

Various have been the perils of the Church since she arose; but there have been two great fires that have almost threatened her existence,—Persecution and Division. (I.)—In the reign of the Roman Emperors, were there ten successive years of persecution, and so hot did the fire burn, that the very name of Christian was deemed extinct; but the name emerged, and the cause survived, while the Emperors died. The age of martyrs was remarkable: blood then flowed in torrents, but it became the seed of men contending for the faith, and loving not their lives unto the death. The times of the Covenanters were memorable, and Guthrie, Largill and Kenwick belonged to the Church with which we are in connection, and though dead, yet speak. But why detail: Persecution has whetted the axe, and the Church has been on the scaffold, kindled the fire, and her sons have been on the pile tied to the stake, and women within tidemark have witnessed, fierce and untried torments have been invented, yet has the church baffled her foes, sometimes by her martyrs praying for their executioners, at other times by their repaying good for evil, and melting their murderers; and at a third, by the persecutor becoming in his turn martyr, and sealing with his blood the reality of his convictions. Thus unconsumed and consuming has she become. The fire but baptized her, so that in one age the zeal for martyrdoms had to be restrained; the furnace but refined her, so that purer, more zealous, and courageous did she become; her afflictions wrought out for her a holier faith and livelier hope, so that she ultimately gained in character. Looking at her in the furnace, you might pity her and prophecy she might perish, but she lost her dress only, and acquired fresh lustre. Helpless and exposed to the wrath of the enemy, you might deem her an easy prey; but the earth helped the woman and swallowed up his rage. You might imagine the fraud and force of the adversary all too powerful for her; but no, she thrives all the more she is assailed, so that this fire has never yet succeeded in injuring her. It has been quenched in the blood of martyrs, or been extinguished by their prayers; or it has spread and influenced others with zeal, and never will it succeed, for it reacts and revives where it was meant to destroy. The torch burns the more fiercely the more it is stirred, and sympathy and enquiry are excited where suffering for conscience sake is by good men endured; so that glorious is the Church in her bloody baptism, all on fire as a bush burning and yet unconsumed.

II. A more fearful fire has scathed the Church—that of internal Division. External persecution was tolerable and safe, but the disputes of friends have rent the body. These are the foxes that spoil the grapes, the thorns that choke the seed. What evil have they not wrought in every age? Ephraim's and Judah's dissensions almost split the ten tribes; the Corinthian Church was torn by division; the Protestant one has been severed by the same cause. Look at more recent times. What has arrayed one branch of the Christian Church against another, multiplied sects, and, worse still, made twain those of one household? Division. This fire tends to no good; persecution does, but not dissension.

Our Church's divisions, alas! have been like Reuben's, neither few nor small. What rent the body in '43, filled with so dismal fruits our unhappy Fatherland, and sent its baleful waters across the ocean to these Colonies where, surely, they might have been spared? Division,—call it not good; it is evil. "Woe unto them by whom offences come." I question not but that these, like many other evils, are ultimately overruled; but evil they are, and tend to it. "From whence come wars and fightings? come they not hence, even from your flesh?" If so, they are evil and of it; yet they are counteracted. The contention of Paul and Barnabas, mentioned in the 13th chapter of the Acts, resulted in greater activity and more good to the cause at large; and so, ultimately, division cures itself. The Evangelical Alliance has brought together the most opposite bodies. That Protestant one to be held in New