

PLYMOUTH
BRETHRENISM.

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BY

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ETC. ETC.



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CHAPTER I.

FIRST ORIGIN OF BRETHRENISM.

No task can well be undertaken by a Christian writer more painful than that of controversy with
And the undertaking becomes

ERRATUM.

Page 21, seventh line of note, for discipline read description.

FAITHFUL AND

'first pure' and 'then peaceable,' to allow our love and respect for individuals, or our just desire for Christian union, to seal our lips where serious error is taught. We have only to glance at the pages of earlier Church history to see that some of the most dangerous heresies have been first

propagated by good and earnest Christian men, who were often doubtless little aware of what their teaching led to. Their spiritual instincts may have neutralized, to themselves, in great part, the errors they taught. But their *fruits* were apparent in their disciples ; and in the next generation of those influenced by their teaching, the 'thorns and thistles' which had been hidden before, became apparent, and the 'plague had begun.'

In the case of the peculiar views we are about to consider,—*i.e.*, those of the teachers usually denominated 'Plymouth Brethren,'—it has been generally the practice of Christian writers and teachers to pass them by in silence. *Attacks* have been made on them, but few attempts, as far as we can judge, have been made to answer them calmly, quietly, and deliberately. Strong expressions of annoyance have not been wanting ; sometimes even an outburst of irritable feeling, which, however it might be palliated by previous provocation, did the cause of the complainant no good ; but very few in any of the Christian Churches have seriously set themselves to examine and consider the tendency and working of a religious movement which, however it may be ignored by many, may be regarded with truth as one of the most remarkable of modern times.

Its influence, it is true, has not been widely or

extensively felt in the world at large : it has been brought to bear almost exclusively on Protestant and Evangelical denominations ; and among these, not on the careless, ignorant, or unawakened, but on the pious, the earnest, the Bible-reading and working Christians, the very 'flower of the flock.' And it is surely no light evil that the ranks of this new party should be recruited chiefly from the very best and choicest members of Protestant congregations of various denominations, especially from the Church of England.

But this is not all : one who leaves the Established or any other Protestant Church, to join another Evangelical denomination, though his pastor and companions will regret his loss, may still be one with them in spirit. He may still be one of those whom all agree in looking on as an active worker in bringing souls to Christ. Our city missions, and ragged-school unions, and open-air preachings, are manned by able and useful men of many different denominations, who can still be fellow-workers in the great fight against ungodliness and unbelief.

But the secessions we speak of, in the majority of instances, put a stop practically to Christian activity, or at least confine it to so narrow a limit that it is virtually extinguished. The words of Dr. Judson, that great leader of missionary work in Burmah, and one in nowise likely to make

assertions without well weighing them, have been proved true by many besides himself:—

‘ They have got hold of ——, and have utterly ruined him,—that is, his usefulness in this world. When the arch-enemy of souls finds a Christian so weaned from the world as to be inaccessible to all the grosser modes of temptation, he first dons this sheep’s clothing of Plymouthism, and, in despair of getting this particular soul, puts a veto on the man’s usefulness, to the serious detriment of hundreds and thousands of others.’

And multitudes of Christian workers, who have seen fair fields of labour ruined at home and abroad by the effects of this movement, can bear witness to the truth of this declaration of the venerable missionary.

Nor is this all. Not only have the ranks of the noble bands who toil in our ragged-schools, and Bible missions, and such kindred works, been thinned year by year; not only have those who were foremost in the field of Christian usefulness diverted the energy once spent in seeking out the lost, mainly and chiefly in urging their old comrades to follow *their* example and leave their respective churches,—the evil has gone further, and entered the Christian families and homes of our country.* We see on every side wives refusing to pray with their husbands,

* And not in our own country only, as all who have resided among Protestants in France and Switzerland can testify.

brothers estranged from brothers, daughters leaving pious and loving parents to lead a life apart, close and happy ties of friendship and affection severed. And this, not, as might happen in any community or denomination, from individual faults of temper or bitterness of spirit in the persons concerned, but from a *principle* distinctly and, so to speak, conscientiously acted out. The persons in question have been led to believe that their course of action is the path of duty and obedience to God.

Many there are, it is true, agreeing in the main with the principles of the 'Brethren,' who would heartily repudiate all such severance; but none the less is it a principle generally recognised and acted on among many of them, as all can testify who have most opportunity of observing its working.

The separatist views of the 'Brethren' have brought division and strife into almost all the departments of mission-work abroad. In countries where evangelistic efforts had been actively carried on for years, the converts have been visited by these new teachers, and by them instructed to turn against those who have been their 'fathers in Christ.' Not content with frankly and affectionately avowing their conscientious differences, they were taught to treat their early instructors as enemies, and instead of fighting side by side against the mighty hostile army, where superstition and unbelief were

arrayed against God's Truth, they turned their arms, like the Jews in the last siege of their devoted city, against their former companions and friends.*

These are painful things to say, and to those who have not looked closely into the question they must seem very harsh and bitter. But it is in no bitter spirit they are said, but in deep sorrow. So many holy, earnest, and devoted Christians have been led into these views, that many others are afraid to notice or blame their errors, lest it should savour of an unloving spirit towards fellow-Christians, many of whom deserve honour and love from us as such, even though they should refuse so to recognise us. But it is false charity which seals our lips where truth is at stake. We do not think lightly of an epidemic because it falls principally on and deals most hardly with the most vigorous constitutions. We rather regard it as a proof of the destructive power of a disease when it cripples and disfigures the healthy and well-formed rather than the sick and feeble.

It cannot be treading in the steps of the Apostle who fought so boldly against the Judaizers among his Christian brethren, if we stand quietly by and see

* Notably was this the case in the Tinnevely Missions in S. India, where the intervention of some holding these views caused a schism which it took years to heal.

so many of Christ's 'beautiful flock' cut off from their fellows, and crippled for service by this blighting influence.

It is not by vehement denunciations or harsh epithets that the evil will be met. It must be confronted calmly and thoughtfully, and the teaching of its propagators brought to the only true test, that of God's Word. 'To the law and to the testimony,' must be our watchword.

We need hardly say that we do not venture on the few remarks which follow in the presumptuous expectation of meeting *all* the difficulties of the subject, but we offer these suggestions in the hope, first, that they may stimulate other and abler pens to take up these important questions and treat of them more fully; and, secondly, that some, especially among the young and ardent, who have been fascinated with these teachers, may be led to pause before they rush eagerly to embrace their views. If but one inquirer be put on his guard, they will not have been written in vain.

Before proceeding to treat of the peculiar tenets and practices of those who call themselves 'The Brethren,' it may be well to begin by a little sketch of the circumstances which led to the rise and progress of this singular body.*

* Several sources, public and private, have been consulted; but especially we have been indebted to an able article in the *British Quarterly Review*, entitled 'Plymouth Brethrenism,'

About the year 1831-32 a strong feeling had begun to manifest itself among many Christian persons of their need for more spiritual advancement and personal devotedness to their heavenly Master. The longing after 'something deeper and truer' than the nourishment which had previously contented them, was drawing at that very moment a considerable body in the Church of England towards that advanced High Church teaching which led to the commencement of the Ritual, or as it was then called, 'Tractarian' or 'Anglo-Catholic movement.

A different manifestation of this same desire among those whose faith was too firmly rooted on Protestant principles and founded on the Scriptures alone, to draw them into such paths, led to the formation of several little circles of pious persons in different places, who met for joint study of the Scriptures, prayer, and religious converse. These 'reunions of edification,' as the French Evangelical Christians call them, were at that time very much less general than they are now. It was *then* quite a new thing for members of different denominations to meet together to pray and read, and confer on the Scriptures. For some time

and published by Hodder and Stoughton as a separate pamphlet. The greatest pains, however, have been taken to obtain from various quarters the most correct information as to the history of the commencement of this movement.

these meetings seem to have gone on without interfering with their attachment to their respective Churches. And even when one of their number, Mr. Groves, proposed to add to these meetings a private celebration of the Lord's Supper among themselves every Sunday, in imitation of the earliest disciples, this was not looked on, apparently, as involving any principle of separation, but regarded much as the 'union communions' held lately at several religious conferences in England and America are now.

One of their earliest associates declared that their principle of communion was 'the possession of the common life' (in Christ); 'and that disciples should bear, as Christ does, with many errors of their brethren.'

For a time all went well. But the separatist principle was very soon to be developed. Some of the little band had left on a mission to Bagdad, and those who remained came under a nearer and more powerful influence than that which had been at first brought to bear on them.

Dublin had been one of the first places in which these meetings had been held; but circles of the same kind had been formed in Bristol and Plymouth, and the latter place became eventually the centre of the movement, to which it eventually gave its name. The Societies were now beginning to take a definite form, and much as they depre-

cated the terms 'sect' and 'denomination,' observers could see that they were more and more assuming a denominational character.

The precise history of the progress made by the principle of Separatism is not easy to ascertain; but when Mr. Groves returned from Bagdad, he was so impressed with the alarming strides which this new principle had made that he wrote to Mr. Darby, who had become the most influential member of the Society, to warn him of the danger. The Societies, he observed, had changed their position from that of witnesses *for* truth to witnesses *against* error.

It was some time, however, before the working of this new principle became generally apparent; but divisions soon began to creep into the camp, and the first 'little rift' in the band of worshippers was formed by disputes on prophecy.

The 'Plymouth Brethren,' as they were now beginning to be denominated collectively, had been all along very earnest in directing the attention of Christians to the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ as the object to which the eyes of the whole Christian Church should be continually directed. They dwelt much, and justly, on the fact that in the New Testament the believer is constantly instructed to watch for his Lord's coming; and they complained that in the minds of many the 'blessed hope' of the Church, the glorious appearing of the

Great Head, had been nearly lost sight of. Their views, like those of many in the Church of England and elsewhere, were strongly pre-millennarian ; and they had bestowed much time and attention on the study of unfulfilled prophecy. But, unhappily, their devotion to this interesting and too much neglected study was accompanied by that spirit of dogmatism and inclination to dispute about details and lay down the law as to the future, which has too often been the bane of prophetic students, and has probably often had the effect of making others afraid of the study and turn away from it altogether.

No school of prophetic interpretation has been altogether free from this tendency ; but in this new Society it had the effect of splitting them into parties strongly opposed to each other in their views of the mode and time of the expected coming of Christ. It would have seemed to an unprejudiced observer that a point so purely speculative, and so impossible *really* to ascertain before it was verified by the event which would make all clear, should have been the last subject to bring about a separation ; and yet it was in reality, as Dr. Tregelles, one of the earliest members of the Society, declares, this controversy which led to the subsequent breach.

In April 1845, Mr. Newton, who had from the beginning been a leading member of the Society,

felt called on to remonstrate strongly, both privately and publicly, against certain doctrinal errors which had crept in among the 'Brethren,' in connexion with some of their peculiar prophetic views. This proceeding aroused a strong antagonism on their part against him, and his opponents, to turn the tables on him, met it by calling attention, about two years later, to a pamphlet which he had published on the subject of our Lord's humanity, about ten years before, to counteract the errors of the Irvingites. In this paper two or three unguarded expressions were discovered, which were supposed to savour of erroneous doctrine on this very subject of the humanity of Christ.

It mattered not that for ten years his accusers had themselves circulated the pamphlet in question without any expression of disapproval; nor that Mr. Newton at once withdrew the obnoxious paper from circulation, confessing that erroneous deductions might have been drawn from his words, though he had no thought or intention of conveying any such ideas, and held firmly to those doctrines respecting our blessed Lord's Person which have been ever accepted as orthodox by the Churches of the Reformation. All this, which might have satisfied any reasonable opponents, availed nothing, for the opposite party were resolved upon a separation.

This was at last accomplished by Mr. Darby,

who had been one of the chief movers in the accusation against Mr. Newton, seceding with a part of the Society, and setting up a separate 'table' from the original Plymouth gathering. In December 1847, Mr. Newton finally and for ever separated from the 'Brethren,' and has ever since been ready to warn others against the errors in their teaching.*

This disruption naturally led to disruptions elsewhere. The seceders called on the 'Brethren' in all places to 'judge the heresy' which had crept in among them, on pain of excommunication. This judgment was to be effected by rigidly excluding

* Mr. Newton, from the commencement of his career down to the present day, has maintained a firm and unswerving attachment to the doctrines of the Reformed Theology. In 1865, he published a series of 'Propositions for the solemn consideration of Christians,' which was most favourably reviewed by several standard writers. His own words, in a late edition of one of his own works, may be cited as a proof of his soundness as a teacher of Christian doctrine.

'The author,' he writes, 'may be permitted to add, that as years roll on, and events unfold themselves, he feels more and more deeply the necessity of closely cleaving to those great foundation truths of our holy faith, which (however practically departed from) are still preserved in the creed and confessions of Protestant Christendom. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the Eternal Sonship of the Lord, His Essential Deity, His *true* though sinless humanity, the perfect and present justification of all believers through His blood, the authority of Holy Writ, its being written in 'words taught of the Holy Ghost,' these, and other connected doctrines, are to the author dearer, he trusts, than life.'

all who sympathised with Mr. Newton from participating in the Lord's Supper at the meetings of the Societies. The greatest obstacle to this decision was found at Bristol, where a Society on the 'Brethren's' plans had been formed under the superintendence of the justly celebrated George Müller, whose Orphanage and other labours of love are now widely known and valued throughout the Christian world. On receiving the command to excommunicate all who frequented Mr. Newton's ministry, the members of the Bristol Society replied that they were not called upon to condemn opinions which had not come before them in their Church capacity, and therefore they could not carry out the proposed mandate of excommunication.

The next step taken by Mr. Darby and those who were associated with him was to excommunicate the Bristol Society at 'Bethesda Chapel' (Mr. Müller's meeting-place), and all who held communion with them in their turn.

'Bethesda' has become ever since, in the eyes of the 'Secessionists' or 'Exclusive Brethren,' as they are termed, a synonym for blasphemy and evil. Mr. Müller and his colleague Mr. Craik were actually spoken of as the 'Bristol Blasphemers;' and the watchword for all who came to take the Lord's Supper with the 'Exclusive Brethren,' was, 'Have you decided *the question?*'

(meaning that of excommunication of all who refused to excommunicate the followers of Mr. Newton, or who held communion with any such). If the answer was unfavourable to the 'Exclusives,' the person questioned was excommunicated. And thus the ban was extended year by year more widely, and the exclusion became more complete. In the emphatic words of Mr. Groves,—

'Out of theories implying the greatest spirituality and heavenly-mindedness has been developed a system wherein the worst vices of human nature,—those defiling things that proceed from the heart of man,—are brought into exercise and sanctified in being made the foundation of union and communion at the Supper of the Lord,—a system that falsely charges godly men with blasphemy, and then makes the acceptance of such charges a ground of Christian fellowship.'

