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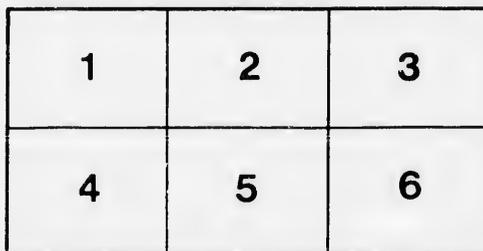
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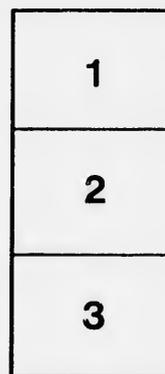
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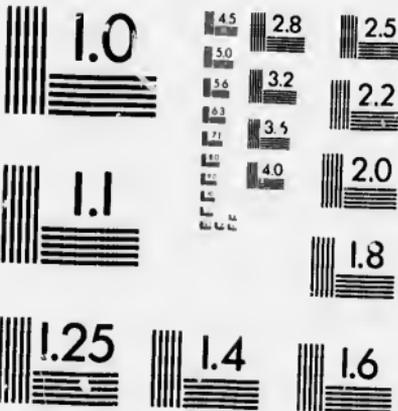
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THE  
WAY OF TRUTH  
IN  
EVIL TIMES,

FOR THE BELIEVER AND FOR THE CHURCH  
OF GOD.

BY  
W. H. DORMAN.

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PREFACE.

It is probable that these pages might never have been written, if I had not promised, hastily perhaps, to revise my "Reasons for retiring from the Dissenters," in order to their being reprinted; and if sickness had not thrown me upon this, as perhaps my present service, in the absence of strength to pursue a more active and accustomed course.

However, in reading over my "Reasons," at such a distance of time from their original publication, I found that my mind had travelled onwards, and that events and principles had travelled faster than my mind, making anything in the way of revision unsatisfactory, if not impossible; so that I had no alternative but either a mere reprint, which I did not think would meet the exigencies of the times and the need of inquiring souls, or to pursue the object of my former book, with any increased light which the study of Scripture and divine teaching may have imparted.

But truths which regard the character, and position, and prospects of the Church of God, lose none of their importance by the lapse of time: and their re-statement at the present moment, and in their present form, may not, in the wisdom of God, prove in vain.

At least, there will be this advantage in the present over the former work, that, if the truths then stated were deemed to be theoretical and therefore unworthy of attention, or doubtful in their application, they will now be presented in combination with experience; which is, alas! in the estimation of many, a surer guide than the unchanging word of God itself.

In my former book there were many details interesting enough perhaps at the time, as giving continuity to the thread of special circumstances, which, without loss, may be omitted now; since the results of inquiry, rather than the struggles of the process, are of intrinsic and lasting importance.

If it may appear that I have spoken with unusual positiveness in these pages, it will be found, on examination, to be, I think, not the positiveness of dogmatism, but the result rather of a habit of unbounded deference to God's word, whose statements, I thank God, have been for years to me in the place of all man's boasted argumentation. For though I despise no helps for the right interpretation of the divine word, I am not ashamed of the apothegm—"They have their arguments, but I have my texts."

My prayer and hope are, that what I have written may be owned of the Lord for the help and instruction of His people, and as a witness, though a feeble one, in these "perilous times," for Christ and for the Church of God.

READING, *January*, 1856.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

More than seventeen years have added their varied lessons to my experience, with whatever result, since I quitted my connection with congregational dissent, and resigned my charge as the minister of Islington Chapel; and it is due to the truth itself, and much more to the God of truth, that I should present, in few words, the bearing of that experience on the following pages.

In the first place, it has falsified many of the predictions relating to it, which were uttered by timid and calculating persons at the time of my secession.

For, as is common in all such cases, there were many minds that could foresee nothing but inevitable ruin and fanaticism as the consequence of leaving the beaten track of denominational Christianity, to walk in what appeared to them an isolated and a visionary path, whatever might be urged in its defence from the Word of God. But the path of obedience will always be found by the humble soul to be the path of light, and the path of Christ's presence and power. There is much more to encourage the poor, feeble, and halting soul in it than, "He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways." There is the promise of Christ's presence and sustinment attached to it. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." "Let your conversation [way of life] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

In the next place, I may add, as to my experience, that whatever I have met with from the imperfections of men, or have enjoyed of the everlasting goodness of God, has but served to deepen the conviction that the truths and principles that first led me into the path I have, too feebly, sought to follow, are truths and principles that were taught of God.

Trials and temptations may beset the pathway of obedience, and sorrowfully teach the truth that "He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey;" but trials are easily borne, and difficulties overcome, when the conscience is at rest and the peace of Christ's approval is enjoyed: and especially when the mind is delivered from the distractions and uncertainty that are rife on every hand, by that divine assurance as to its path, which faith and subjection to God's word alone can give.

Amidst the endless conflict and jar of opinions which mark the present day, and the increasing diversity and confusion that pervade the mass of nominal profession, to talk about *certainty*, and to assume that there can be any "*way of truth*" indicated to the inquiring believer and to the Church of God, will doubtless be esteemed presumption. But be it so. For if Christians—at least of a certain class—are reaping the fruit of their boasted philosophic spirit in a scepticism which has reduced the eternal grounds of a sinner's peace to a rational conclusion, or, at best, to an *argued* certainty, and left them, in effect, to ask, as to everything connected with the will of God, "What is truth?" it is not the time to shrink from the declaration that *divine certainty*, and not the spirit of doubt and hesitation, is assured to the soul that bows in faith to the precious revelation of God's word. "If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant." "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."

However, the only assumption before us is this, that God, in His wisdom, has furnished an unfailing directory for His people in His word; and that Christ does not cease to care for the interests of His Church which is His

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body; and that the Holy Spirit's presence on earth is the guarantee of Christ's abiding love and grace, as it is the power of the believer's entrance into the mind of God and of his communion with all that is precious in the divine spring of his life and joy, in heaven.

This may be little satisfactory to those who are looking to "progress" and philosophy as their stay; and also to those who are leaning upon human tradition and ordinances as their strength. But there are many hearts which trouble has made soft, and the threatened breaking up of all ecclesiastical establishments has left without a resting-place, and forced into inquiry. To such, and to all, to whom the doing of Christ's will is not a secondary object, it will not be in vain to point out that resting place which Christ has provided for His people, and which is found to be the more precious in proportion as everything else is found to be giving way.

Few Christians need to be reminded that the present moment is one that is sufficiently critical to the Church of God, whatever they may hope or imagine will be its issue. That things cannot long continue in their present position requires but little prophetic sagacity to foresee, and the question, therefore, of deepest practical moment is, whether or not God has given that guidance in His word which will carry the soul safely and calmly—for Christ will surely keep His own—through all the surges of a revolution, political, moral and ecclesiastical, that may be near at hand.

It is possible that there may be christian minds who have faith in existing institutions, as having so the power of God with them, that they will stand, and afford a shelter, in the day of trial; but this can only exist in the absence of serious reflection, or be the result of judging by some other standard than the word of God; but "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Meantime, it may be surely asserted that reconstruction by the energies of man is as little foreshadowed in the pages of the Old or the New Testament.

The dispensation is drifting to its final close; the shadows of the last days are come; and the object of each faithful soul should be, while yet it may, firmly to grasp that revelation of God, if there be such, which will carry its possessor along a path in which God will infallibly be with him until his course below is finished; or until the "appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" shall close for ever the sorrows and trials of the whole Church of God.

It has been rightly said, that "When truth becomes important, it begins to be questioned; and perhaps the force of this remark was never more severely proved than in the history, hitherto, of that movement which was originated by the Spirit of God, through the truths and principles with which I am now concerned. Anything but the simplicity and severity of divine truth may at one time or other become popular; but truth itself never can, unless the world were changed in its character; and unless the Church were intent only on God's object and not its own. Nothing is so uncompromising as the truth of God, however ductile and accommodating may be the opinions, and sentiments, and systems of men. For a proof of this, let the reader call to mind the issue of Christ's ministry in Israel; and the reception which Christ declared had always been given, by their fathers, to the prophets. This is the true reply to the question of many a heart, when first rejoicing in the truth, "How is it that all Christians do not see this, and act upon it?" However, it is no part of my purpose to enter into the particulars of the history to which I just alluded. The only desire induced by a remembrance of it is that I may be enabled to unfold the spring and ground of all right position and right action in the Church.

of God, rather than to insist on certain results which, however important in their place, are utterly valueless, except as flowing from this divine and un-failing spring.

The opposite course to this might, indeed, have been pursued, if the object were to found or maintain a decent sect; or a school of doctrine; or a system of prophetic interpretation; or even to seek the unity of Christians on a false ground. But this would be folly in one who judges all sectarianism to be the fruit of sin, censured in its very beginnings by the word, "Are ye not carnal and walk as men?" Faith can be contented with a single clue to guide its onward footsteps, but nature asks a chart of the journey, and will see beforehand its resources, and reckon up its stages, and mark its resting-places. Moses said to Hobab, his father-in-law. (Numb. x. 30, 31, 33.) "Leave us not, I pray thee: forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes." But he said, "I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred." How, now, will Moses and Israel find their way, seeing they are deserted by their guide? Let the Scripture answer. "They departed from the mount of the Lord three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them." Nothing but the guidance of the Lord should direct our steps, and nothing but His presence should satisfy our souls. Opinion and expediency may suffice for the ways of men; but truth and faith are required for the paths of the Lord:—truth which discloses His counsels and ways; and faith which brings in His power to sustain when the wake of these counsels is pursued.

