

of which mankind has ever been the witness, and either the subject or the object. Some men who are adversaries to the Gospel endeavour to reduce the whole of Christ's teaching to the Sermon on the Mount, which is acknowledged to be the chief example of His moral teaching. But the teaching and the miracles are inseparable; for not only did Christ perform the most stupendous miracles Himself, but He engaged that His disciples should do greater works than those which had excited so much astonishment. So that the only way to get rid of the miracles is to ignore the teaching altogether. But blot out the miracles of our Lord from the record of His life; then, after this first suppression, make another—blot out His discourses. And then the Gospel history will be reduced to a single line, which the German critic, Ebrard, has wittily expressed in these words:—"At that time it happened that nothing happened!" And out of this nothing, unbelievers would have us bring forth the greatest event of the world's history, that event since which mankind has begun to count the years of its history anew! No sane man, unless strongly biassed, can possibly admit so gross an absurdity. Without the Gospel history we cannot account for the world's renovation by the Gospel, not for the history of the Church and of modern times. Miracles, and especially those we have been considering, form an essential portion of anything that can claim to be the Gospel, as the foundation of the Christian system.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

MR. HERBERT, a well instructed Churchman in the parish of Esten, had noticed that his neighbours, the Wilsons, had been often absent from Church of late, and so he took occasion one day when he met Mr. Wilson, to say, "I have often missed you from Church lately, Mr. Wilson, I hope there is no serious reason for it."

MR. WILSON. No: If by serious reason you mean sickness, or anything of that kind, I thank God there has been none. The cause of my absence is simply this; My neighbour, Mr. Nixon, asked me some time ago to go down with him to hear Dr. Potter, the new Methodist minister. I like his preaching very much, and the people have been so attentive to me that I have felt more at home there than in church. And so I have gone often since. And I shall probably continue to go, occasionally, at least.

MR. H. I am sorry to hear you say so. I have always been taught that we do not go to church to listen to a lively or eloquent preacher, but to worship God. And the mere fact that you felt at home, does not surely prove that it was right for you to be there. You would probably have felt at home in bed, but that does not prove that that would have been the best place for you to spend the Sunday. St. Paul felt he was right in persecuting the Christians, but that does not prove that he was so.

MR. W. No, certainly not. But I do not see what right or wrong there is about this question. It does not make any difference, in my judgment what church we go to, so long as we hear the Gospel preached. One church is as good as another. There are good and bad in all churches. They are all just so many regiments of the same army, fighting under one General. And we won't be asked when we get to heaven what Church we belonged to here. In fact there is only one Church after all—the invisible Church, made up of the good of all Denominations, all converted men and

women. All true believers are members of, and together make up, that one true invisible Church which Christ and His Apostles founded, and to which the promises and privileges of the Gospel belong.

MR. H. Stop if you please. You have made a great many assertions about the Church. I gravely doubt the truth of every one of them; and if you have time I shall be glad to examine them with you, one by one, in the light of Holy Scripture and of common sense, that we may see where the truth is. For I am persuaded that it is a far more important question, "What Church a man belongs to," than you seem to think.

MR. W. I do not think it makes the least difference; but I am not busy, and I shall be very glad to hear what you have to say on the subject. We ought all to be learners; and for myself, if I have taken up with mistaken notions about the Church, I shall be thankful to be shown my mistakes. It is clearly our duty to believe the truth, however much such belief may require us to change our opinions or practices.

MR. H. That is plainly our first and most solemn duty. And so I will begin by asking you to clear your mind of a certain haziness of thought, which your statements seem to me to imply. You said just now that we will not be asked what Church we belonged to, when we get to heaven. But that, it seems to me, is begging the whole question. The thing that concerns us now, is not what will happen when we get to heaven, if we do get there; but simply, what is the safest and best way for us to take, in order to get there? We are not, you see, in heaven yet. The best we can say or hope of ourselves is, that we are on the way. And the only question that concerns us now is: Is the way we are pursuing the right way—the safest and the best for us to take?