And thus it stands at the present day,—the only change which time has brought about being an increased rigidness in the 'Exclusive' principles and their mode of carrying them out. In general, those who hold with the 'Exclusive Brethren' are willing to receive, under certain circumstances, those who come from other Churches and denominations; but any who are connected with the 'Bethesda' Societies, or others of a kindred character, however high their reputation as Christians, are rigidly excluded.

On the Continent, where the 'Brethren' move-

ment has spread much among Evangelical Christians, especially among converts from the Church of Rome, the exclusion is carried out in a still more curious manner. Foreigners, even though personally unknown to them, are often received, while members of Evangelical Churches on the spot are resolutely excluded. A case in point came under our own eyes some years ago in a town in Italy. A pious old man who lived out of reach of any place of Protestant worship but that of the 'Brethren' was persistently refused the Lord's Supper by them, for no other reason than that of his having been a member of a Waldense congregation, while a lady traveller passing through and attending the service, casually, without even an introduction or any means of knowing her character, was received 'as a sister,' without a question, to take the communion in that same meeting.

We now proceed to notice some of the principal peculiarities which separate members of this body from other Christian communities.

And, first, it is but justice to observe that they are in general very diligent students of Scripture ; and that even those who feel compelled to differ widely from their principles have agreed that valuable matter may be found in some of their earlier works especially. As before observed, the importance of the doctrine of Christ's Second

Advent, as the hope which should be ever kept before the eyes of the Church of Christ, has been much dwelt on by them, though mixed up too often with extravagancies and dogmatic assertions in the details put forward ; and the great and blessed truth of the union of Christ, as Head of the true Church, with His mystical body, His believing people, a truth too often overlooked,—has been set forth by them, and often with much power and fulness.

But these important truths have been mixed up, in the teaching of the ‘ Brethren,’ with so much that is hurtful and erroneous, that,—as usually happens in such cases,—some have received the falsehood along with the truth, and others rejected the truth for fear of the falsehood.

We will now mention, as briefly as possible, some of the leading peculiarities of their teaching. We must premise that this is a task of considerable difficulty ; for, in the words of one of their most able critics, ‘ If we attempt to give an abridgment we shall probably omit some minute point, imperceptible to the naked eye of the uninitiated ; and if we quote passages from their writings we are sure to take them from the wrong place and present them in false juxtaposition : they always complain of misrepresentation.’

All that we can do is to give the heads, as simply as possible, of the views commonly put forth by

them, as far as we have been able to collect them. And this we first proceed to do with respect to their *ecclesiastical* views,—those which are most prominently and habitually brought forward, and most definitely and practically separating them from others.

While holding, in common with other Christians, that the true Church of Christ is a body of believers made partakers of eternal life in Him as their Head, united to Him by a living faith, and regenerated by the indwelling Spirit of God, they go on to maintain :

(1.) The existence of One visible body on earth, representing the Invisible One in the heavens, its members being united not only inwardly by their faith in Christ, but outwardly by their mode of worship and separation from evil. This body they call, not a Church, but 'The Assembly of God.'

(2.) That God's principle of Christian unity is not only *agreement in truth*, but separation from evil : by which is meant unsoundness in doctrine. And the practical deduction from this is, that whenever 'evil' of this kind can be detected, not only must the teacher of such error be expelled from the community, but any person or persons who have received him, or received another who has received him, must be regarded as responsible for whatever error he has taught, and be treated as he is treated.

(3.) That the reception of one whose teaching is unsound does not mean merely reception of him as

a *teacher*, but admitting him to the Lord's Supper. As partaking of this ordinance is regarded by them as the principal act of Christian worship, so, to preserve this worship in its purity, the most sedulous care must be taken, not only to exclude those who live in open sin, but all teachers suspected of unsoundness, and those who even at second, third, or fourth hand, have incurred 'congregational defilement' by holding communion with others who in their turn had been tainted by communion with unsound members. And in accordance with this view, Christians whose personal holiness and soundness as to doctrine no one ventured to dispute, have been continually excluded from the Lord's Supper in 'Brethren's' meetings, on account of having held communion with members of the 'Bethesda' societies, or others of a kindred nature.

(4.) That all sects and denominations are unscriptural; that the Christian Churches are in ruins, and therefore the part of all true followers of Christ is to 'come out' of them all.* (This view, and some others held by the 'Brethren' are also held by most of those in connexion with the 'Bethesda' societies, or 'Open Brethren,' as they are sometimes called.)

(5.) That not only does the Holy Spirit (as all Christian Churches agree) abide in the hearts of

* Compare Barclay's Apology for the Quakers of the Ministry.

true disciples, but that ever since the first foundation of the Church at Pentecost, He holds the special office of 'presiding over the Assembly' of the saints.* In meetings belonging to the religious denominations of the present day, these teachers allege, this Presidency of the Holy Ghost is ignored, and a man fills His place ; but in *the* true Assembly He is the sole president and leader of the meeting, and speaks by whatever man in the Assembly He chooses.

(6.) That all creeds and confessions of faith are to be rejected, as belonging to human systems.

(7.) That an ordained ministry was only lawful in the lifetime of the Apostles. To them alone the commission was given to ordain elders themselves, or to delegate others, like Timothy and Titus, to do the same.† But with the Apostles this power has died, and since their death the appointment of ministers is unlawful, the only ministry left to Christians being what they term the ministry of *gifts*: viz., that any who possess gifts of teaching, preaching, expounding, &c., should exercise them in the assembly as they are moved by the Spirit so to do.

These appear to be the principal heads of the *ecclesiastical* teaching of the 'Brethren.' Their *doctrinal* views are equally peculiar. But before

* Compare Barclay's Apology of Worship.

† Compare Barclay's Apology of the Ministry.

touching on these last we will first consider, one by one, the 'Church views' we have just enumerated, and see how far they can bear the test of reason and of Scripture.*

* It may be alleged by some objectors, that individuals may be found who sympathise with the 'Brethren,' but who do not endorse all the views here named ; and again, that passages may be cited from writers of various denominations and shades of opinion, which may more or less harmonise, on one point or another, with the doctrines mentioned as specially inculcated by the 'Brethren.' But in a case like this, only a *general* discipline can be given. Their objection to confessions of faith makes any other, indeed, impossible ; and we believe that the outline here given of what is commonly propounded by them will be found to be, in its leading features, correct.

CHAPTER II.

ECCLESIASTICAL VIEWS OF THE BRETHREN.

WE will now consider these views in detail. The first point, then, among those insisted on by the Brethren, which we proceed to consider, is their view of the visible Church of Christ. It is remarkable that on this subject their views approximate much more nearly to those of the Church of Rome and other kindred bodies than to those held by the members of Reformed Churches. The view held by most Protestant Christians is, that while visible Churches are intended to hold the place, in some sort, of representatives of the one true invisible Body of Christ, they can nevertheless do this very imperfectly at best, and that *no one* body of Christians on earth has ever existed that could claim for itself the prerogative of being the one sole representative and counterpart of the heavenly Bride,—the one casket to hold the precious gem.

One may think one form of worship or organization more nearly in accordance with what we can glean from the few and scattered notices in the Acts and Epistles, and another may prefer

another ; but most enlightened Protestant Christians would agree, not only that the members of the true invisible Church may be found in various outward denominations, but that no one has a right to claim for his own Church, sect, or community, the title of the ONE Infallible Church on earth, the one pattern of the things in the heavens.

In the forcible words of a living American writer (Dr. Hodge of Princeton):—

‘The Church is a body of Christian men, really such,* and by credible profession such, who are organized for the worship of Christ and the diffusion of His gospel. Wherever there is an organized body of credible, professing Christians, organized for Church purposes, they have a right to be regarded by every other denominational Church as a true Church. This involves intercommunion ; and it also involves that they should regard as valid the sacraments and orders each of the other.’

On the opposite side of the question are ranged the *un*-reformed Churches, and their sympathisers in our own, on the one hand, and the ‘Brethren’ on the other. Both these divisions or classes agree

* It may perhaps be objected to this definition, that man being unable to read the heart, cannot possibly decide who *are* Christians in reality. But the definition of Dr. Hodge need not be affected by this circumstance. In as far as a Church is composed of real and sincere Christians, *in so far* it fulfils the conditions of a Church, as it is here defined ; but men can only take others on their own profession, confirmed, as it will be, if that profession is genuine, by their consistent lives.

that a visible body exists on earth, standing as the only one true representative of the invisible; but they carry out this view in different ways. The Ritual Churches (including the Roman, Greek, Eastern ones, &c., and the High Anglican section of our own) hold that a certain ecclesiastical pattern is to be adhered to, which they believe to be formed on the Apostolic model. The ministry must hold their orders by direct succession from the Apostles; and as a general rule the blessings of God's promises are only enjoyed by those who receive Church ordinances from that unbroken succession of ministers, and are united by baptism to the sacred body into whose pale they are thus gathered.

This, modified doubtless in particular cases, is the general outline of the view held by the unreformed and Ritualistic Churches, and it is at least consistent with itself.

The 'Brethren,' on the other hand, are as determined in insisting on one visible Body on earth as the Ritual Churches;* but here the resemblance stops. They have apparently set out from the same point, but they proceed from it in an opposite direction. *Their* great fundamental principle is that Christendom is in ruins,—the rent state of it

* *Virtually* insisting, that is to say: for if charged with it, they will often deny it in words, while upholding it in fact, and saying the very thing in other words which they have repudiated.

being the best proof of ruin ;* that all the efforts of the Churches to repair the ruins are not only sinful, but quite beyond their strength ; and that the only course for believers now is to withdraw from all religious societies called Churches, and to meet, ' a few sinners saved by grace, in separation from all ecclesiastical evil, owning no other gathering power than the Holy Ghost, and no other centre to which to be gathered but the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and no other creed but the Word of God.'

We quote the words of one of their own body. Yet out of this apparent complete rejection of all ecclesiastical systems they have actually reconstructed on a new basis, what to lookers-on seems nothing less than an ecclesiastical structure as definite and as arrogant and exclusive in its pretensions as the Church of Rome itself.

The 'Open Brethren,' it may be observed in passing, agree in general with the 'Exclusive' ones

* This expression, 'rent state,' they do not seem to perceive to be ambiguous. If by a rent state they mean the existence of separate religious communities, the question is, whether there have not been separate and independent Churches since the days of the Apostles. That these communities should be, so to speak, at war together, is a lamentable proof of the weakness and sinfulness of human nature, even under the highest influences ; but again, does the existence of evil imply hopeless ruin ? If so, the Corinthian and Galatian Churches, and the seven in Asia, must have been, at the time they were addressed, hopelessly ruined ; but we do not find the Apostles or our saying so.

in holding strongly the ruined state of the Church, and many of them go nearly as far in their exhortations to Christians to leave all regular Churches and sects (they do not seem to perceive that they are making, in fact, a sect out of their non-sectarianism); but they do not hold the doctrine of the existence of one visible body on earth to which all Christians are bound to belong.

The 'Brethren' proper (the Exclusives), of whom we are now however specially treating, speak not of the *Church* in general, but of the 'One Assembly of God.'

The difference between the words (whose derivations have evidently the same meaning) is not very clear to a bystander. The 'One Assembly' is as distinct a body as any Church that ever was constructed: for they hold that believers may unite together for worship and hold meetings which are no part of *the Assembly of God*. And the only way in which the real blessings of Christian communion and of exemption from error in teaching can be enjoyed (they hold) is by exclusive fellowship with this 'Assembly,' which is practically, to its members, what the visible 'Catholic and Apostolic Church' is to the Romanists and other Ritual Churches.

Many years ago the claim to infallibility brought forward by the Roman Catholics was answered by Archbishop Whately, in his *Search after Infallibility*, to the following effect:—If such a sure and certain

refuge from all danger of error existed, is it conceivable that the Apostle of the Gentiles should have known nothing of it? And if St. Paul *had* known of it, can it be supposed that when exhorting the elders of Ephesus to beware of the 'grievous wolves' that would 'enter in, not sparing the flock,' he would have suppressed the information that an infallible preservative was within their reach? If they had only to recur to an infallible Church at Rome, or Jerusalem, or elsewhere, could he in common honesty or common humanity, have kept back such a momentous and practical truth? Would he have left the ship to steer unaided when the pilot and compass were at hand?

This argument may surely be applied with equal force to the pretensions of the 'Brethren's' infallible Assembly of God. If it existed, can we conceive the Apostles passing it over in silence? But where do we find any mention of the 'Assembly,' in the 'Brethren's' sense, in the New Testament?

We find in Scripture three senses in which the expression 'Church of God' is used:—

(1.) As including the whole body of believers, living and dead; as when we read 'The Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.' (Acts, xx. 28.)

(2.) As applied to the whole body of believers existing on earth in Apostolic times, or at any one time; as when we read, 'Giving none offence to

the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the *Church of God.*' (1 Cor. x. 32.)

(3.) To the whole body of Christians in a given city ; as 'The Church of God which is at Corinth' (1 Cor. i. 2), or in a given place, or even house ; as 'the Church that is in their house.' (Rom. xvi. 5.)

But how do the definitions of the Assembly as given by the 'Brethren' harmonize with any one of these three meanings? They define the 'Assembly'* as 'the place where God's people *ought* to be ;' 'that assembly which is gathered by God the Holy Ghost round the person of God the Son, to worship and hold fellowship with God the Father ;' as 'the actual living unity with Christ, and with each other of those who since Christ's resurrection are formed into this unity by the Holy Ghost come down from heaven.'

• These definitions throw no light on the question at issue. Do they mean by this 'One Assembly of God' the invisible Church of which all believers form a part? In that case they could not say it is the place where God's people ought to be, for they *are* there already. Nor, for the same reason, can they mean the whole body of living believers on earth ; for the expression, 'where God's people *ought* to be,' implies that, at least conceivably, some of them may be out of it. Nor can it mean all the believers in any one place ; as they declare

* We quote their own words.

that there may be gatherings of believers which are *not* the true 'Assembly of God.' Therefore they cannot mean any of the three senses in which the word 'Church' or 'Assembly' is used in the New Testament.

What, then, can that Assembly be, which is, according to them, in possession of the exclusive power and right to judge of matters of doctrine and practice? That assembly, they will reply, which holds to God's principle of unity. And if we ask what that principle is, their reply is, SEPARATION FROM EVIL.

II. This, then, is the second of their ecclesiastical doctrines we have to consider: how can the unity of the Church be realised by common rejection of error?

Protestants and Romanists agree in rejecting Arianism. Arians and Trinitarians agree in opposing Deists; Deists, and those who receive Christ as the Founder of their religion, agree in rejecting Atheism. Does this common rejection bring them nearer together?

The principle of union in rejecting error is one which carries us on further than we perceive at first. Of course we can all see there are differences which make union in Christian worship impossible. But these differences are surely no points of union, as we observed, to those who agree in holding

them ; if they are united, it is their common *belief* which unites, not their common rejection of error.

