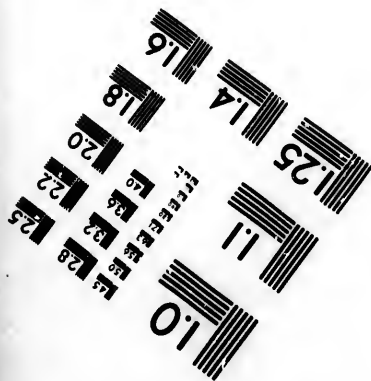
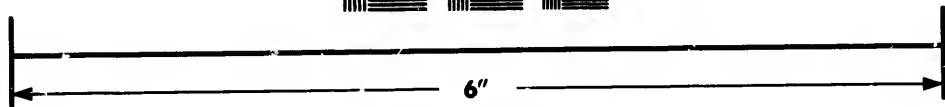
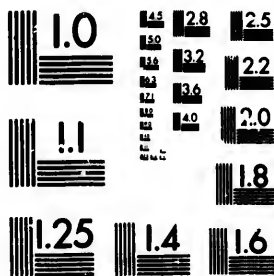


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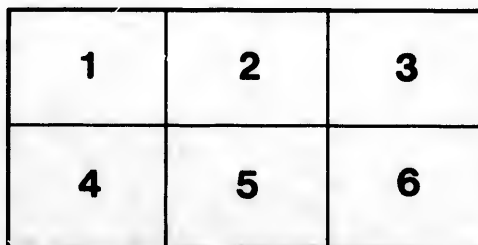
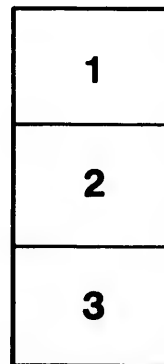
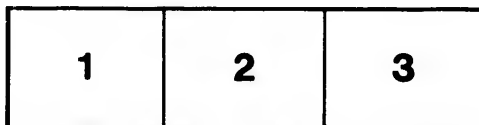
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EXISTING CHURCH THOUGHT AND ACTIVITY

IN RELATION TO

Revealed Character and Objects.

A SERMON

Preached before the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of the Lower
Provinces of British North America, June 24th, 1868.

BY

REV. WILLIAM McCULLOCH, D. D.,

Moderator.

HALIFAX, N. S.:

PRINTED AT BARNES' STEAM PRESS.

1869.

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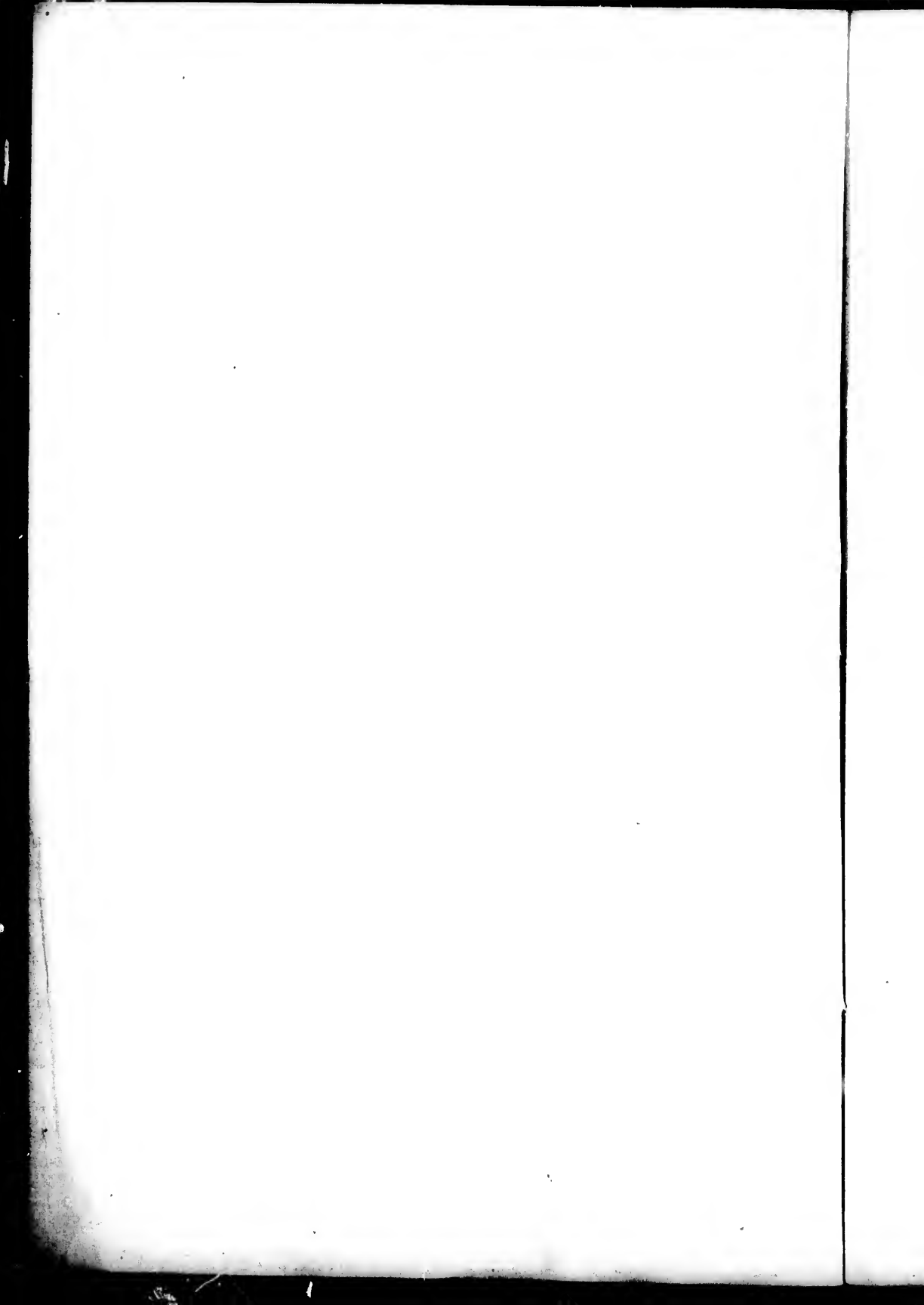
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S E R M O N .

