishment on the guilty; that in teaching no one pretends to go beyond a book that is in the hands of all; that no spiritual Ruler in the world, unless it be the Pope, even affects to be other than personally powerless.

You tell us, say the skeptics, that Jesus and His Apostles worked miracles, and that the latter sometimes inflicted condign punishment on offenders, and you wish us to believe that you are the successors of these men. We have no means of testing what is asserted regarding persons who lived eighteen hundred years ago, but we find no difficulty in satisfying ourselves that you, "the deputies or images of their authority," are in no way whatever distinguished by unmistakable marks of superiority. Why then should we believe that it was otherwise with the Apostles? The evidence you offer us in favor of your pretensions is of the kind, but far less direct, than that which the Romanist produces in support of Transubstantiation. It is evidence altogether incapable of being tested by any faculty with which God has endowed us. How do we know that the pretensions put forth on behalf of the apostles rest on any better foundation? It is this requisition to believe, in spite of our senses, in the magical power of sacraments, in the sacredness of preaching, in the transcendental value of pastoral supervision, in the authority of organized associations to give or withhold the Lord's Supper, that unsettles altogether the basis on which, as you tell us, the proof of Divine Revelation rests, and justifies our skepticism in relation to the entire system of Christianity.

I have, of course, hitherto confined what I have had to say to what are generally termed Orthodox Churches, and many persons tell us they have nothing whatever to do with any other. Some, indeed, pretend that in investigating the value of Churches we ought to leave out of consideration altogether the Roman, the Greek, the High Anglican, -- every Church, in short, except their own; but this is simply ridiculous. If the Church idea be a true one, we must take it as it is, and not wonder that it can be worked quite as powerfully in the defense and propagation of error as of truth.

Mormonism is an instance in point. This delusion would be stripped of nearly all its power over men if it were not a Church, recognizing the Bible, claiming to be in conformity with it, and organized under Elders for the conversion of men. Positivism, too the latest product of modern infidelity, -- is a Church, and a very intolerant one. It has been not unaptly designated 'Catholicism minus Christianity.' Mr. Congreve, its High Priest, thus speaks of it:-- "The western world is dimly conscious that it is settling into a new order after more or less of disorder. It is dimly conscious also that two faiths are contesting the direction of the change. One or other of the two must prevail, and the result will be an organization which will grind down all recalcitrant elements. . . . Our natural allies are those who have, and feel that they have, a common end with us, however different our respective means; the large class which is seeking for a religious constitution of society." *

* Fortnightly Review, April, 1869.

On this paragraph the Pall Mall Gazette * observes:-- "Mr. Congreve and his friends propose to erect a spiritual power which, in the course of a few generations, is to exercise over human society the same sort of influence as the mediaeval clergy exercised when Church authority was at its height. It is to be an organized power. It is to 'grind down all recalcitrant elements,' and it is to rest upon the influence which it is to gain over the great mass of the population who, by mere force of conviction, are to stand to the new scientific clergy in the same sort of position as that in which the Irish peasantry, for instance, stand towards the Roman Catholic priests. 'The new scientific clergy,' Mr. Congreve observes, 'must act, as far as it is allowed, in unison with the clergy of the elder faith.' They will be ready apparently, his critic adds, to 'co-operate as far as it is allowed' with Dr. Manning and Dr. Pusey in order to 'grind down recalcitrant elements.' New Positivist is but 'old Priest writ large.' And all this on the ground that 'Religion is to be considered as the crown and cement of the whole human edifice.' Comte says, in so many words, that "he looked upon women and laboring men as the classes best disposed to accept his views." ** If, then, we have here 'the Church of the Future,' religious people will surely cease to glorify ecclesiastical combinations.

We are told by Christian men that "every religion must have a visible organization through which its inner life may act and be maintained, and its power duly exercised among men; that outward forms and ordinances, although not the life, are necessary as means and instruments of the life's powers and influences. They stand related to the real life and spirit of a Christian Church nearly as the organs of the human body do to the soul -- dead and powerless by themselves, yet requisite for the soul's contact with the material world."***

It may be so. I will not dispute the assertion. But if true at all, it is clearly as true in relation to false religions as to orthodox Christianity. And therefore, when I am asked to bear in mind the witness of the Church, and told that this witness has always been one of the strongest proofs of the Divine character of Christianity, I cannot but ask, Within what limits is this the fact, and by what rule am I to separate the false from the true? The Times' correspondent has told us that three-fourths of all Northern Germans regard Christianity as a dead creed, an 'Asiatic' belief. The Spectator, noticing the statement, says, "We received and published some months since precisely the same account from Hesse. It is confirmed in many essentials by Dr. Lehmann, who is orthodox, and it is not two years since the Austrian Reichsrath rose to its feet shouting that it believed only in the gospel of Darwin." Under such conditions, to say nothing of the all but universal corruption that prevails both in the East and West, how hard is it to estimate the precise value of the witness of the Church!

Everywhere the same difficulty meets us. Whether we study the history of the Ancient Church, of the Empire Church, of National Churches, or of the Kingdom of the Denominations, we find invariably overwhelming evidence that any society which necessarily comprehends, as all human Churches must do, the spiritual and the unspiritual, the deceived and the sincere, can never, when regarded as a whole, be a witness for God, the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, or the visible depository of truth and goodness.

But more. Were it otherwise, -- were it possible to collect men who were all saints, and all therefore it, the highest sense children of God, these too, if formed into all association, and presented to the world as an organized body, would fail to witness; they could only be misunderstood. All that was earthly about them, their defects, their weaknesses their outward form, the machinery they might employ, their various philanthropic efforts, wise or unwise, -- these would be seen and known. But the life that moved the whole would be unknown, nor would it be possible for the ungodly to recognize in such a body anything essentially different from other associations which, formed for good ends, are always liable to be perverted to bad ones, and to be deformed by pride or ambition.

* April 17, 1869.

** Mr. Harrison, quoted in the Pall Mall of Jan. 5, 1870.

*** Dr. Jacob, pp. 18, 19.

CHAPTER II

JUDGED BY FRUITS.

IT can scarcely be doubted that among those who may take the trouble to read the foregoing chapters, some at least will be found who, without denying any of the evils that have arisen in Churches, will yet say, 'What would the world have been without them?' Such persons will naturally call upon me to remember, in any estimate I may make of our religious condition, how great an amount of good has been accomplished by the various bodies, Anglican or Nonconforming, which, since the separation from Rome, have in one form or other expressed the religious life of the English people.

I am anxious to meet the requirement. But two things must be borne in mind. The first is that any such estimate, were it possible to make one even approximating to the truth, would be of little value in relation to the general question, since it must of necessity be confined to one section of the Church only, viz., to Protestantism in England, or at least among English-speaking peoples. The second is, that while it is impossible to separate what is merely social from that which is spiritual, the confounding of these two very different things necessarily renders the estimate valueless.

Still I am willing to do what I can. I am indeed very desirous to ascertain, if it were possible, the exact value of our own churches. But the more I think about the matter, the harder I find it to form any just judgment as to the amount of good with which these institutions should be credited. And this mainly because they have for many ages absorbed the Christianity of the nation. This circumstance alone renders it all but impossible to separate the spontaneous actings of the Christian life from the results of Church organization; and yet it is essential that this should be done if anything like an accurate result is to be arrived at.

Questions like these present themselves. Ought it to be assumed that of the multitudes who have been benefited through the instrumentality of preaching, few, if any, would have derived good, had what we often call that 'Divine ordinance' existed apart from Church order? If so, on what grounds? Again, is the fact to be ignored that much of the spiritual influence ordinarily attributed to the pulpit really derives a great part of its power from domestic instruction, from books that have been read, from conversations that have been held, from agencies little suspected and commonly lost sight of is the statistics of denominations?

To claim for Churches whatever good may have been done by the circulation of the Scriptures, or of tracts, by 'City' or other 'Missions,' or by any of the multiplied devices for benefiting the bodies or the souls of men which have been originated by individuals and sustained by the benevolent, would also be to pervert facts. Such associations cannot properly be regarded as the fruits of Church action.

The multiplication of places for public worship is, on the contrary, clearly a result of the Church idea, and should in all fairness be placed to its credit, with whatever good may be supposed to have arisen from the regular performance of religious services in them. To the same account should also be carried no small portion of the direct and indirect help congregations thus collected have afforded to almost every form of benevolent enterprise. Nor should it be forgotten that apart from the spiritual benefit places for public worship may have been the means of imparting, our churches and chapels, whether endowed or not, have always shed valuable influences over society. They have everywhere promoted religiousness in the community, and by the respectability they have associated with a Christian profession -- whatever that may be worth -- they have done much to create a public opinion favorable to Christianity.

But then it must also be allowed, on the other hand, that they have often been the occasion of stumbling; that they have identified the Christian Ministry in the public mind with pecuniary interests and a given social status; that they have led many to regard that office rather as a learned profession than a Divine vocation; and that they have been the chief cause of our associating a Christian life with the mere habit of church or chapel going. Whatever is seemly and decent in society owes much to Churches, but it may fairly be questioned whether they have been equally influential in producing deadness to the world or self-sacrifice of any kind.

These considerations may tend to show how great is the difficulty -- perhaps I should say how obviously impossible it is, to decide what amount of good has or has not arisen out of Church organization as such.

Still something may be done. It may, for instance, be practicable in some degree to ascertain whether or no Churches have promoted true brotherhood among men; whether they have exhibited that unity among Christians under the influence of which the world was to believe in the Divine Mission of the Redeemer; whether they have elevated character by upholding Christian morality as distinguished from that which is conventional in a Christianized Society; and whether they have generally proved favorable to enlargement of mind, to disinterestedness in the religious life, or to high spiritual development among believers?

First, then, have Churches manifested to the world the unity of all real Christians?

Every one knows how many attempts have, at different times, been made by various Christian bodies to make the world believe that in spite of their diversities they are really one. Among a certain class of ecclesiastics this feeling has of late taken the form of a desire for union with the Greek and Roman Churches; with another class it has led to the advocacy of comprehension by the exclusion of dogmas hitherto held to be essential; by a third it has been thought that the occasional interchange of pulpits with Nonconformists would effect what is desired. These movements, however well intended, have as yet failed to accomplish anything, and I think chiefly because their promoters have neglected to consider, as preliminary to any action in the matter, what that union is which in Scripture is spoken of as so desirable; wherein it consists; and what are its characteristics.

St. Paul instructs us on this point when, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, he identifies Christian union with a right state of heart in relation both to God and man. By him it is regarded as a blessing to be secured by moral attraction rather than by logical agreements. Its foundation is Divine charity, and they who would promote it must 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.' In other words, unity in the Church is that fruit of the Spirit which specially sets forth the truth that there is in Christ but 'one body, and one Spirit; one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.'

The superstructure, like that which rises out of every other fruit of the Spirit, is to be of a character capable of being seen and appreciated. It is to be the sign by which the world is to recognize the fact that Christ came from the Father. It is to be so close, so complete, so heartfelt, that it may fitly be compared to the union which subsists between the Father and the Son. The prayer of the Redeemer is, in this respect, most explicit, -- 'That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, are in Me, and I in Thee.'

Finally, it is to consist with the open, honest, and independent exercise of every variety of spiritual gift and ministry, since these are bestowed for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'

A glance suffices to show how different a thing this is from mere Church fellowship, or from uniformity in ritual; how much deeper it is than agreement in opinion, or any common adhesion to a form of words, however wisely framed, or however scriptural. Such an adhesion was indeed, at the time the Apostle wrote, impossible. For no written document was then in existence to which, as an embodiment of New Testament teaching, submission could be demanded. The only kind of instruction to be had was with the exception of certain apostolic letters, oral; and since diversities, both in form of thought and expression, could not but exist where gifts, instead of being centered in one man, were distributed 'according to the measure of the gift of Christ,' it is obvious that the spirit rather than the letter of the teaching must have been regarded as the one thing needful. The Apostle, in recognizing these diversities as alike intended 'for the perfecting of the saints,' seems to say, 'Let not these differences trouble you or become occasions of strife or debate. The spirit of all these inspired servants of God is one, and it is in the spirit of their teaching alone that living truth is to be found.'

Now let us ask how far this apostolic teaching has been regarded by the Churches. Have they, by dwelling on the spirit of Divine Revelation rather than by disputing about the letter, been careful to leave an impression on men generally that, whatever apparent differences may exist, Christians in their heart of hearts are really one?

I am afraid truth will force the confession that our divisions are much more manifest to mankind than our unity; that our 'interests' are increasingly felt to be diverse. I do not think it is too much to say that if we took the utmost pains to conceal our unity and to proclaim our diversity, we could accomplish our purpose more effectually than we now do. That which unites cannot, from its very nature, be recognized by the outward eye. That which divides we parade in the sight of all men as the symbol of distinction, and as a justification for the existence of our particular sector party. While these things last, whatever amount of spiritual affinity may exist among individual Christians, it is simply impossible that the world should perceive unity, or find therein any evidence whatever of the truth of Christ's doctrine.

All that the looker on is able to perceive is the constant operation in what are called 'spiritual things,' of the very principle he finds dominant in carnal things, viz., competition for place, power, and influence; the separating principle wrapping men in selfishness, and only prevented from producing its full fruits by reason of the remnant of good which is in those who indulge it.

Our next question is, 'Have Churches promoted Christian as distinguished from conventional morality?' By 'Christian' morality I understand not that ordinary standard of right and wrong which characterizes Christian communities as distinguished from heathen ones, but that nobler code which our Lord expounded in the Sermon on the Mount, and which, on account of its high-toned purity, was as distasteful to the Jews as it is to Modern Christendom.

I cannot, in order more fully to explain my meaning, do better than refer to a statement or two which was not long ago made by the present Dean of St. Paul's in an admirable volume of sermons, when commenting on the state of Christian society amongst us. He says, "Here is the New Testament, the confessed source of Christian morality, with its facts and language about which there is no dispute, and with its spirit and tone equally distinct and marked. And on the other hand here is the ordinary life of Christian society, with its accepted principles, its familiar habits, its long-sanctioned traditions; the life of Christian society, not particularly in this or that age, but as on the whole it has been from the time when Christianity won its place definitively in the world; with its legitimate occupations, its interests, its objects, its standards of goodness, of greatness. When we put the two side by side, the mind must be dull indeed which is not conscious of a strong sense of difference and contrast. What does this feeling mean, and to what does it point? . . . The change is not only one of fact, but in the general sense of what is right and lawful in the general view of the conduct of life." *

* Sermons preached before the University of Oxford, by the Rev. R. W. Church, M.A., late fellow of Oriel College, Rector of Whately.

To the question, 'What does this point to?' I am obliged to reply to a failure on the part of Churches to establish among Christians any standard of morality higher than that which is current and conventional. The point involved, let it be remembered, is not whether Christians generally are what the world calls moral, -- it is admitted that they are so; but whether their standard in relation to matters not condemned by society is higher than that of others.'

The Dean says, "I do not speak of scandals, of evasions, of worldliness, of confessed corruptions, -- these we know must be alway; but of what is considered right and wrong in Christian society." The question is one of the most important that can claim the attention of Christians. It is nothing short of this, -- 'Has the Church since the apostolic age followed the instructions of the Master, or has it seriously deviated therefrom? If it has deviated, how has that deviation been brought about, and who is responsible for it? How has it come to pass that Churches have practically fallen in with this tendency to reduce the lofty teachings of the Lord, and to adapt them to our low estate? Individuals are to be found amongst us -- I hope not a few -- who endeavor at all costs to live a higher, nobler, more disinterested life than others, and for so doing they are often regarded as eccentric or enthusiastic, but these persons are not the product of Church organization; they are, on the contrary, commonly marked by strong individuality of character, and not unfrequently regarded with a very cold admiration by their fellow-Christians.

The truth is that Churches have rarely believed, or at least acted as if they believed, that 'the Body of Christ' is to be for ever a tiring apart; a thing of beauty and of sanctity; a thing not of this world; a constant witness to goodness, often in sackcloth and sorrow, but never in purple and fine linen; that it is to share alike the humiliation and the triumph of the Redeemer; that it is to suffer with Him, and to reign with Him; that it is to fill up here the measure of its Savior's sufferings, and hereafter to enter into and complete its Savior's joy, that it is figuratively to endure the cross, and actually to wear the crown.

Churches never have fully realized these things, and as at present constituted, they never can do so, simply because they are creations of God only by assumption; because they are really but reflections of Christian society; because they base their distinctions not on the higher life, but on what they suppose to be purer doctrine; because, in short, they are more or less unreal, and consequently powerless.

I am obliged, therefore, however unwillingly, to come to the conclusion that Churches have not promoted 'Christian' morality as distinguished from that which is conventional in a Christianized society; that no argument in their favor can be drawn from the supposition that they have adhered to and held up the Divine standard of right and wrong when that standard has been lowered by Christian professors. If proof of this be required, it may be found in the fact that, to the last, ministers of all denominations in the Southern States of America justified slavery.

Finally, we were to ask whether or no Churches have proved favorable to enlargement of mind; to disinterestedness in the religious life; or to high spiritual development among believers.

By 'enlargement of mind,' I here understand what St. Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians saying, 'I speak as unto my children, be ye also enlarged;' and also what he inculcated when, on another occasion, he says, 'In malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men.' There is no room to doubt that he refers here, first, to the duty of taking broad rather than narrow views of truth; and next, to the kindred obligation, always pressing upon us, to form kind rather than harsh views regarding fellow-Christians who may seem to us to be in danger of latitudinarianism. He desires that his converts should cherish that expansive love which is the opposite alike of bigotry and uncharitableness.

* See Note B.

By 'disinterestedness in the religious life,' I mean not only that kind of unselfishness in religion which loves God apart from what is to be gained or lost by so doing, but also freedom from ambition and all undue care for pecuniary interests in connection therewith. I mean, in short, the love of God, the love of man, and the love of truth, without reference to any end beyond itself, whether that end be the making of converts, the support of institutions, the establishment of views to which we may be committed, or even the securing of daily bread.

By the phrase 'high spiritual development,' I wish to signify the Divine Life as it is sometimes seen in its vigor and intensity in men who have been specially 'apprehended' by the Spirit of God.

The question proposed is, Are these ennobling characteristics advanced or hindered in the souls of men by Churches? It relates, of course, not to any one Church, but to Churches regarded as a whole, whether Catholic or Protestant. Of the first, the Roman Catholic, I shall say nothing. My observations will relate exclusively to those that adhere to the Reformed Faith, and mainly to such as enjoy the liberty of regulating their own affairs. For where Churches are superstitious, or in bondage, they cannot generally do more than regulate outward acts; they can scarcely help promoting that "unvivifying belief which so many have, regarding the great central truths of revelation;" and which is commonly visible in the acceptance of certain truths "as if they were mathematical certainties --as things laid alongside of their actual life without their ever touching or quickening their spiritual consciousness."