And this principle has been carried out far beyond those boundaries which any would regard as concerning fundamental points. Where one Christian sees evil and another sees none, the evil is condemned and the good passed by. Those whom their opponents own to be true and sound Christians are excommunicated, because they refuse to excommunicate others for heresies of which they, perhaps, never heard.

The argument the 'Brethren' usually employ to urge the coming out from churches and other religious communities is commonly this : 'These bodies are not only false in their constitution, but unsound at the core, from being composed of believers and unbelievers.* Now believers are commanded to come out and be 'separate, and touch not the unclean thing.' (2 Cor. vi. 17.) But what is meant by this passage? Clearly, the Corinthians were *not* commanded to come out of the visible Church at Corinth ; which must have contained unbelievers, in the sense of unconverted persons, as it contained 'false apostles ;' but to separate from *heathen* sacrifices and customs—the 'unclean thing' from an idol's temple, which must not defile God's temple.

The Scriptures do not sanction a believer hold-

* This argument is also used by 'Open Brethren.'

ing religious communion with an unbeliever *as such*; but neither do they sanction the separation of persons professing faith in the same Saviour, on a suggestion that one part of them are unbelievers, contrary to their own express avowal. To take men on their own profession is all that those who cannot read hearts can presume to do; and we see it was all the apostles attempted, otherwise we should not read of 'false brethren,' 'false apostles,' men whose 'end is destruction,' in the visible Church in the very time they wrote.

The only Scripture texts which can by any possibility be strained to support this view, besides those alluded to above, are the commands of the Apostle Paul, in Titus, iii. 10, to 'reject' a 'man that is an heretic;' and of St. John, in his second Epistle, not to 'bid God speed' to certain false teachers.

But in these passages the persons named were clearly, from the context, propagators of openly and glaringly anti-Christian doctrine, and most probably men of profligate lives. The description in Titus is of one 'self-condemned' and consciously a sinner; and even in speaking of such an one the word used would be better rendered 'keep away from,' than reject. (See Dean Alford.) In the Epistle of John the persons alluded to openly denied Christ's incarnation. Not a word of these denunciations would sanction the exclusion of one in whose writings close search must be made to

detect some allusion from which heretical sentiments can be gathered, far less of those who are supposed to be defiled by second, third, or fourth-hand communication with heretics !

Indeed, the tenor and spirit of New Testament precepts does not favour the view, that the existence of evil in a religious community is sufficient ground *alone*, for the servants of God leaving it. The Lord Jesus, when blaming the Scribes and Pharisees in the severest terms, frequented the synagogue Himself, and bade His disciples 'observe and do' what those rulers who 'sat in Moses' seat' commanded them, even while warning them at the same time not to follow their example in their corrupt practice. St. Paul never desires the Corinthian Christians to leave the Church on account of the fearful abuses which had crept in, or the 'deceitful workers' who were in that Church; and in the addresses of our Lord to the Seven Churches, while denouncing the evil in the Churches of Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea, we do not find a word of counsel to true Christians to withdraw themselves.

The argument drawn from this abstinence has been answered by one of the 'Brethren' by the assertion that Christ's object, in the exhortations to the Churches, was not to tell them what *they* were to do or not to do, but to tell them what *He* was about to do !

A more extraordinary assertion was never made ; for each address, as every reader can see at a glance, contains some practical exhortation to believers. The Thyatira Christians, who had 'not known the depths of Satan,' were bid, not to come out, but to 'hold fast what they *had*.' The few in Sardis who 'had not defiled their garments' are encouraged. All who heard are exhorted to hold fast and repent. Why are none bidden to leave the Churches? Surely we may infer that as long as they could obtain Christian teaching, and were not compelled to *join* in what they conscientiously felt to be wrong, the existence of evil in their community was no reason for quitting it.

Of course it may often happen that these very reasons may make it imperative for faithful Christians to leave the Church in which they had been brought up, as was the case at the Reformation ; and as has been since, with multitudes in connexion with churches so hopelessly corrupt, that when once awakened to the fact that they are so, a Christian may well feel that he cannot breathe freely till he separates from them. And this it is which has led to the widespread secession from the unreformed Churches in our own days, which has gone hand in hand with such a blessed revival of Gospel teaching in many Continental countries where Romanism formerly prevailed almost unchecked.

And doubtless, even where there is no actual

violation of conscientious conviction by remaining, a Christian may lawfully join a community where he believes he will enjoy more spiritual advantages and meet with more profitable teaching than in his own.

And again, there are cases in which it may be expedient to prefer some special form of Church organization for special reasons, or to revive an old one, as in the case of the 'United Brethren's' Church of Bohemia. The circumstances, in short, may be many and various in which it may be allowable, or even desirable, to leave one religious community for another. But the addresses to the Seven Churches certainly do show us, that it should not be *lightly* done, as it too often is ; that even the existence of a state of things as sad as that in the Church of Sardis, was no reason why those who 'had not defiled their garments' should not be able to keep themselves pure, in the midst even of many abuses ; that they were *not* looked on as answerable for the evil in their Church, but were distinctly applauded as having escaped that evil ; and that, where it *can* be conscientiously done, we may often be far more useful by abiding in, than by hastily quitting, the Church we belong to.

III. We come now to the third of the heads we had enumerated, viz., that of the exclusion from the Lord's Table of all in whose teaching any

heresy could be detected, and not only those individuals, but any who have received them, or have received those who have received them ; the 'defilement' being supposed to spread like the plague from one congregation to another. It would indeed be difficult to discover a warrant in Scripture for this system of close communion. We are told, indeed, that a man is to 'examine *himself*,' but never to be examined by *others*. The only passage which can possibly be taken as a warrant for this system of examination before communion, is the one which is rather frequently cited by others even, as well as 'Brethren,' the passage in 1 Cor. v. 2 : 'with such an one, no, not to eat.'

Obviously, from the context, it is of openly profligate and evil livers that the Apostle speaks ; so, even if it is to be taken as referring to the Communion, it would not sanction the kind of exclusion practised by the 'Brethren,' which falls most severely on the persons of most decided piety. But the context of the passage leaves it very doubtful if the Lord's Supper was meant at all. The apostle had just been speaking of intercourse with the *heathen* world, with whom there could be no question of Christian communion ; and then he proceeds to say that if one who is called a *brother* be one of bad life, &c., 'with such an one, no, not to eat.' This has much more the appearance of an allusion to the common intercourse of society.

But there is a text which has been so much used by writers of this school as the basis for their notions of 'congregational defilement' that it requires to be taken into serious consideration. The text in question comprises the 20th and 21st verses of 2 Tim. ii. : 'In every great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.'

The 'great house,' it is asserted, is 'Christendom,' as they call it,—the whole Christian world. The 'vessels of dishonour' are unsound teachers. To 'purge himself from these' is to be clear of the evil connected both with unsound teaching and wrong practice, in all churches and communities; and to effect this a Christian must 'come out' from them all, and worship only with those Christians who hold the same views.

Here we have a series of assumptions so curiously joined together that it is difficult to know where to begin if we would destroy the fabric thus built up,—and still harder to find the basis on which each one rests. We are reminded of those Hindoo Cosmogonies, who taught that the earth rested on an elephant, the elephant on a tortoise, and the tortoise on nothing!

In the first place, how are we to know that the 'great house' means Christendom, or any church or churches? This is a gratuitous assumption to begin with. Secondly, how are we to prove that 'vessels of dishonour' mean unsound religious teachers? Taking the passage which precedes it,—'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,'—which is united to the verse following by the Greek particle 'δέ' (translated *but*),—it would seem as if the more obvious and simple explanation would be that the 'vessels of dishonour' meant persons of openly sinful and depraved life, who had *not* followed the precept of 'departing from iniquity.' There is nothing in the context to sanction the idea that unsound doctrine was alluded to. The Apostle's discourse in that chapter is entirely with reference to *practice*, not teaching.

But even granting for the sake of argument that unsound teachers were the 'vessels' alluded to, what would the verse suggest to a plain reader who came to it with no previous bias? Surely that each one, *for himself*, should avoid being led astray by the propagators of false doctrine. Is there anything in the verse that would lead any unbiassed reader to suppose that the unsound doctrine would be communicated from one congregation to another, rendering 'unclean' even those who might never have heard of the heresies in question?

And again, even supposing the 'great house' to mean Christian churches in general, or any one church in particular, would this imply that the 'vessels of honour' can only be cleansed by expulsion?

But the 'Brethren' affirm that the 'great house,' viz., 'Christendom,' is hopelessly defiled, and the pure vessels can only contract fresh defilement by remaining in it. And this brings us to the next head enumerated above, that of,—

IV. The duty of Christians to 'come out from Christendom.' But before we decide that such a step *is* a duty, we must begin by inquiring whether it is a duty possible for us to perform,—whether, in short, we CAN 'come out of Christendom?'

What do we mean by the term? The simplest way in such cases is to argue by analogy. The nouns of multitude, of which 'Christendom' is one, are usually employed to denote, not any particular organization, but the whole body or class which the noun may be considered as qualifying, as a general term. We speak of the 'artist world,' the 'agricultural interest,' 'the medical body,' 'the civilised world,' not in allusion to any guild or society of artists, agriculturalists, or the like, but to denote collectively all to whom the title, 'artist,' 'medical man,' and so on, respectively, could be applied.

If then we are to observe the same rule in using the term 'Christendom,' it would correctly be applied, not to any church or churches singly or in the aggregate, nor even to the whole class of ecclesiastical organization generally, but to all those in the mass who profess to be Christians, whether belonging to any particular church or not. As an individual artist or medical man, though he should keep aloof from his fellows, would still be part of the artistic or medical body; so an individual Christian, though he should be entirely isolated from all others, must in this sense be part of *Christendom*.

If this definition be correct,—and certainly most standard writers use the term in this sense,—it will follow that to 'come out from Christendom' is as impossible for any one who retains even the name of a Christian as for a human being to get out of the human race. In this sense the most solitary and isolated Christian *must be* a part of Christendom. Of course he can separate himself from all communion with his fellow-Christians and read and pray alone. Some persons have done this, and entitled themselves the 'isolated;' and at all events *their* course of action is so far consistent. The isolated Christian is doing all in his power to keep clear of the great mass which he looks on as wholly and hopelessly polluted.

All *in his power*, we have said: but there is *one*

sinful and polluted being of whom he *cannot* keep clear, and that is, *himself*. He may escape one set of dangers, but he will encounter another class, and that of a more subtle kind. He will avoid what Bacon called the 'Idols of the market-place;' but the other classes of 'false notions or idols' of which the great philosopher warned us, and especially of those he denominated 'Idols of the *den*,'—the false notions acquired in a life of exclusively solitary reflection, will still be liable to bias him, and all the more from being off his guard, while he foregoes all the advantages of united action and the blessings of united worship. And even in his solitary 'den' he is and must be a part of Christendom, as he is a part of the inhabited world, and can no more escape either than he can his shadow.

However, the 'isolated' will never be likely to form a large class. The majority of those who have thought they could 'come out of Christendom' by withdrawing from Churches and religious communities, have joined little bands of fellow-Christians like-minded with themselves, and while refusing the name of a 'sect' have, in fact, formed one, or many, as the case may be. And as soon as this step has been taken, as soon as the Christian has 'entered into fellowship' (as they call it) with a group of companions, so soon will he be exposed to the dangers which must beset united bodies of men under all circumstances. Some of these

dangers are more rife in large bodies and others in small ; some affect chiefly those long established, others those more recently formed ; but as long as human nature, even when renewed by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, remains frail and imperfect, so long will there be certain evils and dangers specially to be guarded against, wherever men are met together, whether for work, for general purposes, or for worship and mutual edification. The smallest society of the kind is liable to be made up of 'wheat' and 'tares ;' all the care possible will never effectually prevent the evil. Even persecution from without,—a far more efficient purifier than the severest discipline within,—did not keep out 'false apostles, deceitful workers,' or those whose 'glory was their shame,' in the apostolic days.

It will be replied that we are doing all we can to keep out the mixed element by these precautions. But what if, in our ill-directed efforts, we are actually rooting out the wheat while we keep in the tares? A very searching discipline (we do not speak in reference to open moral derelictions) is apt to act much as a lawyer's severe and threatening cross-examination of witnesses often does : the honest ones are terrified, confused, and silenced, while the dishonest ones pass muster. The same thing, we believe, has often taken place in Christian communities.

But the 'Brethren' would probably reply to these objections, that they are under a Divine guidance which protects them from dangers of this kind ; and this brings us to the next head under consideration ; namely,

V. The Presidency of the Holy Ghost in the Assembly.

This is a doctrine on which they lay peculiar stress, and it therefore requires special consideration. The expression is not one to be found in the New Testament. We may search it from end to end in vain, to find anything even implying it in so many words. But they maintain that it can be deduced from certain passages of Scripture. The passages referred to by their chief writers are two in especial. The first is Matt. xviii. 20 : ' Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'

Now if this passage implies any presidency at all (none is *named* in it), it is that of Jesus Himself, not of the Holy Spirit as distinct from Him. But what privilege do the 'Brethren' deduce from this promise that may not be equally claimed by *any* Christians who meet to pray in the name of Christ? The promise given manifestly refers to prayer, and not church government : it was of prayer that the Lord Jesus had been speaking ; it was as an encouragement to meet together in His name that

He gives the promise, as may be plainly seen by the context. In the words of the able pamphlet already quoted: 'It is the least ecclesiastical passage in Scripture, and refers in no way to the display of gifts or to ministry. Our Lord does not refer to the Holy Spirit at all, but to the disciples' recognition of the value of His own name, and this does unquestionably determine the character of the gatherings.'

The previous verse, 'If two of you shall agree on earth touching anything ye shall *ask*,' shows that the meeting spoken of was for prayer. Nothing is said of any other object.

Again, if this text is to establish the presidency of the Holy Ghost, how comes it that it was never referred to during the time when the Apostle Paul was writing his Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, and his catalogue of ministerial offices to the Ephesians? The text existed then. Was it to remain in abeyance during Apostolic times?

The other text generally quoted in support of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's presidency, is an extract taken from the 33rd verse of 1 Cor. xiv.: 'God is the Author.' This is the manner in which it is quoted by writers of this school. But when we turn to the passage we find that the word 'author' does not exist at all. It is in italics, having been inserted in the translation. Literally rendered, the passage would read, 'God is not of confusion,

but of peace.' Undoubtedly the word 'author' was judiciously supplied by the translator; but it was negatively, not positively, applied to God. The verse was to point out what God was *not*, instead of what He *was*.