1 PET. v. 2,—“Feed the flock of God which is among you.”

The Church is a divine institution. Her means and modes of operation are equally divine, and bear to God's purposes the strict relation of cause and effect; hence, deviation from the Revealed is forfeiture of church character and relation, and failure in appointed results. The fact of failure candor will not deny. That this is the consequence of deficiency in means reverence will not affirm. Scriptural causes of success, in their absence from church effort, proclaim the reason of disappointed expectations:—“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” Effects cannot differ from their causes. But, that there are in the church developments differing essentially from appointed means and divinely assured issues, is undoubted;—developments significant of departure from scriptural principle; and of the extent of that departure the extent of failure is the just measure. This does not arise from defect in the great plan of redeeming grace. That it springs from worldly antagonism is contrary to all historical truth; because, in Christ's Church, when true to her character, energetic spiritual life, visibly progressive, has ever been the correlative of worldly antagonism. In other reasons must we seek the cause of failure. Confessedly the church is not accomplishing her objects on a scale commensurate with her means, while hostility is defiantly aggressive, and alarmingly successful; and why, with such an agency at her command, it should be so, is a question of the most momentous importance.

To this question I purpose to call your attention by reference

I. To the nature and objects of the christian Institution.

II. To existing church thought and activity, in relation to character, and the accomplishment of her revealed purposes.

I. THE NATURE AND OBJECTS OF THE CHURCH AS A DIVINE INSTITUTION.

The Church of Christ is one in character, purpose, means, modes of operation and development, and designed to bear upon the existing condition of the world in relation to God and his designs, and upon moral renovation and happiness. Under divine government, the perpetuity of existing world conditions is an impossibility. Revealed procedure points to this fact in the foreshadowed, recognized, supremacy of Jehovah over all intelligent beings; supremacy flowing from His character, and announced determination, as exhibited in the mission and death of His Son, and in the institution of the church as a subordinate instrumentality. In that mission, and around the Cross, all divine attributes,—all moral principles,—all foreshadowed purposes harmonize, and to develop that harmony, as the element of a redeemed, reconstructed world, is the church's special work. This arrangement at once brings divine wisdom into collision with the ignorance and pride of human nature, and its reluctance of dictation and control, and hence, as in the plan of mercy itself, so in all its essential details, nothing is left doubtful or open to human legislation. All is sovereign,—divine,—repudiating man's interference,—proclaiming perfect adaptation to all Jehovah's purposes; and christian faithfulness and experience attest the great fact,—“The blood of Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin.” The redeemed are they “who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

The subjection,—cheerful or reluctant,—of a rebellious world to sovereign rule, on principles and modes of action clearly defined,—denouncing innovation, and irreverent interference, is the Church's destiny; and here failure, or success, is the test of character, alike of the church and her ministry. To alter, or supplement, revelation, as to reveal, is God's sole prerogative, whether as to principles or forms. As a human pretension it is presumptuous intermeddling. The church is *not* an independent institution. It is, simply, an instructed, accountable, because divinely appointed agency,—accountable, solely, for the use of means: presenting to men God and truth as received by herself, and hence, unquestioning acceptance of the revealed is her grand duty. In reference to the individual, her object is the production, and development, of moral character, meeting relation to God, and supplying want; and in reference to the great ends of the institution itself, the combination of the separate, redeemed, elements, in one vast, harmonious, aggressive, activity, in relation to the revealed future of