Moreover, obedience to known truth—truth as given of God—is the sure path to further blessing; according to the word of Christ, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that which he hath. The unvarying call of Christ, when on earth, to his disciples was, "Follow me;" and the Spirit of Christ in the apostle but re-echoes from heaven the same word to us when he says, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

## CHAPTER I.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT VIEWS CONCERNING THE CHURCH OF GOD.

THOUGH nothing can be farther from my thoughts than the idea of presenting, in some human way, a solution of ecclesiastical difficulties, which on all sides are making themselves felt, yet I may assert that the ground of all the leading controversies of the day will be found in the question, "*What is the Church?*"

This question may assume different aspects, according as the mind which it agitates is nearer to or farther from the just idea which Scripture furnishes of the Church; still it is the question. Thank God, there is one fixed, unchangeable idea which Scripture presents when it unfolds to us God's "ideal of the Church." There is one indelible character which God's eternal purpose and Christ's infinite love have stamped upon the Church. There is one, and one only position, morally, in the world, which Christ's glory and the Holy Spirit's presence have given to it; and there is one destination alone which God's counsels of grace and Christ's relationship to the Church, as His body and bride, have set before it. It is not left—blessed be God that it is not!—to human definitions to settle what the Church *is*; nor to man's wisdom and wishes to mould it according to his ideas of what it *should be*. Be it that, practically, in its manifestation in the world, all has gone wrong, and that the Church has sunk down from her heavenly position, and well-nigh lost the hope of her heavenly

glory; God's counsel has not sunk down to the level of the Church's actual declension; nor is the power of individual recovery withdrawn so long as faith can lay hold of God's thoughts of what the Church is to Christ, and what Christ is to the Church.

It is not for a moment to be imagined, however, that mere abstract views of truth will accomplish this. Nothing—not even the clearest views of divine truth—can for a moment stand in the place of devotedness to Christ. This will enable the soul to thread its pathway through ten thousand difficulties and hindrances, while mere intellectual perceptions and an earnest maintenance of principles, without it, will infallibly leave the heart to a traitorous desertion of Christ in the hour of trial. Ignorance itself—at least ignorance of everything in truth but that which is most elementary—where the heart is constrained in its impulses by the love of Christ, one is almost tempted to prefer to knowledge in its brightest exhibitions and its widest range, where the affections are left to wither amidst cold abstractions. May the heart ever remember the words of Christ, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them!”

But, because God's thoughts about the Church are not the foundation of a sinner's hope, or, as people express it, “are not essential to salvation,” let it not be supposed that they may on that account be studied or neglected, received or thrown aside, without entailing any consequences. For, if it were well examined, it might be found that the secret of the want of peace and confidence before God of many a soul, arose from the absence of a true apprehension of the fulness of God's grace presented in His counsels and dealings towards the Church. Plainly the question of justification is an individual question; and it is so presented, in connexion with the righteous holiness of God, in Romans and elsewhere. But the real portion and place of an individual believer can neither be known nor enjoyed apart from the revelation which God has given of the place and portion of the Church. Because the highest blessing is not individual blessing, but the blessing of the body. I, as an individual, must come into it—it is true; but it is as a member of Christ's body that I come into it, if at all. For if it is said of believers, in their individuality, “We are members of his body, and of his flesh, and of his bones,” it is because the Church is the body of Christ, and believers are members of that body.

Moreover, if the place of “the bride,” and the blessed affections that are awakened by that relationship, and the hold which it gives on Christ's affections be considered, it must be remembered that it is the Church in its corporate character that is both the body and the bride. To talk about Christ being the bridegroom of an individual is folly, and a degradation of Christ, and a proof that the very idea of that divine and blessed relationship is unknown. “Christ loved *the Church* and gave himself for it.”

But I may go a step farther, and say, that the divine truth of the resurrection cannot be known in its fulness and present power apart from the truth of the Church's union in life with a risen Christ. I may know, doctrinally, and on the ground of divine certainty, that the bodies of believers will be raised to life and glory by the power of Christ—for “life and incorruptibility are brought to light by the gospel;” but when I see that God has a Church, and that that Church is the body of Christ, I learn that I am a partaker of the resurrection *now*; and that the life which I possess *now* is Christ's life (Col. iii. 4)—eternal life—for it is of the Church as a whole that it is said, “He hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

But if this question of the Church has often to be settled as a preliminary to

the settlement of the soul in divine grace before God, it is invariably knit up with a right apprehension of what a believer's path should be as he is called to walk and to please God.

With the best intentions, how can Christians know how to behave themselves, "in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God," if their minds are at sea as to God's thoughts of what that Church is? or if they are unsettled as to what Christ's authority as "a Son over his own house" is? or what is closely connected with it, if they know not what that energy is, through the presence of the Holy Ghost, by which Christ's place and authority in the Church can alone be maintained? How, again, can believers be admonished to "walk worthy of the calling wherewith they are called," and to "endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," if they are practically strangers to the truth that "there is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all?" Before, therefore, I enter upon anything more explicit I will state, as plainly as I can, some general principles which Scripture presents as lying at the basis of true obedience to Christ and a walk suited to the character and position of the Church of God.

## CHAPTER II.

### BASIS PRINCIPLES IN THEIR PRACTICAL BEARING.

THERE is a leading statement of Scripture which I have just quoted,—“There is one body and one Spirit,”—the importance of which, in connexion with the present subject, can hardly be over estimated.

I adduce it first, because, in connexion with other Scriptures, it presented to my mind the two main grounds on which I was induced to leave my position as the people elected, and exclusive, minister of an independent congregation. It expressed to my apprehension what was indeed a new truth to me, but which is as old as the Epistle to the Ephesians, viz., the unity of all believers, as the body of Christ, and in that body the presence of the Holy Spirit as the power of its unity and edification. The first of these principles appeared to me to be practically denied by a recognized separate membership in any other distinctive body than the body of Christ. For, however locally associated believers might be, the only membership recognized in the churches of the New Testament was membership of the body of Christ. The second principle also—"there is one Spirit"—appeared to me to be equally nullified by a conventional ministry exercised, as is commonly the case, in all religious bodies, (the "Friends" excepted,) either on the ground of human choice, or by the power of human appointment.

These two principles, or basis truths, have doubtless become more developed to my mind through the study of the divine word, and the sense of their importance has become proportionally increased; still they are essentially those which governed me at the time of my secession, which I have spoken of in my course in the professing church.

In their distinctive bearing on the unity of the body and the question of ministry, I have stated them as two principles, but, strictly speaking, they both flow from the one great cardinal truth that on the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the right hand of God, the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven as the witness of His infinite love in redemption, and also to unite believers in one body by His power. The rejection of Christ by Israel, and His consequent exaltation to God's right hand, gave occasion to His display in far more extended glories than those connected with David's throne; for He now becomes the

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divine centre and head of everything in heaven and everything on earth, in the counsels of God; and to be thus manifested "in the dispensation of the fullness of times." (Eph. i. 10.) His death was necessary for Israel's blessing, it is true; but, once accomplished, it gives scope and ground for deeper counsels of God's hidden love. Israel's high priest, like another Balaam, uttered them, when he said, prophetically, that Jesus should "*die for that nation*; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." (John xi. 51, 52.) This "gathering together of the children of God," apart from the world, is peculiarly distinctive of Christianity; and the idea does not meet us in the Old Testament, except in the form of a moral attraction, as expressed in Psalm cxxxiii., "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity;" or in Malachi, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." The position of Israel in the Lord was that of an elect *nation*; and the principles of God's dealings with them were in accordance with this position, consisting mainly in governmental regulations and providential displays; so that it was said, "He hath not dealt so with any nation." They were a nation bound together, by virtue of a common parentage, and a national ritual, consisting of carnal ordinances; and they were thus owned of God; that is, they were owned as a nation separated from other nations to be an example of God's goodness and faithfulness; for they were in alliance with Him. The salvation of the godly in Israel is another question; and is always a question of *faith*, from Abel downwards. (See Heb. xi.) But the death of Christ gave occasion for the bringing out of the reverse of what was manifested in the position of Israel. For Christianity is the gathering together of saints in the power of a spiritual life, presenting a body whose members are indeed on the earth, but whose life, in all its essential springs and formative character, is in heaven, "hid with Christ in God." God has not now recorded His name in the midst of any *nation*; but wherever two or three are gathered together in His name, there Jesus is in the midst of them. What the temple was to the Jew, that the gathering of saints is to the Christian. For God hath said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them;" and the exhortation based on this is, "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

Too much stress can hardly be laid on the truth—though God is the only effectual teacher—that, in consequence of Christ's exaltation, *the Holy Ghost, as a divine person, is here on earth*; is here consequent upon completed redemption, and the divine witness of its power. This alters everything in regard to the position of believers as to the world, their worship, their relationship and intercourse with God, their hopes and expectations. And if the cursory reader should be disposed to pass this by as a speculative statement, I beseech the thoughtful Christian to ponder, in the presence of God, its profoundly practical bearing. For, if the Scriptures present us with doctrines that "make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus," and so fully unfold the mind of God that, through them, "the man of God may be *perfect*, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," they also bring us, and that in a divine way, *through the power and presence of the Holy Ghost here on earth*, into acquaintance with the living person of the Son of God in heaven, and into living association with Him; and, through Him, into the relationship and intercourse of sons with the living Father.

Thus, and thus only, can be known the profound depth and living strength of that word of Christ, which told of His victory in death, and burst from His lips in resurrection, but which could only be known in its fullness after the descent of

the Holy Ghost:—"Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto *my* Father and *your* Father, and to *my* God and *your* God!" This is, indeed, individual and personal blessing, though the truth has a far wider scope.

The living energy of God's Spirit revealing Christ to the soul, and the fulness of that eternal redemption which He has accomplished, will alone enable His people to maintain their position of faithfulness and service in these perilous times, and "if the will of God be so," to suffer for His name; or that will put them into the posture of waiting for His coming glory. It is this, and not mere argumentative refutation, that is needed to deliver souls, on the one hand, from the reviving claims of Popery, and from seeking salvation by means of ordinances, which is the semi-Popery of Puseyism; and, on the other, to displace that heartless speculative assent to the truths of the gospel which, while it excludes God's power from their application to the heart, leaves the question of sin, and the person and work of Him who is the only deliverer from sin, to be reasoned about as matters of philosophic disquisition.