But what of free and voluntary Churches? Do they promote enlargement, disinterestedness, or high spirituality? I fear not. I scarcely see how it is possible for there to cherish the first, so long as they subsidize an order of men to teach a given theology, and practically support a press to enforce it; so long as they are persuaded that whatever belongs to the creed, expressed or understood, of their community, has received the Divine sanction, and, whether enforced or not, ought to regulate if not control thought; so long as their members are taught to discern growth rather in active effort than in a progressive apprehension and appreciation of Divine truth. How is it possible that 'enlargement' should result from the identification of piety with adherence to any given form of thought or practice? Christian love may, and often does, override these things; but, so far as they go, Churches are unfavorable to Apostolic breadth of mind; they are hindrances and not helps to spiritual freedom.

To 'disinterestedness' Churches are unfavorable, inasmuch as a multitude of secular interests are necessarily connected with them. Even the press, so far as it is representative, whether involving the property of an individual, or held in trust for some benevolent end, is more or less subjected, and often controlled by pecuniary considerations. Everywhere truth, which is but another name for Christ, comes into the market, and is bought and sold without either the buyer or seller realizing the fact that such a traffic is going on. Habit has, in this matter, seared conscience; and public opinion, thoroughly perverted, justifies the wrong. The witness of disinterestedness is lost.

Yet nothing can be plainer than that even our right understanding of Scripture depends largely on our possession of this virtue, -- on our freedom from the entanglements of interest. Only the man that has delivered himself from secondary and disturbing influences can be a thoroughly disinterested inquirer. Such a one may be ignorant of many things, lie may be a very sinful man, he may be actually vicious; and yet, in spite of all, he will, if a diligent reader of Scripture, be far more likely to attain to a clear intellectual knowledge of the truth, whether he obey it or not, than the man who, however devout, however evangelically enlightened, or however personally pure, is nevertheless so mixed up with things which are dear to him as a means of usefulness, or with persons honored for their zeal, that he cannot but approach the Bible with a strong indisposition to see anything there which appears likely to interfere either with his engagements or attachments.

'High spiritual development' in believers must, I think, be hindered by everything that comes between the soul and God, which, as it seems to me, Churches very largely do. The question is a very serious and a very practical one, -- 'Do we or do we not perceive as a fact that union to a Church, as a role, secures or promotes heavenly-mindedness, an enlarged acquaintance with Divine truth, meditative habits, gentleness of character, and moral power over others?' That many individual Christians are to be found who possess these characteristics is unquestionable, but this by no means proves that they have attained their excellence in the school of any particular Church. Far more probable is it that personal communion with God, and fellowship with kindred souls, although such persons may happen to be ecclesiastically far apart, have mainly contributed to a result which man cannot bring about, but which he may greatly hinder.

The truth is, if Churches do not elevate they depress, Well and truly has it been said, "The want of generous and exalted aims, the absence of lofty and kindly traditions, affect a whole community, It is hard to be always in opposition; even the nobler mind will, in some degree, succumb to what it continually meets, becoming, like the dyer's hand, 'subdued to what it works in.' Ice cannot change to water, or water to steam, until the temperature of the whole has been raised to a certain level. Any heat short of the amount required to produce these changes becomes latent and disappears; it is absorbed in producing these changes. Who can say how much Christian energy and love disappears, sinks below the surface, in this way, depressed by the low level of the surrounding atmosphere?" *

This depression must go on so long as there is within the Christian body no fixed opinion as to what is right or wrong in relation to many of the most practical questions that come before a man in life, and no platform on which such subjects can be quietly and seriously examined. For the pulpit is not a fit place for such discussions, and, whether rightly or not, it is felt that much needs to be settled which no one man is qualified to decide.

It is often said, I know not with what amount of truth, that it is by no means uncommon to find both men and women who have been associated with Churches for twenty, thirty, or even forty years, more ignorant of their Bibles, and every way less spiritual, than they were in youth. If it be so, such a circumstance at least leads to the presumption that Church fellowship, whatever else it may do, does not, as a rule, promote the Divine Life.

I have said elsewhere, and I repeat it here, that one of our most pressing wants at the present day is a truer and more perfect ideal of the Divine Life than that which prevails amongst us. Low and defective ideals are curses to a Christian community; and every ideal is low and mean which does not assume that all the circumstances of life, -- wealth and poverty, rank and caste, social elevation or social contempt, are but accidents, subservient, and intended to be subservient, to the formation of a noble, which is but another name for a Christ-like character, The want of which I speak has been created by the ever-increasing approximation of the world to the Church in the outward, without its being really brought into subjection to the inward and living principles of the Gospel.

* 'The Two Friends,' by the Author of 'The Patience of Hope.'

Christ, says the Apostle Paul, is now at the right hand of God in heavenly places, or the heavenlies ' (Eph. 1:20); Christians are there, too, 'quickened,' 'saved,' 'raised,' even now sitting with Christ in these same 'heavenly places' or 'heavenlies' (Eph. 2:5, 6). As such they are 'dead' to the world (Col. 3:3), 'alive' unto Christ (Rom. 6:11); by Him they are already saved' (1 Cor. 1:18), and with Him they are already 'risen' (Col. 3:1); they are fellow-citizens with the saints, and their conversation is in heaven (Phil. 3:20); they are of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews addresses them as persons who have actually come 'into the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,' and are the companions of the angels (Heb. 12:22); while St. Peter, in the same spirit, beseeches those to Whom he writes, 'as pilgrims and strangers,' to abstain from evil, (1 Pet. 2:11); remembering that they are kept by the power of God for a salvation one day to be fully revealed.

That much of this language is figurative cannot be questioned, but it is not therefore the less real. It means, if it means anything, that in heart, in affection, in all that constitutes the inner man, Christians are not of this world, that they dwell elsewhere, that they are but sojourners in a world which is soon to pass away.

Perhaps it may be said, without extravagance, that we come into the world, not so much to enjoy a life which is to be chastened by suffering, as to suffer in a world of sin, amid many enjoyments vouchsafed for its alleviation. It must be so on account of the great moral ends of existence, and they are happy who early learn to recognize the fact, and thankfully to acquiesce in all that it involves. To such sorrow can never be overwhelming. This ideal is certainly a very lofty one, and hard to be reached; but never let us forget that "it is far better to hold to a true and high ideal, however much we may come short of it, than to be content with a false and low one, however much we may live above it.

Whether Churches have or have not occupied this lofty ground, I must leave my readers to decide.

CHAPTER III

SUBJECTED TO A TEST.

THE particular test to which I desire in this chapter to subject the Churches is this, -- Have they or have they not promoted among Christians a supreme and disinterested love of truth?

No one I suppose will dispute that Scripture everywhere inculcates the duty of absolute submission to whatever is true, since all truth is of God, and in a sense is God; for Jesus saith, not merely I teach truth, but 'I am the Truth.' Satan, on the contrary, is spoken of as the Father of lies. His deceits are innumerable. He is emphatically the deceiver. And among the various devices by which he misleads the children of men, none perhaps has been more successful than the persuasion he has always endeavored to foster in the minds of mankind generally, that they are unable to distinguish the false from the true; that God doth know they have neither time nor ability to inquire into the evidence on which anything that may be taught them rests; that they are bound therefore to accept the traditions of their Fathers, to believe what is taught them by their official guides, and to shun, as they would a pestilence, any one who bids them search diligently in order to ascertain whether this or that doctrine be or be not 'worthy of all acceptance.'

Jesus Christ as we all know, when on earth set himself in direct opposition to this false conservatism; so favorable to indolence and a false peace, so unfavorable to growth in grace, to steadfastness, and to any intelligent adherence to Divine Revelation. He himself was perhaps the greatest unsettler of men's minds that ever appeared on earth. He was always in opposition to the God-appointed guides of the Jewish people. They therefore hated him. He was in their eyes a disturber of the peace, a weakener of old religious convictions, despiser of authority.

The Apostles followed the example of their Master. Everywhere they set themselves against what then existed, against all that had for ages been accounted most true and most venerable.

They taught that Jesus was the Messiah, and appealed to the Scriptures in support of their statement. All the religious authorities of the day -- those who 'sat in Moses' seat,' and were, so to speak, his representatives -- denied that such was the case. Jesus, they insisted, was a false prophet and a pretender. If honest in his intentions, he had been awfully deluded; if dishonest, as they insisted he was, his very name was to be abhorred as an incarnation of the Evil one. In either case, what he had taught was to be disregarded, since he had been rightly punished as a criminal.

Now it may not be amiss to ask ourselves what, under such circumstances, was the duty of the Jewish people. Was it to plead inability to decide so difficult a question, and to abide by their religious guides? The Lord had said, 'Search (or ye search) the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.' The Scribes and Pharisees practically rejoined, 'You are incompetent to determine this controversy, and almost sure to fall into error. Obey them that have the rule over you. Accept their teachings, and be safe.' The Apostles, in obedience to their Lord, commended those who did search as 'more honorable' than others. The rulers of the Synagogues followed their spiritual superiors, and persecuted the inquirer. Who was right? Which party presented an example fit to be followed by Christians? We are at no loss for a reply.

It had not always been needful to pursue the course now demanded. For many generations ail had agreed, and rightly, to accept in peace and quietness that which was given them officially. They were, in fact, not called by God to take other line of action. But when John the Baptist appeared, things changed. 'The Law

and the Prophets' were 'until John.' But now, after the announcements of the Baptist, 'the Kingdom of heaven' was to be 'taken by violence,' i.e., lawlessly,-- in opposition to those who sat in Moses' seat. 'The violent take it by force.'

Such periods recur. It is the opinion of many that we are ourselves living in one of them. The question therefore continually presents itself, What ought we to do? Must we stop our ears against innovators on the past, and abide, at all risks, in what are termed 'the old paths'? or must we accept without much question the novelties that are now pressed on our attention? Neither of these courses is likely to be the right one. What can we do then but inquire, first, into the value or otherwise of that which our fathers believed, and next, into the claims of the new views which are offered for our acceptance? Is it possible that in so doing we can be wrong? If careful to pursue our inquiry in an humble and prayerful spirit, with honesty of purpose, with a candid and fair mind, with disinterestedness, i.e., without bias, whether arising from the fear or favor of man, from personal interest, or from any other cause, I see not how it is possible that any one can be injured. For if his conclusions be favorable to the old paths, he will only abide in them the more firmly, because the more intelligently. If otherwise, -- if he becomes satisfied that the old involves error, and that the new embraces truth, he will certainly advance in wisdom by accepting the more novel view, and may expect the blessing of God thereupon. To stand still, to tremble, to do nothing, can never be either wise or right.

Now the question is, have Churches ever promoted this love of truth, or have they on the contrary, as a rule, done all in their power to prevent its pursuit, except in channels that have been dug by themselves

In examining it I shall confine my inquiries to Churches which admit the supremacy of Scripture, and hold that in its revelations alone an adequate guide to truth may be found by any diligent student of its pages. Have they, I shall ask, encouraged above all other things the love of truth, in the perusal of the only volume in which, according to their own statements, it is to be found?

I think not; and for the following reason. Believing, as they do, that in all important particulars the contents of the Bible are fully ascertained and well understood; that its revelations are essentially embodied in our existing Christianity; and that these are, in the main, rightly expounded Sunday after Sunday in the various churches and chapels of the land, they can scarcely do other than regard Scripture -- so far as the discovery of truth is concerned -- as an exhausted mine; and it is needless to say that any man who has been taught to believe this, will have very little inducement to search further, and will be strongly disposed to condemn those who do.

"Whatever retards a spirit of inquiry," says Robert Hall, "is favorable to error; whatever promotes it, to truth. But nothing, it will be acknowledged, has a greater tendency to obstruct the exercise of free inquiry than the spirit and feeling of a party." There is in all sects, he observes, a constant "fear of being eclipsed, and an anxiety in each denomination to extend itself as much as possible. It becomes a point of honor in the leaders of parties to defend and support their respective peculiarities to the last; and, as a natural consequence, to shut their ears against all the pleas and remonstrances by which they are assailed.

"It is observable that scientific truths make their way in the world with much more ease and rapidity than religious. No sooner is a philosophical opinion promulgated than it undergoes at first a severe and rigorous scrutiny; and if it is found to coincide with the results of experiment, it is speedily adopted, and quietly takes its place among the improvements of the age. . . . If we search for the reason of the facility with which scientific improvements establish themselves in preference to religious, we shall find it in the absence of combination, in there being no class of men closely united who have an interest, real or imaginary, in obstructing their progress. . . . In religious inquiries, few feel themselves at liberty to follow without restraint the light of evidence and the guidance of truth, in consequence of some previous engagement with a party; and though the attachment to it might originally be purely voluntary, and still continues such, the natural

love of consistency, the fear of shame, together with other motives sufficiently obvious, powerfully contribute to perpetuate and confirm it." *

Of course it must be granted that, to the mass of men, all independent search after truth is singularly distasteful. Even intelligent persons are, as a rule, but too ready to give up such a quest as hopeless, and to catch at any formula or any order of men which seems to offer authoritative guidance. The tendency of mankind has always been to bow down to anything that professes to settle doubts; to desire above all things to be told what they must do or think; to be delivered, if possible, from the responsibility of decision. The weaker men are in their convictions, through inertness or looseness of mental structure, the closer will they cling to any association which professes to settle for them the great question, What is Truth?

The danger therefore is always a pressing one, that Churches, yielding to this popular indolence, and anxious at once to phase their constituencies and to secure their own position, should encourage rest in themselves rather than in the truth; that they should shrink from the acknowledgment that truth is unattainable by any man without personal labor; that they should deny it to be the duty of every man to toil in the field of Scripture with spiritual spade and pickaxe, or teach him that, whether much or little be finally secured thereby, the blessing is in the search.

I fear it is impossible to suppose that Churches can ever do this so long as their very existence depends on the fixed character of their doctrine; so long as they feel that the validity of arguments brought forward with the object of overturning some old-established belief cannot wisely be discussed; that it is essential to assume the unchangeableness of whatever lies at the root of their association, and therefore to evade whatever inquiry threatens to be injurious or inconvenient. It cannot be otherwise with any ecclesiastical organization. If once this basis be withdrawn they perish as Churches, as Sects, as Denominations.

The individual Christian may live on the spirit of truth, but bodies of men organized for the support and extension of a given order of thought cannot do so. They can only exist on a definite foundation, on a clear understanding, expressed or understood, that certain truths are indissolubly connected with certain forms of expression, and that apart from this expression they cannot properly be held at all.

The misfortune is that what the Church does in this respect is, with rare exceptions, sure to be done also by its individual members. As a rule these will be found to pursue the same path, and too often to be content with a form of religion which is neither intelligent nor operative. The few who may be able or willing to pursue independent investigation are, it is notorious, commonly discouraged by assurances that nothing worth knowing remains to be discovered; that inquiry is dangerous; that it can only end in doubt as to what is true, and in distrust of their recognized teachers. It is because this course is so generally followed, that the habit of 'keeping the mind open and in readiness to receive amendment' continues to be exceedingly rare among Christian people, and that religious truth, instead of advancing with time, by the progressive development of what is written for our instruction, remains dwarfed and incomplete; for stripped of its progressive character, Scripture loses half its significance, and more than half its power.

I am still further led to believe that Churches have been unfavorable to the love of truth from the circumstance that, owing, I suppose, to the necessities of their position, their leaders and teachers are so seldom large-minded in their treatment of Scripture; that they cleave so closely to favorite portions; that they continually ring changes on one set of texts; that their faith so often seems to be rather in one particular aspect of truth than in Divine Revelation as a whole. The root of this habit, so fatal to growth in Divine knowledge, is the long-established practice of proving by Scripture rather than learning from it, -- a fault which must be laid at the door of all the Reformed Churches.

* Works, vol. i., pp. 150-53.

The consequence of it is, that as Christianity, understood in the sense of the fourth century, was "nothing but a scheme of superstition, fanaticism, and spiritual tyranny, which corrupted the morals of the mass of men, and shocked the reason of the few," * so Christianity, understood in the sense of the nineteenth century, is a jumble of conflicting opinions and contradictory conclusions, supported by texts rather than by Divine thoughts, and practically a compromise, sometimes of truth, sometimes of simplicity, and sometimes of holiness; seldom popular except when sustained by exaggerations, or distinguished by some departure or other from primitive purity.

So far, therefore, from believing that Churches as such have been favorable to the love of truth, I cannot but think that the disallowance of any claim to Divine authority, and the repudiation of them as exponents of Christianity, would do more than anything else to stop the progress of modern infidelity.

Some, I know, will Say, Do we owe nothing, then to the Church for transmitting to us that great body of theological truth which 'the Fathers' created and conserved, and of which 'the Divine Society' has always been the pillar and the stay? But for this body of doctrine what security should we have had against the floods of heresy that are always ready to be poured upon us?

The reply I have to make will not, it is to be feared, prove satisfactory to the objector. I fully admit that to professional theologians we owe the definitions in question. Without them we should, in all probability, never have had a systematized theology at all. But that this would have been an evil is by no means so clear. For, however essential these logical expressions of thought may be to the very existence of Churches, it may well be doubted whether the faith they were intended to uphold would not have been simpler and stronger without them.

Before the Reformation, says Principal Tulloch, "the scholastic logic had been for six centuries the great instrument for training the human mind; and the scholastic divinity had become a charmed circle which no one could venture out of, though he might oppose or respond within it." To the great Church leaders of the sixteenth century it seemed but common prudence to seize these weapons of their enemies, and with borrowed arms try to defend their own camp. They adopted, therefore -- perhaps it should rather be said they adhered to the only theology which they had been accustomed to regard with reverence, -- the logical system which had been consolidated and impressed upon the world by Augustine, "a man who, whatever might be his talents or his piety, warmly defended each principal article of the superstition of his times, and has been and may fairly be cited by Romanists in support of almost every element of the papal system." The consequence of this adherence was, that the particular form of truth which Augustine had supported and enforced speedily became identified with the Gospel; was stereotyped for future generations, and remains to this day the only, 'Body of Divinity' that is recognized as unquestionably orthodox.

Into the history and actual value of this theology, consisting as it does of a vast collection of human inferences, apparently enforced by texts of Scripture, but really overriding Scripture itself by the conclusions of human logic, it would be unsuitable here to enter. It professes to be the freest thing in the world, and yet it has invariably sought to crush every movement towards freedom of thought among the good. " Its endurance to this day proves how admirably it has been adapted to the human mind; how skillfully it has combined a field for the reason with rest in authority; and how thoroughly it has been able to solve one of the most difficult of problems, -- that of harmonizing a bold and apparently free exercise of the human faculties with absolute subordination to ecclesiastical influence, whether exercised by Pope, Councils, General Assemblies, Synods, or Sects." **

* Taylor's 'Ancient Christianity,' vol. i., p. 420.

** Tulloch's 'Leaders of the Reformation.'

The truth must be spoken. What Churches have preserved is that particular form of religious thought which, whatever may be its merits, was originated amid a chaos of paganized Christianity and abounding profligacy; which was built up by individual genius in a time of intellectual darkness and moral disorder; which was for ages associated with the grossest superstition; which was subsequently revised and more completely systematized by Calvin and his coadjutors; and which has, in later days, been accepted and defended by the greatest names that have ever been associated with either Anglican or Puritan principles. How far, by this course, truth itself has been honored, Just views of God been promoted, and true piety advanced, is a question to which different answers will be given by different persons, Certain it is that the orthodox Churches rest on this particular theology as their only recognized basis; that they commonly refuse to acknowledge anything else as sound doctrine; that they regard it as the parent of the Christian life; and that they have never scrupled to maintain it against all comers.