our world;—like the Prophet's River, gathering volume and power as it rolls on, and carrying life and beauty where'er its healing waters flow. These views, in their minuteness of detail, or grandeur of development, constitute Jehovah's purpose, and the church's work;—"a new Heaven's and a new Earth," as distinguished for moral beauty, as earth to-day for loathsome vileness;—the grand consummation to which Faith and Hope point, when "the Lord shall reign in Mount Zion, and before His ancients gloriously";—and if, at Creation's dawn, "the morning stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for joy," what the rapturous harmony of that song, destined to signalize the final accomplishment of the great purposes of the Saviour's dying love! In all this, we are pledged,—sworn,—co-workers with God; but let us not forget, that God co-works only, where things are done "after the due order." "See that thou make all things after the pattern *shewed thee in the Mount.*"

But the results of the church's work are not limited by earth, nor exhausted in a world redeemed. In all their glorious perfection, they lie far beyond the present scene of christian activity. A home awaits its blest inhabitants,—a Church her members,—a King His subjects,—an inheritance its redeemed possessors,—the Saviour the travail of His soul; and ours the duty, the privilege, the honor of converting these waiting expectations into realities, by exhibiting truth in all its simple and impressive beauty, undefaced, undefiled by personal ambition, popular gratification, or cowardly expediency; "approving ourselves to every man's conscience;" gathering together into one, and sending Heavenward the ransomed Sons of God,—memorials of a Saviour's dying love,—monuments of ministerial faithfulness.

But this sublime picture has its shades of deepest gloom. Our message is Eternal Life to a dying world, and yet, that message, "the savor of life unto life," becomes "the savor of death unto death," to the unaroused and unconverted; and if this be so, as undoubtedly it too often is, under ministrations reflecting the mind of Christ, what shall we say of those reflecting mere individual views, prejudices and objects? As agents of the church, and ambassadors for Christ, we are bound,—sworn,—to give to perishing men what He has given to us, nothing less, nothing more,—free as the winds of Heaven,—pure as it flows from beneath the Altar; otherwise we belie our characters, and labour in vain, and souls fitted for "light inaccessible" go down to Eternal night. Measure the sublime results of faithfulness, in souls redeemed and God glorified, in contrast with mere hireling labour, and

who would be a hireling? Who mingle the wine of the kingdom with earth's polluted waters? Who, for his own sake, would not desire to say, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation, lo! I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, *thou knowest.*"

Such is, briefly, the church's character and destiny. Let us consider

II. EXISTING CHURCH THOUGHT AND ACTIVITY IN RELATION TO CHARACTER, AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF REVEALED PURPOSES.

(1.) Christian thought, as a duty, and means of efficient activity, should ever correspond with the revealed. But such is not the tendency of the day. The revealed does not retain, in the estimation of the church, its old, reverential position. Free tho't, presumptuously so-called, co-equalizing the human with the divine, and at pleasure remodelling and rectifying old established principles and forms of action, is the spirit of the times. Starting—if there be a God—with the contemptuous repudiation of the only sound basis of deduction, the possibility and probability of a revelation, rejection is prompt and decided, and supernaturalism disappears from the system, and God from the universe,—excepting as a mere idea. With Him, all that is super-rational vanishes, and man arrogantly constitutes himself, not the humble enquirer after truth, but the judge of what is truth,—of the very possibility of a revelation;—judgement is decisive rejection, and the world breathes all the more freely by its deliverance from the incubus of an efete superstition. Supernaturalism, involved in the very idea of a God and moral government, does it exist? Is there such a thing as Inspiration, and in what does it consist? What is Truth, where the deductions of human reason are so multiform and antagonistic,—principles established to-day, to be overthrown to-morrow by "new gods newly come up?" And what say such deep thinkers, such advanced minds, regarding our grand old Bible? Myths and fables,—contradictory to historical truth,—antagonistic to scientific demonstration,—defective in its morality,—and unreliable as a whole. Need we wonder that men sink into infidelity, or in deep mental agony exclaim, *What is Truth?* when so-called christian guides so widely differ.

Poor worms of the dust! Unable to solve the most simple problem of their own being,—bewildered, yet not humbled, before the mysteries of the mote that basks in the sunbeam,—these men of a day proclaim their power to scan the highest heights, or fathom the deepest depths

of all that is mysterious and sublime, in the conceptions of divinity, and scattering to the winds the experience and reverence of a thousand generations, with great swelling words of vanity, teach their fellowmen, under the character of men of God, that there is no God; that the old landmarks of truth and righteousness are mere delusive conventionalities, which deeper thought and riper scholarship have dissipated, with a pitying smile at the weakness and credulity of the past! In such hands all old, time-honoured traces of the Divine,—all just conceptions of moral nature, relations and administration,—all that has constituted the faith and hope of ages, becomes revolutionized, and the effect of revolution is the dethronement of Jehovah, and the exaltation of man.