If you were going to England, you would not say to yourself, It does not make any difference in what kind of vessel I attempt the voyage, I will not be asked when I get to England, whether I came on a raft or by one of the splendidly equipped and fast sailing steamers. As a wise man who has the voyage yet to make, you would consider what is the safest and best sort of vessel for you to sail in.

MR. W. That is all plain enough, as far as it goes. But I don't see how it touches my statement, that the Church of Christ is an invisible association of all who are in the right way, and not a visible society, one-half of whose members are manifestly in the wrong way.

MR. H. No it does not, and it was not intended to touch it; but only to show that the statement you have made, that "it does not make any difference what Church a man belongs to," is not so certainly true as you assume. And that before we can fairly approach that question, we have first to consider what the Church really is; and then whether there is more than one Church, to which those who wish to do what is right can belong.

MR. W. Yes, I think that would be the most satisfactory way to approach the subject.

MR. H. Well then, you say that the Church of Christ, to which the promises and privileges of the Gospel belong, is an invisible fellowship, made up of all who are truly converted, and are true believers, and that none others do or can belong to it.

MR. W. Yes, that is my conviction.

MR. H. But did it ever occur to you that if the Church of the New Testament be such an invisible fellowship, as you say, that then every visible thing on earth calling itself a 'Church,' is unscriptural and wrong? Is, in fact, nothing less than a

wicked attempt on the part of a mere human and unauthorized society, by appropriating a name which does not belong to it, to delude people into the notion that by joining it they will secure to themselves the promises and privileges which belong to another society altogether. It would hardly be honest for a new firm to take the name of an old and well established house, in order to gain for itself the credit and custom that belonged to the ancient and secure establishment. Or in another sphere: It was surely not right, it was most wicked and wrong, for the butcher, Arthur Orton, to call himself Roger Tichborne, in order that he might be able to appropriate to himself the rich estates of the Tichborne family.

MR. W. Certainly.

MR. H. And yet does not your definition of the Church oblige you to believe that every visible thing on earth calling itself a Church, has been guilty of just such a crime as that.

MR. W. I must confess I cannot see the difference, and I certainly think it would have been more honest if they had just called themselves the Methodist Society, or the Presbyterian, or Baptist Society; for certainly the evil you speak of has happened. And a great many people do delude themselves into thinking that they are members of the one true Church of Christ, because they belong to one or other of these societies called Christian Churches.

MR. H. But suppose you find on examination, that Holy Scripture teaches us most unmistakably, that the Church which Christ founded, and to which therefore the promises and privileges of the Gospel belong, is not an invisible fellowship such as you have described, but a visible and organized society, what will you say then? Will you maintain that the Scriptures are guilty of fraud? That they offer men bread, but only give them a stone?

MR. W. No, I could not dare to say anything of the kind. "Let God be true and every man a liar." I should infer, without doubt, that I had made a mistake about the Church being invisible. Though I do not believe that Holy Scripture teaches anything of the kind.

MR. H. You seem to have made up your mind very positively on this question. But, Mr. Wilson, did you ever examine the Scriptures, to see what they really do teach us about the Church?

MR. W. No, I cannot say that I have ever examined them for that purpose. But I read my Bible constantly, and my knowledge of it leaves no doubt in my mind that it teaches what I have stated. The charity which it everywhere insists on, requires us to believe that other Christian bodies are just as much Churches as our own.

MR. H. Never mind about the charity, we are not discussing that question yet; let us get at the truth first. The truth is always charitable. I mean, it is always the truest charity to teach people the truth, no matter how it may require them to act or what to change.

MR. W. Yes, I agree with you in that.

MR. H. Well then, what do we find when we turn to the New Testament for instruction? Do we find our Blessed Lord casting His teaching upon the unseen winds, to bear it over the world, and through all time, as best they can? Or do we not find Him gathering men and women visibly around Him, and organizing them into a visible society. Did He not give them visible sacramental signs; appoint over them visible officers, and guides; prescribe a visible mode for the initiation or admission of new members. And did not He