Here, however, let me remind the reader that as I am not engaged in any theological controversy, so I am not opposing any form of thought whatever which is content to stand on its true ground, viz., that it is human and not divine. I may differ from others as to the value of a given theology, whether employed in building up those who unite in it, or in its general propagation as essential to the welfare of mankind, but I have no controversy with it so long as it is not made the door of entrance to Christian love and fellowship.

So with Church organizations. I am not seeking to discredit organization as such, for without it, as every one knows, little can be accomplished in a world like this. I am simply calling in question the claim of any or of all organizations for the advancement of Christianity either in the world at large or in the individual, which insist that they have their origin in the instructions of Christ and His Apostles; which involve in one form or other theological conclusions that must be accepted by all who unite in them; which are regulated by a discipline more or less bearing thereupon; which necessitate a professional clergy, and enforce conditions under which alone the ordinance of 'the Supper' may be observed by those who desire, in communion with other Christians, to 'show forth the Lord's death till He come.'

I am simply maintaining that such organizations are human, and not Divine; that they are unfavorable to growth in Divine truth; that, as at present constituted, they are insuperable obstacles to Christian unity; that they thus defeat the very purpose for which they are supposed to be formed, and that they must continue to do so as long as their human origin is denied, -- as long as they are held to be in a different position from other human institutions established for Divine ends, -- as long as they are believed to be not properly open to criticism, or capable of being essentially modified.

Whether, under any conditions, unities based upon religious belief are not perilous to society is another question; but it is one which will some day have to be examined. Christians are not the only people who have discovered that "the world is governed by religions;" that "religion and politics are inseparable;" that "as religion is the highest educational principle, so politics are but the application of that principle to the various manifestations of human existence." A school is rising, and increasing every day, which maintains that the rule of life is "the intellect of humanity," and that whenever this is expressed in an organized form the individual conscience must bow. If that order of thought ever becomes dominant, we shall learn how much more powerful Church organization is when it is employed to sustain falsehood, despotism, and uniformity, than when it seeks to embody any form of truth which is from above, and which finds its root in the conscience of the individual.

CHAPTER IV

BEARING ON MODERN SKEPTICISM.

IT may seem 'a hard saying,' but it is nevertheless a true one, that Churches regarded in their corporate capacity, instead of being favorable to truth, are mainly responsible for modern unbelief -- for that Peculiar form of skepticism, at least, which distinguishes the doubt of the present day from all that has preceded it; and which affects not so much scoffers or profane persons as religious young men, mostly educated in the evangelical school, and still remarkable for purity of life, for unworldliness of spirit, for moral earnestness, and for general cultivation.

The evil, so much to be deplored, is not a revolt against God and goodness, but against "statements of doctrine which were received with their first lessons on Christianity, but which, on mature reflection, repel." These doctrines, taught to them in youth as necessary inferences from, or as identical with the facts of revelation, were once acquiesced in as the creed of Christendom; but in modern times repulsion has not unfrequently followed the attempt to read and understand them by the light of reason and conscience.

Originating with these theological inferences, the revolt in question has, of late years, gone much further, and has led to the denial of all authoritative teaching whatever, whether based on the claims of an infallible Church or of an infallible Bible. With this form of skepticism Churches seem quite unable to cope. And this chiefly because they can deal only with the outward and tangible -- with matters which can be discussed and debated, and which can be referred to the decisions of the intellect.

Thus, if the doctrine of the Trinity be attacked, they can formally defend it only as embodied in some supposed form of sound words, such as the Nicene Creed. If the Atonement is called in question, they are, by their very constitution, unable to separate it from one or other of the various philosophies relating thereto, which have become identified with it as a dogma. If Inspiration be questioned, it must of course be defended in connection with some theory or other, apart from which it seems to have no tangible existence. If the authority of any portion of Scripture be disputed, the Churches are necessitated to fight for an infallible book, and to fall back upon what are called 'the evidences,' upon the Fathers, upon the canonicity of certain documents, upon miracles, or upon the witness of Christ; always upon something which is open to endless dispute, to the attacks of a destructive criticism, or to the charge of reasoning in what logicians call 'a vicious circle.' As a consequence, while engaged in perpetual conflict, these bodies seldom gain much ground, and are often worsted.

I do not say that historical testimonies and logical arguments are of little value in the conflict with unbelief. Far from it. But they are not convincing. They tell, with few exceptions, only upon persons who are already believers; to these they are probably very useful for the deepening and strengthening of existing convictions; but as a rule they have now little, if any, power over the skeptic. He, according to his own account, attaches but little value, as evidence of the truth of Christianity, to anything but the holy life and habitual joy of the simple-minded Christian, who bases his belief not so much on argument as on spiritual intuitions.

In all ages it has been found that the men who have been God's most effective 'witnesses' are, for the most part, a very simple race. They are persons by whom Christ is felt to be Divine, rather than proved to be so by any line of reasoning; persons who enjoy that kind of spiritual communion with the Redeemer which nothing external can touch; who have a consciousness of the reality of God's intercourse with the human spirit that cannot be set aside by any dialectical skill that may be directed against it.

Such a one believes in the fact that Christ 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' not the less firmly because he may be quite incompetent to understand any one of the theories on which the doctrine of the atonement is supposed to rest. His heart and conscience tell him that he needs redemption from self and sin, and experience satisfies him that Christ is the only Redeemer. He never doubts that 'holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,' or that all Divinely inspired communications, wherever they may be found, are 'profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction, and for correction in righteousness.' Instead, therefore, of being perplexed or distressed when he is told that the Vedas or the Greek poets exercise a power over the spirit of man quite as beneficial as that which is produced by the Hebrew prophets, he is content to say, 'It is well for the heathen if it be so. Show us the fruits.'

To let his confidence in the Bible depend upon its being proved that it is an infallible book, he never dreams of, unless when under the dominant influence of theological training. He knows by its spiritual influence upon his conscience that it is 'a teacher sent from God,' and he would abide by that conviction even if it could be demonstrated that the canonicity of some of the books is doubtful; that any number of statements in Genesis are not scientifically accurate; that the truth of the miracles cannot be established by ordinary historical evidence; or that errors and interpolations exist which he is quite unable to remove or to explain. He recognizes in its solemn undertones the voice of the Good Shepherd, and in obedience to the teaching he finds his satisfaction as to the teacher becomes positive and complete.

The kind of authority which Churches are continually enforcing, either from tradition or from other sources, has very little if any influence over him. The only authority to which he consents to bow is that of God; and if he is told, as he so often is, that it is impossible he should have any demonstrative evidence that this or that portion of Scripture is a Divine utterance, he subjects the teaching -- it may be quite unconsciously, but not on that account the less really -- to the same test which the Apostle John bade his converts apply to his own inspired instructions, viz., to 'prove' them by their harmony or otherwise with that spiritual faculty which is called by the same Apostle 'the unction of the Holy One.'

Nor is he therefore powerless as a defender of the faith. On the contrary, as an individual combatant, he has a vast advantage in the conflict with error over any organized society. For, unembarrassed by inappropriate weapons, he offers few points of resistance to the enemy, and not unfrequently conquers passively. He too can do safely what Churches dare not do. He can deny that religion is essentially dogmatic in the sense in which that word is commonly understood. He can refuse to allow that a saving faith involves the acceptance of any proposition whatever that is merely received on authority, or simply held as a conclusion of the intellect. He can do this because he well knows that in the reception of dogma it is quite possible for a wicked man to be more than on a level with an obedient child of God; and he cannot consent that anything should be regarded as essential to salvation which is capable of being received -- as all theological propositions, all Church formulas, all merely authoritative statements, whether in the Bible or elsewhere are -- without any action of the Spirit of God on the heart.

On this subject it has recently been well said, no little confusion of thought is prevalent. "The tenure by faith and the tenure by reason" are so often confounded together that it is difficult to separate them in the popular mind. And yet nothing can be clearer than that "the tenure by which men hold their belief in the influence of the Holy Spirit on their hearts is by no means the same as that by which they hold their belief in the truth of the Noachian deluge." Faith, properly speaking, applies only to the reception of truths which are in harmony with, if they are not based upon, the spiritual discernment of the conscience when enlightened from above.

As I said elsewhere six or seven years ago, so long as any dogma or doctrine is held only as a result of intellectual conviction, it can never be more than a religious opinion, whether true or false, whether in harmony with or in opposition to the teaching of Scripture; and being such, it can have little if any influence on the conduct, and none whatever on the heart. A truth divinely taught -- and no great moral or spiritual truth is ever received otherwise -- vitalizes, because it is itself vital; and therefore more or less controls the

life and moulds the character of the man who receives it. So long as it takes the form of a dogma received on mere authority, it is of comparatively little value, even if that authority be the Bible itself.

It must be so, because all moral teaching worthy of the name addresses itself to the consciousness of those to whom it speaks. Only as it comes in contact with a prepared mind; only as it proves an interpreter of floating and half -- formed thought, or is the expression of feelings before but partially recognized or understood, does any teaching produce permanent impressions, or prove of much real value. Tenets may be received by any man, but living truths only by prepared hearts. It is the forgetfulness or denial of this fact which renders so much that has been written on 'the verifying faculty' in man unsatisfactory; since according to the moral state of each individual does the application of the phrase in question embody a great truth, or involve a pernicious error.

"Let a man deny the crucifixion, and I can attack him with a battery of arguments and evidence as overpowering as I might summon to my aid if he were to deny the execution of Charles the First. But if a man denies the foundation of all religion, viz., that God is good, I cannot conceive by what arguments or objective evidence I can hope to shake his denial. If an appeal to his spiritual perceptions should fail, I fail altogether. Until the Spirit of God stirs within him, I can no more hope to address him in an intelligible manner than if I were to talk to a blind man about color."

Churches, because of their inability to deal with anything that is not objective, or capable of being handled intellectually, always discourage and throw doubt on what is simply subjective; preferring to argue for Christianity as if it were a thing that like any ordinary matter might be made out by mere reasoning. From the same cause they are always defining what is indefinable, and drawing inferences of a logical character which expose the faith of Christ to continual attack. That they are led into this course partly by dread of mysticism, and partly by observing that a certain class of men make the subjective element in Christianity an apology for rejecting Scripture altogether as a Divine Revelation, there can be no doubt. But this is no justification for depressing conscience, for slighting or denying spiritual intuitions, or for insisting that without the reception of certain dogmas -- many or few -- man is incapable of attaining to any well-grounded hope of acceptance with God.

Whether Christianity would not have gained on the whole had it been left to demonstrate itself by its own light; by its harmony with conscience; by its adaptation to man's spiritual needs; by the fruits it produces in those who truly receive and faithfully obey it, I will not venture to affirm. But this at least is certain, -- the evidences of its Divinity have never been strengthened by its organizations, nor its power over man increased by all the intellectual forces those organizations have called out and marshaled in its defense.

It may be said that comparatively small portions of Scripture appeal in any direct way to spiritual consciousness; that much of it is simply historical; that other portions embrace predictions of the future, or narrate events which in some other form involve the supernatural; and it may be asked, Are these either to be neglected or rejected because they cannot be subjected to one particular test?

The only reply that can be given is, that all Truth is congruous, and invariably gathers around whatever it has an affinity for. The evidence of this may be discovered in the daily experience of the spiritual man. He may be a peasant or an artisan, or he may, in some other rank, form a part of that great multitude of believers who always have been, and who still are, without any intellectual culture adequate to the investigation of external evidence, and who therefore rest their faith all but exclusively on what they experience of the power of Christianity, -- in other words, on their spiritual consciousness of its truth. These, as we have already seen, finding in the Bible the only aliment on which their souls can live, one and all receive its teachings as a message from above. Practically the range of their knowledge regarding it may be very limited. The texts may be very few on which they habitually dwell. But the power these portions of Divine truth exercise over them extends far beyond what the particular texts embrace.

It is a power which carries with it a reverence for the Book as a whole which nothing can shake; not indeed leading the possessor of it to contend, or even to imagine, that he derives any spiritual benefit from the list of the Dukes of Edom, from the Genealogies, or from many other things that are recorded for purposes he cannot comprehend; but it carries with it a confidence in the Bible as a book, under the power of which he peruses its statements in a spirit of loving reliance which brings to him 'an exceeding great reward.' Apart from this childlike faith which is 'the gift of God,' the Bible will be found to have very little hold upon humanity, and very little influence over human conduct.

If spiritual intuitions are so often found to be but feeble in the believer, the cause is to be sought in the overshadowing influence of Churches, always prone to distrust processes that are merely subjective, and ever ready to recommend men to disregard internal guidance, "until it has been tested by lessons derived from reading, study, reflection, or authority."

One other question may be put, which is this: -- Are we then, it may be said, to suppose that the Spirit of God, as an instructor and a guide, is given to all; that He is 'the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world;' that if the voice of conscience, thus enlightened, were listened to, and its intimations regarded, no further help would be needed to direct a man's path through this life, and to fit him for that which is to come? If so, it will of course be added, -- Why should a written revelation have been given?

An answer to these inquiries seems, at first sight, inevitably to plunge us into controversies of long standing. But this need not be the case if we bear in mind the difference between intuitions and revelations; between a faculty or capacity for recognizing the true and the good when presented to the soul, and the direct impartation to it of knowledge, whether elementary or beyond ordinary reach. The one is a positive gift which may well be considered essential to responsibility. The other is, in all probability, never bestowed on any one who is not divinely inspired. All knowledge, whether relating to this world or the next, has, by the law of our being, to be sought, and often labored for, and can never be acquired except under conditions.

The first, -- the faculty of acquisition, is in all cases a gift, and primarily independent of human effort. The last, whether involving the strengthening and enlarging of the faculty, or its enrichment by ever growing wisdom and knowledge, is largely dependent on man himself. To make him responsible at all, it was needful that conscience should be bestowed. To enable him to become wise and strong in spiritual things Scripture was given, and the extent to which it accomplishes that end depends in great measure on the use he makes of it. Hence spiritual consciousness, and all Divine action on the soul is necessarily a thing of degree, given only 'in measure;' imparted to different persons in strict accordance with their capacity and willingness to improve what is bestowed. Such is plainly the tenor of our Lord's own declarations. Once is merely 'convinced of Sin, of Righteousness, and of judgment to come;' another is 'led into all truth.' To him that hack is given. From him that bath not is taken away that which he seemeth to have.

Now if we will only apply this great ruling principle of the Divine Government to man in all his varied conditions and circumstances, light will be thrown on what is otherwise dark and unintelligible. It will then be seen that the heathen man and the Christian come nearer to each other in relation to God than is commonly supposed. Each has that form and degree of enlightenment which is needful for his position. Each, according to his opportunities, is bound to improve and enlarge whatever he may have. God, the Righteous Judge, will deal with every one equitably and pitifully. Each is preparing here, for a position and purposes in the world to come known only to the Creator. Each is responsible only for the right use of the one or many 'talents' entrusted to him.

If we did but meditate aright on these varying and yet uniform conditions of human existence, we should soon come to perceive that many a field is, even now, 'white unto the harvest' where no hand of man has either sowed or watered. We should see further that if such fields, like half heathen Samaria, may be spoken

of as 'a harvest,' the crop will one day be gathered in; that it will not be left to perish because 'the laborers are few.' We shall discover, too, that if God employs His children to reap where they have not sown, it is not because their co-operation is in any sense necessary, but because He graciously allows the service to be performed by them, partly that they may 'receive wages,' and 'gather fruit unto life eternal,' and partly that they may share here as well as elsewhere in the Redeemer's work and in the Redeemer's joy; 'that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.'

Let us settle it then in our own minds that to every one is given a different allotment of the Divine Spirit, and this for a reason; a reason that may be concealed from us, but which is, without doubt, perfectly consonant with infinite wisdom and eternal love; that on each is bestowed whatever may be required in order to the right fulfillment of the particular duty to which he is called; whatever, in short, is essential to the degree of responsibility with which he is invested, and adapted to fit him for the particular service which he is destined to perform either in this world or in that which is to come.

If we accept this view of the Divine dealings we shall cease to wonder, as we so often do with half disguised dissatisfaction, that a written revelation has for so many ages been given to some, and practically withheld from others; that even to those who in common possess it externally, it should be by no means the same book; that to one it seems full of light, and to another dark and inexplicable; that to this man it should be 'profitable for reproof, and for correction in righteousness,' and to that but a stumblingblock; that by it 'the man of God' should be 'made perfect to every good word and work,' and that by it also the scorner should be hardened in his scorning, and the profane stimulated to increased profanity. So true is it that the Bible, like everything else, is to each of us what we are to it; that to the flippant, the skeptical, and the prejudiced, the Divine oracle is dumb; that 'to the froward it shows itself froward.'

Meanwhile, stumble as we may at the process, spiritual intuitions of one kind or other find a place in every human heart; and if, on the one hand, it must sorrowfully be admitted that these are in most cases choked by sin, and so wither and die, it must also thankfully be allowed that in 'a multitude which no man can number' they are purified and perfected by being habitually brought into contact with revealed truths, which are singularly adapted to the nature and necessities of the being to whom they are addressed.

To Churches these great facts -- for such they are -- should come home with a voice of warning, bidding them beware lest they exalt Divine Sovereignty at the expense of Divine justice; lest, aiming to stimulate man to exertion on behalf of the lost, they should be found to libel God; lest, seeking only to exalt the written Word, and what they imagine to be 'Divine ordinances,' they should unwittingly be guilty of retarding spiritual development, by substituting for the silent witness within their own more noisy and obtrusive exhortations.

CHAPTER V

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

IS it possible, some will say, that the Church of Christ -- the visible and external Church -- can be other than Divine, when, under the designation of the Kingdom of Heaven, its advent was the constant theme, first of the Forerunner, then of our Lord himself, and afterwards of the Apostles?

This reasoning, of course, assumes that by 'the Kingdom' the Lord intended to signify the tangible and visible result in one form or other of the Christian Dispensation. The Roman Catholic Church on this ground has always maintained that in her ecclesiastical organization, as embodying at once the piety and the polity of the Christian faith, the promised 'Kingdom' is to be seen.

Among Protestants the general notion that finds acceptance is that the term simply means the rule or reign of God, realized on earth just in proportion as Society becomes Christianized. Some, however, go much further, and maintain that it must be looked for in a 'visible corporation.'

