

Second, That it is very unreasonable to refuse either to embrace the Gospel, or to unite in Christian fellowship with others, on account of the alleged inconsistencies of professors.

And here it should not be forgotten, that the defects of a Christian's character become known and observed chiefly by the very excellence of the Gospel system. As the value of gold makes us detect the smallest deficiency in its weight, as the brightness of the sun causes us to observe the spots on its surface, so the very purity and glory of Christianity make moral defects, when seen in its disciples, excite scorn and contempt, which, if observed in a Mahometan, Mormon or Infidel, would scarcely elicit a single remark. And certainly no candid mind will undervalue the Gospel on account of imperfections in its professors which, but for the light it emits, would never have been observed.

It is, after all, a poor subterfuge to allege that the defects and inconsistencies of professing Christians (who may be mere hypocrites,) form a reason for excusing one's self from the profession and obligations of religion. If our neighbour pays his debts with spurious money, there is no cause why we should not discharge our debts with money that is good.

To God and to society we all owe it, as a sacred debt, not only to embrace the Gospel for ourselves, but to unite with those who know the truth in holy fellowship and active efforts for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom. We cannot escape from this debt by pointing to another who has not paid it, although he has pretended to do so. Pay that thou owest; leave thy neighbour's affairs alone. "To his own Master he standeth or falleth." If he pretends to hold the truth and has embraced error, do you profess the truth and love it. If he pretends to be moral, and is really vicious, do you both profess and practice virtue. If his religion is a sham, let yours be something more than a cipher.

But there is another use which we may make of this law, which all counterfeiting obeys :

Third, It affords an infallible test of the character and standing of the different religious systems which demand our confidence. Among these some must contain more truth than others. We may suppose a regular gradation from the most erroneous system, which depraved man can call religion, up to that which makes the nearest approach to the whole truth of God of any that has blessed our world. We may suppose the order in the ascending scale to be something as follows: Deism, Unitarianism, Pelagianism, Arminianism, Calvinism. If this arrangement of these systems is correct, we may then, according to the law which all counterfeiting observes, expect to find persons who, in heart, have embraced some of the lower and more erroneous forms of belief, seeking to pass themselves off as adherents of some of the purer systems of religion, but never, except through ignorance or constraint, assuming the garb of any of its more worthless forms. We may expect to see a Deist at times pretending to be a Christian, but never to see a Christian acknowledging himself as a Deist. We may expect to see Unitarians creeping into Pelagian, Arminian, or Calvinistic communities, but never to find an intelligent adherent of any of these systems willingly putting on the garb of Unitarianism. We may be prepared to see Pelagians and Arminians signing Calvinistic Confessions, in order that they may introduce the poison of their errors into enclosures from which they were carefully excluded, but never, on the other hand, to see intelligent Calvinists, of their own motion, signing Pelagian or Arminian formulas, or seeking to introduce their sentiments secretly into these communities. We may, in fact, expect to see error do homage to truth, by hypocrisy, while truth, by its own inherent majesty, is raised above all obeisance to error.

It is not a little remarkable that the state of things which we have supposed is exactly that which the history of the Church unfolds. We are not aware that