Such is largely the tone of the church thought of the day: the consequence of a claimed right to refuse acceptance of the revealed, till subjected to and approved by human reason. But, in the church, practical rationalism co-exists with theoretic disavowal of rationalistic principles. The moral cowardice that shrinks from open assertion of right to deal with the Divine on human principles, or boldly to repudiate the obligation of vows, covertly and insidiously moulds, modifies, explains away or holds in abeyance, old apostolic truths and modes of action, as inconsistent with more advanced thought,—with more comprehensive charity,—with the more friendly relations of the church to the world. Subordinating divine wisdom to human reason, efforts are made to accomplish the grand, eternal purposes of Revelation, without the fixed principles or power of supernaturalism; thus freeing the church from the so-called mysterious superstitious, as an impediment to rational progress, and yet originating a mystery deeper than that which is contemptuously denounced,—*the inexplicable phenomenon, of ends sought to be attained by means, not only utterly inadequate, but actually antagonistic to their production!*

Whence this claim of right to sit in judgment on the divine,—to dogmatize upon its very existence, and modes of development,—to unsettle the entire question of Inspiration,—and in its pretensions, yet pigmy form to overturn, by novel exposition, the convictions of ages? From without,—from the pew? No. From within,—from the very altar of God! Men styling themselves the representatives of the God of the Bible,—guides of their fellow-beings to immortality,—pledged to work out Scriptural ends by Scriptural means; these the men to whom old Heaven sent truth is less sacred than their individual views and objects; these the men who kindle strange fire upon the altar of God,—these the regenerators of a world, and all in the name of the

lowly Jesus of Nazareth! "It was not an enemy that hath done this, else I could have borne it, but thou my *Friend*." Church thought and energy, unregulated by the revealed, fail to represent the mind and purposes of Jesus Christ. Destitute of that, it ceases to be His, thought bearing His name. *The religion of Jesus Christ tolerates no free thought independent of revelation.*

(2.) Under Christ the divinity of her doctrine is the church's power. But in attempts to accommodate the divine to the diversities and instability of human thought, not one revealed principle, not one mode of operation, has escaped hostile criticism. This crops out in novel, far-fetched exposition,—mistaken for deep thought,—in more advanced conception of truth, or in attempts to make the Bible speak, not the mind of God, but the language of men dissatisfied with the good old way, and craving for change. In the rejection or nominal acceptance of creeds, we trace its full, natural development, as the haughty protest of reason against the usurped authority of the divine over human consciousness. Doctrine is a necessity of Scientific Theology,—the atmosphere of the Divinity Hall, rather than inspired, authoritative exhibition of truth, embodying the most sublime conceptions of the divine character and mode of procedure; the glory of the sanctuary,—the life of the church.

To the pulpit of the day this state of thought is no stranger; ignoring all that is divine in the character, and positive in the teachings, relations, and administrative power of the Redeemer, and presenting to men a gospel robbed of its grand essential element,—the supremacy of the divine over the human. Morality, without fixed principle, occupies the place of inwrought spiritual conception and life. Moral suasion, falsely so called, instead of truth in its efficacious power, constitutes the main element of rationalistic reform, and the church dwindles down from a grand, divinely appointed, reconstructing system, to a mere educational institute of which man is the presiding genius, and nature and reason the text book. Hence, for Christ crucified,—the glory of apostolic teaching,—we have icy-cold moral essays,—high-flown exhibitions of the rationalistic ideal,—sensational descriptions of the unrevealed,—panyerics upon the moral fitness of things, and on man's native dignity and self-reforming power, mingled with pulpit sentimentalism; sad evidence of a mind, dry and parched, turning the Eden of God into an arid human waste. Doctrine, as an exposition of the nature and mind of God,—of new mode of moral relations,—and in its bearing upon the production and development of spiritual

life, is either not understood, or disbelieved, and the sublime teachings of the Bible are supplanted by vapid declamation. To such a state of thought, doctrine is rather the harsh, dark, lines of an otherwise pleasant picture, than its brightest colourings, giving unity and attractiveness to the whole.

In the pulpit of to-day, doctrine does not always occupy the prominent position which it holds in the Bible; and hence divinely appointed ends are sought, not only in neglect of, but in opposition to divinely appointed means; too frequently the cheap, voluntary offering of the pulpit, not the demand of the pew. Doctrine is the church's message and power, in the hands of the Spirit, and God's revealed method of a world's regeneration. A church, in which it is undervalued, and its high relation misunderstood, or in which it is either curtailed or adulterated, fails to proclaim the glory of her Lord, and becomes unfitted for her high mission.

