

and sitting down together at a family feast of love.

The visible unity of the Church, which had been thus presignified in the Old Testament; and which had formed so conspicuous a feature in the ministry of our Lord, continued to be enforced by the conduct and writings of the apostles. In confirmation of this statement, let us look through the "Acts of the Apostles," and the Epistles, and we shall find that each, in succession, contemplates, directly or indirectly, the oneness of the Church.

The thousands converted on the day of Pentecost consisted of "Jews from every nation under heaven;" but, notwithstanding their necessary diversity of objects, characters, and prejudices, the principle which drew them to Christ, drew them so effectually to each other, that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul." Who does not recognise in that nucleus of the Christian Church—that earliest hour of its existence—a significant intimation of the unity which was intended to fuse and form the faithful of every age and every nation under heaven, into one harmonious and devoted brotherhood?

But, distinguished as the members of the church must have been by almost every variety of prejudice and character, there was yet one important respect in which they met—they were *all Jews*. Although they harmonise easily together, will they equally unite with the believing Gentiles? No sooner had Peter beheld the vision which forbade him to "call any man common or unclean"—and "Paul and Silas declared what great things God had wrought by them among the heathen"—than all "the elders and brethren at Jerusalem rejoiced" that "to the Gentiles also God had granted repentance unto life." The enclosure of Jewish restriction was thrown open and broken down, heart met heart, and they who were once afar off, were forthwith introduced and welcomed as "fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God."

Having surmounted the first difficulty, however, of receiving the converted Gentile into Christian fellowship, many of the believing Jews still found it hard to conceive that his state could be quite secure unless he joined with them in attaching importance to certain parts of the Mosaic ritual. In opposition to this prejudice, the apostles, especially St. Paul, protested that the great principle of union between Jew and Gentile was the common salvation of Christ: "for he is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, . . . to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

Now this twofold doctrine—that Jew and Gentile, Barbarian, Seythian, bond and free—all believers, without national, civil, or social distinction, are incorporated into one visible body—and that Christ is the basis and bond of this incorporation—is a subject which imparts an entire character to some of the epistles, and which furnishes a clue to much in nearly all. And it is observable how invariably the inspired penman take occasion from this subject to insist and enlarge on the obligations of mutual love; and how often they ascend from this point to the contemplation of a union in Christ, which is destined to include, not only the holy of every age and nation, but also of other worlds.

The first of the apostolic epistles is to be found in Acts xv. 23—29; and may be called "an epistle to restore peace." The whole narrative is pertinent and instructive. An attempt is made by certain erring members of the church at Antioch, to compel others to conform to their prejudices. The Christian liberty

of a part of the church is invaded, and the peace of the whole disturbed. Paul and Barnabas, had they obeyed their early prepossessions, would have sided with those who attempted the imposition; but this their fidelity to their Lord, and to Christian liberty, forbade. Or, in the exercise of that high authority which they possessed, and of the great influence they had acquired, they might have put their veto on the attempted imposition; but this they forbore, both because they would not lord it over God's heritage, and because they supremely valued the peace and unity of the Christian Church. Humbly consenting in this emergency to form part of a deputation, they hasten to Jerusalem—their sole object, *the Christian union and liberty of the Church*. In the council which was there assembled—the first ever held in the Christian Church—nearly all the official powers of the Church militant met. But their only concern was to obey the dictates of their Lord, and their only aim to preserve the unity of the Church entire. "And to this agree the words of the prophets," said James, "as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, on whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." As if he had said,—the admission of the Gentiles may have outrun our expectation, and taken us by surprise; but it was a part of the Divine plan before man had breathed, or the world was made. In pursuance of that plan, the Almighty Architect is now at work, realising the type of the "tabernacle of David" by the erection of his spiritual temple. In every age the glorious fabric has been rising and advancing. The erection has reached that critical juncture, in which new materials—Gentile converts—are to be collected and employed. "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble them not"—that we do nothing calculated to disturb the peace, or retard the progress of the spiritual building. "But that we write to them," to the effect that, as we sacrifice our prejudices in pronouncing them, under God, absolved from the rite of circumcision, so they are kindly admonished to abstain, not only from things essentially and universally wrong, but also from things strangled and from blood, that the conscience of the pious Jew may not be wounded.

Accordingly a letter was sent, conceived in the very spirit of conciliation and love, and "laying upon them no greater burden than these necessary things." Such was the nature of the first epistolary offering laid upon the altar of Christian Unity. Though it is unostentatiously interwoven with the Scripture narrative, it richly deserves to stand out conspicuously in letters of gold, in the recollection of the Church, as a model, in temper and aim, for all who should subsequently attempt to compose the differences of Christian parties. How admirable was the entire proceeding! Instead of exercising their power to abridge the freedom of the Church, they nobly employ it as the champions of its liberty! The course they advise is that of mutual concession, and the spirit they breathe that of Christian love. They offer up their own prejudices at the shrine of the Church; and teach us to regard the peace of its members as cheaply purchased, if we can preserve or restore it by imitating their example.

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.—Dr. Paley, with his usual perspicuity, has shown that the principal object of the argumentative part of this epistle is "to place the Gentile convert upon a parity of situation with the Jewish, in respect of his religious condition, and his rank in the Divine favour." As this was the great