Assuming for our present purpose that the Kingdom of God is the 'visible corporation,' known as the Church; or, if it be preferred, that it is 'Visible Christianity,' manifested in various ecclesiastical forms, -- a sort of Empire, comprising States under different forms of government, -- let us ask what we can see of it. Let us analyze this supposed Kingdom, and note its component parts. The following particulars may be enumerated as coming under our observation, and these, when combined, may, I suppose, be regarded as constituting what is meant by the Kingdom of God or of heaven.

i. Christendom as it is. The nominal subjection of nations and peoples, of governments and of society at large, to a Christianity which, so far as the great mass are concerned, neither affects conduct, enlightens intellect, nor imparts any spiritual life to the soul.

ii. A Clerical class, or order, governing diversely and consisting of persons who are, as a rule, faithful to their profession, but not necessarily gifted above others, either by the possession of higher spiritual endowments, or more enlarged Divine knowledge. These are commonly supposed to be fitted for their work by special education and training; set apart for service by the ordination of their superiors, and sustained, as the case may be, from endowments or by voluntary contributions.

iii. Sacraments, -- spiritual privileges, to be given or withheld at the pleasure of the Church, too often occasioning a depression of the ethical element in Scripture, and the spread of a persuasion that, owing to the mystic virtue they possess, these sacraments are special channels of grace, their reception being "generally essential to salvation."

iv. The separation of certain doctrines from the narratives, letters, or other documents in which they are embedded in Scripture; their subsequent definition and development by human skill; and their final embodiment in creeds, supposed to present in few words the substance of the truth and the marrow of the Gospel.

v. The obliteration to a great extent of essential differences between believers and unbelievers, by the adoption of a common Public Worship; by the recognition of a conventional standard of morality; and by the evasion of whatever is offensive to the unspiritual.

vi. The now extended belief that the Christian Church, instead of being simply a Family, bound together only by common affection for the Head, is, in posse, a universal kingdom, destined ere long to enjoy unlimited sway; and that it may therefore lawfully recognize the temporary headship of earthly governments.

vii. The persuasion by others that the Church, in its best estate, is a theocratic Republic, oligarchical or otherwise, governed by officers of its own appointment, and destined, in some such form, to spread over the earth, and to become universal.

How far such results, as foreseen by the Divine eye, and perhaps dimly foreshadowed in inspired predictions, are likely to be regarded by God as the realization of that kingdom which is set forth in the Scriptures, and which was preached by our Lord and his Apostles, must be left to the decision of careful students of the Sacred Writings, I can only confess my own inability to perceive that such is the case.

It may, indeed, be replied, But what, then, could Christ mean? If neither the Church regarded as a visible organization, nor yet the Christian dispensation viewed as a whole, be that Kingdom of God which John the Baptist announced as 'near,' and which Christ constantly preached as 'at hand,' what is it? When will that 'kingdom come,' and where is it to be found? The late Dean Alford furnishes an adequate reply when he says, " The phrase signifies neither the Church nor the Christian religion, but strictly the Kingdom of the Messiah; which is to be revealed hereafter."

And if it still be said, But how then was the kingdom 'at hand' in our Lord's time? the present Archbishop of York shall supply the answer, when he says most truly, "The sinful will of man, impotent for good without God's helm, is permitted an awful power to the prevention of good. It seems well-nigh profane to say that God cannot act out His love for man if man resists Him; yet this is, in one sense, true and scriptural. 'He could do there no mighty work, because of their unbelief.' Yet shall not one promise of Jewish prophet, of apostles, or of the Lord himself, in the end be found to have perished. We have put back the hand upon the dial, but it moves, and it shall one day strike. Jerusalem was founded that there might be 'salvation in Zion for Israel My glory;' but unfaithfulness wearied the Lord, and He gave it to the spoiler. The Church was founded a second time, but she has never claimed her own, has never moved to follow her Lord but with lame and crippled feet. Yet shall there lie a third Zion, a new Jerusalem, wherein all the promises of God shall meet, and the wealth of His goodness shall be fully seen. Christ shall one day be universal King. The manner may be dark, but the thing shall be." *

Let not this interpretation be thought wild or strange. Among the mysteries of the Divine government there are none greater than the permitted power of Satan and of evil men to hinder the development of good, and well may this be called 'the mystery of God' (Rev. 10:7). But it is vain to deny that such hindrance is possible. Man, explain it as we may, has power to keep back both truth and blessing, and, in so doing, to injure others as well as himself. 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in' (Matt. 23:13). This was what the Pharisees did, and who can say to what extent the professing Church of Christ has followed in the same path?

Of the kingdom itself we can know nothing beyond what is revealed in Scripture. Our only course, therefore, would we obtain true views regarding it, is carefully to examine all those texts of Scripture -- above a hundred in number -- which either describe its moral characteristics; or indicate the position and duties of those who shall possess it; or connect it with reward for eminent service; or refer to the time of its manifestation; or limit its possession to an elect people; or throw at least a side-light on the objects it is intended to accomplish; or foreshadow the mode of its existence; or, finally, connect it with the second advent of Christ.

* Sermons by Archbishop Thomson.

The result of such an examination will be proof that the kingdom is always regarded as a reign -- the reign of the saints; that it is not synonymous with salvation from Hell; that its kingly rule is not the portion of all the redeemed; that its 'Royal Priesthood' is limited to those who were chosen from the foundation of the world; that its thrones are the possession only of the elite among men, the best that the grace of God and the discipline of earth can render fit for such high service; that it is at once a special reward and a glorious compensation for loss suffered on Christ's account; that it is entered upon only in resurrection bodies; that it commences with the second advent of Christ, and that its object and end is the restoration of the race to holiness and to God.

As such it indicates the final abode of man after the general resurrection. It is 'the Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.' Its locality is earth, not Heaven, -- 'the new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness.' It is a world, not of spirits, but of men in resurrection bodies; not of angelic natures, but of human nature; not of equal happiness or honour, but of kings and subjects, of priests and people, of teachers and the taught. It is the world in which Satan and all Satanic works shall be for ever put under the feet of the saints; the meek reigning, goodness triumphant, and Christ present in glorified humanity.

Hence it is a kingdom yet to come, -- the kingdom for the arrival of which the Lord bids His disciples constantly to pray. * It is the kingdom which, originally proclaimed by the Baptist, was by the Lord himself preached, and most emphatically to 'the poor.' It is the kingdom which He first called 'the gospel.' It is the kingdom which the multitude of that day could not comprehend; a kingdom which, the Jews having forfeited, others were to inherit. It is the kingdom, for the obtaining of which Peter charges his converts to 'give diligence.' It is the kingdom which, in almost every epistle, Paul, in one form or other, sets before those to whom he writes as 'the prize of their high calling,' and for admission into which he specially prays that the Thessalonians may be accounted 'worthy.'

For this kingdom saints in all ages have waited. The pious Jew, in prospect of it, felt himself to be a stranger upon earth, and looked for a city that was to come. The captives by the waters of Babylon longed for its arrival, and considered their own Jerusalem only as its type. Daniel, while among them, saw in vision 'One like unto the Son of Man,' coming in the clouds of heaven, to whom it was given as an everlasting possession. At a later period our Lord speaks of it as 'at hand,' comparing it at one time to the growth of 'the mustard seed,' and at another to a priceless 'pearl;' while in the breadth of its call, and in the extent of outward profession to which it would lead, He likens it to 'the net' that gathers both good and bad. Never is it spoken of as if it were either an earthly commonwealth or an ecclesiastical organization.

Yet in all ages have men perverted this great hope. The Jew, by associating it with the carnal exaltation of his people, and thus making it a kingdom of pride and ambition. The skeptical Gentile, by discovering it in the progress of humanity and in material advancement. Christians, sometimes by identifying it with the visible church as it now is; and sometimes by imagining it will be found in the final result of their efforts for the conversion of the world. Most men seem incapable of separating 'the kingdom' as it will be when 'manifested,' from what it is while 'in mystery;' incapable of perceiving that the present is but, so to speak, the recruiting-ground for its soldiers, or, to change the figure, the sphere in which the seed of it is sowing; incapable of doing other than interpreting as theirs in fact what is, as yet, only theirs in figure. As the inevitable result, the ideal of Christianity has been lowered, and the shadow substituted for the august reality.

* But, though future, it is not the less true that God, the living God, is now among the children of men regulating all things in love and mercy, according to the counsels of his own will. They who speak as if the world in its present state were governed by the dethroned Satan, forget that it is already redeemed by One, who now invisibly ruling it, will one day be manifestly its righteous Lord and Governor.

A recent article in one of our religious newspapers, on Joseph Mazzini, indicates but too clearly the dangers which beset those who allow themselves to indulge hopes and expectations which are not warranted by Scripture.

The writer observes, "It shames one to look round on our Christian society in this Christian England, to mark its foul stains, and to hear the wail of its miseries, with this noble witness of what God meant a human society to be, preached to us by a man who thinks our Christianity -- worn out and that the Eternal God is bringing to the birth a new era, lit by a new incarnation of the Divine idea. We may be permitted to state our very earnest conviction that Christianity is on its trial before the world, as it has never been on its trial for 1,800 years. The perilous question of our times is that which is being urged with great keenness and force, -- Has the Gospel fulfilled or broken its promise? Has it the power, or must it confess that it has not the power to heal the wounds, to right the wrongs, to cure the plagues of humanity, and to make brotherhood in Christian societies something more than a dream? We are firmly assured that the grand stumbling-block in the way of the Gospel is the actual state of Christian society."

Now on these remarks I take the liberty to observe that what is called "a noble witness" is only a testimony in favor of the evil dream of that great and final Antichrist which has yet to be manifested to the world. Alazzini, like Hyacinthe, like Comte, like some of our most advanced liberals in England, despises Protestantism, as a thing divided and subdivided into a thousand sects, all "founded on the rights of the individual conscience, and perpetuating that anarchy of beliefs which," he says, "is the sole true cause of the social and political disturbances which torment the peoples of Europe."

The voice of individual conscience, he adds, "does not suffice without a guide. It needs a rule by which to direct and verify its instincts. This rule is the intellect of humanity. Without a faith no good thing is possible; neither a society of brethren, nor any efficacious transformation of the corrupt element in which we live. Humanity, Europe, is now wandering in a void, seeking the new bond destined to link together all the individual beliefs, presentiments, and activities at present lost in the isolation of doubt." He considers "the primary condition of all association to be uniformity of sanction and belief." We, he says, the Church militant of the Temple which shall be rebuilt, "invoke the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven." Sole priests of the future, "we believe that we are bound to combat and to exterminate, as the offspring of falsehood and the parent of tyranny, every authority not invested with these characteristics." *

The followers of Comte, whether in France or elsewhere, proclaim similar convictions, and avow their design and hope one day to eliminate the religious element in society by the establishment of a Church more in harmony with the age than any that now exist. These are the views, too, of many of the wealthier Italians, and pre-eminently of the political guides of the people. Spain is similarly affected, and Germany, as a whole, leads the way.

Mr. Maurice has well said of such men, "If any of their easy tolerant positions -- supposing them to be generally received -- should be disturbed by some great burst of enthusiasm; if their assent to the dogma, 'There is no resurrection,' should be shaken by the loud cry, 'He is risen indeed,' there is no reason whatever why they should not follow the precepts of Caiaphas or of the Emperors."

He indeed who does not perceive in the spread of sentiments like these among the more thoughtful spirits of the age indications of an approaching persecution, however distant at present, must, I think, be very dull in discerning coming events. A wise man sees only in such 'witness' a testimony to some striking features in unfulfilled prophecy.

* See an article in the Contemporary Review, Sept., 1871 -- 'The writings of Mazzini,' by Madame Venturi.

The Gospel has broken no promise and disappointed no hope. Nor would the imagination that it has done so have entered any mind, had not Churches held and taught notions relating to it which Scripture utterly disavows. 'My Kingdom is not of this world' is a saying of far wider reach and deeper meaning than is commonly supposed. And not until this is fully recognized, not until modern Christians cease to expound 'the Kingdom' as did the Rabbis of old, will the chief argument of the skeptic for rejecting Christianity be deprived of all its power and nearly all its plausibility; never till then will 'the grand stumbling-block in the way of the Gospel' be at once and for ever removed out of the way.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARGUMENT FROM JUDAISM.

IT is often argued that even if it could be proved from Scripture that Christian Churches as such have no Divine authority, -- that they are at best but human institutions, an adequate reason for their being regarded as agreeable to the will of God might be found in the fact that God himself established the Jewish Church as a great spiritual organization; and that in so doing He indicated the necessity for some such institution in all future time. The inference, say such persons, is unavoidable that the Divine Founder of Christianity intended and ordained the formation of A SOCIETY at least like unto the Christian Church, whatever differences of opinion may exist as to the form of its government, the limits of its authority, or the amount of deference which it has morally a right to demand.

The supposed analogy cannot, however, be sustained. For, first, Judaism was not, property speaking, a Church at all, but a Theocratic Commonwealth; and next, Christians, unlike the Jews instead of being a separate community, belong to every nation under Heaven, and are required individually to make their 'calling and election sure,' which, in order to be one of a chosen people, the Israelite was not. Besides this it can scarcely be disputed that the only Jewish service of Divine appointment -- that of the Temple -- has passed away. Christianity, as the late Archbishop Whately has so clearly shown, * is a religion without a Temple, an Altar, or a sacrificing Priest.

That in course of time, and as a consequence of corruption, Christian worship developed into something very like the Temple service is clear enough but it was not such at first. Dr. J. H. Newman fully admits this, and considers the change to indicate that the invisible Church had now become visible; that the promises of God had been fulfilled; and that the Kingdoms of this world had been taken up into the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ,

Speaking of the Primitive Christians, he says, "These had no edifying rites, no various ceremonies, no rich music, no high Cathedrals, no mystic vestments, no solemn altars, no stone or marble, or metals or jewels, or costly woods, or fine linen, to signify outwardly, and to honor duly the Heavenly temple in which we stand and serve." The temple of those days was "a spiritual Temple, made up of living stones; a Temple, as I may say, composed of souls; a Temple with God for its light and Christ for the High Priest; with wings of angels for its arches, with saints and teachers for its pillars, and with worshippers for its pavement. This Temple, which has been on earth ever since the Gospel was first preached is invisible, but it is perfect and real because invisible, and gains nothing in perfection by possessing visible tokens."

But it was not to remain thus. For though "Heaven and earth had hitherto been separate, God's gracious purpose was to make them one, and that by making earth like heaven. Lo! in omen of the future, even in His cradle, the rich and wise of the earth seek Christ with gold and frankincense and myrrh as an offering. . . . Pass a few generations, and the whole face of things is changed; the earth is covered with His temples, -- as it has been for ages. Rivers and mines pay tribute of their richest jewels; forests are searched for their choicest woods; the skill of man is put to task to use what nature furnishes. All that is rarest or most wonderful in nature or art has been consecrated to Him. Kings' palaces are poor, whether in architecture or decoration, compared with the shrines that have been reared to Him. The invisible Temple has become visible. All around we see glimpses of reflections of those heavenly things which the elect of God shall one day see face to face. 'The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.' The Temple has sanctified the gold, and the prophecies made to the Church have been fulfilled to the letter. 'The glory of Lebanon' has been given to it, 'the excellency of Carmel and of Sharon.'"

* "Kingdom of Christ," p. 105.

"And now, he adds, "we have joint worship, forms of prayer, ceremonies of devotion, a course of services, orders of ministers, holy vestments, solemn music, and other things of a like nature, all which are, as it were, the incoming into the world of the invisible Kingdom of Christ, the fruit of its influences, the sample of its power, the earnest of its victories, the means of its manifestation."

This view of the Church I have already said is perfectly intelligible, and persons who adopt it may well see in the worship of the later Economy only a glorious transfiguration of Jewish services. That it naturally and almost necessarily leads Romeward may by such not be considered any reason for rejecting it. Consistent Protestants will, however, judge otherwise. These, for the most part, are accustomed to regard Christian places of worship as something like an outgrowth of the Hebrew Synagogue.

That the first Christian assemblies were more or less modeled on the Synagogue is not improbable; but no argument either for Churches or places of worship like ours can properly be deduced therefrom. For these institutions, whether regarded as places in which criminals were judged, and punishments inflicted, or as Meeting-Houses in which something like an open ministry was encouraged, were every way different from modern Christian Fellowships.

Apart, however, from these differences, it must be shown -- if any argument in favor of the Divine character of Churches is to be drawn from the Synagogue -- that these institutions were themselves of God. But where is the evidence that this was the case? They date, it is generally allowed, from the return of the Jews out of Babylonish captivity, and they exist to this day, not by reason of any positive enactment, but on the ground of their supposed fitness to promote the spiritual welfare of the people. Their origin is commonly traced to the proceedings of Ezra as recorded in the eighth chapter of Nehemiah.

It is impossible to deny that the Synagogues produced great effects. They occasioned the multiplication of copies of the Law, which could be read in these assemblies. They probably gave birth to the Order of Scribes. They led to the creation of a distinct class of expounders known as the Rabbis. They greatly promoted, so far as we are able to judge, the general diffusion of religious knowledge among the people, and they probably aided in their deliverance from idolatrous tendencies. By their means 'Moses had them that preached him in every city.'

Nor must we forget that while the Synagogue was a principal means of the Lord's communication with the mind of the Jewish people, their dispersion rendered that Institution not only an opportunity for conveying the Gospel to them in foreign countries, but a most important opening for its extension to other nations. Of this the Apostles, suiting themselves like their Master to circumstances, hesitated not at all to avail themselves. Certain it is that by this agency "a thorough parochial system of Synagogue instruction occupied the whole country; religion became a literature, its ministers men of letters, and its instruction was the popular book-education." **

Still, this is but one side of their history. The question is, What did the Synagogues finally accomplish in the way of elevating and spiritualizing the Jewish people? To these institutions, as to every other, the test must be applied -- 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' When our Lord was upon earth Jerusalem was full of these places of assembly. They abounded also in every part of Judea. What are we led to conclude regarding them from what is recorded?

* Sermons by the Rev. J. H. Newman.

** Prof. A. J. Scott, ' On the First Principles of Church Government.'

I fear the answer must be anything but favorable. They had evidently, as a whole, mis-educated the people, and led them away from whatever was likely to prepare them for the coming of Messiah. The teachings given in them had, in the main, issued in the formation of two great sects or parties, -- that of the Pharisees, and that of the Sadducees. What these men, with the Scribes were as a body, we learn chiefly from our Lord's own words, 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.'

What rabbinical learning was worth we know but too well from the remains of it that have come down to us. In the burning words of Jesus, it made the Law void by loading it with traditions opposed to its spirit, and by depriving it of all spiritual power. Prayer itself was dishonored by the pretence that it derived additional efficacy from being offered in the Synagogue; and Household religion -- the old Patriarchal institute -- died away in the presence of official ministers who unduly exalted their office.

It is, then, but a poor argument in favor of our modern Churches and Chapels to say that they derive something like a Divine sanction from their likeness to an institute, the influence of which war; all but universally brought to bear against Christ while He was on earth, and which to this day is the chief occasion of that determined rejection of Messiah which still characterizes the Jew.

There are those, however, who persist, in spite of want of evidence, that Synagogues were Divine in their origin. They say Synagogues were always necessary; they must therefore have existed from the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan; God saw the necessity, and must have provided for it; the Synagogue therefore arose at first from a Divine appointment, and the memory of this appointment has been traditionally preserved among the Jews. Such inventions -- for they are nothing more -- scarcely need a reply.

Dr. Jacob, referring to such pretensions, says distinctly, "The religious system of the Synagogue was of man's appointment, its services being ordered by no Divine law, but originating in the wisdom of man, and by man's authority and discretion regulated and maintained." The Apostles did little more than transfer the ministrations of the first Christian assemblies to an existing institution. Whenever, says Archbishop Whately, the whole or the chief part of a Synagogue embraced the Gospel, "the Apostles did not there so much form a Christian Church (or congregation, ἐκκλησία) as make an existing Congregation Christian." And so it came to pass, as Professor Lightfoot tells us, that "Christian congregations in Palestine long continued to be designated by this name of Synagogue."