What has this to do with the 'presidency in the assembly?' Again: as it has been truly remarked, if there be a Divine presidency, which ensures peace and guards against confusion in the assemblies, why does Paul presume to rebuke the proceedings in the assembly at Corinth? Why does he give them directions as to their speaking and their cultivation of the gifts they possessed, and conclude with the words, 'The rest will I set in order when I come?' If there existed this Divine presidency, there could have been nothing to set in order. Indeed all the directions, both in the Pastoral Epistles and others, as to ministry and order, would have been utterly superfluous, and worse than superfluous, for they would literally have been dictating, not to man, but to God.

Those who argue in this manner are apt to have recourse to a kind of appeal to our faith, 'Do you believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit?' If we reply we do, the answer is, 'Then you should believe He presides wherever there is a gathering in the name of Christ,' as if the one thing followed from the other.

Some say, that wherever the Holy Spirit is,

there He *must* preside. But is not this dictating to God? How can we tell if such is His will? By parity of reasoning we might say, wherever God is, there He must be the supreme Ruler, and *therefore* we may look for a theocracy like that of the Israelites of old. Such questions are not to be decided in such a manner. It is only by referring to God's Word that we can really know what He will or will not do.

Doubtless, we have the promise that the Comforter should come to be with us, to teach, to convince of sin, and 'take of the things of Christ, and show them to us.' But of His presidency in the assembly we have NO promise; and we do not show faith, but presumption, in taking for granted God will do for us what He has never told us He would do.

If we carefully and patiently study the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, we shall see that the promises of the Holy Spirit's presence with, and guidance of, the Christian Church do not imply—

(1.) Certain protection from false and unworthy men joining the Church. (Acts, v. 1-11; viii. 9-24; 2 Cor. xi. 13.)

(2.) Nor even security for their being at once discovered and cast out. (2 Cor. xi. 26; Gal. v. 12; Phil. iii. 18, 19.)

(3.) Nor certain protection against divisions. (Acts, vi. 1; 1 Cor. i. 11, 12.)

(4.) Nor immunity from false teachers, and the possibility of being deceived by them. (Acts, xx. 29, 30.)

If such a sure protection from these dangers had existed in the days of the Apostles, as that of the 'presidency in the assembly of the Holy Spirit,' is it conceivable, as observed before, that St. Paul should never have noticed it when warning the Ephesian elders and the Corinthian converts against false teachers?

True it is, many have ignored or overlooked the real promises of the help of that blessed Spirit, without which no preaching or teaching, however eloquent, can avail. But faith is shown, not in expecting things that have never been promised, but in trusting implicitly in what *has* been.

As far as the Word of God is faithfully preached, and the Gospel message delivered in its integrity and purity in any Christian congregation, in so far we have good cause to believe that the Holy Spirit is guiding the teachers and preachers in such a congregation.

And, again, in as far as each Christian manifests the fruits of the Spirit in his conversation and life, in so far are we called on to recognise, by the surest tokens, that the same blessed power is working in him. We cannot trust too fully and freely to the precious promises of the Comforter's pre-

sence, and help, and strength, and guidance; or recognise too fully our entire dependence on His power to make us 'new creatures in Christ Jesus.' But let us beware of saying, 'The Lord saith,' 'when the Lord hath not spoken.'

CHAPTER III.

ECCLESIASTICAL VIEWS (*continued*).

THE MINISTRY.

WE proceed to notice the next point enumerated : namely,

VI. The unlawfulness of a regular ministry in the Church of Christ.

The 'Brethren' acknowledge that the apostles had authority to ordain elders and other ministers, and even to delegate others, as Paul did Timothy and Titus, to do the same ; but they allege that this power was limited to the apostles and those immediately appointed by them, and, consequently, that on the death of the last elder appointed by an apostle, no one being left who had authority or right to appoint others, the office *ought* to have died out of the Church then and there finally. They found this declaration on the circumstance that we do not read in the Acts or Epistles of any but an apostle, or an apostle's delegate, exercising the function of appointing ministers.

But surely it would have been very strange if we had ! Who but the founder of *any* society should

appoint its first officers? The apostles, as the first founders of the Christian Church, were naturally and inevitably the persons on whom the office of choosing and appointing officers would fall. But to assume that therefore no one after their death could carry on their work,—a work which would seem essential to the existence of *any* community, secular or religious,—is assuredly a most gratuitous assumption.

There may undoubtedly be cases in which *silence* amounts to a prohibition; but surely no plain reader, coming with an unbiassed mind to the subject, would ever think that this could be one of them. As well might we conclude that the command to preach the Gospel was only given to our Lord's disciples, and intended to cease with their death.

We do not act in this manner in judging of the affairs of this life; and we see, by our Lord's illustrations and parables, that we are to employ, with regard to spiritual things, the same common sense which guides us in ordinary life. Now it is true that in the case of a will or deed of gift it is needful to make a distinct provision for the appointment of fresh trustees to a property at the death of their predecessors, to avoid legal quibbles and dishonest dealing; but we should not expect our Lord's precepts, or those of His apostles, to be given on such a principle.

On the other hand, if a ruler or lawgiver were to draw up a code of regulations and appoint Ministers of State to carry them out, it would *not* be natural to conclude that this code was only meant for one generation, and that at the death of the individual Ministers the State must be left without government.

If the appointment of Church officers had been intended to be only a temporary provision for the first few years of the Church's existence, we should certainly have expected a distinct declaration to that effect, and a prohibition of all future appointments after the death of the apostles.

This is what God has done in other cases. For example, when it was intended that the manufacture of the sacred anointing oil should be of a peculiar kind and confined to the family of Aaron, the Israelites were not left to *guess* whether it should be imitated or no. The most explicit commands, enforced by the severest penalties, were laid on the people, that none but the house of Aaron should ever dare to compound this oil, and none should imitate it.

In all cases of *positive* ordinances (*i. e.* commands where the conscience and reason could not help us) very distinct commands and prohibitions are required; and, as we might expect in ordinances dictated by Infinite Wisdom, we do find the clearest and fullest directions in all such cases laid

down.* In the case before us, the prohibition of any after the apostles appointing ministers would certainly be a *positive* prohibition, because our moral sense and our judgment could never have led us, in the first instance, to conjecture that such an ordinance was intended to be merely temporary.

Any one in judging of the case *à priori* would have concluded the contrary; for if there ever was a time when the Church might have been supposed to be able to dispense with a regular ministry it would have been in the lifetime of the apostles, who could be consulted in cases of difficulty, and could 'set in order' what was wrong. We should naturally think that officers and governors were more than ever needed when the Founders of the Church were withdrawn.

And when we read those full and careful instructions in the Pastoral Epistles as to the appointment and choice of Church officers, would it be natural to think that these were written only for Timothy and Titus, and intended to be a mere dead letter, an antiquarian curiosity and nothing more, after their death?

It is noteworthy that while the directions in the Levitical law were minute and stringent, a very considerable degree of liberty existed in the religious organization of the ancient Hebrew Church,

* See Archbishop Whately's *Lessons on Religious Worship*.

beyond the pale of these Levitical ordinances. The whole synagogue system,—the services, the appointment of rulers, scribes, and readers and expounders of the law,—all these are never mentioned in the law of Moses: all we can find there, to sanction the synagogue institutions, are the general exhortations to study and meditate on the law of God.

If the ancient Hebrews had reasoned like the 'Brethren,' they might have concluded, with far more apparent plausibility, that the *silence* of the law of Moses implied a *prohibition* of all regular services and organizations except those mentioned in the books of Moses. 'If God had intended us to have anything beyond the Tabernacle or Temple service,' they might have argued, 'He would have told us to do so expressly: where He has not spoken we must not venture to make any regulations.'

Accustomed as they were to full and minute instructions, they would have had more reason, we should have supposed, for judging in this way, than Christians and Gentiles could.

But they did not so conclude, and the issue proves that they were right. The synagogue services, though established independently of special Divine commands, were sanctioned by our Lord's own personal attendance on them. He not only availed Himself of them in His own teaching, but enjoined His hearers (as before remarked) to do as

the Scribes commanded them. The apostles and their companions in missionary labour availed themselves constantly of the synagogue services, and some have supposed that they furnished the model on which the earliest Christian services were drawn up.*

Indeed, the principle of concluding silence to imply a prohibition, if carried out thoroughly, might render a large portion of the New Testament nearly a dead letter to all who were not alive when it was drawn up.

A curious instance of the hasty assertions into which a controversialist may be led by his eagerness to prove his point, is to be found in one of the writings of a teacher of this school on the point in question. He alleges that the circumstance of the Churches first formed by Paul and Barnabas in Asia Minor (Acts, xiii.) having *waited* till the return of the Apostles, without taking the appointment of elders into their own hands, proves both that elders or ministers were not essential to a Church, and that these early converts felt they had no right to appoint them without an Apostle. He assumes that a *considerable time* was spent in this transition state. But surely this supposition is gratuitous, for we have the first evangelising visits to these cities recorded in chap. xiii. of the Acts,

* See Canon Bernard's translation of 'Vitringa,' and Archbishop Whately's *Lessons on Religious Worship*.

and in the very next chapter, during the *same* missionary journey, we have the return of the Apostles recorded and the ordination of ministers. They had been driven away by persecution, and returned seemingly with as little delay as possible.

As the new converts were aware (as they must have been) that their instructors were within reach, and *intending* to return to them, it was certainly the most natural course for them to wait for this return to construct and organise their Church,—a work in which they had no experience, and which, during the Apostles' lifetime, was of course *their* special care. Had they known that the Apostles were *never* to return to them, it would have been equally reasonable for them to endeavour, as they best could, to make arrangements for the organization of the new communities.

But the assertion that officers are essential to the existence of a community, or society, may be perhaps answered by the declaration that the opponents of such an ordinance find they can perfectly well carry on their meetings without anything of the kind.

That the use of the words, 'pastor,' 'minister,' or 'elder,' shall be prohibited, is easy enough. But it is plain that a society framed on the simplest plan must have some one to fix the hours of meeting, receive or expel members, and so on. These things must be decided one way or another : if they

are put to the vote, some one must collect the votes ; if they are left quite to chance, some voice stronger than the others will carry the point. And the person or persons who make these arrangements (in whatever way, acknowledged or unacknowledged, they are carried out) are in fact, for the time, acting the part of ministers or officers of the society.

In the cases before referred to in which the duty of the assembly is considered to be to exclude from the Lord's Table any one who 'has received another who has received a false or unsound teacher,' there must be some voice or voices to decide, first, whether the person in question has really been in such and such a congregation or receiving such persons ? secondly, whether that congregation or these persons are tainted directly or indirectly with false doctrine ? And however this decision be made, it is clear that whoever takes a part in it, is exercising, in a certain sense, the function of an officer in the community, however he may deprecate and reject the title.

In most cases some are found in all societies who will rise naturally to the surface,—to whom others instinctively yield. There are leaders and governors by nature : and though such leaders may be quite as much at liberty to abuse their power as those more regularly chosen, perhaps more so, still the most irregular government is better than absolute anarchy. But the important

point is not to deceive ourselves by imagining we have learned to dispense with certain helps, when the difference in fact only exists in the names used and the regularity and mode of appointment.

But we are told by these writers that not only the security against abuses, but a sufficient substitute for the ministry of orders, is to be found in what they term the *ministry of gifts*, or the continual existence, as mentioned in the seventh head we enumerated, of—

VII. Spiritual gifts.

This ministry it is, they maintain, which supplies the place of a regularly ordained ministry in our days.

Doubtless we have no reason to believe that the inward gifts of the Holy Spirit will ever be withdrawn from the Christian Church.

But there is this difference between *gifts* and *graces*. The fruit of the Spirit,—(Gal. v. 24)—the graces flowing from His indwelling—are for *all* who ask in faith.

That 'excellent way' which St. Paul showed his hearers to be superior to the highest gifts (1 Cor. xii. and xiii.) is for all true disciples,—all fruit-bearing branches of the Great Vine; and for this they have but to seek and find. 'He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit.' (John, xv. 7.)

But though the *graces* (the love, the peace, the holiness of life) are for all who seek them, the *gifts* are bestowed with diversity (1 Cor. xii. 4), and not equally, or at all times in the same way.

In our days it does not seem to be in general the Lord's will to bestow those extraordinary gifts which we call *miraculous*. We do not find Christians foretelling the future or speaking with tongues, &c.

The gifts of preaching and teaching the Gospel, on the other hand, wherever they have been blessed to the souls of the hearers, we may believe to have come from the Divine Bestower of the 'Tongue of fire.'

But the difficulty which these persons do not contemplate is, that the Christian Church in our days has clearly not been given the power of *certainly knowing and discerning where these gifts exist*.

In the case of miraculous powers, this discerning power would not be needed. Any one could see if diseases were healed or unknown tongues interpreted. But in respect of those gifts which we believe exist at the present day,—the gifts of teaching, exhorting, preaching, &c.,—how is it possible to form a judgment in which all will agree? One may think himself, and be thought by his friends, to be possessed of powers as a preacher, for example, while others have a low

opinion of those powers. We see every day infinite differences of opinion on the capacities of different teachers and preachers.*

* In a recently published tract by a member of a congregation of 'Open Brethren,' the writer strongly reprobates the conduct of those who, when they assemble together for worship, attempt to speak, exhort, or pray when the 'gifts' are not forthcoming. He affirms that it would be better to sit through meeting after meeting in unbroken silence than for 'the next best man' present to do the 'best he can,' as is generally the practice. But he forgets that we have no means of certainly knowing in any given meeting whether these 'gifts' (this 'power') is present or not. We may mistake a strongly-excited state of feeling, or a burst of enthusiasm, for a 'gift of the Spirit;' and on the other hand, it may be that the humble efforts of the despised 'next best man' doing the 'best he can,' may actually be the exercise of God's 'gifts,' though not in the way he or his companions expected. The Holy Spirit works in us as truly through our reason and common sense as through our feelings: His promised guidance may be, and probably is, in these days, oftener through providential leadings than through sudden impulses and intuitive feelings, 'borne on the mind.' And one who comes to some Christian gathering for reading, or prayer, or instruction, and finds that those he may think better qualified to minister at it are wanting, and that *he* is 'the next best man,' may be as truly led by the Spirit of God, if he prayerfully endeavours to 'do the best he can,' in giving the word of exhortation, or explanation of the Scriptures, or offering up the prayer which he thinks is needed for the time or place, as if he was borne away on the wings of some sudden impulse or aspiration; perhaps more so.

The 'Brethren,' while objecting strongly to the use of any form of prayer, even the Lord's Prayer, see no evil in the use of *hymns*, which must, from their very nature, be *forms* previously prepared. But they object to choosing a hymn beforehand, maintaining that the guidance of the Spirit will lead a Christian in a meeting to open the book then and there at the right place.

