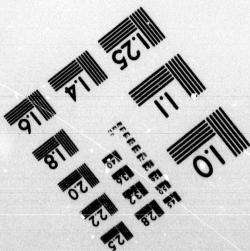
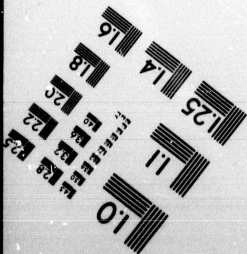
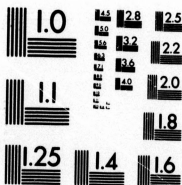


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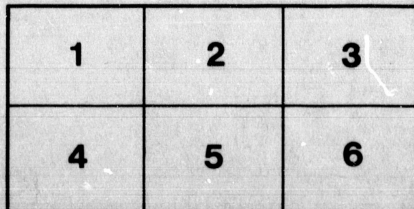
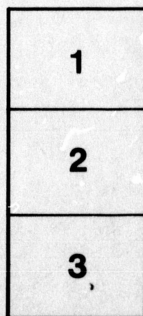
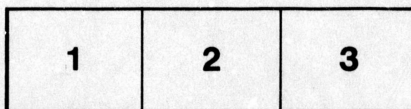
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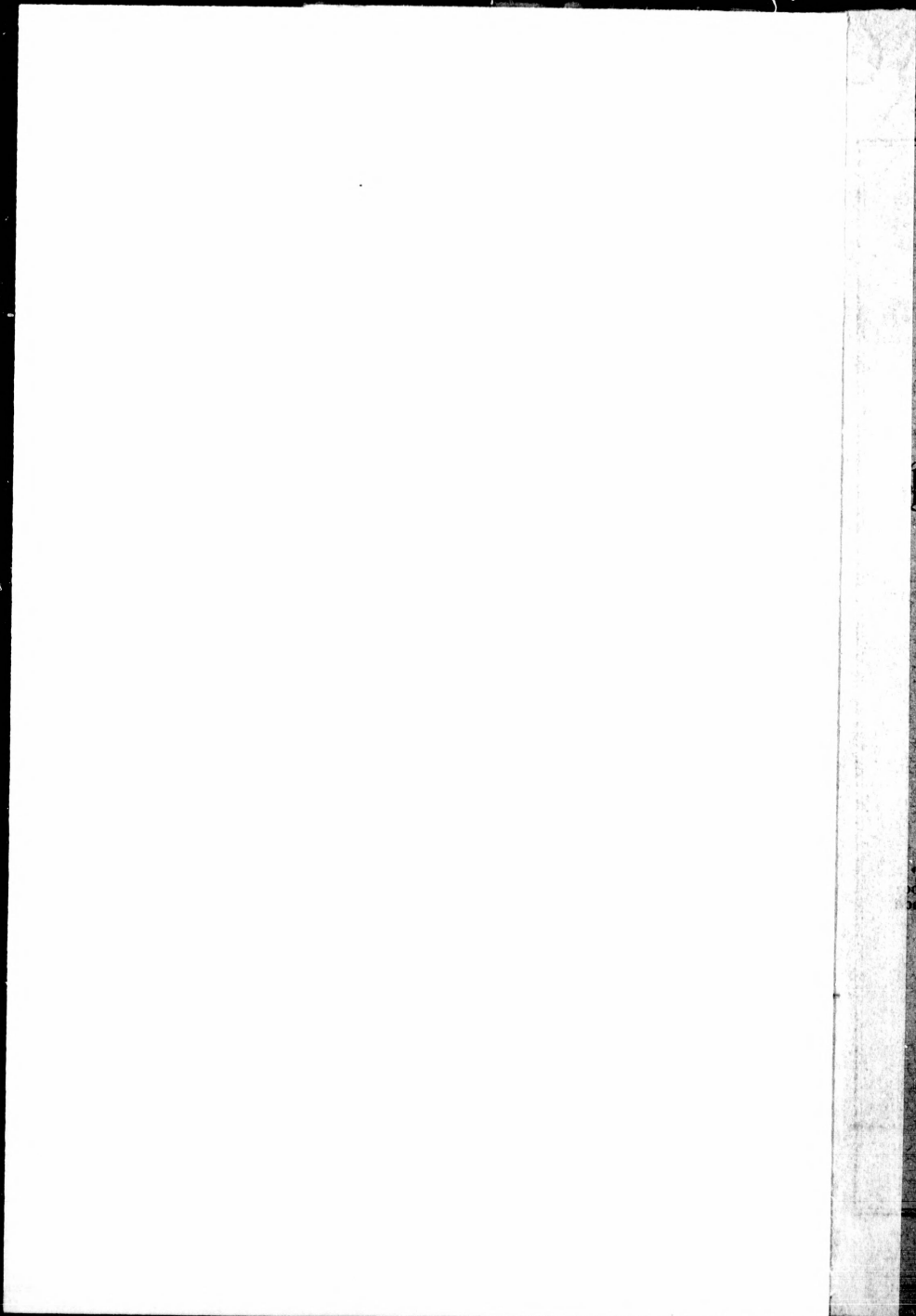
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THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

