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ON THE CHRISTIAN LAW OF OFFENCES.

"It must needs be that offences come." The unhappy propensity of our nature carelessly or designedly to give offence, and easily to take it, occasions perhaps as much misery in the world as any other cause that may be mentioned. Our Divine Teacher who "knew what was in man," and what was best adapted to restrain and regulate his passions, has given us the most amiable rules for the treatment of offences. The law which prescribes the duty of abstaining from every thing which would give offence to another is more readily apprehended, and perhaps more easily reduced to practice than those which relate to our conduct when we have received offence, and the means to be taken to effect a reconciliation; and hence we find the directions are more numerous and explicit in the latter case than in the former. The reason of this difference it would be easy to assign; but our present enquiry is into the nature of the law which infallible wisdom has prescribed to guide us in our intercourse with each other, when any thing has been done to us at which we have cause to be offended.

The general rule is announced, or rather included, in the specific directions which our Saviour gave to his disciples, as they occur in Matt. xviii. 15—17. The offended party is first to try the effect of private expostulation; if this fail, to take with him witnesses and renew the attempt; and if this should not succeed, to bring it before the Church. Should the offender continue contumacious, he is to be considered as a heathen man and a publican. This seems, on the face of it, to be all very plain; and no doubt the great principle of action is clearly laid down: but I apprehend the whole passage is not so perfectly understood as is generally supposed. Three questions occur in relation to the whole proceeding. 1st. What is the nature of the assembly here denominated "the church?" The word *ecclesia*, it is known, denotes any assembly of people: here, probably, the congregation of the synagogue. Such a society as what is now designated as a Christian Church, consisting only of the faithful, or those who appeared so, was not then in existence. 2. To whom is the direction