How much is there for the eternal rest of the soul in that one simple statement of Scripture, "Christ has suffered for sins once, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God!"

Now the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth, sent down from above, as truly as the Son, though in a different manner, is the centre and key to the whole Christian position. It gives its distinctive character to Christianity as a revelation from God, and is essential to the conception of that divine grace which beams in the gospel from the God of goodness towards poor sinners.

But this mission of the Holy Ghost, which took place on the exaltation of Christ, has a two-fold result: first, in His presence in the Church, which He has formed in its own proper unity, as the body of Christ, and in unity with its head in heaven; secondly, in His testimony in the gospel to the world.

He is here not only because Christ is away and believers needed "another Comforter," but He is here because perfect divine righteousness has been established before God in heaven, through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and perfect divine love has been shown towards sinners on earth; and there needed a *divine* witness on earth of that. None but the divine Spirit of God could make known to the heart either the believer's portion and blessing in union with Christ, or the glory of His person and work through whom this portion is obtained, or the infinite grace of God through whom it flows, as from its proper fountain, to us. Christ has made good both perfect love on God's part toward man in his sins; for "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son;" and perfect righteousness for the faith of a sinner before God; for Christ is our righteousness in His presence. "We are made the righteousness of God in him." And the Holy Ghost being sent down, because Jesus is on high, is the divine witness of this love and righteousness in the gospel, "in the whole creation which is under heaven." (See Col. i. 23; (Greek;) and also 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.)

This gospel, which is God's testimony from heaven, and of which the Holy Ghost is the witnessing power, gathers sinners to Christ, in the knowledge of salvation, as is generally allowed. But it does a great deal more; for it gathers from Jew and Gentile the heavenly joint-heirs of Christ; and having so gathered them, the Holy Ghost unites them by the power of His presence into one body, as the members of Christ united to their Head. "God hath made Him to be head *over* all things to his church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. i. 22, 23.) "For by one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles," &c. (1 Cor.

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xii. 13.) "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Eph. v. 30.)

Hence the believer is individually the temple of the Holy Ghost, (1 Cor. vi. 19.) and the whole body also is collectively His temple, (1 Cor. iii. 16,) and hence it is that on earth believers "are builded together for a habitation of God (they are his temple) through the Spirit." (Eph. ii. 20, 22.) Hence also the apostle's statement—" . . . Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature [in the whole creation] which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil [complete] the word of God." (Col. i. 22—25.)

In this passage there are three things stated which it is important to distinguish. First, the apostle states that he was a minister of *the gospel*, as a testimony of God in the whole creation, which is under heaven, as observed before; second, that he was a minister of *the Church*, which, he says, is the body of Christ; third, that in the dispensation which was committed to him there was the completing of the word of God. Or, in other words, that a dispensation or economy was committed to him, which had for its distinctive object the manifestation of God's counsels of grace and glory concerning the Church; and that this manifestation was a necessary part of divine revelation, in order to the completion of the word of God. Subsequent revelations were doubtless given, as in the latter epistles, and in "the Revelation;" but these present only the history, and decline, and final condition, as to this world, of the Church which had been already revealed. As to subjects, when the Church had been presented, revelation was complete. Hence is seen the contradiction and folly of Mormonism, and of every claim to another revelation.

The Scriptures, it may be needful to say, (for some at least,) are occupied, as far as regards man, with three separate classes, termed, "the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church of God," in connexion with which God's counsels and Christ's glory are to be displayed. It is not merely that in these three classes mercy finds its objects, and "wisdom is justified of all her children;" but Christ has a separate title in connection with each; while the Church stands forth in her own peculiar place of union with Christ and as the participant of His glory.

And let me add, that for all intelligent study of the divine word, these distinctions must be borne in mind. They mark the application of Scripture, and are never confounded the one with the other in the oracles of God.

But it is of the Church alone that it is said, "There is *one body* and *one Spirit*;" and it is the unity of this body that is to be kept in the bond of peace. Admitting that the evil of man and the influx of corruptions have scattered the members of Christ, and have substituted another unity than that of the body of Christ, and have brought in another organisation for the unity of that body, the obligation to maintain this unity, which is God's, is not on that account set aside. The estimate which the believer is to form of the Church, and his consequent blessings and obligations in relation with that Church, is not to be taken from the ruin and debasement to which man in his unfaithfulness has reduced it; but from the place in which God has set it in His grace, and from its unalterable relationship to Christ, and its final destination in glory with Him as His body and His bride.

Allowing that there is a lack of power to restore this unity on earth, of which

we have spoken, still the duty of the Christian remains the same; nor can any other be allowed. The believer is bound to own this unity, because God has established no other. It is not a matter of choice, much less is it a matter of indifference; and in owning this unity I am bound to separate from all that would set it aside; being well assured that God will, ere long, gather His Church in one, in the glory, and that on the very principle which he calls me to acknowledge now; and on which, if I am faithful to His objects, I am bound to act. Meanwhile, the provisions of His grace will not fail; for there remains the promise—apart from all thought of reconstruction, and even of the ruin that calls for reconstruction—“where two or three are gathered together in his name, he is in the midst of them;” and thus they enjoy his presence as really, if not as completely, as if the whole Church were gathered together.

Ministry, also, which is so much the subject of question and discussion, and is exercised on such various grounds, takes its character entirely from the truth of Christ's accomplished work, and the consequent presence of the Holy Spirit here on earth. Though ministry comes directly from God, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and makes Him that possesses the gift the servant of Christ in its exercise, it is still carried on practically, by each one engaged in it, as a *member of the body* in responsibility to the head. (See Rom. xii. ; 1 Cor. xii. ; 1 Pet. iv.) Discipline, when called for, is different, and is exercised, in Christ's name, by the Church; but ministry is each member filling up the service which belongs to it, according to the will of Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost working in it to that end. In the world ministry is exercised by the evangelist, to say nothing of the original work of apostles, according to the original word of Christ, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel unto every creature.” In the Church it is carried on by pastors and teachers, and the like.

As to gifts, those which were originally signs to the world have disappeared, but not those by which Christ gathers and nourishes His Church. Blessed be His name, if external power, which was to the world the indication of God's presence in the Church, be gone, Christ cannot cease to call and to bless those who are the members of *Himself*. But all Christians are His members—“members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”

By the work of the evangelist, or by other means, sinners may be brought to Christ. For in the gospel message there is the activity of God's love towards a sinful world; Christ having accomplished that righteousness before God, on the basis of which the testimony of His mercy can go forth to the chief of sinners. When the message of the gospel is received, believers, wherever scattered or wherever placed, may be brought into unity by the Holy Ghost working to this end by light and love. It may be added, also, that nothing but what constitutes a person a member of the body of Christ can be the ground of union; though in this union the whole will and truth of God is to be maintained in holiness, and truth, and grace, according to the word of God and the power of the Spirit.

While such, in brief, is the ground of fellowship, nothing can be of greater importance than that the Church of God should have its own legitimate and proper *hope*. That hope is the coming of the Lord to take His saints, whom He may have already called into glory with Himself, in order that the Church may take her place as the bride, the Lamb's wife. The position into which the gospel calls believers is not merely to taste the blessedness of peace with God and communion here on earth with the Father and the Son, and to be occupied in His service, with an ultimate hope of heaven; but it calls them, in addition to all this, to “wait for God's Son from heaven:” (see 1 Thess. i.)

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even as Christ Himself has said, "If I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also."

After the Church has entered upon this, her proper hope, the power of evil will be set aside, and Christ will establish the *kingdom* in power, and blessing, and glory. It is "the kingdom and *patience*" now; then it will be "the kingdom of God come with power." To make way for this, the merely nominal church, or the aggregate of that which has stood in the outward profession of Christianity (not the members of Christ) will be "spued out of his mouth," will be rejected as the sphere within which His power in grace has hitherto worked, but shall then work no longer. For the time will then be come for the immediate and definite application of the passage, "He that is unjust let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous let him be righteous still; and he that is holy let him be holy still." (Rev. xxii. 11.) Babylon will be judged, and the whole power of evil will be set aside.

In a word, full communion and glory for the Church with Christ, and the judgment of the world, with the resulting blessings under the reign of Christ, is that which believers ought to look for.

As to life, the eternal life which was with the Father, it has been manifested to us in the person of Christ, and He has become *our* life. Hence His precepts, and walk, and words, which were expressive of the life in Him, in the midst of earthly circumstances, become the rule and direction of that life in us. "God has given to us eternal life and that life *is in his Son*; he that has the Son has life; and he that has not *the Son of God*, has not life." Hence, we have fellowship through the Spirit with the Son, in whom our life is, and, consequently, with the Father also. But inasmuch as this life—our life—is in Christ in the power of resurrection, a life which He took after death, we shall never have our full place and glory until we are risen, though "to depart and be with Christ," as it is expressed by the apostle, "is far better."

In sum, it may be said, that the presence of the Holy Ghost, consequent upon Christ's exaltation, when He had, by His obedience, and sufferings, and death, accomplished eternal redemption, and His coming again in glory, are the practical hinges of the true character and position of the Church.

It may be added here, however, that the death and resurrection of Christ is the witness of the world's being entirely lost; for not only have men shown their moral distance from God by the rejection and crucifixion of Him who, in character and claims, was God's representative here on earth; but they have proved themselves to be under condemnation and death, since righteousness and life before God are alone in Him, and through Him, whom they have rejected. Hence the righteousness established before God, in Christ as the second Adam, is the foundation, and only foundation, of God's present working in love towards the world, lost and ruined as it is; and, as Christians, we belong actually, as well as morally, to a *new creation*.