OF A MAN OF YEARS

CONCERNING

Churches and Church Connection.

BY

REV. JOHN CARROLL, D.D.

“As ye therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. — Col. iii. 6, 7.

TORONTO:

PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM BRIGGS,

METHODIST BOOK ROOM.



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OCTOBER, 1879.

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THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

OF A MAN OF YEARS

CONCERNING

ADVISORY.

The following tract is the substance and logical outcome of the exercises of an active and conscientious mind for many years, very briefly expressed in a very plain and unpretentious manner. This monogram was at first intended for one or other of our Dominion Methodist periodicals; but, on second thoughts, it was concluded that more of the class of persons, to whom it would be likely to be useful, under doubts and difficulties, would be reached by the article in a detached form than any other.

THE WRITER.

OCTOBER, 1879.

PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM BRIDGE

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THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS
ON
CHURCHES AND CHURCH CONNECTION.

RELIGIOUS COMPANIONSHIP REQUIRED.

MAN is a social being, endowed with social affections, and made the subject of social relations and dependencies from the time of his birth. In all secular interests and enterprises he requires associates and companionship; and in religion, the most tender and important of all interests, he needs and naturally sighs for fellowship still more than in worldly matters. In the Bible, the value and obligation of Church relation is often asserted or implied. The very word (*ecclesia*), which is translated "Church," means an assembly; and this "assembling of ourselves together" we are charged "not to forget." "With two or three" thus assembled in the name of Christ, He has promised to be present: "there am I in the midst of them." Christians are commanded to perform several acts of care and kindness for each other, which they can seldom have the opportunity for fully carrying out without the closest Church connection. They are to "confess their faults one to another, and to pray for one another." They are to "warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, and to support the weak." And if we fail in "gaining our brother" when we have told him his fault, between him

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and us alone, we are to tell it unto the Church; and if he hear not the Church, he is to be to us as an heathen man and a publican. Now the more intimate and frequent the Church fellowship, the easier the above can be done. To secure these ends, there must be organization, and warrant for brotherly and pastoral oversight, in some form or another—call it Congregational, Presbyterian, or Episcopal, as you will. To some such organization every Christian man is bound to belong, else there will be no visible church, and nobody to confess Christ in the world.

TO WHICH SHALL WE ATTACH OURSELVES?

Now the question arises, to which one of the various modifications and varieties of these three principal divisions of Christ's militant host should I seek to ally myself, or continue to adhere, if I chance to be already a member of it? Which? This problem is revolved in mind, from time to time, by some of the most thoughtful, earnest, and conscientious of men favoured with the light of revelation. On this account I have concluded to place on paper the results of the workings of my own anxious thoughts for many years.

A CASE PROPOUNDED.

I know a man who was brought up with no very particular predilections for any Church in early childhood; neither of his parents was a member of any Church till he was nine or ten years of age—his mother, though of Quaker education, then became a Methodist; his father never became the member of a Church. Up to the age referred to, my friend had never heard a sermon; and only two or three times, at long intervals, a prayer. Almost the only Church contiguous to him during the earliest part of his

life was the Episcopalian, then known as "the Church of England," but he never entered it. About his ninth year a Methodist Church was opened, and a Sunday-school organized; his mother joined the society and the boy attended the Sunday-school and congregation. Three years later a Presbyterian Church was opened, and circumstances led our young hero to attend its services nearly as much as he did the Methodist. He was often exercised in mind with regard to his soul's salvation; at those times he had the conviction that, if he became a Christian, he must join a Church, and of the three Churches he knew, his convictions and proclivities tended towards the Methodist Church. Therefore, when, at the age of fifteen, he became fully awakened and resolutely resolved to save his soul, drawn that way by favouring circumstances, he sought the Methodist services, preaching, prayer, and class-meeting; and when an offer was given to unite formally with that Church, he did so, without one moment's hesitation about its being the proper thing for him to do. The associations by which it surrounded him were the most effectual that could by possibility have been for confirming his convictions and purposes,—for leading him to the knowledge of Christ and the remission of his sins,—and for building him up in the experience and habits of a Christian. He soon obtained a clear sense of pardon and peace, and went on his way rejoicing. How natural and proper that he should have no misgivings with regard to the legitimacy of his Church, or the Christian lawfulness of his own position? None of the family to which he belonged had been baptized in infancy. But as he was the youngest, and the only one under his mother's control after she became a Methodist, she had him baptized at about the age of eleven. Two brothers, some years older than himself, who became members of the

