

## CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

## OLD DANGERS WITH NEW FACES.

CHRISTIANITY as an *internal* power, as a leaven of righteousness, and the Church as an *external* force, as a repressive or as a ruling force, represent ideas so diverse, so irreconcilable, that it is indeed strange to find a constant tendency in the Christian world to treat them as supplementary, if not identical. The sword of the Spirit and the sword of the State are different weapons. They are so contrary in operation the one to the other that in the proportion that the former triumphs, the latter becomes obsolete. While the Gospel is not contrary to the Law, the very intent of the Gospel is to make the Law void. Physical perfection is not growth under swaddling clothes and iron bands, but free development of natural forms from the working of a healthy constitution. A nation, worthy to be called great, glorious, and free, is not a State despotically governed. The ideal family, where humanity is seen in its highest beauty and its bands are indissolubly strong, is not the household where the parental authority is exercised through a code of petty regulations, but where love breeds unconscious obedience, and the gentleness of harmony comes from mutual affection. To all who really exercise their reflective faculties these statements will sound elementary, almost as truisms. But those who reflect, who think, in the sense of considering evidence in support of or against certain propositions, are a very small company. At this time we see whole communities, large aggregations of Christian people, organized into societies, which they are pleased to call Churches, so acting as to manifest that they have never considered these elementary truths. They are seeking to make Christianity an external force. They are seeking to use the sword of the State for the work of the Spirit. They are endeavoring to build up well-proportioned men by swaddling clothes and bands of iron. They are aiming to give greatness and glory to the nation by despotic laws. They are bent upon creating a family of high type by subjecting each member to petty regulations which have no echoing approval in the conscience or heart. Our article last week, "No King but Cæsar," exposed this degrading tendency to substitute the merely physical force of penal laws for the spiritual, the divine guiding force of moral conviction as the inspiration of social habits. The danger to Christianity is no new one; it is an old danger with a new face. It is Hildebrandism, the identification of two vitally distinct powers, or the wielding of an incidental power secured by a totally variant force for doing a work which cannot be done save by that force. The early Roman Church became strong not by man's laws, but by the extension of God's kingdom. The physical force of Rome, arising from the largeness of its numbers, tempted its rulers to use that merely wordly force for the further extension of those numbers, for, in a word, the increase of its merely physical, worldly power. They thus made the same mistake which some so-called

"churches" are making to-day, that is: they are confusing mere physical strength with the only true strength of God's Church—spiritual vitality in full exercise directed and sustained by the Spirit of God. A religious body may have millions on its roll and be comparatively weaker, in a Church sense, than a handful of Christ's faithful ones. That strength, in the only true sense, is not felt, is not indeed existent in some large bodies called churches, is only too glaring. For the fact, that a so-called Church boasts of its numbers and relies upon the physical, worldly power such numbers confer, is a demonstration that the Spirit of God is not directing and inspiring such a body. The hand which grasps the sword of the Spirit, could not even if it would, wield also the sword of the State. Certain religious societies are shewing a passionate devotion to prohibitory, penal legislation. They are displaying a somewhat coarse, overbearing demeanour to objectors. Their violent and slanderous attacks upon all who take the higher ground of Christian feeling are a public scandal. Their insolent wielding of the physical force of their mere numbers, a force gained by despotic crushing out of individual judgment by ministerial threats, is a new and grave social danger. All these features in the prohibition movement proclaim trumpet-tongued that such religious societies have abandoned God's way of advancing the regeneration of man, and are given over to the impossible task of moral reform by the physical force of penal laws. But there are signs that the intoxication of power, the brutish power of mere numbers, is leading these so-called churches to schemes of ambition which have not a jot of even such worldly morality as the prohibition movement. They are like a big, bully-minded boy who first realizes his rude strength at school. They know that, as a body, they have votes. They care not the snap of a finger for individual freedom in matters political, municipal, or social. There is no portent more alarming in a free land than to see vast aggregations of men combined for one noble purpose, becoming so proud of their power as an organization, that they allow their entire personality to be swamped in the general policy of acting as a body for the mere purpose of asserting its strength. That is now being done in Canada. We do not refer to the Church of Rome, but to certain religious societies of an ultra-Protestant class. Municipal candidates bid for the so-called "Church vote," that is, the solid vote of certain so-called Churches. The drainage of our cities is now to be controlled not by experts, but by cunning manipulators of the Church vote. God's houses, ostensibly devoted to His worship, are regularly used to push the candidature of men who ask support, not for their special fitness for public duty, but because they belong to the "Church," or set who worship in the places so profaned. The degradation of religion is complete when it is thus used for schemes of worldly ambition by the two parties in this adulterous compact—the "Church" which sells its vote for the candidate's favours, past, present or to come, and the shameless candidate

who trades upon what he calls his religion in order to secure his worldly advancement.

There will come a new Protestant movement out of this prostitution of "Church" power in the sphere of political, municipal, social life. If these so-called Churches go on wielding their numerical power in worldly affairs, there will be an uprising of all God's people who abhor such an abuse of religious organizations. This movement will be resisted by all who honour individual liberty in the secular sphere, by indeed every citizen who is grounded in the principles of the gospel, and devoted to civil and religious liberty. A stern lesson will be taught these meddling, ambitious, worldly Churches. They will be taught that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, that His Church is not a fit lever for schemers, that His kingdom's advancement is the sole work of His Church. But, happily, Christ's Church knows her duty and functions, it is only "Churches" of man's founding who are guilty of substituting the sword of penal laws for the sword of God's spirit.

## THE UNITED CHURCHES OF THE UNITED STATES.

## THEIR EXISTING AGREEMENT IN DOCTRINE, POLITY, AND WORSHIP.

IT is a cheering remark of Dr. Schaff, at the close of his survey of the creeds of Christendom, "that the age of separation and division is passing away, and the age of the reunion of divided Christendom is beginning to dawn." Glance at some of the grounds of this inspiring hope here in our country. In the first place, we should not overlook the doctrinal agreement already known and expressed, such as the consent of the Roman Catholic and some Protestant churches in the Athanasian, Nicene, and Apostles' creeds; the consent of the Lutheran and Moravian churches in the Augsburg confession; the consent of the various Episcopal churches, the Protestant, the Methodist, the Reformed, in the Thirty-Nine Articles; the consent of the Congregational, the Baptist, and the various Presbyterian churches in the Westminster Standards, together with the indorsement by the reunited Presbyterian Church of the Heidelberg catechism of the Dutch and German Reformed churches. In the second place, we may find some tendencies to a doctrinal agreement between these different groups of churches,—in their American revisions of these various standands which show, now and then, a slight though unsought mutual approximation; in their fraternal intercourse, which always brings into view a large latent consent in the great evangelical doctrines of our common Christianity; in their very controversies, which often serve only to show how trifling is their dissensus as compared with their fundamental consensus; and even in their heretical departures, which sometimes express that consensus with a primitive simplicity free from the scholastic technicality of the old creeds, whilst their pulpit expositions of it are ever setting it forth with scriptural freedom, fresh-