

In our independence of sectarian alliances, we do not by any means intend to seclude ourselves from the communion of saints, or in any way to limit our enjoyment of fellowship with the people of God. On the contrary, we feel that we have enlarged the sphere of our sympathies. I am greatly mistaken if you make us less welcome to a participation in all your spiritual privileges, and I am certain that you will be no less cordially welcomed to our pulpit or pews, our hearts and our homes, when we receive you not as a Baptist, but as a Christian. And if we are not rejected by you, I am confident that many brethren whom we love in the Lord, who are members of other denominations, will be no less cordial in their regards when we come to them without the Baptist name.

While in this freedom we extend our sympathies to all who, in every place, call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, I am persuaded that when I shall have explained our views of the doctrines of Christ, and the Constitution of the Church, we will not be charged with seeking union by a compromise of truth, or bidding for popularity by lowering the standard of faith and life. No one is driven beyond the pale of existing sects by strictness of doctrine or severity of discipline. Your own denomination is not singular for its laxity; and yet, in spite of articles of faith, you and I know, among its prominent members and ministers, Calvinists and Arminians, open and close Communions, Millenarians and Anti-Millenarians, and men holding the vaguest sentiments on all points of Christian doctrine, whose denominational standing is not thereby affected. There are few churches whose discipline can reach any thing short of flagrant immorality or open apostasy. I fear that what is most imperatively demanded in order to a good standing in any of the denominations, is loyalty to the party, zeal for its peculiarities, and conformity to its usages and traditions.

These are the natural fruits of party spirit, which, always blighting and blinding, exercises its most disastrous influences when the weighty interests involved in religion only lend momentum to the unhallowed passions of men. A high standard of Christian doctrine and great scriptural enlightenment are not to be expected when the intellect is cramped and the judgment warped by such an influence. Zeal for the peculiarities of a sect, obscures a man's views and diverts his attention from the great body of divine truth. Little questions of difference, kept close to the eye, conceal from view the vast field of truth which is common ground to the household of faith. It has been well said, "The rise of party sense is the fall of sacred knowledge," and "Sectarian fires put out Christian light."

You or I would have no difficulty in finding a partizan who could hold a disputation on the subject and modes of baptism, with some show of learning, who would display a lamentable ignorance of Gospel history and Christian doctrine. We know also that loyalty to the party covers a thousand errors from the truth, and even defects of character; and that conformity to the usages of one denomination is readily accepted for walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Dr. Owen complained in his day; "While men have contended about ordinances and institutions, forms and ways of religion, they have grown careless and regardless as unto personal holy conversation, to their ruin. They have been like keepers of a vineyard, and their own vineyard have they not kept. How many have we seen withering away into a dry sapless frame, under a hot, contending, disputing spirit, about ways and

differences of worship! While they have been intent on one part of profession, the other of more importance hath been neglected."

The same party spirit which injures a man's personal piety, distorts his views of the piety of others. Those of the same sect excuse each other's faults, if they cannot deny them; and in some way or other they throw a cloud over the brightest excellence of opponents, if they are compelled to admit them. What calumny and detraction, what malice and bitterness does it prompt and palliate! In no way is its tendency better seen than when a member of one party is induced to abandon it to join another. The warm profession of brotherly love and admiration is in an hour changed into bitterness and contempt. The party receiving a proselyte, at once sees graces in his character before unsuspected; and if his character was before doubtful, they at once become satisfied that he has been aspersed; while the party whom he abandons becomes as suddenly convinced of his worthlessness, and discovers abundant reasons to congratulate themselves that they are delivered from the contamination of his presence. I have seen cases where it really appeared that Christian parents and friends would rather have their children and connexions among the openly ungodly, than members of another sect than their own. Christian discipline is impossible when such an influence is brought to bear upon the judgment; for even when a church opens its eyes to the sins of a partizan and proceeds to deal with him, a rival party, in its zeal to gain an accession, will probably sympathize with him as a persecuted man, and in the language of Dr. John Mason, "They open the Church bosom as an asylum for fugitives from the laws of God's house."

But I cannot attempt, within present limits, to discuss the sin and injury of the existence of sects in the professing Church of Christ. I have no hope that any exposure will amend it. The spirit was early manifested in the Church. It was the same which at Corinth said, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." Though it did not then go the length of constituting separate communities unchurching one another, it received the most emphatic rebuke of an apostolic pen. With that rebuke before my eyes, I can no longer call myself by any name but Christ's. I know how little we have accomplished, when, in our limited sphere, insignificant in numbers, influence and resources, we have taken an independent stand on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, owing no head but Christ, and no rule but God's word, and acknowledging the image of Christ whenever we see it. But we wash our hands of the guilt of schism, and in our humble measure honor the Lord, in recognising His Headship and the oneness of His Body.

We do not, in protesting against parties, form a new party. We do not raise a controversy or court adherents. With the views we entertain regarding the prospects of the Church in these last perilous times, we can have no motive to attempt it, though in the existing state of things it might be easily accomplished by a man of bad ambition. I have little hopes of seeing any extensive abatement of the spirit of party among nominal Christians; but I have an impression, that, without any movement to attract the notice of carnal men, here and there a few, out of all the popular denominations, will be drawn together by the sympathies of a higher life, to bear testimony to the neglected truth as it is in Jesus, and to acknowledge the unity of those who have one hope of their calling; and that these, organized in primitive simplicity, walking in primitive purity, separated from the world, conformed to the image of Christ, and