As the Synagogue has been supposed to authorize the Christian Church, so the SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS have been repeatedly brought forward as justifying the selection and training of a Professional Class for the Christian Ministry. But in this case also the argument is worthless, and for the same reason that has been already given. They too were not of Divine appointment. The origin of these companies or Colleges is unknown. We first hear of them at Ramah, and, as we read in the first book of Samuel (1 Sam. 19:20), that great Prophet is there said to be 'appointed over them.' Others are spoken of at Bethel, at Jericho, at Gilgal, and elsewhere. Some say "the constitution and object of these 'companies' were similar to those of our Theological Colleges." Others insist that "we have no actual proof of their existence except in the days of Samuel and of Elijah and Elisha." Their chief subject of study was no doubt the Law and its interpretation." As subsidiary to this, instructions were given in Music and Sacred Poetry, both of which had been connected with Prophecy from the time of Moses." *

* Smith's Dict., art. 'Prophets,' by the Rev. Fred. Meyrick M.A.

The future history of these Theological students, if they may be so called, seems to me fatal to the argument that is founded upon their existence. For it proves first that "to belong to the Prophetic order and to possess the Prophetic gift were not convertible terms. Sixteen Prophets only find their place in the Canon, while hundreds of Prophets were contemporary with each of them. Many of these without doubt produced in their time numberless compositions in sacred poetry and numberless moral exhortations. Why then were they not immortalized? It is difficult to find any other reason than this, -- they had no Divine call to the office of a Prophet, and therefore no Divine illumination to enlighten them."

What these men were in character we only learn from the denunciations of the true Prophets. Isaiah speaks of their erring 'through strong drink' (Isa. 28:7), and says the Lord will cut them off as 'teachers of lies' (Isaiah 9:15). Jeremiah exclaims, 'The prophets prophesy falsely, and the Priests bear rule by their means' (Jer. 5:3). Ezckiel denounces woe against them as men who 'prophesy out of their own hearts' (Jer. 8:2); he compares them to 'foxes in the deserts' (Jer. 13:4); he calls them 'foolish prophets,' men 'that see vanity, and that divine lies,' that 'seduce the people,' that 'conspire in the midst of the land,' that 'destroy souls,' and daub men 'with untempered mortar.' Micah speaks of them as 'making the people to err, and as divining for money' (Micah 3:6, 11); while Zechariah classes them with idols and unclean spirits (Zech. 13:2).

What we see of their conduct as it is recorded in the first book of Kings (1 Kings 22:6), where four hundred unite in flattering the monarch, and in opposing (as they seem commonly to have done) the one true Prophet whom God had appointed, fully justifies what is said of them. If the institutions that trained these men are to be quoted in connection with Theological Colleges, it may well be questioned whether it should not be rather as examples to be shunned than to be imitated.

I gather, on the whole, that no argument of any value, in favor either of Churches or of a Professional Ministry can fairly be drawn from anything that is recorded in Jewish History.

CHAPTER VII

REASONING FROM THE SUPPOSED NECESSITIES OF THE CASE.

I GIVE the argument that title because those who advance it do so under the conviction that, while human nature remains unchanged, Churches, with their various agencies, are absolutely essential to the welfare, if not to the very existence of a Christianized society. Christianity, say such persons, is a social element; and although, as might be expected, Scripture makes no mention of a half Christianized class corresponding to that by which we are surrounded, it is nevertheless needful that for these -- Christians it may be in name only -- facilities for Divine worship should be provided, in order that they and their families should, as far as possible, be kept under what is commonly termed the means of grace.

"A Bible and a Church," says Professor Lightfoot, "a sacred record and a religious community are primary conditions of extensive and abiding success" * in the support and spread of Christianity.

"There must of necessity," says another, "be a scheme of God for bringing all men at all times to the true end of their existence, a scheme properly attested by Him, This scheme involves of necessity a society acting under God, with laws from Him, and power to act in His name; a society which illustrates God's truth by their lives and actions, and which is commissioned to make God's truth known. . . . The lives of men are the only book the ignorant can read without schooling, and without requiring time for study. This involves the giving society, showing forth truth by its life." **

It is needless to observe that both Dr. Lightfoot and Mr. Thring imply an organized society, by the light of which God is to be known, and to which the ignorant are to look for a living specimen of what Christianity is, But how this light -- that of example -- is to be manifested, except by individual Christians, does not appear. The implication no doubt is that the Church, regarded as an organization, holds in its hands what are called 'the means of grace,' which being allowed, the standpoint thus gained becomes at once a steppingstone to the further assertion, first, that these 'means of grace' are of Divine appointment, and next, that they are inseparable from Church organizations. The Gospel, it is said, is committed to the Church in order that all men may be brought into harmony with God and with each other. Hence a stated provision for preaching, fixed arrangements for worship, variety of office and ministration, -- whatever, in short, belongs to the ordering of the Church for the achievement of its great end is a necessity. "And as in things natural, so in the grand spiritual Society also, means are good because of their fitness to attain the end; the machine for the work it does, the road for the ease and safety with which it takes us to our destination; Church order and services for their aptness to strengthen and diffuse in the Church, and through the Church, the life of God in the soul of man and at the heart of human society."

Every religion, it is assumed, however spiritual in its nature, "must have some outward exhibition of its truths and principles, must have a visible organization through which its inner life may act and be maintained, and its power be duly exercised among men," and although, as some allow, "every particular church in its present visible development is a human institution, formed and continued by man's authority and laws, and by man's authority and laws to be, when necessary, altered and reformed," *** whatever has proved to be a good thing in its effects and influence may so far be said to be of Divine origin, because, in the words of Richard Hooker, "Of all good things God himself is the Author, and all things are of God which are well done."

* 'St. Paul's Epist. to the Philippians,' p. 324.

** 'Thoughts on Life Science,' by Edward Thring, M. A. Second Edition, p. 309.

*** Dr. Jacob.

It is by this somewhat circuitous route -- when direct assertions are withheld -- that Divine authority is claimed for what is still admitted to be only a human institution. The necessity spoken of must not, however, be allowed to pass without question, for it is but an assumed one. I am, of course, quite unable to say what would have been the condition of things at this moment had the Church, as an organized body, never existed; had the individuality of the Christian faith been always fully recognized; had the supernatural character of Christianity been properly considered; had it been felt, as it ought to have been felt, that Christ, though absent in body, is present in every believer both to teach and to guide; had it been held that He would not fail either to sustain truth or to extend it, as far as it was the purpose of God that it should be extended under this dispensation.

But what cannot be proved may lawfully be conjectured as a possibility. Without prejudice, therefore, to any further inquiry, we may be permitted to wonder what might have been the history of Christianity had the primitive brotherhood, when they ceased to enjoy the instruction and guidance of inspired men, been content to hold that the one thing needful to the Christian was allegiance to Christ, -- an allegiance carrying with it submission to the Holy Spirit, love to the brethren, and a holy life; but that these graces were by no means dependent on association with a fellowship, or on union to any outward community. We may at least conjecture what might have followed if, in their assemblies, they had only professed to supplement where such addition was wished, or to supply, where it was wanting, the communion and instruction of home; if they had fearlessly recognized the family as itself a Church, and the Father as its priestly head; if they had acknowledged the domestic circle as the noblest form of Christian life, and personal example, as the appointed agency for winning men to the Redeemer. One wonders, I say, what, in such a case, would have been the history of Christianity.

A very different one unquestionably from what it has been. Piety would not have succumbed, that is certain, for all faith that deserves the name is a supernatural thing. The work of the Spirit would neither have ceased nor been suspended. On the contrary, abiding in every Christian heart, and specially present with the families that called upon the Divine name, unhindered by worldly interests in religion, and unmocked by merely professional services, manifestations of His presence and His power might have been expected, far more frequent and striking than any that have been seen during the Church's dark history of eighteen hundred years.

Christianity would certainly, in such a case, never have ascended the throne of the Caesars, but it would probably have permeated society as a living principle to a far greater extent than it has ever yet done. Pagan tyranny might, for a time, have had its victims, but the absence of what the French call *points d'appui* would soon have occasioned such atrocities to cease. The persecution of Christians by each other would have been unknown. The Inquisition could not have existed. Infidelity would have been left without excuse.

Instructors of all kinds might have multiplied. The care of the poor and the ignorant would have devolved, as it now does, on those whose hearts God has touched with love to others. But Priests, Clergy, a Professional Ministry, ceremonies, magical rites, exclusive ordinances, ecclesiastical pretensions, and the intolerance they generate, could not have had a being, unless they had sprung out of some form or other of atheistical unbelief. What we term a Christian civilization must have been the necessary consequence of the quiet and unperceived diffusion of Christian sentiments among the community; but Christendom -- that mockery of Christianity -- would have been nowhere. Men, as a rule, would have been in religion what they professed to be, having no motive for hypocrisy; and, for aught we can tell, the world might have been in a condition approaching much nearer to what God intended it should be than any phase of its society has yet exhibited.

But this is mere conjecture. All that we know with certainty is that the Church -- the visible society -- did come into existence; that, except in the sense of permission, God had nothing to do with its formation; that its history has been a most melancholy one; that its present position, reformed or unreformed, is worthy of

its parentage; that when viewed as a whole, in the length and breadth of its world-wide manifestation, -- as it exists in the East and in the West, as Catholic and Protestant, as orthodox and unorthodox, as established and un-established, as seen in every form of sect and under every designation from Methodism to Mormonism, it ever has been, and, regarded as an entirety, cannot but be, a hindrance and not a help to truth and godliness, injuring if not ruining far more souls than it benefits.

Some such thoughts as these probably crossed the mind of John Foster, the Essayist, when he wrote, in the bitterness of his soul, of " a word infested with those things called Christian Churches." * Nor can any such judgment, however harsh, be arrested by the presentation of a thousand or ten thousand instances in which a faithful pastor ministers to a delighted congregation, converting some from the error of their ways, and building up others in the Divine life. For the question is not whether or no Christianity can survive in Churches, but whether taken as a whole they are good, and of God; whether every man is or is not bound by loyalty to Christ to connect himself with some one of them.

That belief in such an obligation largely dominates the Christianity of the nineteenth century is but too clear. Yet is it without doubt utterly unscriptural, and I might add materialistic. For the man who holds that the hearing of a sermon, the reading of a tract, union to a Church, or the perusal of a single page even of the New Testament, is a condition of salvation, does not in spirit differ from the man who believes that the application of water to the child or adult is equally essential. Neither the one nor the other probably believes that the processes respectively advocated have in them any direct converting or regenerating power; but both hold to their necessity as 'appointed means of grace,' ordained of God for bringing sinners to Himself, and that apart from their use we have no right to expect His blessing. Each in turn is inseparably bound up with the Church idea, and cannot exist apart from it. Both alike would have to be abandoned as essential to salvation if purer and more spiritual views of the Divine character, derived from Scripture alone, were to be generally accepted; for, as things are, both to a great extent practically ignore the supernatural character of God's dealings with the soul of man.

I am not advocating for a moment the Ultra-Calvinism which treats human agency in the conversion of men as superfluous because God is sovereign; but I do hold that such an error, deadly as it is, should be regarded as less mischievous to man, and less dishonoring to God, than the opposite perversion, now so prevalent, that the Divine being has made the salvation of any one loan to depend on the zeal or the faithfulness of another, that the world waits for its renewal until sufficient money is forthcoming to provide it with an adequate number of teachers; that because we are permitted to sow the seed of the Gospel, the harvest cannot ripen unless we are perpetually at hand to watch and to water it. The faith that is content, while working from love to souls, to leave all trustfully and happily in the hands of One who cares for men far more than we can do, burns in our day but feebly. We have more confidence in Churches than in God, more reliance on human agency than on Divine love. And this in spite of lessons which, if they teach anything, show how limited are our powers, how easily God, without our help, can raise up a people to serve Him.

What we have lost by Church organization no one can of course tell. But it is not too much to admit, at least as a possibility, that Churches, if not always, have but too often been a hindrance rather than a help both to the extension and the deepening of piety; that organizations of any kind are but ill suited to advance what is essentially organic; that Churches have presented few elements of resistance to any evil while prevailing in Christian society; and that they have never been felt to be conservators of the highest good, or opponents to the most subtle forms of evil at any time controlling public opinion. Nor is it too much to affirm that if Churches had fairly and adequately expressed the spiritual power of the Gospel, the growth of a suspicion -- now very prevalent, -- that what we call a revelation from God has spent its force, and that the Gospel as an agency for purifying and elevating humanity has become effete, would have been impossible.

* "Letter to Coles," ix., p. 27.

I know it will be said that there is another side to this question; that if a visible Church did not exist, or if it were not regarded as a Divine institution, public worship would be generally abandoned; Christians would cease to assemble for their common edification; all recognition of God would, as a rule, be confined to the family, even if it lingered there; the nation, as such, would practically disown the Creator and Preserver of all things, and sad experience would prove how impossible any general recognition of the Divine Being would become if religion were to be regarded as a purely individual thing, and Churches, sects, and denominations passed out of existence.

I say, when these things are affirmed I must be excused if I reply that nothing can be more improbable. I should indeed like to ask the objector whether he really believes that the results he has anticipated would follow from any general dying out of Churches; and if he does, whether he has ever seriously considered what such a belief involves. For my own part, I am inclined to think that very few persons would seriously like to assert anything of the kind; and yet I am forced to allow that almost everybody speaks and acts as if it were quite certain that were the present order of things to pass away, it could only be followed by a flood of infidelity.

Those who hold to the belief that Churches are essential to the prosperity, if not to the very existence of Christianity, do not, as a rule, shrink from avowing their persuasion that conflicting religious sects and parties, instead of being regarded as unmixed evils, should be considered on the whole favorable to the interests of Christianity, inasmuch as the rivalries they create tend both to promote its extension and to guard its purity. Dr. Chalmers, I believe, avowed this to be his opinion; and Dr. Henry Allon, in a recent article in the Contemporary Review, has maintained that various religious denominations are an advantage, if for no other reason, for this, that they preserve moral integrity. He says, "The only morality that can commend itself to an unsophisticated mind is, for those who believe alike to associate together, and to field their truth strongly." *

This doctrine, which is unquestionably the basis of all modern Churches, and the key-note of Sectarianism, presents an all but insuperable barrier to Christian love and unity. The principle, says Robert Hall, of "organizing a Church with a specific view to the propagation of some particular truth, is a perversion of the original end and design of Christian societies. . . . Let each denomination pursue this plan, and the effect will soon appear, not only in extending the spirit of disunion, but in the injury which the interests of truth itself will sustain. Every denomination will exhibit some portion of it in a distorted and mutilated form. . . . As the beauty of truth consists chiefly in the harmony and proportion of its several parts, it is as impossible to display it to advantage in fragments as to give a Just idea of a noble and majestic structure by exhibiting a single brick." **

Mr. Hall, however, does not appear to have perceived that Churches and sects are identical. What are now called 'Religious Denominations,' are neither more nor less than Churches, classified according to the particular sentiments or opinions which have been made the distinctive badge of their communion, -- the sentiments or opinions for the support of which they have been separated from other Christians. An unsectarian Church is a mere dream.

It is not possible that any fellowship, if in accordance with what is understood amongst us by the term 'Church,' can exist as a separate community without being identified with a sect or denomination. Such a fellowship may repudiate the name of any known sect or party, but it cannot help creating a new one by the mere fact of its existence. To maintain the Divine right of Churches is therefore to maintain the Divine right of sectarianism or denominationalism. To disown the Divine character of all churches is to disown all parties, divisions, separations, or sects in Christianity, and it can be done effectually in no other way.

* Contemporary Review, June, 1871, p. 390.

** Robert Hall's Works, Vol. ii., 475.

Sects in their origin have commonly been outgrowths of freedom fighting for or triumphing over intolerance. They are so far consequences of a full recognition of the rights of conscience; the right not merely of holding but of propagating what we believe to be truth. The blot upon them all is that, with one consent, they claim a divine sanction, refusing to be numbered among other human institutions, or to be judged as other things are judged.

Differing in almost everything else, they insist with united voice that Churches are Divine institutions; that organization is essential to their existence: that whatever may be the form of organization adopted, it must be based on adhesion to certain views or opinions, the maintenance of which justifies separation from others; that it must be sustained by rules of discipline; and that it must provide a given order of teaching for the instruction and edification of its members. Hence the toleration of differences by Churches must always be more or less limited; unless, indeed -- which is sometimes observable, -- all principles are merged in attachment to a particular minister. But just in proportion as this is done the Church element dies, and in its place there comes up a gathering of persons whose only or chief bond of union is found in their following the same gifted teacher.

I have endeavored to show that the idea of any existing Church being a copy of the fellowship which existed in primitive times is a delusion; that the points in which they differ are far more numerous than those in which they agree; and further, that no evidence whatever can be brought forward to show that the first churches were ever intended to be models for the future.

It has indeed been said, 'If there were no Churches there would be no Christians,' -- an objection which would certainly have weight if it were permissible to believe that the Church created Christianity, and not Christianity the Church. Again, it has been argued, 'If there were no Churches, there would be no preaching of the Gospel, no Christian fellowship, and no public worship.' What is going on around us at this day might well dispose of this assertion. Evangelists of all kinds preach without reference to Churches. Christians in a thousand forms combine to do good apart altogether from Church organization, which indeed has commonly to be ignored in order to effect union.

"The desire of teaching, -- the entire unselfish and noble instinct for telling to those who are ignorant the truth we know, and of guarding them from the errors we see them in danger of," says Mr. Ruskin, is an attribute of all good men. "There is no nobler, no more constant instinct in honorable breasts. But, he adds, "let the Devil formalize it, and mix the pride of a profession with it, get foolish people entrusted with the business of instruction, and make their giddy heads giddier by putting them up in pulpits above a submissive crowd, and you have it instantly corrupted into its own reverse."

Nor ought the obvious advantage which arises from instruction being unprofessional and unpaid for be altogether lost sight of. The Dean of Westminster, when Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Oxford, told us, when speaking of St. Paul's refusal to receive money from the Corinthian Church, that Socrates vehemently repudiated payment for instruction, considering such a bargain as nothing less than servitude; and added, "In a time of unsettlement or inquiry, such as was the Apostolic age, and, it may be remarked, as is our own, the authority of a layman in religious matters is usually far higher than that of a clergyman; and for this reason, that every sentiment which he utters on such subjects is regarded as spontaneous, disinterested, and unprofessional, to a degree not felt in the case of the regular and established order of instructors." *

* Stanley on the Corinthians, 2nd Edit., p. 171.

