

GENERAL LITERATURE.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

CONTRASTED WITH THE CHURCH AT THE PRESENT DAY.

THE condition of our church in our own times, compared with what it was in the days of the apostles, and their immediate successors, presents a sad departure in doctrine and practice from the purity in which it then existed,

Then the united prayer was in the language of our Saviour, that the church might be one, even as Christ and the Father were one, that the world might believe because they were one. Now the practice of nearly all is, that the church should be split up and divided into various sects, with no bond of union to join the different bodies of professed Christians. Then Christians made their future existence the great end and aim of their being, and all other questions were made subservient to it. Now professed Christians practically live for this world; the other being only an after consideration. Then to profess the name of Christ, subjected his followers to ignominy, reproach, and death, and the loss of all pleasures which the things of this world afford; they were persecuted, imprisoned, and subjected to the most cruel tortures, that man could inflict, and their property was subject to confiscation, and their very names cast out as evil. Now to profess the name of Christ is honorable, and secures even the respect and favor of the world. Then, the offence of the cross deterred any from becoming the followers of Christ, only as they were influenced by pure and holy motives. Now the honor of a Christian profession is a strong incentive to church membership. Then the followers of Christ were willing to spend and be spent in their Master's service; they suffered willingly the despoiling of their goods, and counted not their own lives dear unto them for the sake of Christ; and if needs be, they were willing to endure every affliction and privation, and death itself, for the more enduring joys of that better country. Now we have reason to fear that similar trials would cause multitudes of those who are loud in their professions, to forsake the cause of the Redeemer, for the husks of this world. Then there was a marked difference between the church and the world, in the lives, conversation and examples of men. Now the outward acts of the majority of professors furnish small evidence of their discipleship; they are as close in their bargains, as overhearing in their dealings, as virulent and unrelenting in their animosities, as miserly in their savings, as aristocratic in their feelings, as dogmatical in their opinions, and as worldly-minded in their conversation and intercourse with the world, as are many whose hopes and desires are bounded by the limits of time: they are as fond of equipage and show, as much given to laying up riches here below, as fond of the honors of this world, and of being called by men Rabbi, as are many of whom we do not expect better things: and they embark with the same zeal in political animosities, and are as light and trifling in their conversation, and all their feelings apparently as limited to earthly pleasures, as are many who have not a name to live. Then the Christian lived for Christ and for him alone. Now we fear multitudes of professors are living for themselves. Then they went from house to house, exhorting sinners, comforting the afflicted and encouraging the brethren. Now most seem to be satisfied, if their ministers alone perform these duties. Then the cause of Christ was near their hearts, it burned upon their tongues, and was their continual theme. Now how cold and dead are professors; how seldom is the sinner exhorted, or the enquirer encouraged by them, ex-

cept at stated periods. Then, in their intercourse with each other, their tongues gave the most ready utterance to such joyful emotions as the cause of Christ inspired. Now how often professors meet, hold long intercourse with each other, and part with not a word of heaven, or God: even in the social circle, where they congregate for friendly intercourse, the news, the weather, the fashions, and politics are fruitful themes; but their relations to God come not into all their thoughts. Then the Bible was their book of books. Now the last new novel is eagerly devoured. Then they forsook not the assembling of themselves together. Now how many names are on the records of the church, who seldom visit the stated prayer meeting. Then they were content to believe the Bible as it reads, and did not seek to be wise above what was written. Now each one fancies there is some hidden meaning in the text, which he brings to light by interpreting it in a figurative or spiritual manner; and that the Bible does not mean what it says, according to literal reading. Then Christians were living in constant expectation of their Saviour's return. Now the church are satisfied to delay his coming 1000 years. Then they strove with all their might to advance the interests of the church; but now they are more eager to build up their respective sects.

A careful comparison of the church in the two periods of its existence, cannot but satisfy the candid inquirer after truth, that the standard of piety is sadly lowered; and that professors of religion do not live in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for the day of God, as did the early Christians. This is most truly the Laodicean state of the church, and Christ stands at the door; while the church are saying in their hearts, "my Lord delayeth his coming." We therefore who are looking for the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of the great God and our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, ought to be up and doing, that we may arouse others to be ready, with their lamps trimmed and burning, read to meet the bridegroom when he cometh, like the Christians of the primitive church.

