

vast influence on the truth preached. People think that they have stated the case and found the explanation, when they have traced the degree of spiritual life in the congregation to the minister: we have fallen upon days of man-worship. People do not say now-a-days: "who is Paul and who is Apollos?" for the world is full of Pauls and Apolloses. Who is your minister? is the whole question, as if the minister were the Church—the very error that Protestantism repudiates. Whenever a church is a-sleep, the fool crieth aloud: "let us have a great man." This corruption is partly an error of sentiment and partly of practice. Contrary to the ancient law and practice of the Church of Scotland, which had a liturgy, the words of which were read to Knox three hours before his death, and of which he then said: "I thank God for that heavenly sound," the minister has now everything to do in public worship. The prayers are his prayers; the praise and lessons are his selections; and the sacraments are administered much as he pleases. In short he is the Church. The people feel that they are only an audience, and they certainly, in most of our congregations, look very much as they feel. When a different minister comes, the people have a new kind of church, for he may alter everything. A minister of great ability does not strengthen the attachment of people to a church, for they think that he is an exception to his brethren. And when he leaves, the people are apt also to leave, because they feel as if their church had gone. Hence the violent excitement at the settlement of a minister in Scotch churches, and the tremendous interest which that subject has always awakened in the Scottish mind—an interest which is unparalleled in other denominations. The idea of the Church as a great communion in the earth has died away from the minds of people, who graduate their support of the congregation by their estimate of the talents of the clergyman. They come to church to-day, but not to-morrow; because such and such ministers are expected to officiate. Of two ministers who both preach the truth, and have both been solemnly set apart to do it, one is over-praised and the other is unduly depreciated. Hearers

now can scarcely wait till they get to the door, till they begin their criticism; just as if they had come for the purpose. Their conduct and remarks generally show that they have no proper idea of what they are talking about. For when people receive benefit, they never think of the preacher but of the truth. A good preacher is like a great painter. You don't see himself, but his picture. A good sermon is like a clear pane of glass; you don't see itself, but the landscape outside of it. So you see Christ and not the preacher. I only mention this to show the corrupt state into which our congregations have fallen in this matter—all produced by the novel prominence given to the clergy in our Church service, and by the attempts which have been made in later times to create capital out of popular rights, as they are called, in the selection of ministers.

Thus the miserable history advances through all the stages of folly down to infidelity. What is all this but downright ignorance or unbelief? It is to lose sight of the divine element in the human. It is to make the church a mere human institution. It is to exalt the man and to degrade the office. Our Shorter Catechism teaches, that "the sacraments become an effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them or him that doth administer them; but by the blessing of Christ and the effectual working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them;" and so of the truth which saves, not because it is spoken by a particular man. It would be God's truth, though it were uttered by a child or preacher in a barn. It is not a thing of persons or place. The light is the light, whether it darts into the eye of an eagle or an insect. It is to the food, not the result, that we must look; and it is humiliating that people should go, Sabbath after Sabbath, to listen to a man only. They should go to worship—to maintain the society and its testimony on the earth—to feel the warm sympathy of their brethren, and receive the truth from the lips of the ambassador, so far as it is authenticated to be the truth of God, by an appeal to the sacred Scriptures. I find correct opinions on the subject of the church and religious worship more common among people of other denominations than among Pres-