One thing, however, I must admit, and it is this: if PREACHING be, as we are so often told, a Church ordinance and a Divine institute, its separation from Ecclesiastical organizations would undoubtedly be fatal to its power, however earnest or Scriptural it might be. "God," says a well-known Evangelical Clergyman in a recent sermon, "has appointed teachers as a permanent institution of the Church. They have not, like the Prophets and Apostles, to reveal Divine truth to their fellow-men, but to expound and apply the truth which has been already revealed. And the same earnest desire to know and to do God's will which made the first Christians so diligent in attending the Apostle's teaching will produce similar diligence on the part of Christians now in availing themselves of the help which God has provided for the better understanding and the more personal application of what the Apostles have left on record. Even if the hearer should know more of Divine truth than the teacher, great benefit may yet be derived from his admonitions and exhortations."

He proceeds, -- "There is scarcely anything which I would more earnestly desire to burn into the very soul of every one present than this fact, that the amount of benefit you will derive in the long run from the ordinance of public teaching in the Church, depends mainly upon the extent to which you habitually realize that it is appointed by God Himself for your benefit, and consequently that you must look to Him for the blessing, and not to the gifts which He may have bestowed upon any particular minister. What the sermon may be is of very little consequence indeed compared with the spirit in which it is listened to. . . No one who seeks a blessing from God on a sermon can possibly go away empty A discourse may be more or less calculated to profit the hearers, but when you say that you actually derived no profit from it you are simply condemning yourself, it was your own fault that you did not. . . . The less you think of the Preacher, and the more earnestly, believingly, prayerfully you look to the Spirit of God, to make use of His own ordinance, the richer will be the harvest that is reaped."

Now all this, which I am sure faithfully expresses what is generally believed among Christians, is either true, and of great practical importance, or it is mere superstition, and as mischievous as superstitions always are. Let us see what is assumed. It is taken for granted that God has appointed an ordinance which is administered every Sunday by the tens of thousands who on that day, whether in Church, in Chapel, or in the street, stand up to preach; that this preaching is a Divine institute; that as the first Christians were diligent in attendance on Apostolic teaching, so we ought to use 'similar diligence' in availing ourselves of 'the help which God has thus provided' for the better understanding of truth; that the benefit is -- to some extent at least -- irrespective of what may be taught, depending rather upon a belief in the Divine character of the ordinance or institute than upon what is spoken by the preacher.

It may be said these notions are confined to a few weak men. But it is not so. The sermon from which I have quoted was selected by one of our most popular religious newspapers as eminently adapted to suit the taste of its readers, and to benefit them. Further, nothing short of a persuasion that speaking from a pulpit is something essentially different from speaking elsewhere, could, I imagine, have led a man like Mr. Dale, of Birmingham, to utter some things that have recently fallen from him regarding the impression supposed to be sometimes produced by preaching.

Addressing a mixed audience at the Annual Meeting of Cheshunt College, he thus expresses himself; -- "Sometimes, while listening to us, perplexities which have troubled you for years have been disentangled, so that you have never been troubled by them again. Sometimes you have suddenly discovered shining constellations of truth when there was only blank darkness a night before. You have forgotten your sorrows; you have learned how to master, sin; you have had your conceptions of the moral greatness and in finite issues of life ennobled; the City of God, with its stately palaces, its golden streets, and its eternal songs, has seemed to descend out of heaven; you have been filled for a few brief moments with the rapture of the redeemed, and you have bowed with unutterable awe and wonder before that eternal light which is the home of God."

What would be said of arty Statesman if he were to talk in this inflated way of Parliamentary eloquence, whether it were his own or that of others? Speech of this kind can only be explained by the supposition that he who uses it believes that, apart from any utterance of his own, a Divine character belongs to the work in which he is engaged.

But is this the case? Granting, which may cheerfully be done, that the Lord instructed His disciples to 'Preach the Gospel to every creature,' and that, in obedience to His command, when great persecution commenced at Jerusalem, 'they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word,' it will scarcely be pretended that the preaching there spoken of had much in common with what we understand by that phrase. The gathering together of congregations, great or small, in a time of persecution is as unlikely as it is that 'they who were scattered abroad,' men and women alike, should have been competent to address such bodies in any connected or continuous discourse even if they could have been gathered. It is plain enough that 'preaching' in the New Testament simply means evangelizing, whether by private conversation, by 'reasoning out of the Scriptures,' or by the most powerful of all forces, love and a holy life. And therefore it was that not the organization, but the general dispersion of the believers was the first step in the dissemination of the Gospel.

In all this the Divine design was carried out. The influence of man on man, of heart on heart, and not that of the orator on a crowd, was from the first intended to be the great agency for winning the sinful to God. Nor was it until that original and Divinely appointed agency had been in great measure superseded by ecclesiastical organizations, that men came to believe that eloquence, position, wealth, or popular favor were intended to be the greatest of agencies for the extension of the religion of the crucified One. When they did so the Gospel ceased to spread in its parity. Not till then did extension bring with it deterioration, and what was gained in numbers or in space was lost in intensity and in simplicity.

Great and good men have often spoken very unadvisedly on this subject. Robert Mall is an instance. He too talks of "preaching" as "an ordinance of God." The "Christian Ministry," he says, "derives a peculiar efficacy from its being a Divine appointment." When he attempts to prove this, he begins by tracing "the origin of preaching" to Ezra, who on the return from Babylon, "ascending a stage or put it for the advantage of being better seen and heard, read the law in the ears of the people, and "gave the interpretation thereof;" which interpretation, however, he admits was probably this, -- he translated, "paragraph by paragraph, the Hebrew original into the Syriac or Chaldee which had become, during a captivity of forty years, the vernacular language of the Jews." What this has to do with modern preaching it is hard to see.

He gets at the root of the matter, however, when he goes on to say, "From that time synagogues were erected in all the cities throughout Judea, and regular officers appointed to read, first the Pentateuch, and, after their persecution by Antiochus, the Prophets, and explain them in ample paraphrases or comments." He forgets to add, which 'paraphrases and ample comments' tended to and finally accomplished the purpose of rendering 'the law of God of none effect.' To what an extent modern comments of a similar kind have altered the character of Christianity it is not for me to say.

He goes on to assert, but without any authority, that "upon the formation of Christian Churches an order of men was appointed in each society for the express purpose of preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments," * and he fails to see, or at least to notice, the fact that such phrases as 'the foolishness of preaching,' 'the hearing of faith,' begat by 'the Word of Truth,' -- the 'Word of God,' which word is 'by the Gospel preached unto you,' have exclusive relation to the doctrine taught, and nothing whatever to do with the person who teaches it, with the mode of its presentation, or with its being accompanied by 'ample comments.'

* Works, Vol. i., pp. 459-480, 'On Hearing the Word.'

In like manner the great Baptist orator speaks of modern pastors as if they occupied the position of the Apostles. They are persons to whom is 'committed the ministry of reconciliation;' he does not say, but he speaks as if they were 'the salt of the earth, and the lights of the world;' if they go wrong, he says, theirs "is the misconduct of the pilot, who is denied the privilege of perishing alone;" he tells ministers they 'are set for the rising and falling of many in Israel;' he calls them 'stewards of the mysteries of the kingdom;' he bids them 'consider the dignity and importance of the profession,' and 'stir up the gift ' which is in them, as if they like Timothy had some special endowment; he applies to every minister the words in which the Lord restored Peter to the Apostleship, -- ' Feed My sheep, feed My lambs.' Their business on earth he believes to be "the very same that employs exalted spirits, 'to minister to there who shall be the heirs of salvation." Well may he add, "ministerial functions bear an indelible impress of sanctity."

But more yet. Ministers are called "to stand in the Counsel of God, and to imbibe the dictates of celestial wisdom in their first communication;" they are stationed as "watchmen to give the alarm, 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh;'" they are "detained by Him in His sanctuary on purpose to preserve it pure, to trim the golden lamps, and maintain the hallowed fire, that lie may find nothing neglected or in disorder when 'He shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom we delight in,'" * by which coming he understands our death; for in another place he connects the cry, 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh,' not with the joy it supposes, but with "'inexorable Death,' hastening, in spite of tears and prayers, to execute his stern commission." **

Now all this rhetoric about the ministerial office is either true or false. If false, I say again it is exceedingly mischievous both to ministers and people. If true, the question cannot be evaded, To whom does it apply? To the ministers of any one particular denomination? Of course not. Does it apply then to every young man of serious piety who decides to 'go into the Church,' or to adopt the Dissenting Ministry as his calling in life, -- the profession by which he hopes to live and to acquire fame, a competence, a given status in society? Does it apply generally to the thirty thousand or more who every Sunday, in England alone, stand up in pulpits to preach? Nobody will pretend it. To whom then does it apply? I think to no uninspired man whatever. But let that pass, and for the sake of argument suppose that the statements I have quoted do really belong to those, but to those only, who have really been called by the Spirit of God -- for there are such, although probably much fewer in number than is commonly supposed, -- what then becomes of 'the order,' the 'class,' the 'profession'? It is given up the moment we admit that the high calling with its honors and responsibilities belong only to certain individuals. Yet who in his senses can come to any other conclusion?

There were those in the sixteenth century who affirmed that preaching was "the first mark of the visible Church and a supernatural gift of the Spirit;" but there were others, wiser far, who could say with Hooker, "Touching our sermons, that which giveth them their very being is the will of man, and therefore they oftentimes accordingly taste too much of that over-corrupt fountain." And what was true then is true now. It is not preaching, but teaching of truth that is of Divine appointment, and only as this is honestly done can there be the slightest ground for supposing that any Divine approval is vouchsafed.

* Works, vol. i., pp. 230-270 'Discouragements and Supports of the Christian Minister.'

** Ibid. p. 367 -- 'Sermon for the Princess Charlotte.'

But even then it is far from evident that the particular mode adopted -- that of a sustained address from a pulpit -- is ordained of God, or that any such method is specially adapted to accomplish the end in view. Everybody knows that Sunday after Sunday, not in one place only, but in a thousand localities, sermons, the most Evangelical in sentiment, are not only borne with, but approved and admired by men who, whether calling themselves Christians or not, have obviously no sympathy with the mind of Christ. How is this? Partly no doubt from the incompleteness of the message delivered; but partly also from the fact that eloquent orations merely impress truths which are now recognized in society as right on the lips of the preacher. Does anybody believe that if the same truths were addressed to the same men in earnest personal conversation, or in small companies, and in more colloquial forms, they would be even tolerated? Most assuredly they would not.

And what is true of so-called worldly men is equally true of the mass of believers. They too would often turn away with disgust from the very truths they now patronize, if they came from the lips of men who, without either eloquence or official position, sought to bring them home to their hearts.

Still more would this be the case if the progressiveness of Scripture were generally recognized; if it were felt that there are truths therein, commonly little noticed, which are specially intended for our own day; that there are teachings, which directly oppose prevailing tastes and opinions. Then would it speedily be seen that what the natural heart was in the Apostolic age it still is, and that when the truth for the time is supplied the same thing would happen to the modern minister which happened to Apostles and Prophets.

Let me be forgiven then if I say that few things are more mischievous than the notion that teaching from a pulpit, however feeble or erroneous it may be, is something sacred; that God has ordained it for our benefit; that if we seek a blessing upon it we cannot go empty away. It amazes one that so obvious a superstition should be allowed to pass unchallenged among intelligent religious people. That it has long done so can only be attributed to the influence of associations that are dear, and to the fact that on the assumption of its truth innumerable interests rest undisturbed.

The notion, baseless as it is, seems to possess a strange charm for all classes. The Romanist, the Ritualist, the Calvinist, the Methodist, the Unitarian, and the Mormon, all alike look up with something like loving reverence to their favorite preacher, and all alike believe that in listening to him they are fulfilling a sacred obligation, and observing one of the first duties of religion, whatever their views regarding religion may be. But who will say that all these are in so doing acting in obedience to a Divine law, in the performance of which they may expect a blessing? -- Nevertheless it is certain that if preaching be a Church ordinance, and as such appointed by God, every so-called Church, whatever may be its errors, has an equal claim to any benefit or blessing that may attach to its administration.

On the other hand, if the blessing is confined only to cases in which the doctrine preached is in accordance with the will of God, it is simply absurd to speak of preaching itself, apart from the truth that is taught, as a Divine institute. Yet this is the superstition -- I cannot call it anything else -- which has for ages been sedulously fostered, and which has always proved one of the main supports of the notion that Churches must be sustained as the only means of providing for one of the first necessities of human nature.

The supposed obligation, resting upon every man as part of his allegiance to Christ, to unite himself with some Church, I have already said, does not exist. The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher admits this in a recent sermon addressed to young men, urging upon them the obligation to unite with a Church, whatever that Church may be. He observes, I admit that "I can find no explicit command to organize a Church in the whole of the four gospels." I can find in the Apostolic writings "incidental allusions to gatherings of Christians as being already established; but nowhere can I find a special command to organize a church, nor one sin ;le hint that there is an external or legal obligation on that subject."

Where then is the obligation? He breaks out, "Men and brethren, have we come to such a miserable condition that we cannot understand that a thing may be obligatory upon us though it is not a matter of fixed law? . . . Laws for those that need laws; but the moment that a man is so quick and sensitive that he follows spiritual necessity promptly and truly, that moment he can do without the law what other people have to do by the law. I call you into Church fellowship then, not because there is an external law that says you must go into, the Church, but because in Church fellowship you will live happier, more easily, and upon a higher level; because the public sentiment that surrounds you will be a mighty tide that will buoy you up. I hold that if a man is living by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, he ought somehow and somewhere to let it be known."

Here the call to Church Fellowship is simply placed on the ground of expediency. But who does not see that the force of the appeal rests altogether on the character of the body that is to be joined? The level may be lower instead of higher than that of the individual. The public sentiment maybe a very depraved one. It must be so whenever a Church is cold and worldly -- no uncommon case, -- when it is distracted by divisions, or when the tone of its public sentiment is received from men who are themselves ambitious or formal. Nor can any delusion be greater than that which supposes that a man's separation from the world is made known by his union to a religious party, or his spirituality deepened by alliance with persons who but too often care more for the interests of their sect or the respectability of their 'cause' than they do for the promotion of truth and godliness. The wisdom or otherwise of union with any given religious body must depend on its spiritual condition, a point which it is not always easy to ascertain.

One word more. It is often asserted that if we had no Churches we should have no associations for doing good, Persons who think so, and who may not be unwilling to misconceive what I have written, will probably insist that I oppose all united effort for doing good.

The only reply I can make to such a misapprehension is, that I have not said a single word against organizing for any purpose whatever; that I have not objected to Churches as organizations, but to combination based on principles altogether different from those which obtain in any other case, and claiming to be of Divine appointment. We organize, and rightly, to circulate the Scriptures, to instruct the ignorant, to preach the gospel, and to visit the sick; and no good reason, so far as I know, can be given why Christians should not organize, if they think it desirable, for united prayer, praise, or religious communion. But we do not claim for our combined efforts, whether they take the form of Bible Societies, Sunday Schools, or Missionary Societies, any authority beyond that which belongs to all other voluntary associations, nor do we interfere in the slightest degree with the individuality of those who agree thus to unite. It is only when the object of union is the manifestation of a common life, the fruit not of human but of Divine husbandry, that we introduce elements intended to control and regulate that mysterious spiritual existence which is incapable of confinement except as it becomes dwarfed or paralyzed. To pretend that all this is essential to the existence of Christianity is to forget its supernatural origin, and to mistake altogether its character and object.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAMILY A CHURCH.

WHAT I wish to show in this chapter is that as the Church is a Family, so surely is a God-fearing family a Church. The natural relationship of a family and its members is the particular illustration it has pleased God to make use of in order to teach us the nature of our relationship to Him and to one another. The family, therefore, must be the most appropriate sphere for the manifestation of what God is to us; and family worship, so far as it is spiritual, the highest form of its expression. In this respect, as in so many others, Christianity stands in striking contrast to all false religions.

The effect produced by the introduction, through Christianity, of Family Religion into the world can scarcely be overrated. This characteristic had not indeed been unknown among the Jews, and at one period domestic life had been cultivated among the Romans; but at the time Christianity was introduced this had to a great extent disappeared. It was, therefore, a notable thing when an entire household became the home of virtue and a center of light and purity. From that time, as Dr. Lightfoot says, "the worship of the household plays an important part in the Divine Economy of the Church. For as in primeval days the Patriarch was the recognized priest of his clan, so in the Christian Church the Father of the house is the divinely appointed center of religious life to his own family. The religion of the family is the true starting-point, the surest foundation of the religion of Cities and Dioceses, of Nations and Empires."

First, therefore, in rank, as first in order, the family, above all other agencies, is intended to be chief as a 'means of grace.' But men do not usually think so. On the contrary, they apply the phrase 'means of grace' for the most part to what are called the public ordinances of religion, and attach a peculiar sanctity to places of public worship. Why they do so is greatly owing to the many false associations which have been allowed to gather round terms that are Jewish rather than Christian.

That the temptation to think little of family instruction is, in the present day, very powerful, cannot be disputed. The 'mess of pottage' everywhere obtrudes itself on men who hunger far more after wealth than after righteousness; and of men too, who, with Divine tastes, yet feel or fancy that their first duty is to preserve for their children a given rank in society, and their second to train them for the skies.

As a consequence, on every hand, although on different grounds, is inability to carry on domestic teaching earnestly pleaded; and if the assistance of the pulpit be subsidized, few are distressed by the recollection that they are habitually neglecting one of the most sacred of their obligations. Who, it is often said, now has time to be the religious instructor of his family? How few, again, it is responded, are competent to the task, even if they had the time! It might but too often be added, How rarely does the father exercise that measure of authority over his household which is essential to its accomplishment! How seldom has he that amount of moral influence over his dependants, whether children or servants, which is always needful to render teaching effective!

Such are the sentiments now commonly in vogue amongst us; sentiments avowed, sometimes with indifference, and sometimes with sadness; nearly all agreeing that it is much more consonant with modern ideas, and, as they willingly persuade themselves, much more beneficial, that the work should be transferred to the minister and paid for in coin, than that it should be left either to the prayers or to the pains of the priest in his own house.

* 'St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians,' p. 56.

Yet for centuries, in what we are accustomed to call Roman Catholic times, even the Lord's Supper was in England, although consecrated by the Priest, not unfrequently taken at home, and regarded as a family rite.

Take as evidence the old Saxon word *housel* This was the designation given by the Saxons to the Lord's Supper. It comes from the same noun which we in the present day employ as *house*. As the adjective of that word it expressed among the Saxons the character or quality of the memorial of Christ. It remained in use until and long after the Danish conquest, and will be found in the laws which then regulated or enforced the observance of the Eucharist. The '*housel*,' therefore, carries us back to the period when the Lord's Supper was celebrated by the head of the household among the members of his family. It does more; it describes the characteristic of the families in which it was celebrated, and shows that these households were marked by it in contradistinction to the Pagan families by whom they were scorned; as also the nominally Christian families by whom they were regarded with disapproval or indifference.

The first step towards the abandonment of household communion in England was a claim put in on the part of the Priest to celebrate and guard the Eucharist as 'a sacrifice.' The next was to confine its administration to Churches. The first law which interdicts communion in private houses is found in an ecclesiastical canon (A.D. 740), forbidding the celebration of the Mass in any but consecrated places. And it is curious to observe that about the same time Laymen were forbidden " to teach in the presence of Clergymen unless it be at their request."