(3.) Purely of discipline, as a necessity of existence, and of vigorous church life, is inseparable from purity of doctrine. Where right views of the institution prevail, integrity will secure the supremacy of decency and order, and the church reflect her principles. But where views are not co-extensive with God's revealed purposes in the establishment of order and law,—where they reflect personal ambition, or timid time-serving, discipline is regarded as a hinderance to progress, hurtful to peace, and unsuited to the times. Tampering with, or unfaithfulness to truth, leads to unfaithfulness in its official application in order. Laxity and dead life are the results, and "the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, *the work of the potter.*" Is it deemed to-day any violation of christian duty or decency, to hail as a brother, or bid God-speed to him who cries Lord, Lord, while the poison of asps is under his lips? Does not the old apostolic curse upon the promulgator of false doctrine savor of an age destitute of charity, and which, happily, the church has outgrown? The teaching, or action, which lowers the standard of truth, is destructive of its administrative purity, and inconsistency is winked out of sight, to the dishonor of the church and injury of the souls of men. Who deems it wrong to eat with an excommunicated brother; and are not rules coolly ignored in the absence of all danger of official interference, and are not church courts often swayed by an unscriptural expediency? Such a course is an attempt to construct the household of faith without the conscientious enforcement of divine rule, and need we wonder, that there is the absence of that loving

unity and vigorous life, of which Scriptural order is one of God's appointed means? Low, and too prevalent, views of the nature and ends of discipline,—personal ambition,—the fear of man, and lax ideas of ministerial accountability, are rapidly forming a church, not bound in the “bundle of life with the Lord our God,” but united by mere personal feeling. Does the word of God authoritatively require us to deliver the transgressor “to Satan”?

(4.) Adoption of principles, and submission to vows, are not mere duties. They are duties, but they are voluntarily accepted obligations. Creeds, confessions and vows, as expositions of truth, and basis of church position, and necessities of a state of imperfection, are the natural effect of that accepted obligation. But current free thought, while recognizing and tolerating creeds and vows in theory, is hostile to their official application, as despotic interference with human liberty,—dangerous to personal integrity, and hurtful to ministerial success. To attempt revealed ends in opposition to creeds acknowledged as exhibiting the mind of Christ, to vows which are usually regarded as tests of integrity,—and even by unauthorized means, is nothing strange in the Church of Christ, and hence, Scriptural principle and order must often be learned, not from visible character, and modes of operation, but from the mere letter of confessions and vows. On the basis of creeds and vows, men are solemnly pledged to work out Scriptural ends by Scriptural means. But vows assumed, and vows redeemed, are two totally different things. There is often a painful levity,—a lack of stern integrity on this subject, that, in the common affairs of life, society would not tolerate for a moment; and vows solemnly pledged, and under the most awful sanctions, are as quietly ignored, as if ordination were a mere form, instead of involving the most momentous duties and relations with which we can come in contact. There is, too frequently, a want of tenderness about official consciences,—a claimed right to interpret vows to suit men's own purposes, and what is best in their view becomes the rule of action, instead of the plain and only safe path of duty. All this free thought is rapidly moulding the church, and ministerial success is measured, not by conversions to Christ, or the beauty of holiness and decencies of order, but by personal popularity, crowded sanctuaries, and accessions to the denomination; modes of estimating success not exactly such as the Saviour would sanction. From the Rationalistic impugner of the Bible, to the puerile Ritualist, there spreads over the church a mongrel teaching,—an inefficient, unscriptural, order, and a delusive spiritual

life,—bearing every kind of fruit but that which grows in the garden of God; turning divine guideposts to immortality into mere human fingerboards, and should it excite astonishment that men go astray? Subserviency to popular gratification, instead of authoritative exhibition of truth and principle, is the characteristic and sin of the day.

All this independency of creeds and vows is, by many, esteemed the sign of advanced thought,—reason asserting her rightful position; instead of what it may be justly termed, ecclesiastical perjury;—if broken promises be entitled to such a designation. Under confessions acknowledged as reflecting Bible truth, and so simple that he who runs may read, every kind of system finds shelter, and men deem it no disgrace, no stain upon integrity, to hold, and openly disseminate, principles, and advocate practices, antagonistic to vows, and yet remain in the church, whose teachings and forms they repudiate, regardless of the moral,—or immoral,—significancy of such a position. Under ordination vows, such free thought, such tampering with obligation, is dishonest, and he who cannot fulfil his pledges ought, in self-respect and common decency, to seek another and more congenial home. Pledges, lightly regarded in the pulpit, descend, in their moral influence, to the pew, and unfaithfulness supplants fidelity. How evident this on the general question of strict adherence to vows,—the unity of church forms,—consistency in order and discipline, and the Sabbath; in short, in all that is opposed to free independent thought. *The rule of action is too often found, not in the tenor of confessions and vows, but the individual opinion of what is best.*

Vows are often regarded, practically, as promises made, not to God, but to man; and as stepping stones to church position, rather than promises regulating the entire ministerial life, in its relation to the souls of men, and final accountability; and hence, as sole guide of conscience in duty, and tests of integrity, they, too easily, sink into oblivion. The result is a Bible rationalized,—a church in which humanism sits enthroned,—a morality shorn of its distinctive features,—a short pleasant path to Heaven; the natural tendency of that light estimation of vows, of which the unsettled, ever-changing, tone of Church thought and activity is, to-day, the too evident indication;—a craving that “the good old way” cannot appease.

