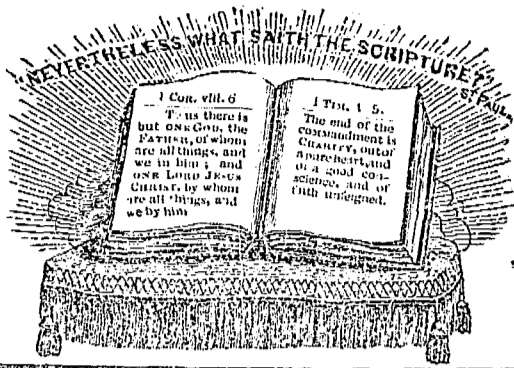


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THE CHURCH.

The Church, as at first constituted, presents interesting and beautiful aspects. It was not a forced and arbitrary, but free spontaneous union. It grew out of the principles and feelings of human nature. Our nature is social. We cannot live alone. We cannot shut up any great feeling in our hearts. We seek for others to partake it with us. The full soul finds at once relief and strength in sympathy. This is especially true in religion, the most social of all our sentiments, the only universal bond on earth. In this law of our nature, the Christian Church had its origin. Christ did not establish it in a formal way. If you consult the New Testament, you do not find Jesus or his apostles setting about the task of forming an artificial organization of the first disciples. Read in the book of Acts, the simple, touching narratives of the union of the first converts. They were of one heart and one soul. They could not be kept asunder. The new truth melted them in one mass; knit them into one body. In their mutual love, they could not withhold from one another their possessions, but had all things in common. Blessed unity! a type of that oneness and harmony which a purer Christianity is to spread through all nations. Among those early converts, the most gifted and enlightened were chosen to be teachers in public assemblies. To these assemblies the brotherhood repaired with eagerness, to hear expositions of the new faith, to strengthen one another's loyalty to Christ, and to be open witnesses of him in the world. In their meetings they were left very much to follow the usages of the synagogue, in which they had been brought up; so little did Christianity trouble itself about forms. How simple, how natural this association! It is no mystery. It grew out of the plainest wants of the human heart. The religious sentiment, the spirit of love towards God and man, awakened afresh by Christ, craved for a new union through which to find utterance and strength. And shall this church union, the growth of the Christian spirit, and so plainly subordinate to it, usurp its place or in any way detract from its sole sufficiency, from its supreme unrivalled glory?

The church, according to its true idea and purpose, is an association of sincere, genuine followers of Christ; and at first, this idea was, in a good degree realized. The primitive disciples were drawn to Christ by conviction. They met together and confessed him, not from usage, fashion or education, but in opposition to all these. In that age, profession and practice, the form and the spirit, the reality and the outward signs of religion went together. But with the growth of the church, its life declined; its great idea was obscured; the name remained, and sometimes little more than the name. It is a remarkable fact, that the very spirit to which Christianity is most hostile, the passion for power, dominion, pomp, and pre-eminence, struck its deepest roots in the church. The church became the very stronghold of the lusts and vices, which Christianity most abhors. Accordingly, its history is one of the most melancholy records of past times. It is sad enough to read the blood-stained annals of worldly empires; but when we see the spiritual kingdom of Christ a prey for ages to usurping popes, prelates, or sectarian chiefs, inflamed with bigotry and theological hate and the lust of rule, and driven by these fires of hell to grasp the temporal sword, to persecute, torture, imprison, butcher their brethren, to mix with and embitter national wars, and to convulse the whole Christian world, we experience a deeper gloom, and are more tempted to despair of our race. History has not a darker page, than that which records the persecutions of the Albigenes, or the horrors of the inquisition. And when we come to later times, the church wears anything rather than holiness inscribed on her front. How melancholy to a Christian, the history lately given us by Ranke, of the reaction of Catholicism against Protestantism. Throughout, we see the ecclesiastical powers resorting to force as the grand instrument of conversion; thus proving their alliance not with heaven, but with earth and hell. If we take broad views of the church in any age or land, how seldom do we see the prevalence of true sanctity! How many of its ministers

preach for lucre or display, preach what they do not believe, or deny their doctrines in their lives? How many congregations are there made up in a great degree of worldly men and women, who repair to the house of God from usage, or for propriety's sake, or from a vague notion of being saved, not from thirst for the divine spirit, not from a fullness of heart, which longs to pour itself forth in prayer and praise? Such is the Church. We are apt, indeed, to make it an abstraction, or to separate it in our thoughts from the individuals who compose it; and thus it becomes to us a holy thing, and we ascribe to it strange powers. Theologians speak of it as a unity, a mighty whole, one and the same in all ages; and in this way the imagination is cheated into the idea of its marvellous sanctity and grandeur. But we must separate between the theory or the purpose of the church, and its actual state. When we come down to facts, we see it to be not a mysterious, immutable unity, but a collection of fluctuating, divided, warring individuals, who bring into it, too often, hearts and hands any thing but pure. Painful as it is, we must see things as they are; and so doing, we cannot but be struck with the infinite absurdity of ascribing to such a church mysterious powers, of supposing that it can confer holiness on its members, or that the circumstance of being joined to it is of the least moment in comparison with purity of heart and life.

