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2, 3,) was permitted the high privilege of ministering to the wants of our Lord's humanity,—as if prophetically indicating the services which they should thereafter render to "His Body, the Church." And that such charitable offices were discharged in the Apostolic day no one can doubt who reads carefully and dispassionately the instructions given by St. Paul for their guidance and encouragement. Indeed, many of his directions would lead us to infer that he was ordering—not individual, but—associated action for the instruction of the ignorant and relief of the needy.

It was, we may believe, on such warrant as this, that the Church, at a very early day, based her *associations of religious women* for the purposes of charity. Devoted to Christ, trained under a godly discipline, and acting under the guidance of the Church, these constituted a ministry whose efficiency for good it would be difficult to over-rate. By their means the faith was brought home to the domestic hearth, was inculcated in lessons of piety on the young, and breathed, in the spirit of consolation, into the ear of the bereaved or afflicted poor. Truly the early Church utilized her strength. All her resources were brought into play. She did not, as we do now, work with only one half of her powers. Woman, as well as man, found a vocation and associate life in her service; and the result was—the triumph of religion!

It is objected, Mr. Chairman, that the institution was abused, and on that account set aside. This is true. In later times, when the Church became worldly and forgetful of her early life, abuses did creep in. They reached to almost every doctrine, practice, and order of our holy religion, and that these particular institutions should have suffered is not surprising. The contrary would indeed have been so. But it may justly surprise us that at the Reformation,—when so much was attempted—no effort was made to restore this agency to its former dignity and usefulness. What was lawful in the one case was certainly also lawful in the other.

For this however there was a reason. The spirit which guided the Reformation was *not wholly pure*! There was confessedly much zeal, much regard for the truth of God; but