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"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem! let my right hand forget its cunning."---Psalm 57., v 13.

Sermon

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The Restoration of the Erring.

"Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."—Gal. vi. 1, 2.

It would be a blessed thing for our Christian society if we could contemplate sin from the same point of view from which Christ and His Apostles saw it. But in this master society is ever oscillating between two extremes, undue laxity and undue severity.

In one age of the Church, the days of Donatism for instance, men refuse the grace of repentance to those who have erred: holding that baptismal privileges once forfeited cannot be got back: that for a single distinct lapse there is no restoration.

In another age, the Church, having found out its error, and discovered the danger of setting up an impossible standard, begins to confer periodical absolutions and penary indulgences, until sin, easily forgiven, is as easily committed.

And so too with societies and legislatures. In one period puritanism is dominant and morals severe. There are no small faults. The statute-book is defiled with the red mark of blood set opposit. innumerable mis-

demeanours. In an age still earlier, the destruction of wild animals is punished like the murder of a man. Then in another period we have such a medley of sentiments and sickliness that we have lost all our bearings, and cannot tell what is vice and what is goodness. Charity and toleration degenerate into that feeble dreaminess which refuses to be roused by stern views of life.

This contrast too, may exist in the same age, nay, in the same individual. One man gifted with talent, or privileged by rank, outrages all decency: the world smiles, calls it eccentricity, forgives, and is very merciful and tolerant. Then some one unshielded by these advantages, endorsed neither by wealth nor birth, sins—not to one-tenth, nor one ten-thousandth part of the same extent; society is seized with a virtuous indignation—rises up in wrath—asks what is to become of the morals of the community if these things are committed; and protects its proprieties by a rigorous exclusion of the offender, cutting off the bridge behind him against his return for ever.

Now the Divine Character of the New Testament is shown in nothing more signally than in the stable ground from which it views this matter, in comparison with the shifting and uncertain standing-point from whence the world sees it. It says, never retracting nor bating, "The wages of sin is death." It speaks sternly with no weak sentiment, "Go, sin no more, lest a worse thing happen thee." But then it accepts every excuse, admits every palliation: looks upon this world of temptation and these frail human hearts of ours, not from the cell of a