

life,—bearing every kind of fruit but that which grows in the garden of God; turning divine guideposts to immortality into mere human fingerboards, and should it excite astonishment that men go astray? Subserviency to popular gratification, instead of authoritative exhibition of truth and principle, is the characteristic and sin of the day.

All this independency of creeds and vows is, by many, esteemed the sign of advanced thought,—reason asserting her rightful position; instead of what it may be justly termed, ecclesiastical perjury;—if broken promises be entitled to such a designation. Under confessions acknowledged as reflecting Bible truth, and so simple that he who runs may read, every kind of system finds shelter, and men deem it no disgrace, no stain upon integrity, to hold, and openly disseminate, principles, and advocate practices, antagonistic to vows, and yet remain in the church, whose teachings and forms they repudiate, regardless of the moral,—or immoral,—significancy of such a position. Under ordination vows, such free thought, such tampering with obligation, is dishonest, and he who cannot fulfil his pledges ought, in self-respect and common decency, to seek another and more congenial home. Pledges, lightly regarded in the pulpit, descend, in their moral influence, to the pew, and unfaithfulness supplants fidelity. How evident this on the general question of strict adherence to vows,—the unity of church forms,—consistency in order and discipline, and the Sabbath; in short, in all that is opposed to free independent thought. *The rule of action is too often found, not in the tenor of confessions and vows, but the individual opinion of what is best.*

Vows are often regarded, practically, as promises made, not to God, but to man; and as stepping stones to church position, rather than promises regulating the entire ministerial life, in its relation to the souls of men, and final accountability; and hence, as sole guide of conscience in duty, and tests of integrity, they, too easily, sink into oblivion. The result is a Bible rationalized,—a church in which humanism sits enthroned,—a morality shorn of its distinctive features,—a short pleasant path to Heaven; the natural tendency of that light estimation of vows, of which the unsettled, ever-changing, tone of Church thought and activity is, to-day, the too evident indication;—a craving that “the good old way” cannot appease.

(5.) Unity that combines the mass, and yet, to the fullest extent, develops individual energies, is Christ’s ideal of the church. But free thought disintegrates instead of combining, and is destructive of true individuality, and consequently of right action. The absence of that