(5.) Unity that combines the mass, and yet, to the fullest extent, develops individual energies, is Christ’s ideal of the church. But free thought disintegrates instead of combining, and is destructive of true individuality, and consequently of right action. The absence of that

sense of personal accountability, under which the Gospel places every christian, enforcing obligation for the entire success of divine purposes, as far as God gives means, is no stranger to the church. Ministerial action, contemplating the mere personal and local, conduces to this, and the congregation and its members become detached units, instead of component parts of one grand, mutually influential whole. Individual judgment becomes thus, the sole guide of action, and destructive of personal, relative accountability, by transferring the authoritative from the Bible, to man's own consciousness and convictions of duty. Even where the Bible retains its official position,—from some unexplained cause,—in large organizations, individual responsibility is, too often, in the inverse ratio of the mass, the effect, it may be, of unwise centralization, but, certainly, the effect of the absence of that teaching which elevates the christian above the mere personal in religion, raises him to the contemplation of its sublime objects, and enforces individual accountability for all Jehovah's purposes, as far as means and qualifications are concerned,—a teaching that developes the highest degree of personal activity, and yet gives to centralization,—often a necessity of circumstances,—its commanding power as the expression of the intelligent, combined individualism of the entire church. Without this teaching, energies become contracted and localized, and upon pastors, office-bearers, boards and committees, all practical responsibility is unconcernedly permitted to devolve, as if they, and they alone, instead of *all the people of God*, were Christ's agents on earth. This is the natural effect of substituting the personal and local for the all-embracing activities of christian life. The absence of large, Christ-like sympathies, working individually, yet in combination, is not unknown in the church; and to this fact may be traced much that is unsatisfactory. Christians are, practically, not their brother's keepers, feel little interest in each other,—in struggling congregations,—in the conversion of sinners, or in the world's redemption. Large-hearted, spontaneous, giving, for Christ sake, how rare! There is a lack of that individualization, and yet cohesion, which mutual character and relations, and reciprocal duties and interests demand. The rarity of conversions to Christ,—the low standard of professional piety,—the limited interest taken in the great ends of christian life, are evidences of all this; signs of an unsound condition more dangerous than external antagonism. There is an agency paid to do all this,—we pay it, and thus christians settle their doubts as to their personal duty, if doubts ever existed, and the beauty of holiness and aggressive activity

cease to be the result of disjointed, partially developed piety in the church!

Why is there so much dead life,—so little vigorous manhood,—so little conscientious giving or earnest working; why do so many, notwithstanding their solemn vows, keep so carefully aloof from all church work,—and why are the church and the world on terms of intimacy so close? Simply, because combined activity, the result of Scriptural individualization, in realized personal accountability, is not the doctrine of the day. Christians are not thoroughly trained to rise above the mere personal in religion, nor to hold themselves individually pledged for the conversion of the world, as Joshua to God's service, "Whatsoever others do we will serve the Lord." The christian, or church, that fails to recognize, and act upon, this great use of the believer in his personal call, consecration and accountability for God's entire work, in correspondence with his position, fails to realize its true relation to divine purposes,—“sees men as trees walking,” and as is the position so will be its effect on efforts to promote the glory of Christ. Can a church, in which obligation to work personally, yet in frank, earnest combination with fellow christians, is a secondary thought, or where self reigns “flourish as the palm tree or grow as the cedar in Lebanon?”

How painful this state of church thought and activity, as contrasted with the all-absorbing, self-consecration of apostolic times. Time, property, and even life itself, was consecrated to Christ. A world subdued to Jesus was the sublime idea and incentive of primitive life; and the disciples of Jesus, throwing their whole soul into the contest, with all of theirs necessary to success,—went forth conquering and to conquer, as certain of the issue, as if the shout of victory already rolled over the battle field. That no man counted himself, or ought that he had his own, explains many of the wondrous facts of pentecostal times; and until that grand idea of individual, whole-hearted consecration,—the effect of love to Jesus and the souls of men,—exhumed from amid the rubbish of conventional christianity, and freed from the selfish spirit pervading the church, be made to occupy its true position, in connection with a world redeemed, as the end and aim of personal activity;—till then, the christian will not sustain his true character,—the church fulfil her destiny,—or “the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose.”