The administration of the sacrament to the sick alone remained, as it does to this day, "a remnant of the original household character of the Eucharist." But even this was disgraced by indignities to the laity. The 'cup of blessing ' was withheld, and the washings of the Priests' fingers presented instead. In the reign of Henry the Third (A.D. 1236) distinct instructions are given for "the washings of his fingers to be drunk by the sick man after the taking of the Eucharist."

The Lollards alone appear to have witnessed for the truth. The complaint made against them to Richard the Second is that " they impiously declare that by the law of God any faithful man or woman may consecrate the Eucharistic bread and wine without the Priest, and by Statute (A.D. 1383) such are commanded to be held in arrest " till they will justify themselves according to the law of holy Church." *

Such is the history of Eucharistic error in England, the dark shadows of which still hang over the Church of Christ. Even those who are most free from superstition exaggerate the character of the ordinance, and give it a pre-eminence which is fearfully injurious to true piety.

If it be objected that a family is too restricted to be a Church; that its members are too much alike, and its laws wanting in the reach which is essential to the government of a mixed body, I reply that a godly family is a Church, because it is a society differing as all men differ, yet ruled by a law comprehensive enough to harmonize and to control the varieties of disposition which always characterize the members of such a community.

It is this diversity -- quite as much marked among adults as among children -- that, more than any other element, brings into play the wisdom and love which God intends should characterize those to whom He entrusts the high responsibilities of guiding, governing, and instructing a household.

* Altar Sins; or., Historical Illustrations of the Eucharistic Errors of Rome, as taught and enforced in England.' By Edw. Muscutt. The authorities relied on are Bede, Spelman, and Johnson.

The persons to be ruled and trained may, at first sight, seem to have but little in common, and yet they are to be treated as a unity. One, it may be, is distinguished by a simplicity of mind and directness of speech which is charming even when it errs; another may be marked by a reticence which, if sometimes wise, is also sometimes unpleasant. One is ready to believe almost anything on mere authority; another is naturally skeptical. The former is perpetually wondering at the folly which allows mere speculative differences to destroy peace; the latter can only mourn that his perplexed heart and dark thoughts are a sealed book to those that surround him. Yet, as I have just said, all these, as members of the same family, are ONE, and as such must, if the purpose of God is to be cared for, grow up together in love; and all these, if Christians felt aright, could at home, whenever it might be wished, gather around the Table of the Lord, and with their Parents not Jar fully only, but with singular propriety and beauty, commemorate together the love of their Redeemer.

The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher in a recent sermon said to his people, "If you administer the sacrament yourself it is just as good (as if it were administered by a minister); for the Lord's Supper belongs to every man who belongs to Christ, and he has as much right to administer it to himself as to have it administered to him by a Priest." The following remarks thereupon appeared in the Contemporary Review (Feb. 1872) from the pen of the Rev. H. R. Haweis, a well-known clergyman of the Church of England. "These opinions," he says, "may startle some persons, but in reality they are not far removed even from the orthodoxy of the Church of England. Lay baptism has generally been held valid, and if one sacrament may be administered by the laity, it is really difficult to see why the other may not; and as to the question of a man's administering a sacrament to himself, it is done every time the Priest consecrates, for he always administers the bread and wine to himself first."

That these were the opinions of Dr. Arnold is well known. In a letter to Sir Thomas Pasley he observes, "Lay baptism was allowed by Hooker to be valid, and no distinction can be drawn between one sacrament and another."

I repeat, therefore -- As surely as the Church is a Family, so surely is a God-fearing Family a Church, of which the Father is the Priest, clothed with full power to discharge every ecclesiastical function, without exception, which he may consider desirable to be performed therein.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION.

BEFORE bringing what I have to say to an end it may be well to recall the attention of the reader to the precise aim and object of the work.

I began this book by stating, as distinctly as possible, that the object of it was simply to inquire whether churches, as they exist amongst us, are Divine or human institutions; whether therefore they are essentially of God or of man. What I proposed to examine was, not whether Churches are of God permissively, or providentially, as are our various Philanthropic associations; nor yet whether any one particular Church exists by a Divine right which does not belong to other Churches; but whether Churches regarded as institutions, and apart from all questions relating to their government, are Divine in a sense that renders it incumbent on every consistent Christian to unite himself with one or other of them.

If I have shown -- as I think I have -- that this is not the case, but that, whatever may be the merits or demerits of these institutions, they are but human ordinances established for Divine ends, certain consequences follow. They may be thus enumerated:--

(1) No moral or spiritual obligation rests upon any one to unite himself with any Church, Sect, or Denomination whatsoever.

(2) No Church, or sect, or body of men has any right to that control of the Lord's Supper which is implied in a claim to administer it by an appointed minister, or to decide, in whatever way, as to the moral and spiritual qualifications of any individual wishing to partake thereof.

(3) No Church, sect, or denomination has any authority for gathering around either a doctrine or a rite, or for assuming to be in possession of given truth.

(4) Modern Ministry, Church Fellowship, Preaching, mixed worship, with all that pertains thereto, are mere human arrangements, to be honored or otherwise accordingly as they are seen to be practically useful and promotive of true godliness.

(5) The responsibility of accepting or rejecting truth, of illustrating Christianity in life, and of promoting it among men, rests exclusively on the individual Christian, and cannot be shared by any body of persons whatever, let the antiquity of their claim to regard be what it may.

(6) Christianity is not to be held answerable for any of the crimes that have been committed in her name by Churches, whether dominant over, or supported by, or independent of the State.

(7) The basis of faith, the nature and authority of dogma, the place of conscience in relation to Divine Revelation and Christian evidence generally, is not to be viewed from the standpoint of any Church or Churches, but from that of the individual Christian regarded as the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit.

These conclusions, startling as they may seem, all point in one direction. They indicate to the thoughtful Christian how great is his need to cling more closely than ever to the revealed fact that God always has upon the earth an elect Church, 'chosen from the foundation of the world;' at once visible and invisible; consisting of persons in whom the Spirit of God dwells as the source of their excellence, and who exist on earth for the

purpose of exhibiting the Divine life, and the hidden order of humanity;" a body "which has an existence continuous through the ages, on the principle of spiritual similarity of character," but which cannot be recognized either in any one ecclesiastical organization, or in the sum-total of all of them; visible in every individual member of it, so far as he or she by a holy life illustrates the character of the Redeemer; invisible when regarded as an organized unity, whatever shape it may assume.

Of such a Church -- however divided by distance, or however unknown to each other the members of it may be -- unity may be predicated; for these persons, wherever they recognize each other, will be found, in the absence of artificial hindrances, "not divided by a repelling selfishness, but united by a common love, having common sympathies and a common end in view, viz., that each and all may be perfected in holiness." The extent to which, in carrying out this object, they may be able at any given time or place to 'edify one another,' to 'exhort one another,' or to 'bear one another's burdens,' must depend on circumstances. That which is required of them is simply a desire to render this service to their brethren to the utmost of their power.

Christian fellowship, so far as it becomes practicable, is a means to this end; beneficial just in proportion as it has its root in the instincts of the new nature; as it manifests itself by common affinities; and as it is exercised in harmony with the oneness of the faithful and holy throughout all places and ages. The clear enunciation of this great truth -- imperishable amid the wreck of organizations -- will be found our best defense against the lawless anarchy which may be expected to follow that breaking up of the great deeps which is clearly at hand.

It may now be said -- as it probably will -- that if what I have advanced be true; if Churches date, not from the Apostolic age, but from a later one; if their parentage is human; if their history is, on the whole, painful and perplexing; if they have failed to answer Divine ends; if they have landed us in doubt, in disunion, and in very low ideals of the Christian life, -- then I am bound to say what I would substitute for them. Should this be done, I can only reply that the demand is most unreasonable.

Churches, of one kind or other, everywhere exist, and are interwoven with National life, with the very structure of Society, and with the deepest and most sacred feelings of all classes. That they should be rooted up -- even on the supposition that they have done more harm than good -- is out of the question. No one wishes it; no one would dare to advocate it. We must wait for action until it is known what is likely to be our social and political condition in the immediate future. The 'transition state,' in which everybody admits that we now are, must ere long be succeeded by important changes, and on the character of these changes decision as to the line of duty will very much depend. *

And if it be retorted, 'Why then not keep silence? Why disturb us in vain? Why seek to alarm either Priests or People, if you have no remedy to propose, no course of action to suggest?' I can only reply, I do so because disturbance, created long before the time arrives for action, is commonly wholesome. Thought should come first; then, an eager desire to arrive at truth for its own sake; then, and not till then, may we hope for enlightenment as to duty, or have any good reason for believing that when the critical moment comes we shall be guided aright.

* "The disintegration of existing religious bodies is imminent, and we must reconcile ourselves to the anarchic amorphous periods which must precede the reign of Christ." -- The late Edward Denison, M.P.

"The cry of the present day, on all hands, is CONSTRUCT. They who join in this cry forget that for construction 'two powers must concur -- the power of the man, and the power of the moment.' He who is destined in the long run to accomplish most in the correction of the evils which now oppress us, is the man who is most willing to wait for suitable materials before he begins to build, or, if needful, to provide them for others; who is able to hold a truth firmly without seeking to revolutionize the world with it; who is content to handle it disinterestedly, and without reference to any party objects whatever; who steadily refuses to lend himself to ulterior considerations; whose aim is first to know the best that can be known, and then to create, by the agency of this knowledge, a current of true and fresh ideas; the man, above all, who never ceases to protest with all his might against whatever makes truth subserve interests not its own; whatever stifles it with practical considerations; whatever makes practical ends the first thing, and true thought the second thing." *

But while maintaining the ground thus ably set forth by Mr. Arnold, I am not insensible to the fact that a serious call is made on certain classes for very serious consideration as to what may or may not be their practical duty in a crisis like that at which we have arrived I refer to Heads of Families, to Young Persons of serious piety, and to the Ministers of the Gospel at large.

I. HEADS OF FAMILIES. -- On these, as it seems to me, a very serious responsibility rests. Whatever may be in the future, it is clearly their bounden duty to cease from leaning so exclusively, as they have long been accustomed to do, on public and professional teaching; to consecrate at least some portion of their time to studies intended to bear on the spiritual interests of those committed to their care; to own and to honor the privilege of -- Priesthood in their homes; to make their various Christian households Churches in the house; and to set the example of a life higher than that which is satisfied with the ordinary objects of this world's ambition, -- a life towering above that love of distinction and inordinate greed after money which is now so often a stumbling-block and a grief to all who eater into the spirit of the Master.

Mournful as is the admission, it must I fear be allowed that at present very little moral and spiritual influence goes forth from the head of a household. In nothing are we more lacking than in the power to bring truth home to the individual by private conversation. We shrink from the attempt because we are conscious of our weakness. We feel that we are not living conductors of the Divine Spirit.

How this is to be remedied it is hard to say. But it is not difficult to perceive that the busy, artificial, luxurious life we all lead has much to do with it. A mind in which animalism is predominant, and self-indulgence the rule; a heart under the influence of ambition and worldliness, can never have the conducting capacity which is essential to the transmission of that which is Divine.

Perhaps it may be asserted that true spiritual power of the best kind, and capable of being exercised for the benefit of others, is rarely found except in connection with habitual self-denial, and the endurance of what the apostle calls 'hardness;' that it cannot be retained unless thorough honesty, supported by a fearlessness arising out of strong faith, characterize all our beliefs of a religious character; without absolute disinterestedness in the propagation of what we hold to be truth; without the crucifixion of the world and its conventionalities; without deadness to earthly ambitions, and a constant and lively realization of things that are unseen and eternal?

* "Essays on the Functions of Criticism," by Matthew Arnold.

2. YOUNG PERSONS. -- What shall these do, as one by one they rise up and beg the help which at present is scarcely to be obtained by those who stand aloof from the ecclesiastical organizations by which they are surrounded? It would be an injustice to deny that over many young persons existing Churches, for a time at least, often act very beneficially. They sustain the weak; they preserve from temptation; they promote religious and benevolent undertakings which unite young persons in a common service; and they often lead to companionships which are highly salutary.

On the other hand, union to a given religious body or society frequently has an influence over them that is very decidedly injurious. It often leads them to suppose -- which is anything but true -- that members of these religious associations are more likely to be saints than other people, and so occasions comparisons to be drawn which are as unfavorable as they are unjust in regard to those that are without. It favors, especially in women, that sort of submission to spiritual authority which is welcomed as a deliverance from the burden of freedom. It excites a premature desire to save souls before personal character is consolidated, and it brings young people into a too exclusive and therefore an injurious association with those who hold their own particular religious views. Living in this atmosphere, they fancy themselves unworldly.

Now, as it has been well said, "There is danger everywhere and at all times of our taking up a worldly idea of unworldliness, but never more than when, as in our own day, the pursuit of wealth is hottest; for a coarse and money-hunting age naturally takes coarse and low views even of goodness." It is this tendency which constitutes the peculiar danger of modern Churches; for low views are inevitably fostered by associations in which money-hunting men are prominent. The young catch the contagion, and justify what it leads to by the example of their elders. Deny it as we may, our Churches are now to a great extent but machinery for carrying on benevolent enterprises, and for promoting the use of 'the means of grace.' It is because they are so that Christian work is commonly regarded as the panacea for almost all evil, the rendering of service to the poor, either by instructing their children or by visiting their homes, being considered the best if not the only way of promoting growth in spirituality.

Further, Churches act on the young and inquiring as hindrances in the attainment of truth by the value they affix to certainty apart from investigation; by the importance they attach to assent to religious formulas; and by the inducements they offer to seek for peace in almost any doctrine that can be held without disturbance. "This idol -- for such peace is when obtained at the sacrifice of inquiry -- God will one day assuredly break."

Unwilling, therefore, as I should be to dissuade any young person from joining a Church, I can have no scruple in advising such to pause before they take a step which identifies them with a system of things so unchristian and so hollow as is that which embodies Christianity in Churches and sects, and which will hinder them from giving a quiet witness for something higher and better.

3. MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL. -- It may perhaps be regarded as an impertinence even to suggest any course to men who are by office instructors of others. But I am willing both to run the risk and take the consequences. Their safety -- if they will allow me to say so -- will be found in spiritually educating those to whom they minister, instead of merely interesting them by rhetorical discourses. Their wisdom will be to develop to the utmost the gifts of the people; to avoid doing for them what they ought to do for themselves; to bring out the capabilities and to strengthen the characters of all; to do, in short, whatever may seem best adapted to render their own existence unnecessary.

Not that they will ever succeed in so doing. Neither education, nor leisure for solitary thought, nor time to acquire learning or culture of any kind, is within the reach of the many; but these endowments will always be found, as a rule, essential to any lengthened continuance of moral or spiritual influence over men. They are absolutely needful to every one who hopes to be useful in developing what is in others, whether of gifts or graces; of intellectual ability or of spiritual power.

When this is done it will be discovered that it is still possible for the 'whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, to make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.' Then shall we both realize and reap the benefit of the fact that there are diversities of gifts; that to one . is given 'the word of wisdom,' to another 'the word of knowledge,' to another 'the discerning of spirits,' and that all gifts needful to a perfect ministry are but the work of one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.

At present the eye says unto the head, 'I have no need of thee,' and the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' We still follow after charity with sincerity of purpose, however feebly; but we have ceased to desire spiritual gifts. We have no wish that good men should 'prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be comforted.'

Let it not then be said that I am simply advocating individualism. "Perfection is not possible while the individual remains isolated. The individual is obliged, under pain of being stunted and enfeebled in his own development if he disobeys, to carry others along with him in his march towards perfection, to be continually doing all he can to enlarge and increase the volume of the human stream sweeping thitherward."*

A CLOSING WORD.

I have no reason whatever to suppose that anybody will think it either needful or expedient to reply to what I have written. Those who may most strongly object to the book will probably console themselves with the thought that, as a clear clerical friend of mine, now departed, used smilingly to say when pressed on some of these topics, 'all the weaknesses and prejudices of mankind are in favor of things as they are, and therefore no great harm will be done.'

Others -- and they are many -- will say, 'I cannot be diverted from the work I have to do by any man's views of Truth. God, I know, hath bidden me call sinners to repentance and faith, but whence these new views come I know not. I shall act on the amount of Truth I have received, and leave the rest for another world.' So argued many of the Jews in our Lord's time. They said, 'We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is' (John 9:29). So argued many a good man in the days of the Reformation. 'The lathers we know, Saints innumerable we know, but who is Luther?' So in every age argue men whose habits of thought, whose interests, whose peace of mind is threatened by what seems to them novelties. Let us refrain from judging any of them. 'There is one that judgeth, that is the Lord.' Human nature being what it is, I feel I have no reason to expect that much, if any attention will be paid to what I have advanced.

But, speaking from past experience, I have a right to believe that while few will read with either care or candor, many will hear of the book or glance at it, and -- with or without evil intention -- utterly misconceive and totally misrepresent it. And this for two reasons:-- first, because unless it is carefully read and judged as a whole, it is almost sure to be misunderstood. Secondly, because each man will throw around what is said associations that are foreign to the writer, and will draw inferences therefrom which the Author would be the first to disown.

* 'Culture and Anarchy,' by -- Matthew Arnold.

If what has been written had borne only on evils supposed to attach to the Romish Church, or to the Anglican, or to any given Nonconformist polity, thousands would listen and approve, because each reader would feel that he and his were untouched. But having been obliged to deal with claims put forward by all Churches, and to deny their validity, every reader in turn will be but too apt to bring before his mind, not Churches generally, but some one little Bethel peculiarly and perhaps deservedly very dear to himself, to apply what is said to it, and without further consideration to deny at once and with indignation the force or fairness of all that has been said.

There is no help for this. "Proof, however plain, cannot take an unwilling mind by storm, and words can never be certain of making proof plain . . . hence all boasts of demonstrative truth are false, if by demonstrative truth is meant truth which must intellectually compel belief. Apart from mathematics, that subject is a very narrow or a very superficial one which admits of being dealt with in this precise, rigid way. Andersen's 'wonderful creation of the devil's distorting mirror' must also be kept in mind, where Satan is seen shattering and shivering whatever of truth is presented to the mind, 'sending it floating in impalpable atoms through the world; each atom with its perfect distorting power, and each atom able to stick in a human heart, and pass its distorted images into it.'" In short, whether we perceive it or not, all communication between human minds is at the best very imperfect.

"No mind is so unbiased as not to be able to evade disagreeable statements, and no subject which touches on life can be set out with logical and exact demonstration." Perhaps it is not too much to say, "Words cannot do more than roughly hint the truths we feel or know to friendly hearts " *

When therefore it is said, as I know it will be said, that I am opposed to Christian Fellowship as such, and to all organizations for doing good, that I am, in short, a mere destructive, my reply must be, 'Read all that I have written on that head, and especially look again at pp. 8, 12, 23, 117, 304, 305, 361, 377, 386 and 390. If after such re-perusal the impression still remains, I can say no more.

"He that's convinced against his will
Is of the same opinion still."

* "Thoughts on Life-Science," by the Rev. Edw. Thring, M .A.

NOTE A

BAPTISM.

(To be read in connection with pp. 43-53.)