But this is a difficulty which exists, it will be replied, in all communities. Of course it does ; but in regularly organized bodies it is a difficulty which is at least recognised. Men are solemnly chosen and set apart for the ministry, and urged to examine themselves and see if they are truly called to the work. Doubtless many neglect this ; doubtless many are chosen unwisely and wrongly, by those whose duty it is to choose. These are evils which, in our imperfect state, cannot be entirely avoided with the most sedulous care. But the 'Brethren' forget that if any, the smallest check, be laid on any man's standing up to speak in the assembly, the person or persons who exercise this function are acting in some sort as ministers, deny it as they may.*

But we have faith in God, they reply, to believe

Of course the execution of the hymns must in most cases suffer from the want of previous practice together ; but this their principle positively forbids.

* It must be conceded that they have one strong point which they can plead with truth against most organized communities : viz., the tendency to ignore the difference between the gifts of a pastor or teacher on the one hand, and an *evangelist* or missionary on the other. There can be no doubt that there are admirable and efficient pastors who do not succeed as evangelists, and evangelists of the first class, as to power, who cannot act as pastors ; and yet too often the work of both is expected from one individual. This distinction, however, is better understood now than it was a little time back ; and we can trace much encouraging effort in a right direction in various countries and Christian communities.

that He prevents these confusions and difficulties. That He *could* prevent them, and bestow the power of infallibly and certainly discerning the reality of gifts, we do not for an instant doubt; but there is no faith shown in declaring that He *will* do a thing because we have made up our minds that it is desirable. Practically, it is certain that there is *no infallible* mode of judging of gifts, and that the wisest and best men have made mistakes. And while this imperfection exists, it is clear that a ministry of gifts *alone can* have no existence, call it by what name we will.

All that is left to us to do is to decide according to the best of our judgment, with prayer for Divine help and guidance, on the powers, whether natural or spiritual, which may fit any man for the exercise of ministry; and those who officially do so decide, are really and virtually holding an *office* of ministry in the community or society to which they belong.

VIII. We now come to the question of sects.

These, it is said, are contrary to the Word of God, and every Christian should leave them. But here again the question is, What is a sect? If the word is applied to a certain number of Christians forming a community, and agreeing to worship, and be regulated in a certain manner, how is it possible to give up sects except by giving up united worship?

It is quite clear that all Christians cannot live in one place and worship in one room. It is also clear that even where this might be feasible, as far as numbers go, the difference of views on minor matters *must* lead to outward separation, unless external coercion be employed. The smaller matters, in fact, divide more than greater ones, practically, in respect of united worship. Fellow-worshippers might differ on predestination and free will, and yet worship together; but the questions as to the use or non-use of a liturgy, the manner of administering the Lord's Supper, the employment of instrumental music in worship, &c., are questions, which, however trivial in themselves, must practically separate worshippers.

In such cases there are but two alternatives: either for the majority to force the minority into compliance with practices they object to, or to allow the several congregations to follow the modes of praying, singing, &c., which they respectively think most suitable, without condemning their neighbours for differing. And surely such a course is more likely to produce real peace and harmony than any attempts at a forced conformity.

It has been well observed that many neighbours and friends can live in perfect harmony, who would disagree if they were compelled to reside in the same house, and conform to the same habits of life. And this holds good even more in a religious body;

for many things may be yielded as a matter of friendly compliance, which, if they were insisted on as a matter of religious duty, an honest Christian would feel bound to resist. He might contentedly, on occasion, eat salt fish on a fast-day, for instance; but if he were called on to declare that he believed such an observance to be binding on him as a Christian, he must refuse at all risks if he were convinced of the contrary.

How is it possible, then, while men differ in their views on subjects of every kind, theoretical and practical, to put a stop to sects, except by putting a stop to religious liberty?

It is replied by some that the Holy Spirit's presence will reconcile all such difficulties. But experience contradicts this, as far as agreement on points of practice goes. Where that blessed Spirit is really working in the heart, as we may believe, we shall see its fruits in a real and cordial Christian love between those who differ on many points, *in spite* of their differences; the spirit of contention will disappear, and the differences will take their right place. But to say that none will exist is to deny or ignore actual facts. We see, and know, and have opportunity of observing every day that the holiest and best of Christians, while united on the great vital foundation points of their faith, do continue to differ on minor points.

Nor do we find that a mighty work of revival

tends to produce outward conformity in modes of worship. What it *does* produce is a spirit of mutual love, and a deep realisation of the points of union, which underlies and triumphs over all minor differences. We have seen great gatherings taking place in our own and other countries among persons of various nationalities, denominations, and shades of opinion in lesser matters, where brotherly love, among those united in living faith in Christ, swept away all distinctions, and they could meet in prayer and praise, and even at the Lord's Table, as brethren in Christ.

'But then they went back to their several denominations.' This is the objection we have often heard. Certainly so; and this showed that the spirit of love really triumphed over their distinctions. Had they conceived it necessary to remodel their respective congregations and mould them into one, they would have thereby shown that their distinctions were viewed as of greater importance than their agreement. By agreeing to meet as brethren, though *not* drilled into any given form, they were bearing witness to the existence of unity *without* uniformity, to the possibility of sects and communities existing without that which is the real evil to be dreaded in all such matters, the *spirit of sectarianism*.

The sects which the Apostle condemns were

not communities formed independently of each other, but parties formed *within* the Church : men setting up rival teachers one against the other—strifes as to which were the greatest, Paul, Apollos, or Cephas ;—in short, that *sectarian spirit* or party-spirit which might exist, though all the Christians in the world were to worship in the same manner and by the same rule.

‘ But,’ the objectors reply, ‘ this is taking a very low view of the Holy Spirit’s power to unite all who love Christ together.’

Scarcely, if we consider that the love which can exist in spite of differences, is a higher and deeper love than that which refuses to allow them. To leave our own religious body and join another may happen to be a solemn duty in individual cases, when we find that remaining would involve compliance with what we disapprove ; but it can hardly be looked on as a proof of brotherly love. But when members of many different churches and denominations can learn to look on each other, not as rivals or foes, but as soldiers in one great army, only differing as to the uniform of the several regiments ; when they can learn to rejoice in the success of each other’s Christian work, to be ‘ helpers of one another’s joy,’ to be careful in the mission-field to avoid rivalry in their efforts, and ‘ building on another man’s foundation,’—then,

indeed, true Christian love will have taken its proper place, and differences in minor matters will be maintained in due subordination.

It is a fertile source of errors and abuses to believe that the way to avoid evil is to take some merely *outward* step, and think that by changing our uniform we are escaping the notice of our un-sleeping enemy. It is said that no *cipher* has ever been invented, however intricate, which has not been sooner or later discovered and detected by those accustomed to the study. And so, if we rest secure in some 'cipher' of our own, some watchword or secret signal which we think the enemy can never detect, we shall soon discover to our cost that we have not escaped his snares.

It is much easier to live in the complacent assurance that we have 'come out from evil' by meeting in an upper room instead of a church or chapel, and giving ourselves a new name, than to set ourselves to combat evil in all its forms by daily, hourly watchfulness and prayer, seeking, each for ourselves, to draw nearer to the heart of Christ and walk humbly before Him day by day.

Not that we would accuse all who hold these views of want of Christian watchfulness; but the delusion, even though, through God's mercy, the individual who holds it may be unhurt spiritually, is still a delusion, and a dangerous one; and as far as it affects the inner life of any one of us, so

far it will have a tendency to draw the attention from real dangers to unreal ones ; and thus, like a general who has been deceived by a feigned attack of the enemy, lay us open all the more to the *real* perils which surround us.

‘ But are we to sit down in despair, and acquiesce contentedly in the wretched divisions which rend the Christian Church ? ’

Not so. We are to seek to do, each for himself, that which, if *all* did, divisions of this kind must cease altogether,—to cultivate a meek, humble, loving, and tolerant spirit ; that true largeness of heart which is tenderly compassionate to the erring, while watchful not to gloss over or make light of the error ; and, above all, to seek that unity in *the midst of* minor diversities, which is all we can hope for in a world where we know in part and prophesy in part, and see ‘ through a glass darkly.’

Much of what has been said will also apply to the next point ; viz.—

IX. The rejection of creeds and confessions of faith.

There is a strong tendency among persons of a school the very opposite to the one in question to deprecate all such aids. But then again, on the other hand, there may have been a tendency among some Christians to make too much of them, or

rather to insist on their filling a place they were not intended to take.

The real use of creeds and confessions, as has been well remarked,* is not to give a full epitome of Christian doctrine, but to act as breakwaters and embankments, &c., which are erected to keep out the incursions of the tide,—to guard mainly against the forms of heresy or unbelief which may happen to prevail at the time the creed or confession is drawn up.

For example, the Apostles' Creed dwells strongly on the truth that God is the Creator of heaven and earth, because this doctrine was denied by some heretics at the time. It is very exact in dwelling on the Incarnation of Christ, which was, as we see in the Epistles of St. John, much disputed in those early periods; but His atoning death for us is rather implied than mentioned, because no one at that time seems to have ever disputed the doctrine of the atonement; while in the Nicene Creed both this and the perfect Divinity of Christ are insisted on very fully and distinctly, in order to combat the Arian heresy; and the same with the Athanasian Creed.

It is clear that if Christians are to worship together, there must be some agreement in their belief. And the advantage of creeds and con-

* See Archbishop Whately on the Omission of Creeds in the New Testament.

fessions of faith is, that they enable us to understand what that agreement is, and to learn in some degree what doctrine we may reasonably expect to hear preached in any given congregation.

The 'Brethren' dispense with all safeguards of this kind; but they cannot altogether dispense with a substitute for them, as their practice proves. *Their* substitute, in fact, is generally described, by those who know them best, as being a very close and constant mutual surveillance,—each watching his neighbour with the assiduity of a detective officer, lest a word should be let drop which may be thought to savour of false doctrine. Whether the evil of such close personal inspection does not overbalance the advantages gained, and exceed all the possible evils of creeds or confessions of faith, we need not here discuss; nor whether soundness of doctrine will always be infallibly secured by such a mode of proceeding. Opinions may differ on these points; but at all events, if this system of mutual watching is carried on as it appears to be, it must be looked on as a substitute for a definite creed or articles of faith.

A favourite watch-word with the 'Brethren,' and with those who sympathise more or less with them in their views, is, 'Come out of all systems;' 'Set yourselves free from system, if your spiritual life is to flourish.' Some of them seem hardly able to preach the Gospel at all without this additional clause.

Would it not be well, before we propose to get out of systems, 'to begin by trying to ascertain *what* we have to get out of;' in other words, what is meant by a system? *

The most correct definition would perhaps be, that it is an attempt to reduce any science, art, or opinion on any abstract subject, to some kind of distinct shape,—to classify it, as it were, so as to facilitate reference, and to enable us to take a clear and comprehensive view of the different parts, just as a heap of books of all sizes and shapes in a library are reduced to order, and made useful to the student by being arranged on shelves on some definite plan, it may be according to their size or shape, or the language in which they are written, or the subject of which they treat.

Such a classification must, from its very nature, be imperfect; the books could not be sorted according to all their properties at once, and whichever arrangement we think it advisable to follow, some characteristics must be neglected or passed over. Still, no one in his senses would refuse to adopt any plan of arrangement, and leave the books lying in a confused heap, because he cannot find any plan for classifying them which is not open to the charge of imperfection.

The very word 'definition,' literally, to mark out

* The remarks that follow have been partly reproduced from another work of the writer's.

boundaries, implies this kind of classification. But what is this but a 'system?'

So, again, with the notes of the musical scale, and the plan of counting time in singing or instrumental music. Every mode of notation is a system; so are the lines ruled for a child's copy; so are the rules of grammar, and the Arabic figures in arithmetic.

No one supposes these rules, methods of notation, &c., to be actually parts of the things represented. We all know that it is possible to calculate in the head without the aid of numeration, to sing or play by ear without notes, and to pick up a language without grammar; but we do not for this reason decry grammars, musical notes, and arithmetical figures. They are all *systems*, to enable us to perform these processes both more quickly and readily, and also more accurately and correctly,—and the evil of dispensing with them would be far greater than any evil incurred by their necessary imperfections. As long as we are alive to the fact that they *are* imperfect, it does not detract from the usefulness of these helps to us.

No system can be more artificial than the classification of the stars into constellations; still it answers the purpose for which it was framed. The astronomer can only judge of the heavenly bodies as they appear to his eye and telescope; and even the knowledge he can acquire in this way will

require him to alter his maps of the heavens frequently. But he does not, therefore, renounce their use; he sees they are indispensable to the acquirement of accurate knowledge; he uses them for what they *are*, and does not expect them to be what they cannot be.

Now what a map of a partially discovered country is to a geographer, or a celestial chart to an astronomer, that a theological system, however clear and well formed, must be to the Christian student. The difference generally, is this, that the astronomer and geographer know exactly *how* to use their artificial systems, where to trust and where to distrust them; while the theologian is in danger of learning to look on the system in which he has been trained as a perfectly accurate representation of the truth as it really exists, which it never can be, seeing it is a human representation of things whose sources and origin are utterly beyond our ken. It is a map of a country whose rivers and mountains have their beginning outside its boundaries, and which, therefore, presents only parts of the great whole to our eyes. But to discard all systems because they are imperfect, is as absurd as it would be to throw aside maps, globes, and grammars.

The right way, in short, to treat systems is to make them, as the scientific man does his books of reference,—our *servants*, and not our *masters*,

But no persons are more likely to fall into the error of making a system their master than those who decry its use altogether; for we shall find generally that those who fancy they are dispensing with systems are only doing so nominally, and in point of fact have recourse to what is virtually a system of their own, though unacknowledged and unrecognised. As the professed opponents of all sects are generally the most truly sectarian, so the professed opponents of all system are precisely those most inclined to shut themselves up in a close and narrow system. And this is emphatically the case with the teachers of whom we are now treating. Their watch-cry is, 'Come out of system;' but in reality, though not in so many words, they add, 'Come into OUR system.'

Another point in reference to ecclesiastical matters, in which the 'Brethren' strongly insist, is that of the unlawfulness of paying a salary to pastors, or evangelists, or others employed in spiritual work. They do not object to receive support if it comes in no stipulated proportion; but to receive a fixed sum is regarded as unscriptural.*

And yet the analogies employed in the New Testament to enforce the duty of supporting ministers would seem rather in favour of a fixed

* This is also insisted on by the 'Open' Brethren, and all who are connected with them.

sum. 'The labourer is worthy of his hire' is the expression used by our Lord Himself: and the Apostle says, 'Who goeth at any time to a warfare at his own charges?' The labourer and the soldier certainly received fixed sums; and generally, also, the vinedresser and shepherd, whose cases are alluded to in the same chapter as illustrations. (1 Cor. ix.)

It is often alleged that the evangelist or missionary teacher who never knows from week to week what he may receive, exercises more faith than one who receives his salary quarterly or half-yearly, as the case may be, and knows exactly what he has to expect. We would not attempt to depreciate the faith of the former; but we doubt whether it may not be a greater exercise of trust in God for the pastor who is quite aware that he must not look for more than a certain moderate sum to last him a certain time, to commit his family's wants to their heavenly Father, when that sum seems really inadequate for their supply, than for the 'Brother' to do so, who must well know that any day he *may* receive an abundant supply from friends, quite irrespective of help he may already have had from other quarters.