THOUGHTS ON THE DOMESTIC INSTITUTION.

ALL the foundations of the earth are out of course, (Ps. 124: 5) God, in the plenitude of his wisdom and goodness, has seen fit to create man in his own image, that he might be happy in the enjoyment of his favor forever. To carry out this great and benevolent design, he has made every necessary provision in the adaptation of means and laws. Although he has left us to choose our own sphere of life, yet he claims the prerogative of being law-giver: he only knows what is most needful for us.

Whatever reference the psalmist might have had in this text, it nevertheless seems applicable to the subject before us. We therefore proceed to inquire, what are the foundations of human happiness in this life. Although this is a most important inquiry, yet it is not a very difficult task to furnish a correct answer. Every person possessing common sense will readily answer, that the foundation of domestic happiness is laid in a properly regulated family. The marriage institution is from God. When rightly viewed, it is such as is worthy of its author, being every way adapted to the end for which it was designed.

Nothing on earth presents such a scene of exquisite delight, as that of a holy family. Perhaps we shall not be understood when we say a holy family. The true meaning of this term, like that of many others, has been so perverted as to convey to many very erroneous notions concerning God and things of God.

Let it forever be understood and remembered, that to be holy is simply nothing more nor less than to be right, to think right, feel right, act right, and only right, in all things at all times, and in all places. This is all that is meant by the term holiness; the opposite is sin. In this view we see what a holy family is. It is an instance where the union of the heads has been according to the law of God legally consummated, and where the law of love is predominant. Where both temporally and spiritually there is a place for everything, and everything in its place. As long as this is the case, there will be harmony and substantial happiness. But if the smallest wheel of this moral machinery is displaced, it throws the whole into confusion. Much more is it so where a principal wheel or the spring is wanting.—This reverses the whole scene, for there is, and there can be no earthly scene so dreadful as that presented by an unholy family.

To this sentiment all candid thinking persons must yield a ready assent, as one that is based upon incontrovertible facts. Every family is a fountain from which issue the streams of society, both bitter and sweet. What language can express the height, and depth, the length and breadth of the responsibility of all heads of families? The world is what it now is, by reason of sin. When we look about and see, as we are compelled to, on every hand the ravages of sin in every department of life not excepting the sacred pale of the family circle, we are constrained to cry out in anguish of soul. All the foundations of the earth are out of course. God's merciful designs, and Satan's devices are not understood, for the simple reason that they are not studied. God is ever bountiful, but he helps those only who help themselves. He giveth wisdom liberally to all who ask in the right way. The sluggard, and especially the spiritual sluggard, is of all men the most loathsome character that can be conceived. The enemy of man is ever on the alert, and after some six thousand years of experience, he knows full well how, when, and where to hurl his fiery darts most successfully. He seeks continually to poison the fountains whence flow the streams of human enjoyment.—This done, his work of destruction is accomplished, as effectually as would be the case if the only fountain from which a family could be supplied with the cooling beverage, were poisoned. He continually seeks to undermine domestic happiness, by leading astray both husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters. Sapping the very foundations of all that is dear to man on earth. Let the work of reform commence with families, and thus let the foundation be cleansed so that the streams may be pure. It is truly surprising to see how the enemy, ever since the fall, has been successfully lulling the world to sleep on this great subject. In view of the various and multiplied efforts that have been put forth for reform during the last twenty years, we have said, Whereunto shall we liken this generation? It is like unto a man who, instead of plucking up by the roots, is continually mowing down or rather clipping off the tops of the noxious weeds in his garden. Or like the man who, wishing to fell a mighty oak, over whose head centuries have rolled, instead of laying the ax to the root, is seen climbing to the very top of the tree, and there striking the first blow, and so trimming down towards the roots, which have struck deep into the earth. That scripture is literally true, which, in giving a description of the character of fallen men, says, that madness is in their hearts while they live. The author of sin and its consequences looks on with the utmost complacency, and says, Well, that all works admirably.