Purity of heart and life, Christ's spirit of love towards God and man; this is all in all. This is the only essential thing. The church is important only as it ministers to this, and every church which so ministers, is a good one, no matter how, when or where it grew up, no matter whether it worship on knees or on its feet, or whether its ministers are ordained by pope, bishop, presbyter, or people; these are secondary things, and of no comparative moment. The church which opens on heaven, is that, and that only, in which the spirit of heaven dwells. The church whose worship rises to God's ear, is that and that only, where the soul ascends. No matter whether it be gathered in cathedral or barn; whether it sit in silence or send up a hymn; whether the minister speak from carefully prepared notes, or from immediate, fervent, irrepressible suggestion. If God be loved, and Jesus Christ be welcomed to the soul, and his instructions be meekly and wisely heard, and the solemn purpose grow up to do all duty amidst all conflict, sacrifice, and temptation, then the true end of the church is answered. "This is no other than the house of God, the gate of heaven."

In these remarks, I do not mean that all churches are of equal worth. Some undoubtedly correspond more than others to the spirit and purposes of Christianity, to the simple usages of the primitive disciples, and to the principles of human nature. All have their superstitions and corruptions, but some are more pure than the rest; and we are bound to seek that which is purest, which corresponds most with the divine will. As far as we have power to select, we should go to the church where we shall be most helped to become devout, disinterested, and morally strong. Our salvation, however, does not depend on our finding the best church on earth, for this may be distant or unknown. Amidst diversities of administrations, there is the same spirit. In all religious societies professing Christ as their Lord, the plainest, grandest truths of religion will almost certainly be taught, and some souls may be found touched and enlightened from above. This is a plain, undeniable fact. In all sects, various as they are, good and holy men may be found; nor can we tell in which the holiest have grown up. The church than answers its end in all; for its only end is to minister to human virtue. It is delightful to read in the records of all denominations the lives of eminent Christians, who have given up every thing for their religion, who have been faithful unto death, who have shed around them the sweet light and fragrance of Christian hope and love. We cannot then well choose amiss, if we choose the church which, as it seems to us, best represents the grand ideas of Christ, and speaks most powerfully to our consciences and hearts. This church however, we must not choose for our brother. He differs from us probably in temperament, in his range of

intellect, or in the impressions which education and habit have given him. Perhaps the worship which most quickens you and me, may hardly keep our neighbour awake. He must be approached through the heart and imagination; we through the reason. What to him is fervor passes with us for noise. What to him is an imposing form is to us vain show. Condemn him not. If in his warmer atmosphere he builds up a stronger faith in God and a more steadfast choice of perfect goodness than ourselves, his church is better to him than ours to us.—*Channing.*

JESUS THE SAVIOUR.

"And thou shalt call his name Jesus."—*Mat. i. 21.*

It was a custom among the Israelites, of which frequent examples are recorded in their sacred books, to bestow upon their children significant names, intimating either the feelings of the parent, or the circumstances of the birth, or the character and destiny of the offspring. Such are all the names in the patriarchal history; some of which, as those of Isaac and Sarah, were changed in commemoration of some epoch in their lives, or to mark their altered fortunes. It is further observable respecting this custom, that the name was often framed by a combination of one of the names of God. Thus Isaiah means the salvation of the Lord; Elisha, salvation of God; Elijah, God the Lord, or the strong Lord; Elihu, he is my God himself; Lemuel, God with them; and a child, given as a pledge of deliverance to Judah in the reign of Abaz, was called Immanuel, that is, God with us. As this prophecy was also applied to the Messiah, he is on that occasion once called Immanuel; intimating that by his residence among men, the presence of God would be particularly manifest. There can, then, be no ground for the opinion that this name implies a divine nature in Jesus, as if the very God, literally and personally, came to abide with us. For, as we see, this application of the name of God to men was a common thing; and if Christ's being once called Immanuel could argue that he was truly God, a man's being always called Elijah, Elihu, or Lemuel would no less certainly prove him to be truly God. It was in his case, as in others, a significant name, and not an assertion of personal divinity.