Still the presence of the Holy Ghost, forming the unity of the body, is the centre and hinge of the whole doctrine of Christ, now exalted on high until He comes again in glory. As to *the manifestation* of that unity—a manifestation, be it remembered, that once existed—all is scattered and ruined. Of this there needs no proof; while the attempts that have been made to establish it upon false grounds have rendered the difficulty of realizing its blessings and effects still greater. But this difficulty has not altered the duty of the servant of Christ; nor has it enfeebled the love of Christ towards the members of His

body, nor abated, in the least degree, His interest in them; so that the Christian is bound, still, according to the grace given to him, to seek souls in the world by the testimony of God's righteousness and love, as displayed in the cross of Christ; and also to seek the unity of the body in all patience, and the edification of all its members for the building of it up in dependence on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In giving this brief summary of the Church's constitution, position, and hope, I have not noticed the leading orthodox truths, which I receive in common with all Christians, as my object in writing is not to present a confession of faith, or a treatise of divinity, but merely to explain, for the profit of others, the grounds of my personal course amidst the general mass of profession in the present day.

### CHAPTER III.

#### CONTRAVENTION OF BASIS PRINCIPLES IN THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH AT LARGE.

At this point I am conscious of entering on a thorny path, though controversy, in its ordinary acceptation, is not in the least degree my aim. As little also is it my aim to wound the feelings of any Christian, whatever his position or his path may be. Truth indeed may wound, and the light may make manifest the darkness; but the truth will heal as well as wound; and God has called us out of darkness into His own marvellous light, to walk as children of the light. But there has been so wide a departure by the whole Church of God from the grounds on which it was originally set, and a departure so long continued, that the conscience which should take notice of this declension is almost extinct; and the only standard by which everything must be tried, in the present case, is considered by no small majority of Christians, practically, at least, to be almost obsolete.

Now the difficulty which arises, to the thoughtful mind, in such a state of things as this, is not the difficulty of avowed infidelity, which is so common in the world, but of appealing to the authority of a standard, which, while it is so acknowledged in word and confession, is, at the same time, disallowed in thought and application. And that this is the position which the Scriptures hold in the minds of the majority of persons who profess to be guided by them, one must have had very slight, or very unthoughtful, intercourse with the people of God, not to have perceived.

But when it produces the recoil of an almost hopeless feeling to know, beforehand, that nearly every statement which depends, for its practical effect, upon a conscience in healthful exercise, will only be met by one that is blunted and paralyzed, and that needs almost to be new-created. But "with God all things are possible;" and that He will have a testimony to the end, and will continue to work in grace amidst every confusion and corruption in His Church, is my conviction and my joy. But I hazard little when I assert that a national establishment is not that testimony; and as little is dissent either the presentation of the positive good to meet the need of souls, or an efficient protest against the evil which as a tide on every hand is coming in. For neither the one nor the other, in fact or principle, presents any barrier to the inroads of Popery and infidelity; but as systems, are strongly acted on by both. Individuals may be faithful, and God will assuredly keep His own; but the time is come in which everything is being tried as to its pretensions and reality, and nothing that has not the power of God with it will stand.

It would be a thankless task, and one little congenial to the heart that loves the sheep of Christ, to dwell on all the corruptions of the Establishment, which the spiritual in its communion are forced to groan under; or on all the evils which mark the various forms of Dissent, and from which many amongst them, that have a heart for Christ, would be gladly freed. It will, therefore, be my object, mainly, to point out the practical setting aside, by the one and the other, as systems, of those basis principles which are essential to any adequate witness for the unity of the Church of God, and for the true and divine grounds of the fellowship of all believers.

Not only, then, is there no practical exhibition of the unity of the Church as the body of Christ, or of the foundation and bond of Christian communion, but there exists, as a fact, and has long existed, the prescriptive establishment of grounds of communion and bonds of fellowship so entirely opposite, that it is difficult in the extreme to rouse the great body of professing Christians to the thought that the Church ever was, or ever could be, any other than the mass of jarring elements, and worldly principles, and rival and discordant sects, which it now presents.

If personal piety be cultivated, and such fellowship be enjoyed as the sect may afford—and especially if, through the ministry of the word, souls be converted to God—in the apprehension of the majority of Christians there remains little more to be desired, and little to be mourned over, in reference to the general condition of the Church of God. It is hardly suspected by them that the great body of truth presented in the apostolic epistles has as much to do with unfolding the blessings in which the Church as a body is set, and in directing the communion and *associated* walk of believers, as it has with the establishment of the grounds of individual justification and the direction of the separate walk of the children of God.

But, as an exhibition of the Church as the body of Christ, having one life with Christ and one destination with Him in glory, what is the Church of England? and what is Dissent?

How, it may be asked, does the one or the other present the unity of the body or the grounds of christian fellowship, so that there should be any place for the exhortation, “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?” I do not here invidiously inquire what are the manifest corruptions of the Establishment, or what are the practical evils of Dissent. I take the principles of a national establishment and the abstract theory of dissent; and I find that the one, in its very constitution, *because* it is national, and therefore gathers the world within its pale, subverts the very basis of the Church as composed of the members of Christ’s body, and renders impossible any witness for the glory of Christ against an idolatrous world. The other also, in its endless divisions and conventional rules of communion, even though it require a spiritual confession in its members, is founded, nevertheless, on the non-existence of the unity of the Church, such as the epistles of the New Testament present.

It is matter of history that in the settlement of the parochial system of the Church of England there was a transfer of all the inhabitants of a parish from a popish to a protestant form; and that altogether apart from the question of whether there was a single Christian in the parish or not. So that, from the outset, the Church of England failed to accord with its own definition of a church, as “a company of faithful men,” &c., and failed in the scriptural requirements of a church.

I may add here, in the words of another: “At the time of the Reformation two great elements entered into the composition of the Church of England, as

it is called—one the power of the Spirit of God in the preached word, which was directed *against* the Church of England, or the Church of Rome in England, then subsisting, and was carried on by a system of irregularities—Latimer, Bernard Gilpin, and a host of others, whose names are better known in heaven than on earth, preaching and teaching all about the country, without regard to parish or any such thing, but which was the power of light against the power of darkness, and that was blotted. The other element, partly through the fears of churchmen, and mainly through the interference of the crown and secular power, was a system in which, in order to maintain unity in the whole country, and to conciliate Roman Catholics for political purposes, under Queen Elizabeth, a vast mass of association with Roman Catholic forms and the value of ordinances was preserved and asserted, by which a connection with the great apostasy was kept up; which, although the power of truth and the providence of God may have a long while hindered, its effect is now beginning distinctly and publicly to show itself, and will, I have no doubt—woe is me that I should have to say it—result in this once comparatively happy country being immersed in and given up to darkness and opposition to God.”

The truth may continue to be faithfully preached by many godly men in the Establishment, which I am glad at heart to acknowledge, still the consequence of the retention of this popish parochial unity involved the forfeiture by the Establishment of the title to be considered a church at all; and that not on account of its corruptions, but by its very constitution and system.

It is not that many a faithful clergyman will not own, in heart, the godly labours, and seek the fellowship of those without the limit of the Establishment; but that no right individual feeling, no personal liberality of sentiment, will release him from the obligation to own, as pastors of the flock of Christ, because they are *legally appointed*, men whom he knows to be unconverted, men whom he honestly denounces as subvertors of souls, and preachers of deadly error. A godly clergyman may be placed in an adjoining parish to one whose teaching and aim he knows to be to deliver the Establishment, and the nation, so far as it is connected with it, into the arms of Popery; and not only can he not do anything to hinder this, but he is bound to *own*, both by his own subscription and under legal penalties, that man as *Christ's minister*, and pastor of the sheep of Christ. He is compelled so to own him, that he dares not cross the parochial limits to minister the word of life to dying souls, or to help and comfort the sheep of Christ, though he knows that their acknowledged pastor is “a wolf in sheep's clothing.” A dissenter may go, if he has the good of souls at heart, because he is bound by no parochial arrangements; but a clergyman cannot, because the system of the Church of England binds him to own those whom it has placed in certain parochial limits as pastors of the sheep of Christ. No matter that they are destroying instead of saving souls,—they must be so owned,—there is no remedy! But can such a system be owned as a *church*? Let every conscience that knows the Church of God to be something more than a legal fiction return the answer.

If I look, then, at the actual state of things in this country as to the professing body, there is, in fundamental constitution, the principle of parochial arrangement, and that of voluntary association. In the appointment of ministry there is the fiat of authority; the choice of the people; and the appointment by conference. And, it may be asked, by what reasonings does each section seek to maintain the rightness of its position. The nationalist, by a reference to Old Testament Scriptures and the national character of Judaism: the Independent and Baptist by an appeal to abstract right, as in civil and national affairs: the

Wesleyan by the principles of expediency, because the founder of the sect so arranged it, without any reference to Scripture at all.

In this state of things, apart from all questions of corruption, it will at once be perceived that the authority of *man* is paramount, and that the Church is viewed, practically, as one in common with the various existing institutions, which are moulded, by his plastic hand, according to the dictates of his will. But how utterly alien is this from the scriptural idea of the Church being "*buildd together for an habitation of God through the Spirit,*" where a common relationship to Christ gives the common bond of union to its several members, and where the Spirit's presence is the source, and power, and guiding energy, of its Christ-appointed ministries!

My reference to these things is with no pleasurable feelings; but they must needs be pointed out by the hand that would indicate the pathway of God's people in an evil day; because it is in the midst of these evils that their path is found.

The radical defect of both the Establishment and Dissent is the absence of the recognition of that which the New Testament emphatically calls *the Church*. I do not deny that there may be a reference to "the visible and invisible Church;" (a poor substitute for "the epistle of Christ, known and read of all men;") but I assert that there is the entire absence of the idea of what the Church is, in its essential nature as the body of Christ, and of its distinctive endowment by the presence of the Holy Ghost. And by consequence there is the absence of all practical recognition of the privileges and responsibilities of believers, as connected with that "one body and one Spirit."

But the nature of the Church and the unity of the Church must be seen, if the positive ground of a Christian in these days is to be seen; and if there is to be any true standard before the mind by which to judge what is, and what is not, consistent with the unspeakable grace of God, in which believers are set; consistent with the blessed and wondrous ends for which Christ died.