same Church, one at the same time as he did and one a little after, felt it their duty to seek for, and to submit to, baptism; but he himself felt that his boy-baptism was sufficient, and that he was only called to fulfil its obligations. He was never disturbed a moment on the subject all his life.

THE CHURCH FOUND READY.

The Methodist Church then operating in Canada was Presbyterio-Episcopal, being still a part of the M. E. Church of the United States, and enjoyed all the advantages of thorough and authoritative ministerial oversight, and the mutual watch-care of its members over each other. The class-leaders watched over and admonished their members, in the class and out of it. Discipline was strictly enforced, and disciplinary enquiries into charges against the moral conduct of members were mostly conducted either by "a select number," (the selection being made by "the preacher in charge") or, not unfrequently, "before the society"—that is, all the assembled members; but then the numbers at that time were small. Such a Church, he now feels assured, conformed in all essential matters to the spirit and practice of the primitive Church, let who will cavil against it.

REASONS FOR KEEPING ON IN THE CENTRAL BODY.

My example has adhered to the main central body of Methodists in this country all through, because he thought the essentials of Methodism, which he believed, with Dr. Chalmers, to be "Christianity in earnest," were preserved; and that all the changes of relation and administration which subsequently took place, were providentially called for, constitutionally effected, and substantially maintained

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the identity of the Church with which he had first united.
[Reasoned out in Carroll's EXPOSITION.]

But in the course of his long experience, his multifarious reading, and the thoughts that his mind revolved, he never saw occasion for being "shaken in mind" by the bold and boisterous claims put forth by certain exacting sections of our much-divided visible Christianity. They sometimes led him to re-examine his ground, but the examination always resulted in the conviction that he should remain where he was.

IMMERSIONIST CLAIMS CONSIDERED.

One of the first of those pertinacious claims which address themselves to the inquiring Protestant mind is that of the strict Baptist, who asserts that a valid baptism is the only means of formal admission into the visible church, and that no baptism is valid but that administered to a believing adult by immersion in water; and some of them go so far as to say, by a person who himself had been immersed, that is, say, by a Baptist; and, consequently, that there are no regular Christian Churches but those which are composed of adults who have been plunged. Now, these claims never weighed with my friend so as to induce him, for one moment, to suspect the validity of his own baptism, much less to inquire after admission into a Baptist Church to the renunciation of his own. For, after careful reading and study of the New Testament in English and in Greek, he saw no warrant for exclusive adult baptism—in view of the Abrahamic Covenant,—the relation of children to the Israelitish Church,—the predictions of the Old Testament prophets relative to the relations of children under the Gospel,—and the way they were treated by Christ himself, and the course of procedure towards them by the apostles and early

ministers, he did not think the validity of infant baptism could be overthrown. Furthermore, he could find no positive example of immersion by John the Baptist, Christ, or His apostles, either before or after the Pentecost. Nor did he conclude, upon inquiry, that any of the original words applied to baptism favoured the exclusive immersionist's views. Besides, he felt persuaded that to make the position and claims of the ultra Baptist good, that is in consistency with their principles, they should be able not only to prove the necessity of immersion from the New Testament, but to demonstrate the lineal, unbroken succession of every administrator of baptism among themselves, from an apostle, who had himself been put under water by John the Baptist, or Christ, which he knew no one could ever demonstrate.* In short, he became persuaded that what made these claims so taking was the pertinacity and confidence with which they were put forth, and the pictorial or ritualistic effect of their particular form. He did not, however, unchurch the denomination, or deny the validity of their ministry for their preferences; but he could have enjoyed their services better were it not for the extremes to which they pushed their principles. Certainly he saw nothing to constrain him to renounce his church relations to form a connection with them, especially as Methodism did not enjoin a form repugnant to any one, or coerce parents to have their children baptized contrary to their convictions, but left this secondary matter open.