It would be invidious to exalt one at the expense of the other. God's providential leadings may render it necessary for His servants, at times, whatever their views, to depend on uncertain

means of support; and undoubtedly true and simple-hearted Christian workers are to be found holding opposite opinions respectively on this point: but it may be well to remember that in this and in other cases, there is not unfrequently the greatest trial of faith where the least credit is given for it.

CHAPTER IV.

DOCTRINAL VIEWS.

FROM the ecclesiastical views of the 'Brethren' we turn to the doctrinal and practical ones which distinguish them from other Christians. Into these we shall not attempt to enter so fully as we have done into the 'Church' views, but we may touch slightly on some of the principal heads.

As far as we can gather the leading points are:—

(1.) That it is not lawful to pray for the pardon of our sins, because, if we are real Christians, they were forgiven 1800 years ago upon the cross.

(2.) That by parity of reasoning we are wrong in asking for the Holy Spirit, because He abides with all true Christians, and they have no need to ask for what they have already.

(3.) That Christ's humanity was not one like ours, but a peculiar and *heavenly* humanity, apart from that of any mortal man.

(4.) That the life-obedience and life-sufferings of our Lord were in no sense vicarious; and that even on the cross it was only during a certain time that His sufferings were of an atoning character.

(5.) That justification consists in our being brought into a condition of *actual* righteousness 'in the risen Christ;' and that the old nature is one with which we have nothing more to do, for our life is really no longer on earth, but 'up yonder with Christ,' and only the *new* nature is known or recognised by God.

(6.) That the Law is in no sense our standard, or binding on us as Christians, our only standard being 'the resurrection-life of Christ.'

(7.) That the Christian has no right to take any part in the administration of this world. The governments of the world being in the hands of God's enemies, those who are followers of the Saviour have no business to hold any office in the State, to be rulers, magistrates, &c. Nor should they attempt to improve the condition of the world, which is lying under condemnation; their part is only to keep separate from it entirely.

Other peculiar views they hold, connected chiefly with 'dispensational' theories; but these we do not attempt to consider here. We proceed to examine the heads here enumerated,

(1.) The pardon of sins. That our sins were atoned for, fully and perfectly, on the cross, 1800 years ago, is the great central truth of the Gospel; that if we have come to Christ we have personally appropriated the blessings of that atonement, is no

less true. But these writers forget that *atonement* is not itself forgiveness, but that which supplies the *ground* of forgiveness. A subject like this needs in fact to be viewed experimentally as well as doctrinally ; experimentally and practically we can see plainly that God's will is to connect the cleansing of the daily sins of the believer with a daily coming to God in humble confession of our sins, acknowledging our need of pardon, and pleading the precious blood-shedding by which it has been obtained for us.*

It is not that *God* needs to be reminded of that all-sufficient Sacrifice : but *we* do. Our eyes need to be again and again turned towards it. It is for our own sakes that we need to come before Him for daily cleansing, not as condemned sinners, if we are truly His people, but as restored and forgiven children, humbling themselves for their daily errors and sins. The words of the Apostle John are evidently meant for believers (1 John, i. 7, 8) : 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth (not *has* cleansed, but *is* actually cleansing) us from all

* It is only fair to admit that many teachers of this school do insist on the need of Christians humbly confessing their sins to God day by day ; and in such cases the difference is one of words rather than reality. Still, there is in many cases also a real and practical difference. Several of our standard hymns have been altered, to suit this view. In 'Rock of Ages,' for instance, we have 'Grace *hath hid* me safe in Thee,' instead of 'Let me hide,' &c.

sin,' . . . 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us.' And again (chap. ii. 2): 'If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, . . . and He is the propitiation for our sins.'

Surely this is illustrated in the very words of the Lord to Peter: 'He who is washed (*bathed*, as it should be rendered) needeth not save to wash his feet.' (John, xiii. 10.) 'One who has been in the bath is clean; but his feet may be soiled by the earth as he steps along.' (Bonar.) The priests in the Law were commanded to wash their hands and feet continually, in the course of the Temple Service.*

The words of the Lord's Prayer would seem in themselves a warrant for daily asking 'forgiveness of trespasses;' but the writers of this school declare that this prayer was not intended for

* Some of the 'Brethren' explain John, xiii. 10, somewhat curiously, by referring to Ephesians, v. 26. The washing of the feet, they say, is 'the washing of water by the Word,' mentioned in the latter verse—that is, according to them, the reading of the Scriptures. But surely those who profess to pay such attention to the original should know that the word in Eph. v. 26 is not literally 'washing,' but should be rendered 'laver,' or 'bath,' (see Alford): namely, the vessel in which the water is. It might be translated, as it is in one version, 'the water-bath,' and should be read, not 'by' but 'in' the Word, therefore *might* be rendered the Lord's command (Alford). But, however this be taken, to refer it to the perusal of the Scriptures is to do violence to the meaning.

Christians after the day of Pentecost, but only for the use of the disciples in our Lord's lifetime.

The reasons we have heard given against the use of the Lord's Prayer are generally twofold ; one, that the blessings asked for are those already *promised* to Christians, and therefore need not be sought afresh: the other, that the prayer is not made in the name of Christ.

In reply to the first of these objections, it is enough to observe, that all through the Scriptures we see that a promise, so far from being looked on as a reason *against* prayer, is constantly made the *ground* of prayer. 'Remember Thy word unto Thy servant, unto which Thou hast caused me to hope'—is the scriptural plea, in almost every recorded prayer in the whole Bible. Not that prayers are to be restricted to things promised, for we are told in *everything* to make our requests known to God ; 'but that in the case of a promise we can come forward boldly and confidently, pleading His own word and acting as "His remembrancers."' (Isa. lxii. 6, marg.)

In answer to the second objection, we may observe that clearly, before Christ's work had been completed, it was impossible that prayer should be offered in His name. The Lord's Prayer was dictated by Himself, and therefore, as such, was of an exceptional character in its wording. But it may surely be offered up by Christians with a real

and virtual reference to Him ; and more than this, we may truly say, that every clause in this wondrous prayer does really, and in fact, point to Him, because every clause refers to blessings which He has distinctly named as instrumental in procuring for us, and which we enjoy through Him and Him alone.

We can only look up to God as our Father through Him who has given us the power (or right) to become His sons. (John, i. 12.)

His name is hallowed in Christ, who is Himself God's Temple, and in whose name all are to bow. (Phil. ii. 10.) The kingdom is to be His. (Rev. xi. 15 ; 1 Cor. xv. 25.)

He came to do His Father's will perfectly, and 'all power is given to him in heaven and in earth.' (Matt. xxviii. 18.) He is the true Bread of Life (John, vi. 48) ; through Him we have forgiveness of sins : 'He is able to succour them that are tempted' (Heb. ii. 18) ; and He it is Who has overcome the evil one and delivered us from his power.

Therefore, in using the petitions of this prayer, we are, if we use them intelligently and in faith, virtually referring to Christ all through, and every petition should bring Him more forcibly and vividly before our minds.*

* It has often been noticed by other Christians that there is a tendency, in persons holding these views, to make the element of praise, thanksgiving, and ascription of glory to God, nearly

(2.) The next point to consider is the unlawfulness of prayer for the Holy Spirit. Since Pentecost, they allege, the presence of the Comforter has been granted us ; why then ask for what we have already ?

In this and in other cases some confusion is occasioned by our overlooking (as the merely English reader, unless forewarned, can hardly avoid doing) the distinction, never lost sight of in the original, between the title given to the *Person*—the *Giver* of grace ; and the Influence—the gift bestowed. When the Personality of the Holy Ghost is referred to, He is always designated as *The Holy Spirit* (literally the Spirit, the Holy), as in John, xiv. 26 ; Acts, i. 26 ; ii. 33-38 ; v. 3 ; and many more places. But when the *gift* is spoken of,—the Divine *power* given by Him,—then it is ‘ Holy Spirit,’ without any article ; thus designating the influence working in the hearts of Christians or shown by mighty works. In the last case the article is, we believe, never used. The literal rendering of the words in Acts, ii. 4 ; iv. 8 ; vi. 3-5, and other similar passages, would be ‘ filled with Holy Spirit.’

This distinction may throw some light on the staple of their prayers, while the essential part of *prayer* itself, ‘ Making the requests known to God,’ is left comparatively in the background. But many, doubtless, are practically more Scriptural and simple in their religious habits than their theoretical belief would seem to warrant.

subject before us, for it is plain that while a *person* as such must either be absolutely present or absent, a gift or power admits of degrees. When Christ Himself was on earth, He was either with His disciples or away from them in person; but the *power* of the Holy Spirit, His working influence, may be present in very different measures and degrees. The very expression 'full,' or 'filled,' implies that the vessel might be conceivably half full or nearly empty. There may be infinite gradations between a faint spark of spiritual life and being 'filled with the Spirit.' There must be *some* rays of the sun always shining in the day-time, or we should be in darkness; but we express a desire for sunshine and warmth in cold misty weather. Surely, then, we may ask for a *fuller* measure of what we are conscious of possessing in a feeble and imperfect degree. And the prayers of the Apostle, that the Ephesian converts (for instance) might have 'the spirit of wisdom and revelation,' &c., were surely prayers, virtually, for the Holy Spirit.

(3.) The doctrine of the heavenly humanity of Christ is one on which it is very difficult even to touch without violating the reverence with which we should approach the awful mystery of Christ's Incarnation, and the blending of the divine and human natures in Him. It is surely one of the 'secret things' that 'belong to the Lord our God;'

and in handling them, we too easily forget that we are on holy ground. The history of the heresies which have distracted the Church of Christ from the apostolic days downwards, sufficiently proves the danger of venturing to look too closely into a subject so far beyond our finite capacity to understand. If we cannot fully comprehend how our own souls and bodies are united, how should we be able to sound the mystery into which the 'angels desire to look?'

And those who seek to inquire thus curiously into these topics forget that they incur the danger of being more systematic than the Bible. It is safest to take the Scriptural accounts simply as we find them. We are repeatedly told that Jesus 'took our nature upon Him,'—He was 'made in the likeness of men,'—(Phil. ii. 7); 'He is not ashamed to call them brethren' (Heb. ii. 11); He 'took part' in 'flesh and blood,' 'took on Him the seed of Abraham,' was 'made like unto His brethren,' 'tempted like as we are.' (Heb. ii. 14-17; iv. 15, &c.) Could these things have been truly said of One whose humanity was different from ours? Can we read the Gospel records of His suffering from hunger, thirst, fatigue, shedding tears for His friends and His country, seeking the sympathy and even nearness of His disciples in Gethsemane, and doubt that His was a human nature like to ours, in all but sin?

This is no speculative theory. The sense of our blessed Lord's sympathy with us, and therefore our full communion with Him, must suffer, if we lose sight of His human nature, as our full trust in and repose on Him must, if we let go the Divine part. Modern heretics have usually denied this last, and looked on Him as merely a created Being, superior to man, or perhaps only as a pre-eminently holy Man ; but the ancient forms of heresy, as we see in the Epistles of St. John, denied the human nature,—the coming in the flesh. We see the Apostle did not regard this error lightly ; and however veiled it may be in modern times by such expressions as 'heavenly humanity,' it behoves us to beware of all such expressions, which, though they may be used by pious and loving Christians, contain the seed of what may lead to serious and deadly mischief.

(4.) The next point is the non-vicariousness of Christ's life and sufferings on earth before the crucifixion.

That He lived on earth to be our perfect and holy 'example, that we should follow His steps,' is a blessed and weighty truth ; but if we dwell exclusively on the example, and leave out of account what He did *for* us, we run the risk of falling into grave error. If He was not righteous *for* us, what becomes of the words in Rom. v. 19 :

‘By the obedience of One shall (the) many be made righteous?’ His atonement could not have been perfect had He not perfectly fulfilled the law,—had He not been ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.’

It is replied, that as His death, being vicarious, exempts us from punishment, so, if His life was vicarious, it would exempt us from the necessity of being holy. But we are not called on to be holy *in order* to be justified; this would be justification by works instead of faith: we are to be holy *because* we have been pardoned and saved.

That Christ’s sufferings were of an exemplary *as well* as of an atoning character, and that *in so far* as they were the sufferings of a pure and holy Being in a sinful world, His disciples can have fellowship with them, is plainly shown in many passages. (We may instance Phil. iii. 10; 1 Pet. ii. 21; iii. 17, 18; iv. 1, &c.)

But the atoning character is never lost sight of in the New Testament. This double character is especially set forth by the Apostle Peter in 1 Pet. iii. 18. He has been exhorting his hearers to patience under persecution, and points out Christ to them as an example; but in the very same verse, and even clause, he goes on to dwell on the penal and atoning character of these sufferings: ‘For Christ also suffered *for* sins, the just *for* the unjust.’

The first 'for,' in this clause is clearly penal; that is, He suffered the punishment due to sin; the second, 'the just *for* the unjust,' points out that those sufferings were vicarious, that is, in another's stead.

Under the government of a just and holy God, it is impossible that a *guiltless* being should suffer. But Jesus suffered, though perfectly holy, and with no spot of sin of His own. He must, therefore, have been *accounted* guilty, though not for sins of His own. All His sufferings through life were clearly penal, that is to say, He suffered the punishment due to sin. But whose sins? The just *for* the unjust; *i.e.*, His sufferings were vicarious. Any kind or degree of suffering, small or great, inflicted on a Being who did not deserve it, would be a manifest injustice; but Christ, having put Himself in the sinner's place, deserved it (so to speak) as our substitute. To deny this would lead us virtually to impugn either (with reverence be it spoken) the justice of God, or the sinlessness of Christ. Therefore, the 'non-vicarious' theory of the 'Brethren' must fall to the ground.

Some of these writers go further still, and actually divide the sufferings of the cross into separate classes, one part of them only being, strictly speaking, of an atoning character. Others say that part were endured specially for the Jews

and part for the Church. It is painful to have even to record theories which touch so sacred a subject, and one which it seems scarcely befitting that any should handle but with profound awe and humble reverence. We find nothing in the Scriptures to authorise this attempt 'to mutilate and destroy' (in the words of a living writer) 'that which the apostles, without one exception, present unbroken and entire.' The right course for a Christian is, surely, simply to receive the inspired statements and leave them as they are given, remembering that the central point on which all the types of the Old Testament and the doctrinal statements of the New hinge, is that the blood of Christ is our all-perfect and all-sufficient atonement and satisfaction for sin.*

(5.) The nature of justification, the 'Brethren' allege, has been obscured: they hold that justification consists in our being brought into a condition of actual righteousness in the risen Christ. One of their leading writers speaks of Christ's death as atoning and His resurrection as justifying: but the passage in Rom. iv. will not bear this interpretation, for, literally rendered, it should be,

* We do not mean to imply that this last is not taught, and fully taught, by 'Brethren;' but a truth may be weakened by rough handling on the one side, as much as by being vaguely and imperfectly stated on the other.

