

should govern the different classes of society in their relations to each other. But very little indeed is said on the subject of discipline, and that little relates to the treatment of scandalous cases, such as could hardly be tolerated in any decent heathen society—to say nothing of the Church of Christ.

It was almost inevitable, however, that discipline should soon come to play a considerable part in the administration of an organization such as the Christian Church was. The ethical standard which it proclaimed was on many points higher than that which had hitherto been recognized among Jews or Gentiles, and for the most part it was disposed to take that standard seriously. It could not very well admit into its membership any who did not profess their intention to live in general harmony with it, and when flagrant lapses from it afterwards occurred it could not very well retain those guilty of them in their privileges, without exacting some reparation in the way of open confession and public humiliation. So long as the discipline was administered honestly, fairly and in such a way as to carry along with it the consciences of the members of the church generally, every instance of its infliction would make a deep and wholesome impression. It deepened the sense of sin, and educated the consciences of the weaker or more ignorant, while the forgiveness that was afterwards extended conveyed a valuable object lesson on the grace of God to all those truly penitent. Its effect on the surrounding community would be almost equally wholesome and could hardly fail to increase their respect for an organization which had the courage to maintain its own purity.

But hardly had this excellent system of open discipline made good its place in the church and gained the influence that comes from general approval, than forces began to be at work which ultimately transformed its whole character, spirit and methods. The clergy, finding themselves in possession of a power which greatly increased their influence and flattered their vanity, soon increased the number of offences for which discipline was exercised. Instead of confining it to scandalous sins, they extended it to every petty