This—may God's children believe it!—is no question of expediency, to be settled according to one's views of the relative claims of different existing systems. It is not a question between Evangelicals and Puseyites; of Church and Dissent; of the appointment of ministers and their sustainment. But it is a question about the existence of the Church as the body of Christ, and of the liberty and functions of God's blessed Spirit as present in the Church, and of the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures for the guidance of believers according to the mind of Christ as long as the Church is continued here on earth.

Here Dissent is equally at fault with the Establishment.

Dissent in general, and especially independency, apart from its political character, and increasing advocacy of worldliness, fails in even the recognition of the Church in its unity, at least as to anything to do with earth. In heaven it cannot be questioned. But there will be no need of "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" there. The unity, however, spoken of in Eph. iv, "one body and one Spirit," a unity connected with the earth, however it may be perfected in heaven, has neither place nor consideration in the system of independency or congregationalism. It exists neither in fact nor in desire. I do not assert that individuals may not recognize and desire it; but if I look at the system, individual churches, or federations of churches, are assumed to answer every exigency of Scripture on this point.

However, in the New Testament, it is unquestionable, there is the Church in its unity, as presented in Paul's Epistles, especially in Ephesians and Colos-

sians. There are also the separate *local churches* of the various cities where the gospel was received, as the Church of Corinth, Ephesus, or Jerusalem. When you come to *provinces* you have *churches*, as those of Galatia, Macedonia, and Judea. Beyond this, there is the happy idea of the church *in the house*. There is no other application of the term in the New Testament to bodies of Christians; however it may be applied, in a secular sense, to a promiscuous assembly.

Hence it follows, that if national churches have no shadow of sanction in the New Testament, as little is there for separate communities of Christians assuming the title of churches in any given city or town. Neither idea has any existence in the New Testament. In the New Testament history, with which the Epistles accord, it is a truth which every one reading it may ascertain for himself that however large the number of believers might be in any given place, and whether actually meeting in one building or in many, they were designated as the Church of God, or God's assembly, in that place. A separate name, or a separate membership, or a separate order did not exist. Separate and rival, or even friendly, churches, in the same town or city, like the separate guilds of a corporation, may be maintained by Erastian arguments, but they have no existence in Scripture.

This is no abstract question. For if the claims of Rome to be the catholic or universal church are justly repelled by Protestants as a baseless and a haughty assumption, on account of her abominations and corruptions; still the idea of an universal church is a true and Scriptural one. But the existence of national and independent churches has served almost to blot out from the minds of Christians that there is such a thing as the Church on earth, to which the members of Christ, by virtue of that membership, and by virtue of that membership alone, belong.

Voluntary associations, and politically constituted churches, are alike opposed to the principles of the New Testament, and necessarily hinder the association and action of believers on the grounds of the Church of God. For it is not by being born within certain geographical limits, nor by voluntary association, but by the necessity of divine grace and life, received from Christ the head, that I am associated with the Church, which is His body. This is undeniable as to that which is vital; because there is but "one body and one Spirit;" and the members of the Church are the members of the body of Christ. There may be a thousand other things wrong, important in their place, because of the bearing they have on the safety and the good of souls; but this is the fundamental error. For certainly Erastianism has no more place nor divine sanction, in regard to the form, and worship, and service of the Church in the New Testament, than it had in relation to the polity, and worship, and service, of Israel in the Old, where it was said, "See thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount." Albeit the principles of the one and the other are different and opposed. Still, if ritual enactment under the law was necessary to keep the worshipper in the path of duty, and to enable an election to present the divine type of worship in a "worldly sanctuary," no less is the knowledge of sonship necessary, and the apprehension of union with Christ, and the faith of the presence of the Holy Ghost, here on earth, in order to produce a walk, and worship, and affections, suited to the Church, as set in divine grace, and brought into the very light and presence, and the full acceptance, of the living God.

When people are groaning under evils that oppress the conscience, it is small comfort to be told that, "there cannot be a perfect church;" and that "Judas

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was amongst the disciples." But be it so. I am not seeking for a perfect church. I am occupied with a much simpler thing. I am seeking a path for myself in which I shall not have my conscience bound by any authority to do or to sanction what the word of God and conscience condemn. It is a very simple question for a disciple of Christ to ask himself. By what authority am I bound to go on with what I see to be wrong? And why am I to acquiesce in a state of things, ecclesiastically or otherwise, merely because it exists, when, at the same time, I see so many things in it which are plainly contrary to the record of Christ's will? I speak not now of Church, or Dissent, or Free Church, or any other system, in particular, but of all. And I ask, where does Christ bind His disciples to association with that which is evil?

Imagine what would be Christ's judgment of the present state of things if He were now personally present—if He were to appear in *glory*: the conclusion is plain. Ten thousand things, which now find their place and approval in the systems of men, and which bind Christians to association with them, would be withered up by the very first beam of that glory; while "the shaking of heaven and earth," which will actually take place when He does appear, will be but the overturning of all that men are, in Christ's name, so strangely seeking to uphold. But Christ *has* visited the scene. And He has caused a record to be made of His moral judgment about it. He has walked amidst the candlesticks, and has declared that unless there were repentance, even in those early days of decline, and doing the first works, He would "remove the candlestick out of its place." He has declared that He *will not* put His stamp of approval upon anything that falls short of the expression of the Church's "first love." And, alas! the succeeding epistles to those apocalyptic churches only show the deepening shades of moral declension, until Laodicea causes him to reject it altogether. And then the whole book gives the programme of the whole character of evil of the latter days, until Babylon's corruption and Babylon's doom are the final issue.

I know well that any feeling of dissatisfaction with the existing state of things is readily imputed to restlessness of mind, or to wildness of views. But, be this as it may, one thing is certain, that God never binds any evil on the consciences of His people, however, in departing from the evil, they may provoke the opposition, not of the world alone, but of those who have other objects than to do His will; or at least have another standard than His word by which to judge of that will.

"But where," it may be asked, "is the refuge for the isolated believer amidst this confused and jarring scene?" For if it be deemed a fruitless hope to look for a restored-unity to the Church, it does not set aside the fact that *division and sectarianism exist*. And if so, it appears to me there exists but this alternative for the Christian, either to coincide with that which the word of God condemns, or to seek a path where, at least, he may be individually free from fellowship with the world and the evils of sectarianism; and be free also from the *spirit* which at first produced, and still perpetuates, these evils. "Are ye not carnal and walk as men?" is as much a beacon to warn of danger and shipwreck of the Church's interests now, as it was in apostolic days.

"But where," it may be repeated, "is any place of rest for him, if he breaks through those ties which bind him on every hand?" The answer is presented in one single sentence of Scripture—so much misconstrued, so little valued, so often overlooked, and yet presenting so perfect and gracious a provision by Christ Himself, that nothing but heaven itself can go beyond it. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Now as the gathering together in His name—solely and simply in His name—alone answers the requisition of this gracious abiding promise of Christ, so is it His promised presence that is the simple and only guarantee of the looked-for blessing. And if we could suppose such a thing as all Christians at this moment acting on the faith of this word of Christ, adding nothing to Christ's name as their bond of association, but having a heart-felt value for that name, what would they leave behind them, as they stepped disencumbered within the limit of this simple but comprehensive bond? What, but the doctrines and commandments of men?—but bonds unsuspected or self-imposed?—but human systems and human forms? What, on the other hand would be gained? CHRIST'S PRESENCE—faith's beginning and faith's ending. Is this enough? To the heart that has known His presence it is enough. And to the heart that has never thus committed itself to Christ's faithfulness and love, as to a heaven-thrown plank amidst the general wreck, there is a secret spring of security and joy, which it never dreamt of while trusting to the wisdom or the security presented in the creeds and systems of men.

The provision of Christ is perfect. In a single sentence HE has pointed out "the way of truth in evil times for the believer and for the Church of God."

This is no wholesale condemnation of everything, bad or good, in the professing church, and the setting up of the claims of a narrow sectarianism in its place. It is but the presentation of that which in Christianity characterizes the child of God amidst every outward change that may mark its progress, from its first brightness to its darkest hour, and which over-lives all its corruptions and incrustations by human forms. Believers are bound to Christ, their living head, not so much by a voluntary profession of His name, as by their possession of eternal life—a life that links them with Himself, and links them with one another as possessors in common of this eternal life, in a world whose moral characteristic is that of death. It is infinite grace then in Him to assure their hearts that He will, everywhere, and at all times, meet them by His living presence when they seek it on this simple ground. For, whatever be the fates or fortunes of that which ostensibly and publicly bears the profession of Christ's name, if but "two or three" are found gathered together, animated by the faith of His promise, there is *His presence known*.

To acknowledge good to be of God, wherever it is found, and to be separate from all evil, by whatever name disguised, is the unchangeable obligation of the people of God. The standard by which the one and the other must be judged is, and can be, nothing short of the revelation which God Himself has given.

God will have a testimony to His grace until the day of grace is closed; and He will continue to work where there is any presentation of His truth to which He can attach His blessing. But he leaves everything connected with the testimony, which is not the testimony itself, to be judged by the light of His blessed word. It is, therefore, no legitimate use of His blessing, whether in the conversion of souls, or in the maintenance of fundamental truth for the good of His people, to point to it as if it were, or could be, a sanction in practice of that which is contrary to His word. Because God still works in grace, amidst the corruption and confusion of His church, to use that as a proof that He sanctions evil, or that He thinks lightly of it, is ecclesiastical antinomianism; while an appeal to His blessing as a proof of His approval of the system is as much as to say that he approves equally the most contrary things—things both opposed to one another, and opposed to the word of God.

