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# THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.—HAB. ii. 1.

REV. A. H. BURWELL, Editor.]

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## FOR THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

### A VILLAGE CHURCH.

The Church which owned the ministrations of our good Pastor was a venerable structure, situated on a little eminence which skirted one side of the village. It had stood there for centuries. Ave Marias had been repeated within its walls, prayers in an unknown tongue had been offered from its altar, and the little niches which still remained, supplied the inference that images had been there of wood and stone; while those whose bottoms had been hallowed out on each side of the little porch, near to the massive, nail-studded, iron ornamented door of entrance, had invited the worshipper to dip the finger into the consecrated element, and to mark the holy cross upon his forehead. These had passed away, and were succeeded by a worship more rational, pure, and consistent with the plain sanctity of the place. Ave Maria gave place to "Lord have mercy upon us"—prayers in an unknown tongue were changed into those which were winged to the throne of grace with the spirit and understanding also; and instead of images of saints, behold a plain open desk appended to a substantial pillar, to which was chained a Godly treatise, the object of which was to afford to all a facility in knowing and being "able to give a reason for the hope that is in them." At a little distance from this stood, in primitive rudeness, a box supported by a plain column, ready to receive any offering which the hand of charity might be disposed to deposit in it for holy purposes;—the box remains, but the spirit which suggested its purpose is fled;—it stands a venerable monitor of the more extended liberality of our forefathers, and the apathy of the present age. The custom has passed away, which made the village pastor the common almoner of the more affluent, and the dispenser of charity to the less fortunate; and though, perhaps, there is now a more splendid diffusion of this spirit, and instances of more profuse liberality are now to be produced, yet that homely principle of enabling the minister to feed his flock with food convenient for them is fading;—its very domesticity is its bane, its unobtrusiveness its ruin. The poor's rates, it is true, were then unknown, yet beneficent as in some instances they are, though by no means commensurate with the spirit which prompted their institution, they are inadequate substitutes for that spontaneous exercise of Christian charity, which made the minister of the establishment, as well the spiritual guide of his flock as the dispenser of material comforts to the poor. They exact what is paid grudgingly, and generally received without gratitude. Thus both contributors and receivers survey one another with unkindly feelings; and the spirit of good will to men, which the uncompelled offerings of the rich were calculated to foster, is evaporated, whilst one of a baser and more degrading nature is engendered. The only relic of this spirit within the Church now, is this antiquated box, and the inconsistent custom of calling meetings for fixing the rates, and announcing the information when they are granted. Near this was placed the font, of size sufficient to satisfy the tender scruples of the most strenuous sticklers for infant immersion, and showed the disposition of our reformers on that subject, whilst its six-sided structure delineated as many nondescript animals, as ranked high in the imagination of its Saxon carvers. It was canopied by a heavy piece of wood uncarved, unornamented. The massy pillars which formed an avenue down the Church, stretching upward on each side into four broad arches, evinced the rude but lasting workmanship of centuries gone by. The pulpit of black oak, with its antique carving, surmounted by a broad tapering upwards to a point in a small spire of exquisite and elaborate carving which restrained

the sound it was intended to dissipate, was a rich banquet for the antiquarian: it combined elegance with simplicity: and whilst it displayed the handwork of science, was not without its devotional meaning. The altar and altar-rails were in admirable keeping with it. The windows, as far as regarded the apertures for light, commonly occupied by glass, were of a mixed character; fragments of glass were promiscuously joined with the dull, tattooed panes of distant days, and flouted with the transparent fragility of more modern manufacture. The hand of taste had left memorials of its beauty in some of the stone work: and though each window had something peculiar to itself, yet there was a character common to them all, save to one, which some barbarous Churchwarden had inserted near the reading desk, the modern squareness of which formed a paltry contrast to the pointed archings and tracery of stone which distinguished the others. There were few regular pews, excepting those belonging to the squire and minister: the stalls were uniform, rising in a part adjoining the aisle with an undulating sweep, into various shaped terminations, some if not all, of which had been rudely sculptured by the hands of those in former days, who, freed from the necessity of pursuing any secular avocation had time and leisure for such productions, which remain monuments of their skill, known but unrecognised.

Each stall had its peculiar appropriation; and the eye of the pastor knew where to find any of his more aged parishioners during divine service. Some of them had feasted their respective seats almost the time allotted to the life of a man. Even during the performance of occasional duties, particularly at funerals, they would have seemed transplanted to other scenes, if they could not occupy their respective places; so that when any of them was removed by death, the beautiful and mournful picture of Job was faithfully striking, "his place knew him no more." There is something of almost feudal affection in those who love to worship their Almighty Father in the house where their earthly fathers bowed, to the spots indented by their knees. It is an affection associated to the best feelings of the heart; and baneful is that effort, unallied to spiritual purity, which would destroy a principle grounded in "the form of godliness" vouchsafed to us by the inspiration of God's holy Spirit, without whose sanctifying influence our faith, our prayers, our hopes, are vain.

Chaste and elegantly firm was the roof: the naked rafters, it is true, were seen, but they were perfect and unincumbered by the superfluous supportings of huge mis-shapen cross-bearers, which too frequently disfigure the plain and interesting overhead work of our village churches. A careful attention had been paid to the construction and disposition of these; hence they were neither so large as to create a dusky shade, nor so light as to give an idea of instability. At alternate distances some larger than the rest were based upon a little projecting pedestal, carved into the figure of some quaint animal, which, it would seem, have not survived the Reformation, and of which there now remains not even the shadow of a record. The whole interior, indeed, had a sober cast, much differing from the light airiness and almost theatrical effulgency of modern conventicles. It suited that sober and rational form of worship, which was now offered up within it; a worshiping by the hand of reformation from the ruins which popery had piled upon apostolicity and evangelicalism, and scoured, without injuring, from the rust and corruption such ruins had brought upon it. Like some antique column, which for ages has lain beneath accumulated piles of earth and rubbish, but which, when reproduced by the searching hand of enterprise, and cleared of its cohesive foulness by the chisel of taste and care, appears in its original