(6.) Theoretic, or practical, abnegation of divine influence is the result of reliance on what is human, as adequate to the production of

revealed ends. Even where supernaturalism is a recognized doctrine, skill in planning, and energy in execution, are often more reliable means of success, than divine influences; an error that explains many church facts and appearances. Under the latter day dispensation of the Spirit, there is the absence of things promised to integrity, and men are astonished at, and exult over, passing drops of blessing, where, to true church life, there ought to be the early and latter rain. As a felt, individual and church want, the presence and work of the Spirit lacks prominence in the pulpit and pew thought of the day; the necessary consequence of substituting human wisdom and energy for divine teaching and blessing. The church, in which spiritual power is a secondary necessity, is destitute of the element essential to character, relation, and the success of effort, and the blessing comes in drops, because "Heaven over us is as iron and the earth brass." The Spirit is stayed,—the Priest falls from the Altar,—and the "faithful from among the sons of men;" and yet, in self-laudation over the mere outward and visible, men exultingly cry, "the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these," where they ought, in deep self-condemnation, to cry, "our leanness, our leanness." It requires no better evidence of the deviation of the church from God's order, than the absence, under the dispensation of the Spirit, of the blessings promised to integrity. The presence and work of the Spirit is a necessity of true scriptural church life, and God's only means of giving efficiency to labour. Without it we labour in vain, and "the harvest will be a heap in the day of desperate sorrow."

(7.) The existence of a sectional spirit and of party tactics, in the house of God, and as a combination for objects not always in accordance with the mind of God, is a marked and deplorable feature of the day. Bitter, mutual, antagonism, plotting, scheming and undermining, exhausts energies, solemnly consecrated to the production of the loving unity of which the apostle speaks; "Whereto ye have already attained walk by the *same rule*." The expedients employed, and means adopted, under the holy name of God, to interfere with fellow-christians, to break in upon and weaken their churches, and to add, if it were but one, to the party, are almost incredible; painful indication of the substitution of denominational morality for that of Christ. Gains are counted, not by conversions to the Redeemer, the increasing decencies of order, or the beauties of holiness, but by mere proselyted accessions to number. Exultation over denominational success, and ill-concealed envy at the progress of others, or delight in their weak

ness and failure,—all this is evidence of the absence of the Spirit of Him who said, “forbid him not.” Distinctive tenets, and matters of secondary importance, and not the love of Jesus in the salvation of souls, forms, too frequently, the main element of aggression against both the world and fellow-christians, and accessions from both are equally counted as gains to the Church of God! The church imbued with this sectional spirit, and aiming to rise upon the ruins of others, can neither grasp, as a conception, nor work out as a fact, her high destiny. It forms a fold, but not of Christ’s sheep, and the battle cry is not—all for Christ, but the *Shibboleth* of Party.

Denominationalism is fruitful, not of that diversity of view which, while agreeing to differ, differs in love, but of that world spirit which renders the church, in which Christ said, that the greatest should be the servant,—the arena for the display of a spirit, and an ambition, becoming the world and the worldling, and not the House of God or the christian. Purity and peace are sacrificed to personal and party ends, not because they are right and true, but because they secure individual interests, or the objects of the party with which, for the moment, we happen to be identified. The altered position of the church, as regards her secular interests, presents objects of ambition, against whose allurements the professed lowly spirit of Christ’s ministers is not always proof. Hence her growing likeness to the world in those ambitious rivalries, which excite wonder, even among the men of the world.

In defence of truth, party is a duty,—“earnestly contending for the faith.” But “the faith” is not always the cause of church contention. Individual and sectional antagonisms too frequently lie at the foundation; and all that is Christ-like is recklessly sacrificed at the shrine of aims and purposes, as like Christ, as darkness is like light. Where the spirit and procedure of worldly partizanship and tactics divide a church, or *predominate* in relation to other churches, can religion flourish? Impossible,—for there, there is the presence of that ungodly temper, which, in a common cause, refuses to recognize as a soldier of the Cross, or to fight side by side with one whose armour, tho’ tempered in Heaven, forsooth, differs in pattern slightly from our own. How condemnatory of all this the divine command: “Whereto ye have already attained, walk by the same rule;” and is not the church responsible for maintaining and increasing division and strife, beyond what strict Scriptural principle demands? “Keeping the unity of the Spirit,” and “as much as in you lieth live peaceably with all men,”

are the expression of God's will to His people, whether as among our selves or toward those whom, equally with ourselves, God has owned and blessed. Failure in this is an open violation of every principle and demand of the Gospel, dishonours the Prince of Peace,—impedes His cause, and leaves without *real* success the labourer, whose rule of action differs from his Master's. Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas, as adopted representatives of church antagonisms, have done more injury to vital godliness, in the disunion of brethren, than the combination of all her foes, whether in the individual church, or in reference to other churches. The existence and moulding power of this Spirit, is not the indication of the co-existent Spirit of Jesus Christ.