' who was delivered *on account* of our offences, and raised again *on account* of our justification.' ' In other words ' (says the author of the valuable tract already referred to), ' it especially teaches that His death resulted from His bearing our sins, and His resurrection from the accomplishment of that propitiation by which we receive pardon and peace. The resurrection was the proof that He had borne the full penalty. Scripture always makes Christ's vicarious work on earth, and not union with Him in resurrection, the sole ground of our justification.'*

The fact is, that to speak of union with Christ in resurrection life, as the ground of justification, is to

* In Mr. Darby's revised version of the Scriptures, instead of the expression, justified *by* faith, he has substituted '*on the principle* of faith.'

Another curious alteration of the received text has been made in this new version of the Scriptures, both in English and French, which is worth mentioning. In both these versions, in the passages in the Gospels in which the disciples are described as 'falling down and worshipping' Christ, the word 'worship' is changed for 'doing homage,' or 'rendering homage.' The defence which is made for this alteration, is that the word will bear both significations (as certainly the word 'worship' did in old English, as we see by the marriage service in our Prayer Book).

But surely, even admitting this, it is not a reason for *choosing* the purely human sense of the word in preference to the other. Let any plain unbiassed English or French reader simply go through the Gospel narratives, and can he for a moment doubt that the disciples rendered divine and not earthly reverence to their Master?

mistake the very meaning of the term. Justifying, or imputing justice or righteousness, must in its very nature be something *forensic*—something reckoned to the party who would not otherwise have possessed it. But the new nature given to believers cannot be a nature to which anything can be imputed or reckoned. It must be as pardoned sinners, not as ‘new creatures in Christ Jesus,’ that His righteousness is reckoned or imputed to us. That this imputation is intimately connected with our union with Him is true; but it is in virtue of His being our representative and substitute that His righteousness is reckoned as ours.*

These teachers declare that Christ took in resurrection a *new* life, and that sin attached to the life He laid down, as righteousness attaches to the one He now has. But His own words are, ‘I lay down my life that I may take it again,’—the very life He laid down.

They tell us that God only knows the Christian as he is in the new man: that He does not look

* ‘What is the testimony? (Of God, concerning Christ.) “That He came into the world to save sinners. That He has come to bring in an everlasting righteousness, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” That God’s acceptance of it is evidenced in that He raised Him from the dead. He was delivered on account of our sins, and raised on account of our justification. This is God’s testimony.’ (Extract from report of an address by Rev. Marcus Rainsford at Centenary Hall.)

on our old nature or recognise its presence in believers. But if this were true, what is the object of the passages which, like those in the twelfth of Hebrews, refer to God's 'chastening' His children 'for their profit,' and Christ's words, 'As many as I love I rebuke and chasten?' Why was the thorn in the flesh sent to St. Paul, lest he should be exalted above measure, if this manifestation of pride belonged to a part of his being which God does not recognise? Why are Christians exhorted repeatedly to mortify their members on earth, and resist the temptations of the devil to sin?

A precious and blessed Christian truth is often travestied, and stated in so exaggerated a manner, that at last it ceases to be truth. The doctrine of the life of the believer in heavenly places is one which has met this fate at the hands of the 'Brethren;' the mystical manner in which they meet it leads to serious error. It is true that the Christian is *representatively* in heaven with Christ; but while he lives he is on earth, exposed to trials and temptations on all sides, and needing watchfulness, and prayer, and grace divine to keep him from falling: 'the whole armour of God' is not too much to protect him.

Again, the doctrine, so important and so precious to the Christian, of the union of Christ with His people, is literalized and exaggerated by some of these writers till it loses its real signification. The

intercession of the High Priest, the personal sympathy, and help, and guidance of the Good Shepherd, who 'knows His sheep' and 'leads them forth,'—all are lost sight of, for the High Priest and His people, the Shepherd and sheep, are spoken of as if they were literally and actually one person. And the consequence is that the Epistles are studied in a very partial and one-sided way, and those which are supposed not to harmonise with these mystical views are quietly handed over to 'Jewish believers,' or in some way or other regarded as inappropriate for Christians in this dispensation.

But even in those Epistles in which, as in those to the Ephesians and Colossians, the greatest stress is laid on that very 'mystery of Christ,' the union of the Divine Head with the Members of His Mystical Body, we find at the same time the most earnest exhortations to Christian duties, and to the resistance of evil and the necessity of carrying on a warfare with our enemies. If we were literally and entirely dwelling in the heavenly places, and with no more need to think of our old nature, where would be the need of 'putting on the whole armour of God?'

(6.) The denial of the obligation of the law as affecting believers is nearly connected with the points above mentioned. The resurrection life of Christ, they say, is our standard, not the law.

True, our position, representatively, is that of risen ones with our Risen Lord,—and a powerful motive this blessed privilege gives us, not only to ‘set our affections on things above,’ but to ‘mortify our members which are on the earth.’ But how does this do away with the moral law as our standard? The Lord Jesus Himself came, not to destroy, but to fulfil: His teaching was full of illustrations of the depth and breadth of that law; far from teaching His disciples to pass it by as obsolete, He pointed out how *much more* that law meant than had been supposed, even by those who professed to follow it strictly. Love to God and man, doubtless, is the spring from which the law rises. The law tells us what to do, and love supplies the stimulus,—the motive enabling us to do it. ‘Love,’ says the Apostle, ‘is the fulfilling of the law;’ and he repeatedly refers to that law, in his exhortations to Gentile Christians, as a standard of conduct.

It would seem almost impossible to read through the Epistle to the Romans without seeing how perpetually the law is referred to as ‘*established*’ by the Gospel—its commands, with respect to moral duties, confirmed and enforced, while its ceremonial types are pointed out as perfectly fulfilled in Him who is the ‘end of the law,’ who has ‘magnified the law and made it honourable.’

Another point much insisted on by ‘Brethren’

is the exclusion of the Old Testament saints from the Christian Church in another world. In the heavenly state, after the resurrection, Abraham, Moses, David, &c., must occupy a different and inferior position from that held by those who became believers at, and after Pentecost.

This, again, is surely a gratuitous assumption. We find no word of it in the New Testament, but we do find Abraham spoken of as the father of all them that believe: 'If ye be Christ's, ye are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' (Gal. iii. 29.)

Surely the father and the children would not naturally occupy different positions. He who 'rejoiced to see' Christ's 'day,' was, undoubtedly, as truly united to Him by faith as those who followed Him after His work was completed.

The above are the principal heads, we believe, of the doctrinal points in which the 'Brethren' differ from most other Christians. We have only touched on them here, leaving the subject to be followed up more fully by others.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORLD.

WE now proceed to examine the maxims of the 'Brethren' with regard to the position of Christians as to the *world*.

The world, they allege, is lying under condemnation ; its governments are in the hands of God's enemies ; therefore those who are followers of the Saviour have no right to take any part in work connected in any way with the State.* A Christian reigning prince ought to abdicate : a Christian man should refuse to be a magistrate, to serve in the army, navy, or police, or to hold any office under Government. His business is to keep steadily apart from all connected with the ruling powers in this world.

Now, will this bear close inspection ? That 'the world lieth in wickedness' (or the wicked one) ; that the spirit of the world is opposed to the Spirit of God, all Bible-readers can see for themselves. But the *world*, in this sense, is one thing ; the

* Practically, 'Brethren' discharge these functions, as many can testify from personal knowledge.

inhabited earth another. It is true, sadly true, that in the present state of things the majority of the inhabitants of the earth, even those who have been taught to know God, are living in alienation from Him. It is true that the ordinary course of life pursued by the majority is contrary to the Spirit of God. But it is not *as* inhabitants of the earth, but *as* inhabitants in a state of rebellion against God, that they are condemned.

Now, as we cannot read hearts, we cannot venture to pronounce of any number of men and women we see before us, that these individuals are certainly ungodly and under condemnation. We can only judge—as far as human beings can judge—by their fruits: that is, their works. It is not because men buy and sell, plant and build, marry and give in marriage, that they are living in rebellion against God, for these things are necessary while we live in the world; and so is government, if social order and even life are to be safe. It so happens that the governments and powers of this world have been most commonly in the hands of men who have no regard to religion; but if this is to be an argument against taking part in such things, it might equally be pleaded against taking part in all the common affairs of life.

It is not *as* governing that rulers are sinning against God: for the 'powers that be are ordained of God,'—even heathen powers, as the Apostles tell

us : they sin against Him when they rule without reference to Him,—without seeking His help and guidance. Doubtless they do most commonly fall into this sin ; but to say that the pious man who serves the State *must* be a partaker in such a sin, is as extravagant as to say he is a partaker in the sins of the ungodly men who may eat of the fruits of the tree he has planted, or buy the goods he is selling.

Joseph, Nehemiah, Daniel, served under heathen rulers, and yet never swerved from their close walk with God. What should prevent Cornelius the Centurion and Dionysius the Areopagite, and ourselves, nineteenth-century Christians, from doing the same ?

Doubtless, in serving rulers who do not fear the Lord, there may come times in which the Christian must choose between the approbation of his superiors and his duty to his God. He may, like Daniel and the three youths in the furnace, be called on even to give up his life for the cause. Doubtless, too, those who hold public offices are more exposed to trials and temptations than those in a more private walk of life. But this is no argument for always choosing the smoother part. It may be God's will that His servants should in some cases submit to a moral martyrdom ; and there may be cases in which retirement from office may not be obedience, but cowardice.

We have a standard by which to try the world's conduct and our own : that standard is the perfect law of 'holiness to the Lord,' which He has set before us in His Word. Our own conscience is the inward witness He has given us to bear testimony to this pure and holy code. Whatever work, calling, profession, or trade, *necessarily* involves *to us* a swerving, even by a hair's breadth, from the straight path, or has the effect on *us*, whatever it may have on others, of drawing us away from communion and close walking with God,—that calling, that work, must be renounced by one who desires to follow the Lord fully. But it is not as an earthly calling, but as one involving moral harm to himself or others, that the Christian is bound to abandon it. The earth, in short, becomes the *world to us*, *when* it involves contact with 'the flesh and the devil.' Thus what is the world to us, may not be so to another ; and we are bound in such cases to avoid judging our neighbours for the view they may take.

The way for the Christian to keep himself pure is not to shun this or that outward position, and then to say, 'I am now out of the world ;' nor even to be sure that he is safe from it because he avoids some worldly pleasure or some style of dress ; but to beware of that spirit of the world which may creep into the hermitage as easily as the palace, and be worn under the plainest garb as under the richest.

A tendency to what may be called *mental* asceticism,—the starving and crushing of the intellect, the taste, and the mind,—has been the bane of pious and earnest Christians of almost all denominations; but in none is it stronger than with the 'Brethren.' And their exaggerated views of the impossibility of influencing the young and leading them to Christ have often led them to unite the opposite faults of over-severity on one hand, and over-laxity on the other. The same persons who will rebuke a fellow-Christian professing piety, for worldliness, in wearing a trifling ornament or looking at a secular book, or joining in cheerful, general converse, will allow their unconverted children the most entire liberty, and indeed, in some instances, exclude them from participation in family worship or religious instruction. They do not perceive that by making so high a wall between the converted and the unconverted, they may actually keep timid or wavering Christians back; and still less, that while they make worldliness depend on the colour of a riband, or some equally trivial external mark, they are practically putting themselves and others off their guard as to the *real* assaults of that subtle enemy.*

* Many, indeed, besides 'Brethren' are deluded by this device of the tempter. It is said that the secret of a skilful juggler's success is mainly by making a *feint* in an opposite direction from that in which he intends to practise, to divert the

With regard to charitable, philanthropic, and even missionary work, the views of the 'Brethren' relative to 'the world' go far to cripple individual energies. The world, they say, is mixed up in all charitable and missionary work which is carried on in an associated manner; therefore, as the Christian's part is to keep out of the world and be separate, he must abstain from all united action in doing good. Missionary associations, charitable societies, collections, &c., are all so mixed up with the worldly element, that the only safe course for the Christian is to avoid them all.

That the worldly element *is* mixed up with all good things as well as bad, on this earth, is what no one can venture to dispute; but the question is, first,—Is worldliness inseparable, necessarily, from such united efforts? And, secondly,—By abstaining from them, do we escape the evil?

To both these questions we must certainly reply, No. Admitting to the fullest extent the worldly spirit which too often has crept into the noblest Christian works (and it does behove all who direct and lead them to beware of such tendencies), still, is it the part of a good soldier to give up a disputed

attention of the spectators from his real object. The enemy of our souls not unfrequently has recourse to the same expedient; and while the minds of Christians are occupied with some 'Touch not, taste not, handle not' question, his *real* assaults and snares pass unperceived.

battle-field to the enemy, or to seek to drive him thence? It is easier, no doubt, to withdraw from it all; but is the easiest and least troublesome course always the *right* course to pursue?

And surely, even allowing that many join in missionary works who are not on their guard against the incursions of the world, this need not taint all who work for them. The real strength of our great religious societies does not lie in crowded meetings, or the support of the rich and great, but in the quiet, unpretending labours of humble unknown Christians, who toil on patiently without looking for any public testimony to their efforts. The widow's mite was not less blessed because many rich men put their gifts ostentatiously into the treasury.

Whether it may be best, in individual cases, to work alone and independently, or in conjunction with others, must depend on the circumstances of the case and person in question. Many of the noblest and most eminently blessed works of charity and of evangelism have been begun and mainly carried on single-handed: nevertheless, on the other hand, it is certain that in a vast multitude of cases, work *must* be done jointly or not at all. Thousands of Christians who long to spread the Bible in distant lands can only do so by their silent and obscure labours in aid of those who can go themselves or send out others. And there is this advantage which they may enjoy,—they have less

temptation to vanity and self-seeking in such humble work than there might be in anything undertaken more independently. A preacher or teacher who has apparently been successful in his labours, may be tempted to be puffed up by the applause and admiration of his companions or hearers ; but the little Sunday scholar, handing in a store of laboriously gathered pence, will probably never receive any mark of approbation or praise till the gracious 'Well done' of the Master is heard.

These teachers say that Christians have no call to improve the present world. It is doomed. Nothing can be done for it ; and all that true disciples of Christ have to do is to set the Gospel message before those who will listen, and leave the rest to their fate.

Here we have an assumption which is supported as little by Scripture as reason. We are told to 'preach the Gospel to every creature ;' now, to separate the Gospel from the healing and civilising influences which invariably accompany it, is simply impossible. In all missionary efforts it is found that civilisation and Christianity go hand in hand ; and missionaries who would refuse to civilise must also refuse to Christianize. If we look to Scripture, we see again and again doomed cities saved by the prayers of the godly. They are the *salt* of the *earth*—and their presence doubtless has again and again saved it from destruction.