The name Jesus is also one of appropriate significance. It means Saviour. It intimates the deliverance which he was sent to accomplish. It designates the sense in which he was to bless the world. Thus his very name is a memorial of his office; so that we cannot speak of him without being reminded both of the honor which he had from God, and the blessings which he brought to men. We call him Christ, the anointed of God; Jesus, the Saviour of men.—*Ware.*

NATURE OF CHRISTIAN SALVATION.

"He shall save his people FROM THEIR SINS."—*Mat. i. 21.*

The great root of evil and wretchedness is sin; and its prevalence is the only cause which renders a Saviour necessary. Freedom from sin is freedom from all essential ill. With this also the language of Scripture strikingly corresponds. It represents salvation to consist in the removal of sin and its consequences, and the substitution in its place of holiness, with its happy consequences and lasting rewards. Jesus came to put away sin; to give repentance and remission of sins; to bless in turning away every one from his iniquities; to redeem from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. This is the constant language of the New Testament, which no man can read without the persuasion, that a moral regeneration, a deliverance from the power of sin and perfection in purity and holiness, is the purpose to be effected by the gospel; that in this consists its salvation, commencing upon earth, and consummated in the glory and bliss of eternity.

A strict adherence to the language of the Scriptures on this point, will keep us from the error of imagining, that the evil from which Jesus saves is the curse of man's original condition, the fearful destiny in which he is involved by nature. Now it is not only perfectly inconceivable that a benevolent being

should have subjected his creatures to such a miserable fate, prior to their sinning, or even to their existing, but, which is more to the purpose, the sacred writers perpetually teach, that the misery to be saved from is that of sin, not of natural condition; that the wrath to be escaped is that which visits their own transgressions, not that which awaits them because they are men, or to which they are naturally subjected. They speak of no evil prior to or greater than that of sin. They speak of no curse antecedent to this, or independent of it. And they propose to save from this as the grand, the essential, the all-comprehensive ill, leading to infinite consequences of wretchedness and despair.

We are very glad to suppose that the work of redemption is some expedient for getting rid of the punishment due to sin—as if that were of all things the most to be desired; and thence we are easily led to persuade ourselves, that we may so take advantage of the work which has been wrought as to escape the punishment, though we may not have relinquished the sin. Thus to avoid the penalty, and yet enjoy the transgression, has always been a chief object of false religions, and men would fain believe that it has been accomplished in the true. But let us not be deceived. No such proposterous compromise has been made. It is inconsistent with all that we have been taught either by experience or religion. For what says experience? The penalty of sin often continues to visit the sinner long after he has repented and reformed. The impiety, indiscretion, and vices of youth, for example, are followed with suffering and shame through life, and burden the memory with bitter thoughts as long as reflection lives. But it would not be so if the grand design were simply to provide an escape from punishment, or to devise some means of abolishing it. In this case all such suffering must have been done away at once. Let us not then be deceived. Even the assurance of pardon is no assurance that the consequences of transgression shall be altogether removed. For what says the Scripture? "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance on their iniquities."

And if we inquire of religion, as taught either by nature or by revelation, what is it, in strict truth, which God designs especially to promote by his government and his dispensations? Happiness? Yes, unquestionably. But if so, there were no need of laws and restraints, and moral means, and institutions of discipline and instruction, for he might by the arbitrary appointments of his will lavish it abundantly on his creatures. But surely it is not so. Being a holy God, whose abhorrence of sin is equal to his desire of happiness, and in whose view there is no true happiness where there is not holiness, he makes holiness the primary object of his government, and the moral perfection of his offspring the favorite purpose of his dispensations. Nothing will answer in the place of this. He cannot be satisfied by some plausible device for remitting punishment, or by shifting it off upon some other than the transgressor, nor even by arbitrarily excluding all suffering from his universe. It is not suffering, but sin, which he would exterminate; he could esteem no salvation accomplished for his children, until this principle of all evil is itself utterly eradicated.

Let us not, then, be deceived in regard to the nature of this salvation. It is not the abolition of punishment, but of sin. As when a man is saved from a disease, that is, by curing him of it; so he is saved from his sins by being rid of them. It would avail little to deliver the sick man from his pangs, if his disorder were still unrelieved, and bearing him down imperceptibly to the grave. And it would avail little to deliver the sinner from punishment, and the sufferings which follow in the train of vice, if his evil dispositions were left unrebuked. For while he remains a moral being, he may choose for himself what happiness he pleases, yet if he cannot relish that of virtue, he will find no content. Let his fetters be stricken off, let the fire be quenched, and the gnawing worm be dead; open to him the rich paradise of heaven, and place him among the obedient and holy worshippers around the throne of God; yet if he have not been redeemed from sin, nor his affections reclaimed from its love, there is no