For example, if the working of God's grace in those who are faithful is to be taken as a sanction of any system, it would make me an evangelical with the

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evangelicals, in the Establishment of this country; and at the same time, and on the same ground, a Dissenter with the Dissenters; and a Wesleyan with the Wesleyans; and if I had lived at the time, I must have been a Lutheran at the Reformation, and a Papist with Pascal and the Jansenists! There is, however, another conclusion which is often drawn from these premises; viz., that it is a proof of God's present indifference to these things, provided the gospel is preached and souls are saved. My only answer is, this is not merely latitudinarian indifference, but it is the nullification of the wisdom and care which indited the Epistles for the Church's guidance; and it is practically saying that God is indifferent whether the Church, which is the epistle of Christ, presents a true or a false transcript of His grace and character to the world.

It appears a strange thing to the heart which has known, in ever so feeble a measure, God's goodness, and has proved, perhaps as scantily, the stability of His ways, that in writing to *Christians* one should be obliged to turn aside to insist on a thing so obvious, so elementary, as that *God* may, at all times, and in all circumstances, be surely trusted when the doing of His will by His children is in question. And that His word, which is but the expression of His thoughts and will, however opposed to our notions, and contrary to flesh and blood its dictates may seem, may be always confided in.

Yet it is necessary. Or, if the observation be founded on a practical mistake, those who are so happy as to carry the reputation of it in their own confiding trust in God, and their habitual subjection to the paramount authority of His word, will know how to forgive the anxiety which dictated the remark. But when thinking about others, rather than oneself, as a Christian is called to do, what rest is there for the heart, amidst a thousand things that try it, in that declaration, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called into fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ!" And, when the results of labour are such as to present but little to be rested in, how does it dispel any feeling of despondency to remember, that "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong on behalf of them whose *heart* is perfect toward him!"

What is needed, especially in a day like the present, is, the laying hold of the principle uttered by the prophet, "Say ye not a confederacy to all them to whom this people say a confederacy, neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. *Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself*; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. *And he shall be for a sanctuary.*"

For one thing is certain, that if all Christians were prepared at once to give in their adherence to a perfectly scriptural system of church polity, as far as it could be presented, but little would be effected by such a movement, except it were accompanied by the faith which recognizes God in all the breadth of His claims, and in present living association with the heart—a God living and true.

In no age can the paths of the Lord be traversed except by the power of faith; and the conviction of this has determined me not to present a system made ready to the hand which might guide persons in setting up breaking-off-bread churches; or some such thing: but to present those principles which, if God is acting on the soul, and the conscience be in healthful exercise, will be sufficient to help it in the pathway of inquiry from the word. This may perhaps create a feeling of disappointment for the moment, but I trust it may turn the heart of some one or other to enquire of God.

There are, however, several points which I feel called to dwell upon a little more particularly. One, indeed, especially, in order to obviate what appears to be a general misconception. I mean the bearing of the truths which have been stated upon what is popularly termed, "the ministry."

## ON MINISTRY.

In employing the phrase, "the ministry," it must not be imagined that there is any countenance given in the New Testament to the idea of a sacerdotal caste. It is true the apostle, in Corinthians, uses the expression, "giving no offence in anything that the ministry be not blamed;" but he employs it only to designate the service of the gospel in the abstract, and not at all as characterizing a separate class of persons. The New Testament knows nothing of the distinction of clergy and laity; nor indeed of the more modest terms, "minister and people," when they are used to mark out those to whom ministry is supposed to belong, and those to whom it does not. The simple rule of the New Testament is this, "as every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, as the oracles of God; if any man minister, as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

Under the law there was the priesthood and the people; and the priest was the link of connexion between the people and God, and the medium of their worship and of their approach to Him. But that was when the way into the holiest of all, (*i. e.*, into God's presence,) was not made manifest. But when, on the death of the Lord Jesus, the veil was rent, because the justice of God against sin had been fully vindicated, and His presence as the spring of infinite grace and love, could be disclosed, there was this double effect—the worshipper could *come nigh* to God individually, and directly, by virtue of the blood of Christ, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was given; and there could *go forth* from God's presence, by virtue of the work of Christ, a testimony of this grace to men in order to draw them to Himself as well as to build them up in its fulness.

This is what ministry is exercised about.

In the world it is the presentation of this grace as the means by which God can bring sinners to Himself; and in the Church the unfolding more fully the blessings and obligations resulting from this grace—"warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom; that every man may be presented perfect in Christ." Ministry, if it be true, whatever be the individual characteristics of the vessel to which it is committed, is directly of God, and it owes its efficiency to the measure in which the power of God is found in it, and not the power of man. "We are not," says the apostle, "sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament." And again, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us."

But in stating the liberty which the New Testament gives for the free exercise of any gifts which God may have bestowed for the edification of the body, it has been supposed that there is involved the entire setting aside of a stated, or continuous ministry. This is by no means the case. For in the disallowance of a humanly appointed ministry it does not follow that there is also a rejection of that which is divine. A "stated ministry," as it is termed, there is no difficulty in recognizing as scriptural, and the gracious provision of Christ for the edifying of His body, but this must not be confounded with an ecclesiastically appointed ministry, which sets aside, as contrary to its order, all free exercise of gift apart from those who have been designated, in some way or other, to the ministry as an office. For *this* order of ministry there is no authority whatever in the New Testament. It is plain that in apostolic times none could minister but those who were gifted of God, by the Holy Spirit, for that end. But it is

equally plain that wherever the gift was possessed an unlimited freedom, subject to Scripture order for its exercise, was given; or rather, the obligation, in grace, for its exercise was imposed.

This question of ministry is not to be summarily settled by the assertion that the 12th and 14th chapters of Corinthians could only be in force while miraculous gifts were present in the Church: much less by the untenable notion that the Epistle to the Corinthians presents only a provisional local order; a notion contradicted in terms by the address of the Epistle, which is strictly universal. "Unto the Church of God which is in Corinth . . . with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our LORD, both theirs and ours." (See also 1 Pet. iv.; Rom. xii.)

There is but the alternative, either to avow that the ministry of the word, since apostolic times, and the edification of believers, rests on the basis of human competency, and is subject to human training, and is to be guided, in its exercise, by the human will, expressed by vote or otherwise; or to acknowledge that it is divine, and that the source from whence it flows, the directions for its exercise, its limitations and grounds of responsibility, are to be determined by an appeal to the New Testament Scriptures alone. If the latter be accepted, it will be seen at once that an ascended Christ (Eph. iv.) is the source from whence it flows, and by whom it is perpetuated; that the Holy Ghost is the power of its exercise, and its only limitation the possession of the gift bestowed by Christ, and its exercise in charity or love, according to 1 Cor. xiii.; while the ground of its responsibility is the known character of Christ and His relationship in grace to the soul.

One thing which has greatly tended in practice to destroy this basis of ministry, and to limit its blessings, as in the hand of Christ, is that almost all the religious systems that have been formed by men have been looked upon as a more or less extensive sphere for the preaching of the gospel; from which this double consequence has resulted, viz., that the work of the evangelist has been impeded by local bonds and obligations, and the Church of God has not been fed, and believers have not been built up on their most holy faith, *because* almost all stated ministry has become ostensibly that of the evangelist, or the preaching of the gospel to the unconverted. But beyond this there has been this further practical consequence, that the competency of the Church to worship and to enjoy Christ's presence has been utterly lost. This absorption of everything into the act and function of preaching leaves neither place nor power for the worship of the united church.

It is not pretended, here, that there is too much zeal in carrying the gospel message into the highways and hedges to poor neglected souls that are dead in trespasses and sins; but the Church of God is a thing to be cared for, as well as the salvation of souls to be sought. "Feed my sheep," "feed my lambs," as much expresses the will of Christ as, "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It is the same activity of His love working in another sphere. But worship, which is the Church's special function, whether it possess ostensible ministry or not, rests on the ground of Christ's presence, wherever two or three are gathered together in His name; which has been already insisted on. Worship is, or at least ought to be, the happy occupation of the Church when met together in Christ's name and in the power of the Holy Spirit; but the preaching of the gospel is the proper work of the evangelist, who goes out with the message of mercy to ruined souls in responsibility to Christ. Or there may be teaching in the Church according to the gifts which Christ may have bestowed for that end, according to the word of the apostle, in

Col. i. 28 : " Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

#### ORDINATION.

Ordination, or setting apart to ministry, is another question, and rests altogether on another ground. It is simply a question of power or competency to act for that end. If it goes beyond commending to the grace of God, on the part of the godly, those whom Christ has empowered for His service, it involves at once the whole question of delegated and successional authority, which is the thing meant by the popular phrase "apostolic succession." For it is perfectly plain that in the appointment of elders or bishops (it is the same office) none were concerned but the apostles, or those acting under immediate apostolic direction and authority. See Acts xiv.; Titus i.; compare Acts xx. 17, with verse 28. Ordination, or appointment, for it means nothing more in Greek, was confined, in New Testament times, to elders, or those that were competent to the office of ruling and teaching in the Church of God; and the plurality of these elders or bishops in the local churches in which they appear, shows on what ground diocesan Episcopacy must rest its claims; and at the same time it removes from under the feet of the solitary independent minister the ground of Scripture on which he has been supposed to stand. All elders however did not teach, (See 1 Tim. v. 17,) though it was a desirable qualification in a bishop that he should be "apt to teach." (1 Tim. iii. 2.) But the mind that is subject to the will of God will find another order of ministry recognized as valid, and in exercise, where there had been no appointment at all, at the very time when apostolic appointment was in force. "I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves (*ετασαν εαυτους*) to the ministry of the saints) that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us and laboureth." (1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16.) Here then is a ministry that is owned by the apostle, for which there cannot be pretended either apostolic or Episcopal ordination, or choice by the people; and that at the very time when apostolic appointment of elders was in force. "The kingdom of God is not in word but in power:" and when Christ endows a man for His service His orders and ordination are complete.

For the choice of a minister by the people, and his ordination over them by other ministers, there is not the least ground in the New Testament. There exists no example of such a thing, nor is there any principle in God's ordering of His Church on which the practice can be based. It may be argued on other grounds; but there is no warrant for it in the New Testament. This, one would think, should be a serious consideration to those whose boast is that they are "*scripturally constituted and ordered churches*," though there is not the least scriptural authority for the very basis principle on which their whole system rests.