Then, again, if we look to actual experience, we may well say, that so far from Christians having nothing to do with the improvement of the world, this is actually their special vocation. In point of fact the Christian Church has really been the great reformer of abuses, whose influence has been to remedy evils, physical and moral, in the world, ever since Christianity first began.

It was a Christian who put an end to the gladiator fights by the sacrifice of his own life. It was the influence of the Christian Church, though very imperfectly enlightened at the time, which put a stop to domestic slavery, and serfs of the soil in Europe. It was by Christian efforts that hospitals and asylums for the aged and infirm, and orphans, were first instituted. It was through the efforts of a Christian man that prisons were reformed. It was the work of Christian men (for the most part) in the early part of this century, to abolish the African slave-trade. The 'Red Cross' Societies, to help the sick and wounded of all nations, had their origin in the efforts of a few Christian students at Geneva. And we all know how emphatically Christian men have been the pioneers in all the efforts, at the present day, for improving the physical as well as moral condition of the poor in our great cities.

If these good men, all through these eighteen centuries, had considered the improvement of the

world as something with which they had no concern, the world would have been filled with violence utterly unchecked and unmitigated. More than this, thousands would, humanly speaking, have been left to perish in ignorance, to whom the door has been opened for the Gospel through these despised philanthropic efforts, and who, but for them, might never have had an opportunity of hearing the 'glad tidings.' We are too apt to forget that *every* thing has an outer and an inner side to it, and to separate the one from the other is a hopeless task. When sin came into the world outward ruin came too; thorns and briars, 'serpents and scorpions, and all the powers of the evil one,' followed the fall. When this evil shall all be reversed, and the renewed earth 'full of the glory of the Lord,' we shall have the *outer* part of the curse removed also; the myrtle instead of the brier (Isa. lv.), the 'weaned child playing by the cockatrice den,' the 'inhabitant no more sick,' because iniquity is forgiven.

So the outer and inner part are always together, and to separate the *inner* Christian work of 'calling out a people' for Christ's name, from the *outer* work of civilising and reforming abuses, and overcoming physical evil, is as hopeless as it would have been for the Jew in the old tale to cut 'the pound of flesh' from his creditor without severing the arteries and veins that united it with the rest

of the body. The outer and inner forms of evil are as inseparable as the flesh and the blood.

When Christ came, He united the outer with the inner healing: 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' with 'Arise and walk.' And so it has happened, as before observed, that the reform of outer evil has been emphatically the work of the Christian Church in all ages. The reflected light which Christianity has thrown on a dark world, the *indirect* influence it has exerted, is one of the most striking evidences of the reality of its work,—an evidence which is patent even to the world, and a testimony of that mighty power which will one day bring about a reign of universal peace and righteousness.

Doubtless, the practice of many who bring forward these objections is better than their theory. A pious and loving Christian heart, no matter what may be the scruples that hamper outward work, will find ways and means both to alleviate human suffering, and make the Gospel known to those in any way within reach. Still, while human nature is liable to be tempted on the side of self-indulgent ease on one side, as well as over-restless and spurious activity on the other, it is no light evil when excuses are provided which may be taken as a plea for doing nothing, under the cloak of religious scrupulosity. And that numbers of active and devoted Christian workers have been led by such fallacious arguments to abandon promising

fields of labour, and give themselves up to a life of comparative uselessness, is unhappily a truth to which very many can bear witness.

It may perhaps be useful, before we conclude these few remarks, to pause a moment and inquire what have been the principal causes which have led to the rapid progress of this singular movement.

As before observed, it took its first rise when the great Evangelical revival at the commencement of the century, was beginning to degenerate in many places, into comparative coldness and languor.

A period of reaction was at hand, and this reaction found vent, as we have seen, in two opposite movements, that of the High Anglican or Ritual party on one side, and of what may be considered the germ of 'Brethrenism' on the other.

The one addressed itself chiefly to those who had vague cravings for something to satisfy the conscience without real, spiritual enlightenment, and met their wants by elaborate ceremonial observances, and exalted ideas of church authority; the other addressed itself more to the desires of the really awakened believer, and offered him (as it then appeared) a free and unfettered Christian intercourse, which could not at that time be easily obtained elsewhere. For Christians to meet together as such, and not as members of any particular church or congregation, seems at that period to have been very rare, as we have remarked be-

fore; and it is easy to understand with what intense delight this new Christian fellowship was enjoyed by those who had never before experienced it.

Then, as already observed, certain truths, which had been too often cast into the shade, were prominently brought forward by these new teachers.

This fact has been dwelt on, it is true, in a somewhat exaggerated and one-sided manner; it would be most untrue and unjust to deny that faithful teachers have always been found who insisted on the union of Christ with His mystical body, the Church, as forcibly and truly as the 'Brethren' have done; and though the study of prophecy had certainly been at one time much neglected, still it has never altogether wanted earnest and judicious expounders; and at the very time when the movement in question was beginning, able and devout Christian writers and preachers who had no sympathy with 'Brethren' as such, were to be found, who were taking pains to direct the attention of all to the great future of the Church of Christ, His second Advent in glory.

To say, then, that these doctrines were first revived by the 'Brethren' is not true; but it is certain that the prominent place these teachers gave them, greatly contributed to their success; and that many could with truth allege, that they learned them first from those who had more or less of sympathy with the 'Brethren's' views.

Then again, their peculiarities were a reaction from certain tendencies which are peculiarly liable to predominate in long-established churches, viz., the inclination to fall into a kind of *routine* of religious observances, which, if not quickened by a very intense inner life, may easily degenerate into something almost mechanical, and also the disposition to centralise too much—to make the regular officers of the Church everything, and the people nothing.

Now both these tendencies are peculiarly galling to a newly-awakened Christian, especially if young and ardent. In such a mind, the craving for abundant spiritual food on the one hand, and Christian activity and direct work on the other, are as intense, and almost as instinctive, as the eagerness for bodily food, and the longing for bodily movement is in all young creatures when in health. It may be a natural instinct, but it is a case in which nature and grace may be said to combine, and the desires so awakened cannot be safely left unnoticed. Many a one has fallen into careless backsliding, or rushed into wild extravagancies, from such feelings being ignored or checked by those around him. And if those who take the lead in a church or congregation, will not show any sympathy in the longing of young believers for warm and animated services, and, above all, for active employment of their energies, they will find that in times

of what is called a 'revival,' they will lose their most promising members.

And this is just what has happened in the present instance. The religious awakening in our country which has marked the course of the last seventeen or eighteen years, exposed all the regular churches to a severe trial. It was necessary that they should be beforehand with the wants which that awakening produced in their people. Many pastors and teachers were wise enough, as well as earnest and zealous enough, to come forward and supply these wants themselves : but in some cases there were sincere and well-intentioned persons who were afraid of the movement becoming extravagant, and tried to check or discourage it. And wherever this was done, the 'Brethren's' teaching was likely to find a ready welcome.

But even where no fault could be found with the teachers and ministers in the long-established churches, they had to encounter peculiar difficulties which must always be more or less felt in a time of religious awakening.

There are two principles in our nature, which, like the centripetal and centrifugal forces in the planetary system, act in opposite directions ; one is the attachment to the habits of life, teaching, mode of worship, &c., to which we have been early accustomed ; the other is a reactionary *distaste* for all our old ways, and a desire to rush into something

quite opposite from all we have been accustomed to.

The former principle is most active in our common every-day life, and influences us more and more as we advance in years; the other works most at times of special excitement, and in the young and enthusiastic. It led men, at the French Revolution, to change the established order of things, down to the very names of the days of the week, and months of the year.

This feeling often powerfully influences young persons who have been awakened suddenly to Christian life, especially if it has been by some instrumentality outside their own church, or community, or family. It produces for a time, too often, a kind of repulsion from the services, the preaching, even the hymns and prayers, however excellent in themselves, to which the young 'converts' have been accustomed, and which they associate with their days of carelessness and religious deadness. They are tempted to turn from all these things with an unjust dislike, and to long for what is most unlike all they have been used to. If they have belonged to our English Church, they will be tempted, at such a moment, to undervalue our beautiful Liturgy, and think that no prayer but an extempore one can be of any value, and so on.

This repulsion will often produce effects very

painful to parents, teachers, and pastors ; but it is very needful to meet it calmly, firmly, and patiently. If not increased by opposition on the one hand, or worked on by unhealthy influences from new teachers on the other, it will generally be short-lived, and gradually pass away ; and in later life the same persons will be ready to see and own they were mistaken in their former impatience with all they had been accustomed to in their early days. But while this reactionary state of feeling is in active exercise, those who are its subjects are precisely in a condition to be most influenced by any new and attractive teaching ; and probably this is the origin of many of the new sects and extravagant manifestations of religious sentiments which have followed closely on a period of spiritual revival.

Another tendency in our nature is to regard any newly-revived and previously neglected truth, or one to which our attention in particular has been recently called, with an exclusive attachment which leads us to undervalue the equally important doctrines that we held and believed before. Not content with rejoicing over the 'lost piece of silver' we have found, we are ready to throw aside the other nine as useless. And thus truths which were meant to be taken together, are violently separated, and in so doing, misrepresented. In the language of the poet :—

‘Torn from the tree, ere long they lose their bloom,
Poor faded chaplets on the spoiler’s tomb;
And of their leaves decaying, or decay’d,
The poison-draughts of future times are made.’

Both these tendencies rendered the influence of the ‘Brethren’s’ teaching peculiarly powerful and fascinating; and it was brought to bear on the minds of a multitude of religious persons, precisely at the period when a spiritual revival had thrown them open in a special manner to these influences.

And so, curiously enough, just as heat produces evaporation, which in its turn produces cold, so a period of strong religious excitement, at the present day, is peculiarly apt to be followed by an outbreak of ‘Plymouthism,’ which usually ends by producing a comparative coolness in Christian zeal, at least a cessation of Christian activity and a dying out of that missionary spirit which is the surest sign of healthfulness in all Christian communities.

Such are some of the causes which appear to have led to this strange state of things. The question is now, how to remedy the evil, or at least to check its spread; and this question is not so easily answered as the former.

It may be truly and justly alleged, that the evils pointed out as existing thirty or forty years ago in the Christian communities in our own country, are to a great extent removed at the present day. There is much less of the over-centralisation which

was justly complained of. Both in our own and other churches, lay influence is far more recognised and encouraged : there is much more *diffused* religious activity, and far more opportunities can be found for a free and cordial intercourse among Christians than was ever the case before. No one need, in these our days, join the 'Brethren' for any of these things.

And yet, the mischief has not ceased. It is true. But there are many evils which timely precautions might avert, but which cannot be always cured by their adoption when those evils once exist. Bolts and bars may hinder goods from being stolen, but will not restore them when they have been. Whitewashing and drainage may prevent disease, but will not stop it at once when it has fairly set in.

There is no doubt that many were led to join the 'Brethren' from impatience at the difficulty sometimes experienced in finding a vent for their Christian zeal and energy, unless they entered the regular ministry of their respective churches. No one can plead that excuse at the present day : perhaps there never was a period when the openings for Christian work for all classes and all ages were so many. But this will not bring back those who have been carried off by the stream, though doubtless it may do much to prevent others following in their track. At least, the more openings for work

are placed within reach of those who are anxious to be employed, the less they are likely, all other circumstances being the same, to be influenced by 'Brethrenism.'

Still, it requires much courage to meet the evil in this way. Those who see, as all who have given attention to the subject must see, a kind of religious 'lawlessness' in the ascendant, are tempted to take fright, and try violently to check everything that can be supposed, directly or indirectly, to foster the evil.

But this will not be found, we believe, the way really to meet the danger. The experienced backwoodsman does not try to quench a burning forest by pouring water on the flames. He kindles the space round it, and so leaves the fire no fuel to feed on. And this is what we have to do in the present case. We have to show zealous and ardent young persons that there is no *necessary* connexion between lay preaching and revival meetings and Plymouthism, however often the one has seemed to lead to the other.

We have to be prepared to give hearty and affectionate sympathy to active Christian workers, and not allow ourselves to be chilled and discouraged when, as too often happens, that sympathy is abused. It is hard on a Christian pastor when he finds that the young preacher whom he had cordially welcomed and aided, rewards his friendship by trying to turn his flock from him

and to create a schism in the place where he had been affectionately received. And this is a trial which many a faithful minister is called on to endure at the present day. How bitter and poignant an one it is, very many could bear personal witness.

Such conduct is, in truth, the very essence of sectarianism, though it is generally met with in those whose watchword is 'non-sectarian.'

But painful as the trial we have described is, it is better to risk encountering it than to draw back from a work which under good and wise and-judicious guidance, *may* prove a valuable one. Much care must be needed, lest the pastor find he has been fostering a schism instead of a revival; but often if a wise Christian teacher puts *himself* at the head of a movement instead of keeping aloof from it, it may become a blessing instead of a source of mischief.

The steam is there, and a safety-valve must be given to it. To try to shut it in will only produce an explosion. As Lord Macaulay has observed, the tendency of regular churches is to crush and suppress zeal, and of new sects to give it unrestrained license; while the only wise part is to seek to make it useful by careful direction, instead of repression. And this is what Christian pastors and teachers are called on specially to do at the present juncture.

Another important safeguard against these 'strange doctrines' is the careful instruction of the young in the Scriptures, and encouragement of intelligent study of the inspired record. There is no preventive to erroneous and one-sided teaching so sure as clear and accurate knowledge of Scripture. One accustomed so to study and 'rightly divide the Word of God,' will be fortified in the best way against the attempts of such new teachers; he will learn to see the difference between a patient and diligent comparing of Scripture with Scripture, and the too prevalent practice of picking out isolated passages and placing them together like the parts of a puzzle. He will learn to 'prove all things, and hold fast to that which is right.'

What may be the ultimate history of this remarkable movement, or its influence on a generation trained up in its teaching, are questions which only the future can answer.

In the meanwhile, one point is clear. The teaching of the Brethren adds another chapter to the long list of attempts made to do what no one on earth will ever be able to succeed in doing; namely, to form or find out a community on earth to form the *one* perfect and infallible counterpart to the Church above. In the face of the very description in the last book of the inspired record, where the Bride is shown descending *from* heaven (not ascending from the earth), men will persist in

trying to build the temple on earth, and, unlike Solomon, to let the 'axe and hammer sound' in its precincts. They take the tuning of the instruments in the orchestra for the full concert of sounds for which it is but a preparation, and in so doing have but caused increased discord. It is for us to remember, in these days especially, the solemn warning of our Lord Himself: 'If they shall say to you, Behold he is in the desert, behold he is in the secret chamber, believe them not.'

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