CLAIMS OF PROTESTANT HIGH-CHURCHES.

Just here, the High-church Episcopalian breaks in, and accosts the nonconforming Pædo-baptist and the Ana-baptist,

* See these ideas elaborated, and the proofs given, in "METHODIST BAPTISM," for sale at the Book Room.

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and addresses them as follows: "Gentlemen,—Your prefer-
ence and claims with regard to baptism or any other sacra-
ment or ordinance, or indeed any other feature of Christianity,
amount to nothing. It matters not which way either of you
dispense the one ordinance or the other, or the time of life
when you bestow it; neither of you has been regularly or-
dained, and therefore neither of you is a minister at all with a
proper warrant to preach the Gospel and to disciple mankind.
None but bishops are authorized to ordain, and no bishops
but ours can trace their connection with the apostles by
uninterrupted succession." But when my friend looked into
the matter, he could find no reason for believing the Holy
Scriptures taught the physical or mechanical efficacy of
material elements by whomsoever dispensed; nor any
scripture that enjoined the necessity of any such lineal suc-
cession. He observed great stress laid upon *character* and
purity of doctrine, but none on lineal descent. Further-
more, when he looked into his New Testament, he found no
proof that Bishops succeeded to Apostles. He found cases
in which "apostles" and "presbyters" "laid on hands,"
but none where *bishops* had, only as we can construe them
and elders, or presbyters, to be the same order, of which he
found easy proof.* Aside from all that, he found that they
had their own episcopacy and their succession from the
Church of Rome, which they had renounced, and which in
turn had anathematized them as schismatics.

SIMILAR ROMANISM.

"True," interposed the Romish Church, "the episcopal
order and ordination and also the succession is indispensable,
indeed if you have it, but those important pre-requisites
are wanting to Protestant Episcopalians; our Great Mother

* See the twentieth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Church is the only one which has them both in their integrity. We have them undoubtedly."*

This startled my friend a little, and he said he should like to belong to the true church whoever she was; but when he came to reflect upon the claim of the Episcopacy, *jure divino*, he found that institution and the idea had all grown up in and after the patristic times. And as to the Fathers themselves he became thoroughly satisfied that even they were very uncertain authority for any doctrine or ecclesiastical usage. His own private examination brought him, early in life, to the same conclusion as the one here so neatly expressed by the Rev. Dr. Hodge:—"Such is the diversity of opinion among the Fathers themselves—such the vagueness of their doctrinal statements—and such the unsettledness of their *usus loquendi*, as to important words, that the authority of the Fathers may be quoted on either side of any disputed doctrine. There is no view, for example, of the Lord's Supper, which has ever been held in the church, for which the authority of some father cannot be adduced. And often the same father presents one view at one time, and another at another time."

He also found that the further on down the stream of ecclesiastical history he went, the further usages drifted from the simplicity of apostolic times—the more arrogant bishops became in their claims, until one of their number, the one at the capital of Imperial Rome, claimed to be Universal Bishop, with jurisdiction over all the rest; and before he had done, claiming the right to raise up and put down earthly rulers, to discharge their subjects from their allegiance, or to transfer that allegiance to other Sovereigns. But as to these Popes, through whom all episcopal ordina-

* See Dr. Dewart's tract on "HIGH CHURCH PRETENSIONS," for sale at the Book Room.

tion was required to descend, he often found the regularity of their succession and the legitimacy of their claims very confused and doubtful. Female popes, duplicate claimants, simonists, and the like, very much divided, discoloured, and dissipated the stream of succession.

He also wondered why if the descent from the apostles was so indubitably uninterrupted and so important as maintained by its advocates, it had not conserved the apostolic character, spirit, and doctrine in a more effectual manner than it had. Especially, how it was that auricular confession, priestly absolution, sacramental efficacy, transubstantiation, mariolatry, worship of pictures and images, purgatory, prayers for the dead, to say nothing of the immaculate conception, and the personal infallibility of the Pope, no traces of which he could find in the Scriptures, should have obtained among such undeniable successors to the apostles! Also, how such bigotry and cruelty as the Church of Rome had always exercised, could come from a source so benevolent and holy!

CONCESSIONS TO ALL CHURCHES.