The churches of the New Testament were so constituted as to embrace in fellowship all Christians on the ground of their membership to Christ; and all ministry they were taught to receive without difficulty as their known endowment from Christ. The apostle says all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas; and Apollos was received by the churches of Achaia precisely on the same ground as he had been welcomed at Ephesus. That ground was his ability to help them in the truth. See Acts xviii. and xix. Where is the counterpart of this now?

It would be folly to argue the point that to be permitted to occupy, in occasional service, the *pulpit*, which is supposed to be in the power of its proper occupant, is the same thing as coming in Christ's name to minister, on the ground of gift committed for the good of the body by the Lord Jesus Christ, and seeking no other sanction than the consciences of them that believe. As to preaching the gospel in the world, the evangelist was not the servant of the *Church*, but of Christ. He was not sent forth by the Church, neither was his gift under its control. The Church is neither the founder nor the director of missions, though glad to help forward, after a godly sort, those whom the Lord of the harvest sends forth.

In stated labour also, for the servant of the Lord to be occupied here or there, as the Lord Himself may guide, asking only the recognition of the power which Christ may have given for edification, is not the same thing as being chosen by the people for the exclusive office of minister; and it ought not to be argued as if it were: to say nothing of being bound by an appointed salary to the performance of this exclusive duty. But the whole foundations are out of course; and the modes of thought and expression current amongst Christians generally are expressive of anything but the ideas of the New Testament.

It is true indeed that no position, however scriptural, which is not held in faith, will long displace the spirit of the world which is ever stealing in upon those who are most desirous to be apart from it. It requires not only true principles and a true position, but the constant exercise of faith to overcome the world. Incessant vigilance and walking with God, with affections in heaven, are necessary to counteract its power. But alas! for that state of things where the credit and power of the world are, on principle, sought by Christians, and where ministerial faithfulness and power are reckoned amongst the rest of the purchasable and saleable commodities of this trafficking age! "There, sir," said the manager, to the newly-elected minister of — Chapel, in a day not long gone by,— "there, sir, is the chapel; and when the sittings are all let, it will produce eight hundred pounds a year; and if you can fill it, it will be *all your own*." I make no comment. I only ask, "could the servant of God, in such a position, say, 'I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel?'"

#### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

I am conscious that in the statements of the foregoing pages many principles have been assumed to be true and scriptural, which, it is to be feared, are not always admitted to be so by Christians generally, even if they would not venture to deny or question them in terms. For example, it is assumed that the knowledge of the mind of God should bind the conscience of a Christian to obedience, in whatever circumstances, and at whatever cost; whether that mind be expressed by direct injunction, or gathered from the known character of God, or from the general principles of Scripture, which are clear to the spiritual mind.

It has been assumed also that, in the Scripture of the New Testament there is to be found a perfect revelation for the guidance of the Church and of the individual Christian, whatever may be their altered circumstances, or whatever changes may take place in the world up to the end.

More ver, it is assumed, that it never can be right, nor according to the mind of God, to continue in practical association with any evil, on the ground of expediency, when once the evil is seen, or when it might be seen by an honest examination of it in the light of the divine word. For "whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

It is admitted, indeed, that there is a difficulty sometimes, to honest-minded Christians, in understanding how far they are called to separate from evil, when they see the prophetic declarations of incoming corruption, and find that, as a fact at least, there is the recognition of a mingled state of things of good and evil characterizing the general profession of Christianity. I do not here refer to the parable of "the tares of the field," in Matthew xiii, which is often wrongly referred to, as affording a sanction to this mixture of Christians with the world; for if any one would notice the terms of the parable, when he is urging the well-known passage, "Let both grow together till the harvest," he would see it stated, "the field is the *world*,"—not the Church. But on the contrary, when speaking of the *Church*, the language of Scripture is, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven;" and "I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no not to eat," &c.

But in the epistles to the seven churches of Asia, in the book of Revelation, and in the Epistle of Jude, there is the marked presence of evil. But both these cases have a prophetic bearing. For whatever might have been the incipient evils when the apostles wrote, both the Revelations and Jude look on to the final corruption of the profession of Christianity as committed to the responsibility of man. In Jude, moreover, a *remnant* is addressed apart; and the same may be said as to the church of Thyatira and the following churches in the Revelations. However, the solution of the difficulty is simply this, that, if God has stated prophetically what would be the results in the hands of man, and his failure in responsibility in regard to what has been committed, in Christianity, to his trust, that his people might not be stumbled when they see the evil, being thus forewarned of it, still the principles of His grace for their guidance can never vary. No outward changes connected with the course of the Church on earth can ever be a sanction for a Christian's separating, in his individual walk or corporate association, the principles of holiness and grace. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

It is assumed also that there has been a manifest departure on the part of the Church, through unfaithfulness, from the position in which it was set as a witness for Christ, in the world, in apostolic days; and that the dispensation with which the Church is connected will close in scenes of apostacy and judgment instead of universal blessing; and that the proper hope of the Church is Christ's personal appearing for her glory, and not a spiritual millennium through the means of the preaching of the gospel.

These things have been noticed in this place in order to obviate mistake or disappointment. The Scriptures abundantly teach the truths that have been asserted or assumed, so that it is not the setting up of any authority but the word of God. Moreover they are so plain that they will be at once obvious to the mind that is brought to study the Scriptures as they ought to be studied, and that is not biassed by the systems of men. However, from the number of subjects noticed, and the limits of these pages, it was not possible that the grounds of each principle should be adduced and argued out.

If I have insisted strongly, and, it may be, with some repetition, on the doctrine concerning the Church, I have done so because of its important bearing on all the practical questions which have been considered, and which are at this time agitating the minds of Christians. It is not merely that the Scriptures, which relate to its own position, and privileges, and duties, cannot be rightly apprehended, unless the distinctive character of the Church is seen, but even

the truths of the Old Testament, and the prophetic scriptures, will infallibly be wrongly applied without it.

It is a matter of rejoicing that so much attention is being given to the subject of prophetic interpretation, and that there is an awakened expectation of the speedy coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; but there never can be an appropriation of prophecy to its legitimate objects, as long as the distinction between Israel and the Church, and the absolute contrast of the past and the present dispensation, are not seen.

The Church, as the body of Christ, is not, and cannot be, the subject of prophetic declaration; for it was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and is associated with a *heavenly Christ*, or a Christ rejected by the earth. Until Israel had rejected Messiah, as the nation's hope through the promises given to their fathers, the Church could not be revealed. For however glorious the person of Messiah, as the Son of David, might be, it was the glory of a *person* who was to reign and rule: there was no place for the idea of His being the head of a body of which believers were the members. But the proper and distinctive character of the Church is that it is the body and bride of Christ. It is not, as is so often argued, the introduction of Gentiles into Jewish privileges, and giving to Israel's national hopes a spiritual interpretation which find their issue in what are termed gospel privileges. Such an interpretation falsifies everything in Scripture, to the mind that has not been schooled in the use of a spiritual alchemy that changes the application of the simplest terms, and alters the nature of everything, and that in the end brings the clearest truths, as they are stated in Scripture, to a mere negation.

It is simply a truth that the Jew nationally is spoken of, and the Gentile also, in a passage of the New Testament where the distinctive character of the Church is presented. "Give none offence, neither to the *Jews*, nor to the *Gentiles*, nor to the *Church of God*." (1 Cor. x, 32.) For if the distinctions of Jew and Gentile, circumcision and uncircumcision, in the case of those who once bore them, cease when faith unites them to Christ; so, it will be remembered, do the distinctions of "bond and free," "male and female." And this shows at once the Church's peculiar relationship to Christ, leaving untouched the question of nationality on the part of all that are not brought into this association with Him.

Now it is as simply true that, in its terms, prophecy relates to Jews and to Gentiles, *not* to the body of Christ. This is not argument, but fact; and the Scriptures may be searched for its confirmation of its refutation. The same also may be said of God's covenants and promises. The Scripture, speaking of *Israel*, says, "To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the *covenants*, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the *promises*;" while speaking of the *Gentiles* it says, they were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise;" but when it speaks of the *Church of God*, and its peculiar title to the promises, by virtue of its union with Him who is the heir of them all, it says, "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."

The Scriptures of the Old Testament speak very distinctly of *national* blessing to the Jew and to the Gentile; while the New Testament declares that the mystery of God's grace to Jews and Gentiles, brought together in one body, in Christ, was not revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures at all; but was the special subject of manifestation by the apostles and prophets of the New. It is declared to be "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but *now* made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known

what is the riches of the glory of this mystery amongst the Gentiles: which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" (Col. i. 26, 27.) They being the members of a Christ in glory, the life of Christ in them necessarily takes in them the form of a hope; that is the hope of the members being in glory with the head. But this is not the way Christ is spoken of when the national blessing of Jews and Gentiles is in question. When speaking of this the apostle says, "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust." (Compare Eph. iii. 1—11; Rom. xvi. 25, 26.)

Prophecy, in its proper sense, does not reach to heaven; but the earth is the sphere of its accomplishment. Israel and the nations of the earth are its objects; and the judgments and blessings predicted will find an issue in their punishment or exaltation. This is true of the New Testament *prophecies*, as well as of the Old. They have to do with the corruptions which mark the general course of the age, within the limits of which the Church has had its existence on earth, though belonging to Christ in heaven; but it is the age, or course of the world, that these prophecies contemplate. (Matt. xiii. xxiv.; Rom. xi.; 2 Thess.; 2 Pet.; Rev. from iv. to xx.)

There was no place for prophecy when Israel stood in its integrity; nor indeed in connexion with Christianity except as contemplated in its failure as a dispensation. Hence the bearing of such passages as Rom. xi. 22: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." It is of the dispensation, and not of the members of Christ, that he speaks when he says, "Thou also shalt be cut off." In truth, the great end of prophecy is to bear witness of evil and departure from the Lord, in those that bear His name, with the resulting judgment from the Lord; and to point the hopes of the faithful to the counsels of God's grace, which are paramount to all man's evil. Accordingly the Church of God is pointed to the coming of the Lord Jesus to take His people out of all the evil of the dispensation which will be judged; and is warned also of the resulting judgment on the corruption around that it may be practically clear of the evil.