These and other indications of deviation from the divine original are found in the church of the day,—the necessary effect of ignoring the divine and positive, and of underestimating responsibility. No Prophetic power is required to foretell the issue. Whatever partakes of deviation from or innovation,—arrogantly called improvement,—upon what is revealed, is destructive of the relation and efficacy of truth in view of God's purposes, and hence, in fancied success, we find men exulting over the beauty of a scene, whose realities are delusions, “outwardly fair, inwardly full of rottenness.” Not a little of professional christian life is tinged with this spirit, and men look for Heavenly fruit on trees that God's hand never planted. Whatever is real, or reliable, is inseparably connected with Scriptural principle, and conscientious adherence to vows. To the conventional christianity of the day, stern adherence to Bible truth, and to the observance of vows, may be unfashionable; but, however unfashionable, it is the teaching of Jesus Christ, whom we hail as our Master,—it is the spring of all that has affected, or ever will affect, the church for good,—the element of the grand old martyr life, when men loved not their lives to the death,—the bulwarks against which, for a thousand generations, the surges of infidelity have dashed in vain; and why not learn from the past to deter from trifling with sacred things, or laying on the Altar of God unhallowed hands? Why not, ere committing ourselves, ask of history the results of human interference with divine arrangements? Where are the men of free, independent, thought,—the giants of the past? Where the men given to change, whose folly was wiser than the wisdom of God? Where the mark of enduring good to tell that they had ever been? Neglect, or oblivion, has been their destiny, and “*their works have followed them.*” Why expect different results from similar causes? “When the knowledge of the Lord shall cover

the earth," what of the free thought giants of our own day,—men who trifle with truth, and set order and vows at defiance,—who feed famishing souls with husks,—who daub the wall with untempered mortar,—what of these men? The history of the past is the history of the future. To-day, spread like the green bay tree, to-morrow forgotten; and men, whom God can trust, will guide the affairs of His house, and work out the final triumphs of the great Redemption.

That the Church of Christ is in a satisfactory condition,—that it is adorned with the beauty of holiness,—that it is what its Master designed it to be, "a light shining in a dark place,"—that it commands the respect of the world,—that it is achieving results commensurate with its origin, nature and means, or with the outward visible activity of the day, in relation to the present and future of our world, the candid enquirer will be slow to affirm. Where then lies the evil? Just where, under God, lies the remedy,—in the pulpit,—so largely accountable for existing church thought, and modes of activity, in neglect of, or attempts to supplement divinely appointed means of accomplishing revealed ends; and now, when the ecclesiastical heaven is gathering blackness, and the storm, in no indistinct murmurs, is heard, threatening to overthrow or supplant old established order, instead of boldly breasting the storm, there are strong symptoms of timid yielding to its power,—a swimming with the tide,—as if stability and success lay in unfaithfulness to solemn trust, instead of in God's realized presence. That scriptural success can result from human methods, or the combination of these with the revealed, no true student of the Bible and Providence can for one moment dream; and largely, to one or other of these elements of thought, is the state of the church to be traced.

The interests entrusted to us are God's,—resting on the Rock of Ages,—honoured with the latter-day dispensation of the Spirit,—the conservation of those interests is one of the noblest works in which man can be engaged; and when, against rationalistic reform,—ritualistic puerilities,—infidel taunts,—the antagonistic world spirit, and worst of all, internal treachery or unfaithfulness, the church shall rise to her old, time-honoured position, when the rush lights of human wisdom shall have gone out in deep darkness, and the giant thought of to-day dwindled down to its true pigmy proportions, then "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners," will stand forth the grand old institution, characterized by the beauty of holiness, "a Royal Priesthood."

In our hands God has placed the means, and we are the agents of this glorious consummation, and ours the responsibility of seeing that nothing but divinely appointed means enters, as an element, into the church's activity. Ours the duty of rising to the urgent necessities of the times, by more thorough Scriptural exposition of truth,—by higher elevation of personal, congregational and individual life,—by more enlarged and thorough reliance upon the promise of the Spirit; combining all around our one grand object, a Redeemer's glory in a world redeemed, and then will signs, so ominous of evil, pass away as a dream of the night,—the church resume her true commanding position,—the pulpit regain its lost power, lost thro' ignorance or unfaithfulness,—men flock to the Saviour, "as doves to their windows," and "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth," announce the final consummation of the great purpose of "the decease accomplished at Jerusalem."

How bright the prospect as it rises to the eye of Faith! Ours the duty, the privilege, the honour of rendering those visions of Faith, realities of sight, by bending our every energy to the great purpose to which we have been consecrated and pledged,—laying at the feet of our Redeemer, King, a reconstructed world. To the eye of Faith this grand result is only a question of time, for divine faithfulness is pledged that "the Kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ." Amen.