His reading, reflection, and observation, however, led him to believe that there were many instances of sincere and truly spiritual piety even in this spiritual Babylon—such, for instance, as Frederick Von Schlegel, to mention no more—and that as it respected Protestant Episcopal High Churchmen, some among the clergy and laity were men of great seriousness, conscientiousness, and fidelity to their convictions; while their narrowness, bigotry, and formalism, made theirs a very undesirable church to join. As to Low Church men, he found vast numbers of them men of most estimable and lovable character, whom there would be no difficulty in fellowshipping, and the pastoral care of whose ministers

would prove an incalculable blessing to those who were providentially placed under that care, albeit he felt that the structure and working of that church was not of a kind to develop the benefits of mutual brotherly watch-care on the part of its members to the greatest extent to be desired.

FINAL CONCLUSION.

Upon the whole he came to the following conclusions : That essential truth is held by all the principal Protestant denominations ; and that all of them secure a measure of mutual fellowship and help to their members, beneficial pastoral oversight, and the due administration of the ordinances and services of God's house. And all these purposes, he unquestioningly concluded, were especially secured by the various Methodist organizations in which its original and fundamental principles and objects were duly maintained and carried out ; which, alas ! we must confess, is not always the case, through the reluctance of many of the laity and the carelessness and cowardice of too many of the ministers.

The connexionalism of Methodism, which in nearly all its types and sections, amounts to a practical episcopacy, or system of oversight, seemed to him to secure all the benefits of Congregationalism—a government by Presbytery—and the beneficial superintendency of more general overseers. These elements, he thought, are so nearly preserved, under different names, in one form or another, by the several Methodist bodies, that there is no principle to prevent their amalgamation, if there were only wisdom enough and a spirit of generous concession on the part of influential minds in the several bodies, a consummation which would save the community from the pitiful sight of weak little rivalries in sparse populations. Diversity, however, he was fully persuaded, is no necessary bar to unity ;

and, to a certain extent, he felt assured it was a feature in some degree unavoidable and which ever and anon would appear. The following sentiment of a living writer he learned to adopt: That "there is in Scripture no foundation for the assumption that all the visible associations of Christ's people shall hold on all points precisely the same views, and be united in the same visible organizations, or shall possess precisely, the same graces and in the same degree." [Dr. Robb, in the Introduction to "EDGAR'S VARIATIONS OF ROMANISM."]

My friend could worship and feel himself at home with any Protestant denomination, and could sincerely wish them godspeed or help them in any way in his power; and concluded that this ought to be the feeling of all Protestant Christians towards each other. If he had been shut up to the necessity of seeking fellowship elsewhere than in a Methodist church, he would have violated no principle of conscience in seeking membership in any of these, although he would have preferred some of them, as a matter of taste and feeling, to others—or because he thought he would have derived more help from them on the way to heaven, and would have been more useful himself than in other connections. He, therefore, learned not to pursue with ill-will, whether minister or member, who had seen fit to transfer his membership to another section of the visible church of Christ, but rather felt glad that Methodism had the means of "lending" rather than of being necessitated to "borrow." This course of proceeding, he was led to think, was one by which visible unity would yet be brought about among the detached sections of true believers in the world. And these thoughts and conclusions of his led him to feel that he would not be justified himself in inflicting a pang in the hearts of those with whom he had been pro-

videntially associated all his Christian life, by separating from them, on the grounds of pique or self-interest, to unite with some other—a maxim this which should govern all members of all evangelical churches.

If the views above enunciated, as those of a third person, are correct, and I see no flaw in them, they warrant us in looking on our Protestant Zion with more complacency and hope than we sometimes do. We should endeavour to draw the bonds of affection and fellowship among all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity still closer; and rest assured that the evangelical church of these times is more in conformity with the mind and spirit of Jesus, than it was at any period before our own times since the apostles' days, whether patristic or mediæval. Let no Methodist at least be disturbed by the claims and anathemas of ultras, whether extreme immersionists, High Church Episcopalians (whether Roman or Anglican), or those smaller denunciators of "sectarianism," who themselves constitute the narrowest of all sects, and who are withal so impracticable severally, that no sufficient number of them can be brought into combination in any one locality to accomplish the building of a church, planting of a mission, or the erection of college.* What is required is that we should strive after more imminent degrees of piety and holiness—to "adorn the doctrine of God in all things," and to labour with all our might to bring souls to God by personal effort.

INTENTION AND USE.

There are many members of the Methodist Church who pass through the exercises, and are subject to the assaults above indicated, and it was thought that these "Thoughts

* See Dr. Dowart's able tractates, "BROKEN REEDS" and "MIS-LEADING LIGHTS"

and Conclusions" might serve to guide them in such emergencies; and that to have them embodied and printed in this form, would be a convenience, to lend or give by those whose duty it is to watch over the flock.

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