It will, I suppose, be admitted without dispute that Baptism is commonly regarded amongst us as "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." Some -- as the Romanist and the High Anglican -- hold that it is the sign of grace actually received in the ordinance. Others -- as the Baptists, and some English Churchmen -- consider it to be symbolic of a Divine gift bestowed previously. To them it is but the recognition of an existing fact. Others still -- as Paedobaptists generally -- think of the rite as showing forth the fallen and depraved condition of human nature, and consequently the necessity that exists for its renewal by the Spirit of God. All alike, however, hold, in one form or other, that the outward act is the sign or symbol of that which is inward and spiritual.

A little consideration will, I think, suffice to show that this is not the case, -- that Baptism never sews considered to be the sign or symbol of any inward work of God, but only of an outward profession.

For, first, nothing can be clearer than that in the baptisms recorded in Scripture there is not the slightest reference to anything needing to be done. It is always the public profession of something supposed to be already accomplished. The person baptized is said to have 'believed' -- whatever that may imply -- and therefore is subjected to the rite.

In Jewish baptisms, as administered to Proselytes of the gate -- whatever phrases might be used regarding it, such as being born again in the water -- it is equally clear that the act was never understood to signify more than circumcision. viz., that the Proselyte had abandoned idolatry, had professed his desire to be henceforward a worshipper of the true God, and was in water figuratively washed from idolatrous pollutions.

John's baptism could scarcely signify more than an outward profession of anxiety in the multitudes who flocked to it to be prepared for the advent of Messiah; and Christian baptism, as administered at Pentecost to the thousands who had become convinced that Jesus was the Christ, evidently implied neither more nor less than a public avowal of this conviction. Such phrases, therefore, as 'Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins' (Acts 22:16), or 'Be baptized for the remission of sins' (Acts 2:38), or such as speak of the 'laver of regeneration' (Tit. 3:5), or 'Baptism doth save us' (1 Pet. 3:21), must be only figurative representations of the work of the Holy Spirit, or they point to a spiritual change effected by the rite itself when administered according to an authorized order. Between these two interpretations we have, I think, to make our choice.

If it be still insisted that Baptism is intended to signify a striking symbol a work of the Holy Ghost which has already been effected, -- that it is but the recognition of an existing fact, we have a right to ask, Where is the evidence that the change thus symbolized has in any given case actually taken place? Surely the sign cannot set forth what is only possibility. Yet who can say positively of any given person that the renewal of his nature has or has not been accomplished? 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou nearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.'

Now, if this be true, Baptism can have no relation, either to children or adults in a Christian country -- using that phrase in its ordinary acceptation as signifying mere outward standing -- simply because in such cases it signifies no visible change; while any invisible and spiritual work of God on the soul -- if it has been wrought -- can only be made manifest to others by a holy life and endurance to the end. The person who is

renewed may individually have strong, and, to him or her, satisfactory evidence of having become 'a new creature in Christ Jesus,' but it is evidence which cannot be imparted to another.

When, therefore, any one is now, with a view to Christian fellowship, baptized on what is termed 'a profession of Faith,' the rite can signify neither more nor less than the acceptance by others as true of what the candidate believes to be his own new spiritual condition. Any fellowship may, if it thinks proper, demand such a profession, and endorse in this fashion the supposed Christian character of one or of many; and any other, in the exercise of a like discretion, may attach an equal importance to the reception of the ordinance in infancy; both may, in judicious hands, render such services pictorially impressive, and even beneficial to spectators; but neither the one nor the other can furnish even a plausible reason for insisting that the requirement is a Divine one.

NOTE B

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

(p. 280.)

NOTHING is more common than to hear from the Pulpit vigorous denunciations of 'worldliness,' Nothing is rarer than to listen to a specific statement intended to show in what worldliness, according to Scripture, consists.

Nor is reticence on this subject altogether without excuse. For it is by no means easy to say in few words what the phrase in question precisely involves. To pretend that there is no difference between 'the world' by which the Apostle Paul was surrounded when in Greece or Rome, and that in the midst of which the Church of Christ in England now dwells, is simply absurd. On the other hand, to expect that a minister should be able to mark out clearly and definitely the line beyond which lies the enemy's ground, seems somewhat unreasonable, and yet, in one way or other, it ought to be done.

In a volume of sermons, recently published by a popular Clergyman, * the existence of a similar difficulty is recognized in relation to some of the more direct teachings of Christ. The precept particularly referred to by him is the saying, 'If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also.' "Submit that," says the Preacher, "to the criticism of the understanding, without permitting spiritual feeling to play upon it, and it becomes absurd. Define it accurately, and there is either too much or too little left of it. But do not attempt to define it, let the spirit of each man explain it to himself, and the truth which is in it will work its way. Christ would have refused to explain such a text. All He would have said He did say,-- 'He that hath ears to hear let him hear.'"

Now it is easy to understand how many a preacher should argue thus in relation to 'worldliness;' for there is much truth in the observation that "Christ gave ideas, but not their forms," and it is unquestionable that the meaning of much that He said is to be gathered from the heart rather than to be expounded by the intellect. But so far as this is the case, Preaching, if not injurious, is of very doubtful utility; the value of all human expositions of Scripture becomes questionable, and the worth of a commentary whether written or spoken, is vastly lessened. Positive injury, however, is inflicted most severely when such endeavors to translate Divine thoughts involve, as they too often do, their dilution, or else conceal them under vague generalities which have no power over the conscience.

The process by which this can unintentionally be done may be gathered from the sermons I have already referred to. "Tell," says the Preacher, "the man who has a tendency to fear 'that he is to take literally the command regarding non-resistance,' and he becomes a coward on principle. Tell the same to another who has military traditions of honor, and he says that Christ's teaching is not fit for practical life." Leave it unexplained, and, "the truth that is in it will work its way."

To this it may be replied, if no exposition of such a passage existed, it certainly would do so; but this is not the case. To say nothing of what has been spoken or written a thousand times, the great and all-powerful commentator which is embodied in the minds of Christians meets the inquirer on every hand, and biases his decisions continually. This exposition tacitly sanctions, if it does not justify him in concluding, that the precept iii question must be dealt with according to circumstances, and that it may lawfully be evaded whenever it comes in contact with Christian traditions.

* Sermons by the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, M .A., 'Christ in Modern Life.'

But how utterly delusive all this is! How it tends to support the allegation that Christ's doctrine of non-resistance favors cowardice! when in reality it demands courage of the highest kind, although it utterly condemns "the military tradition of honor." Grant that the 'saying' may, in some respects, teach a different lesson to the timid and to the brave, to the rough soldier and to the delicate woman, its spirit is in every case the same, -- a spirit that stands in direct antagonism to the Christianized sentiment of the day, which, under the teaching it has received, generally regards the command in question as not inconsistent with a moderate indulgence of what the world calls 'high spirit,' or a just resentment of injuries.

The fashion of the day is professedly to exalt the words of Christ, while in truth they are but lowered; being commonly regarded as addressed "to the emotions rather than to the understanding," and being likened to "an air of Mozart's, which means one thing to me and another to you, yet leaves on both an indefinite but similar impression -- a sense of exquisite melody which soothes life, and inspires an affection for the man who gave us so delicate an emotion."

So is it with 'worldliness.' The Churches, regarded as a whole, have here too it way be unintentionally lowered the Divine standard, chiefly by giving too much prominence to those aspects of Christianity which favor success in life, and too little to other aspects which speak of the Christian as but 'a pilgrim and a stranger here,' called upon to 'crucify the world,' and to eschew its ambitions.

Preachers now tell us, and on the highest authority, that godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come:' they add, with an admixture of truth, that, in a land like ours, the rule is that the religious man enjoys the respect and confidence of his fellows; that, instead of being disliked or distrusted because he calls himself a Christian, he is more likely on that account to acquire reputation, and to be highly esteemed; that, as things now are, it is not difficult for such a man to keep a conscience, or to follow his convictions; that his habits will help rather than hinder his advancement; that the object of the Gospel is to leaven universal society with religion and righteousness; to unite men together, through ecclesiastical institutions, in one spirit, though it may be under different forms of social organization; that under these conditions the moral constitution and laws of the Universe are reaching their end and manifesting their design. On these grounds they recommend Christianity to the young.

Such at least is the order of thought that Churches demand, that Society approves, and that Ministers feel bound to supply.

The element wanting, and which is rarely introduced because it is so unpopular, is that which of hoses itself to the notion that Christianity, if truthfully exhibited in, its entireness, can be approved by worldly men; which denies that obedience to the Highest does promote advancement in life; or that it is easy to keep a good conscience in society or that it ever was the primary object of the Gospel, through ecclesiastical institutions, or in any other way, to subdue all men to itself under this dispensation.

These persons, whether they be many or few, hold that some of the most distinguishing precepts of the Lord were addressed, not to men generally, but to a particular class of men; that they apply, not to those who willingly have their portion in this life, but to those only who elect to live for another; that they were never intended to be carried out by nations -- for society as at present constituted could not exist if the doctrines inculcated in the Sermon on the Mount were acted upon, -- but that they appeal exclusively to those who are seeking to lay up treasure in heaven, and whose ambitions lie beyond the present state of existence.

These hold that "Before Christ can gain the citadel of man's will and affections, many pleasant places must be laid waste before him, many fair and flourishing outworks be brought low. These are hard sayings, and if they are met by the rejoinder, Who can bear them? the answer is already written: They to whom they are addressed by Christ, and they only. He who forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be my disciple.' Christ does not say he cannot be my servant, does not say he cannot be my son, but he cannot be my disciple. There are

many gains, many losses in Christ, over and above that great inappreciable loss of the salvation of the soul in him. We are made poor by what we miss as well as by what we lose. *

"The character which Christ forms within the heart is one at variance with our ideas of natural greatness; His rule opposes itself as much to the higher as to the lower instincts of human nature. That this should have been most clearly seen by thinkers looking at Christianity from without, ought not to make us careless of the truths they disclose; for intellectual and spiritual contemplation alike lead up to clear, calm summits, and upon them are strange meetings undreamt of by the dwellers in the valleys and the plains below. ** Most assuredly the holding of the one thing needful involves the letting go of many things lovely and desirable, and in thought as well as in action such a man must go on ever narrowing his way, and avoiding much."

If this great truth had been inculcated as it ought to have been, it would not have been said, as it has, that while " during the last quarter of a century the ministers of religion in England have had access to the attention of the nation in a greater degree probably than at any previous period, they have not exercised much salutary influence on the operations of trade, commerce, or other kindred enterprises as regards a scrupulous adherence to equity and honesty."

My own deep and settled conviction is that neither the Bible nor Christianity will ever be understood until the twofold purpose revealed in the one, and illustrated by the other, is fully and fairly recognized, That purpose I hold to be --

i. PRIMARY. -- The calling out and perfecting of an elect people, known only to God, but destined eventually to be Kings and Priests under Christ in the world to come, and to co-operate with Him in bringing the myriads who have passed away from earth in their ignorance and sin into a higher life and a nobler condition, and to whom alone much of the Bible is specially addressed and adapted.

ii. SECONDARY. -- The education of the race at large, by labor and sorrow, by nature and conscience, and more or less by Divine Revelation, for this other, future, and wider existence.

That such an education, in one form or other, is perpetually going on can scarcely be doubted. Much of it of course is purely elementary, and, as far as we see, having little or no relation to other states of being. But what we see not, God sees; and, by means we little understand, myriads may be preparing for existence in a world where their education can be carried on under more favorable auspices, and with happier results.

The facts of life sustain this expectation. The experiences of every missionary confirm it. It matters not whether we bear the Gospel to a savage or a civilized community. Everywhere and at all times the truth that is diffused touches the many, but triumphs only over the few, To the one it is the parent of a new life; to the other it is merely an enlightener, -- modifying, it may be, laws, customs, and institutions, but having little vital effect on the general conduct of the masses.

It is the same with the Bible. Distribute it as widely as we may, it but little affects a nation. To 'the man of God' only, -- the 'chosen one from the foundation of the world,' is it ' profitable for instruction and for correction in righteousness.' He alone by it is 'perfected unto every good word and work.'

* 'The Patience of Hope,' 3rd edition. Strahan.

** 'It is a remarkable feature of our time that it has produced an order of thinkers who, while avowing their disbelief, see more clearly than many Christians do what Christianity really means. They can perceive what Christians deny, even that neither Shakespeare nor Goethe could have been as great in the world as they have been and are, if they had possessed either the simplicity or severity of Christ.'

Confusions innumerable have resulted from the denial or forgetfulness of this twofold purpose of God: the Christian religion has been presented as if it were a narrow system of favoritism, blessing the few, but infinitely adding to the miseries of the many; the eternal condition of every man has been made to hang on his belief or unbelief of truths he may never have understood, and certainly never deliberately rejected; the Bible has been treated as if it were a talisman; regeneration has been regarded as a change that could be wrought by human agencies and outward ordinances; Christianity has been called a failure, because it has not done what it never professed to do; while the teaching of the Savior, reduced to what has been considered a practicable level, has, to a great extent, lost its power over those for whom it was specially intended, without, in return, acquiring any hold on the multitude for the sake of gaining whom it has been lowered in tone and limited in range. For all this mischief I hold the Churches to be responsible.

NOTE C

INDIVIDUALISM.

(p. 294.)

WHEN writing on 'Modern Romanism' (Part III., chap. vii.) I remarked that zealous Protestants were sometimes much perplexed when they discovered, as they sometimes do, that perversion to Rome has improved the character of the pervert. It might have been added that the same thing has often been observed in other cases; that it is indeed by no means unusual for men to be greatly benefited by the reception of what is to them a new doctrine, even when the novelty in question may involve, as it often does, much error.

The reason for the improvement observed need not be sought in the intrinsic value of what has been discerned; it will more probably be found in that quickening of the mind regarding Divine Revelation generally, which is produced by the attention being strongly drawn, from whatever cause, to its teachings on any given subject. Whatever may be the occasion that leads a man to read his Bible with a fresh interest; to examine it more closely; to weigh and consider its statements more carefully than he had done before, the very fact of his doing so will carry a blessing with it.

Investigations, therefore, although often feeble and one-sided, into unfulfilled prophecy, into the nearness or otherwise of the Second Advent, and inquiries respecting the Destiny of the Human Race, the Eternity or otherwise of Future punishment, or the bearing of Election on the world at large, although not unfrequently spoken of by good men as unprofitable speculations, may be, and often are, highly beneficial to the inquirer. And this whether the conclusions arrived at be right or wrong. They must be so if they are conducted in an intelligent, candid, and prayerful spirit, since the inquirer is thereby led to the more frequent and vivid contemplation of things that are unseen and eternal.

This fact -- for it is a fact -- is full of instruction, and explains to us more clearly perhaps than anything else can, why the Bible was constructed as it has been; why the Apostles never prepared any summary of doctrine for their converts; and tunder what conditions God has ordained that all holy Scripture shall be 'for our learning.'

It has further been observed (Part IV., chap. iii.) that the text, 'And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent [the lawless] take it by force,' indicates how needful at certain times individualism is to the attainment of truth. The inquiry is an interesting one, -- 'Wherein did the time that elapsed between the preaching of John and the general promulgation of Christianity differ from other periods?' The answer to it is scarcely doubtful. The period referred to was one of transition; it was a time when force of conviction, developing a new and hitherto unfelt sense of individual responsibility in relation to truth, would necessarily lead to a course of action sure to be stigmatized by the rulers as lawless and violent.

It is not very easy for us fully to realize the change that was at this time wrought on the Jewish mind. Submission to an authority so unquestionably established by God himself as that of the Jewish hierarchy, was at once the habit and the duty of every devout child of Abraham. To oppose the rulers of flit Theocracy had been long regarded as treason against God, He who did it was said to have set at defiance all legal authority, and became, in consequence of the act, an outcast from the commonwealth of Israel.

Yet to this lawlessness the men of that day are here called. Christ indeed came not to destroy, but to fulfill; but the effect of His coming, owing to the obstinate rejection of His claims by the Scribes and Pharisees, was

to place those who accepted His teaching in direct antagonism with their Divinely appointed spiritual guides. Their first duty as believers was, in the strength of an individualism created and sustained by the Holy Spirit, resolutely to set aside alike the commandments of the Sanhedrim and the traditions of the elders.

Nor is such a fact without its lesson to us. Periods like those to which our Lord refers, not unfrequently repeat themselves in the history of the Church and of the world. Such a period as the reformation from Popery; and such a period will probably come again; whenever it shall appear that existing institutions have lost their power; that their vitality has departed; that accumulated and permitted unrealities have superseded the living and the true.

Those who take alarm at the spread of individualism do so most needlessly. Men are, as a rule, singularly unwilling to allow that it can ever be needful to re-examine any tenet which is generally received: some asserting their incompetence to engage in such investigations; others refusing to listen lest they should eventually find themselves obliged to give up the habit of mere acquiescence in traditional beliefs, and so be involved in responsibilities which they would much rather avoid.

"The desire for truth," says Madame Gasparin. "agrees ill with our comfort, When one values repose, fears currents of air, desires above all things to lead a quiet life, shaded from the sun, guarded from the rain, pleasantly unfolding in the midst of general approbation, one is wise in leaving Truth alone. So soon as a man serves Truth, he must resign himself to displeasure. Nor is it only the indifferent whom he offends; he will pain friends besides. That weak people should find him absurd he could easily hear; but serious minds blame him, and this troubles him. He is proud, they say, full of himself, intractable. A terror seizes him. Am I indeed such a one? and if I am, how can truth dwell with me? Once shaken, they shake him further: they ask him whether he supposes himself to be the only one right, and the whole world wrong; if he believes himself to be God's confidant? The abyss has indeed opened, but heaven has opened also, It is when everything else hides itself that God appears; when all beside fails us, that God imparts Himself."

What the accomplished French lady describes so well applies with eminent force to ourselves. Offer as many apologies as we may for this state of feeling, it exists. Like a lion ready to devour, it stands before the honest inquirer day by day, chained indeed, and so to some extent harmless, but not the less terrifying to those who approach the gate of the temple. Almost every difficulty which Bunyan has depicted as having to be encountered by his pilgrims in their march to the Heavenly City, has at this day to be overcome by all who resolve, regardless of hazard, to follow Truth alone. Why should we wonder then that so few are found traveling in the direction where she points onward; that so many are indifferent, so many more indolent, and the multitude too busy or too ignorant to care anything about the matter?

The happiness, the increased piety, the growth in grace, which follow the search that costs so much, is the compensation that God gives to those who are willing, in the exercise of that Private Judgment which, properly speaking, is only another name for Personal Responsibility, to cast themselves fearlessly on Him alone, and to suffer, if needs be, for the love of the Truth.

Will the observation be misunderstood if it is added that "the spiritual individuality" of Christ is one of the features of the Redeemer which we are bound to imitate? He communed with God alone. He derived nothing from man. Of what He gained by attending either the Temple or the Synagogue we hear nothing; of what He received direct from the Father we hear much.

It will of course be said, 'We are not as He was;' and in a very important sense this is true. But not altogether so. For has He not said, 'Ye shall know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you ' (John 14:19- 20). To how great an extent this Divine indwelling fails to be realized by us, simply because we dread 'spiritual individuality,' -- being alone with God, and prefer to lean more or less on man, it is very difficult for any of us to estimate.

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