All the judgments that precede Christ's early manifestation and reign, as well as the blessings which follow the establishment of His kingdom, will have Israel for their centre, and will include the nations which are to be judged in connexion with Israel's judgments, and blessed in connexion with Israel's final blessing. However, the Church will be associated with Christ when He reigns; for "if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also *reign* with him." (See Jer. xxv.; Deut. xxxii. 43; Isaiah xix. &c.)

Christ's *kingly rights* are in question when Antichrist is on the scene, and are to be determined in connexion with Judah and Israel, and will have Mount Zion and Jerusalem as the place of their immediate display. It is in the midst of Jerusalem also that the witness to His claims will be raised up prior to His coming, and in the remnant of Israel will these claims be established. To Israel, and not to the Church, the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth belongs. Still Christians are called to recognize the claims of Christ as king in the sphere to which His kingdom belongs; though through Israel's rejection of

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Him, and for the accomplishment of other divine counsels, the kingdom is for a while in abeyance. For to say that Christ is reigning now, is to say that His reign may sanction evil, in every form, instead of its being a reign of righteousness, as the Scriptures invariably represent.

But the most of Christians mistake the very standard of consistency, because they mistake their own position in the world. They are satisfied generally with being converted men of the world—men who have the profession of Christ's name, and the ultimate hope of heaven superinduced upon their worldly position—and who do not see that they have been by grace taken out of the world and sent into it again to maintain a special character and a special testimony in it! (See John xvii.) For such surely is the testimony of our blessed Master: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which *thou gavest me out of the world.*" . . . . "They are *not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*"—"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." Hence the confession of the kingdom of Christ will not be connected with any attempt to validate or establish His claims in the world, but will be found in His servants maintaining a walk in accordance with the principles of His kingdom, and in a testimony to His rights against the usurpation of the world. For if the affections and hopes of the Church are formed by its special relationship to Christ, still the characteristics of "the children of the kingdom" should be upon believers, in their walk and spirit, in the world that has rejected Christ the Son of God, not as Saviour of sinners so much as earth's only rightful king. Hence all that should mark the allegiance of those who own a rejected king, belong to the spirit and position in the world of a Christian now. The time will come when He who is thus owned will "take to himself his great power and reign:" and then those who have owned Him will reign with Him! Such is the precious purpose of His grace!

But if this truth concerning the Church needs to be insisted on, because it has been so lost sight of by Christians; no less, perhaps, is it necessary to recall the truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the believer and in the Church of God, because it has practically been so overlooked.

Very greatly indeed has my purpose in writing been misconceived, if it be imagined that the question at issue is, whether Christians should meet once a week around the Lord's table, as well as to hear the preaching of the word—though the practice of the New Testament on this point is plain; as well as the meaning of the act and the character of the Lord's day; or whether there should be in the Church of God the ministry of one or of many; or whether those who minister should do so by the choice of the people, or by virtue of the possession of the gifts of the Spirit. These things, have, indeed, their place, but their importance flows from this, that the owning of them results from the recognition of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church—a truth which, as has been already stated, gives its distinctive character to Christianity. As to individual believers, it is declared that the possession of the Holy Spirit is God's seal and earnest with them, until they come, as joint-heirs with Christ, into possession of the inheritance in glory. (Eph. i. 13, 14.) "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Moreover, the personal indwelling of the Spirit is asserted as their distinctive privilege, and made to be the ground of the holy consecration of their bodies to the service of Christ, and not to the lusts of the flesh. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy

Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor. vi. 19.) Not alone is the believer born of the Spirit, in the sense of being regenerated; (though the declaration, "that which is born of the Spirit is often recognized in the idea of regeneration;) but the Spirit dwells in him. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God *dwell* in you." (Rom. viii. 9.) "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead *dwell* in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that *dwell*eth in you." (Rom. viii. 11.) As to the Church, the whole question is whether the Holy Ghost is to be recognized as vitally present and operative in it or not; and not one of the exercise of gifts. The point at issue is simply whether man's order and appointments shall carry it over the order and appointment of the Holy Ghost in the Church; whether man's wisdom and authority shall rule, or whether the Holy Spirit shall be permitted to regulate the house of God which is the Church of the living God; for which end He was specially promised by Christ, and sent down by the Father on the exaltation of Christ.

All the operations of the Holy Spirit, when He has quickened believers into the life of Christ, are connected with His *personal presence*, whether they relate to the individual believer or to the body, the Church. For example, the special promise of Christ to His disciples runs thus:—"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may *abide with you for ever*." (John xiv. 16.) And in verse 26—"The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." In such passages as the following, there is no question of gift, miraculous, as it is called, or otherwise, but the presence of one by whom all gift is divided and distributed, and who is here to be the controller and the director of it all. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God *dwell*eth in you. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.) "Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. ii. 22)

Simple would be our creed, and energetic and free from complexity our walk, if, as Christians, the word of God were the sole ground of our appeal; and if, in the power of faith, we held fast its precious revelations, instead of "conferring with flesh and blood."

The worldliness of our affections, and not the difficulty of the path, makes it hard for us to find our way. Unbelief casts a haze over the plainest road; and a wayward heart and an unbroken will never fail to plant it plentifully with thorns. That painful course of moral discipline, and those years consumed in doubts and questionings, hesitations and conflicts, through which some of us have been brought to discern the will of God and to bow to His authority, tell not so much of the difficulty of the road, as of the pride of heart and carnal reasonings which required to be corrected before the way of obedience could be pleasant to the soul.

#### CONCLUSION.

Whatever statements may have met the reader in his progress, hitherto, through these pages, nothing, he may rest assured, has been advanced with a view to misrepresent the principles of those from whom the necessity of subjection to God's word has compelled the writer to be separate—separate in position and desire, he trusts, from the evil he has censured, though not separate in spirit

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from any who are faithful to Christ. The corruptions of the Establishment were purposely not been meddled with, and, for the same reasons, the practical evils of Dissent have been left untouched. The fundamental principles of the one and the other have been noticed, and there has been no scruple in attempting to show their contrariety, as systems, to the New Testament, and their hindrance to the development of Christians on the basis of the Church of God. It is true that he has a difficulty in imagining how Christians can satisfy their consciences to remain in connexion and communion with the Establishment, when they see the rocks toward which it is drifting; and on which, to its utter destruction, even as a Protestant institute, its pilots are sparing no efforts to urge their ill-fated bark.

And if I turn to Dissent, I can have no pleasure in thinking of the strong political spirit by which the great body has of late years been distinguished, nor of their systematic advocacy of worldliness. Nor do I think that the pseudo-philosophical intellectualism of the ministry, which is rising up amongst them, is likely to help the children of God, except it is toward that semi-infidelity which, together with high-church principles and superstitious notions, is corrupting the profession of Christianity on every hand.

These things of themselves systematically exclude the idea of the Christian's heavenly calling and subjection to Christ in the confession of a kingdom which is not of this world. They are entirely antagonistic to the statement of the apostle—"Our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus." It may be questioned, indeed, how far this bias has to do with the almost universal rejection of the coming of the Lord as the hope of the Church, by dissenters, and especially by their ministers.

To boast of being the advocates of Christ's spiritual reign in opposition to the testimony of the two men in white apparel, who said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven, this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven," may indicate a good deal as to the effect of philosophical study, or of the effect of systematic theology; but it speaks little in favour of sound exegetical ability, or, as Scripture expresses it, the ability of "rightly dividing the word of truth." Few persons, I am persuaded, who have not been delivered from its trammels, can have the slightest idea of the baneful effect of systematic divinity on the study of the word of God. Its legitimate effect is to put aside the healthful and free study of the divine word, and to reduce it to a mere searching for texts in support of the dogmas it presents. But there is a worse effect than this. For while the prayerful, diligent study of the word of God brings into direct contact with the divine mind, systematic divinity at best settles those who trust it in the narrow conclusions of the mind of man, and neither brings into the breadth nor the living power and authority of the thoughts of God.

But if it be asked, what hope can there be of the Church's revival in a day like this, or what can be accomplished by the adoption of the truths and principles that have been insisted on? my reply is, that if things are to be judged of by their results in this world, there may be little encouragement to set out in this "way of truth," or to persevere, if already on the road, in the toilsome stages that may yet remain.

But everything depends upon the point from which the question is viewed. If it be judged of by expediency, I have not a word to say. Or, if the rewards of social or ecclesiastical reform be sought, I do not think that the path will attract. The age is philanthropic and reformatory in its spirit; though ever

and again there are features rising up to view in the body politic, which tell of a fearful under-current of evil, which defies all the efforts of benevolence and philanthropy to stem.

The world is deluged with Bibles, and yet the infidelity and superstition of the age are increasing. The mind of the age is set on plans of amelioration, and yet the problem which is now baffling the wisdom of politicians in civilized states, and in this country especially, is how to dispose of that part of the population which neither morals, nor law, nor government, can restrain. The commercial spirit of the age makes men ask for peace with bated breath, and yet, against the will of all concerned, the world is embroiled in deadly war! Christians, too, are talking of progress, while the dark shadows of a mediæval superstition are settling upon the land; and the fierce torch of revolutionary principles sheds its lurid glare. Men are talking of the need of "an earnest faith;" but is it faith in God, or His word, they mean? No. But faith in themselves—faith in human nature, in order to work out for itself its own high destiny. And if the fore-tokens of "the coming struggle among the nations of the earth" cannot be evaded, a voice is raised to promise immunity, when God's judgments are in the earth, to this country, and to all the favoured "Anglo-Saxon race," because they have been, and are, the only champions of civil and religious freedom! But who has declared this amnesty on the part of heaven? An "Anglo-Saxon." And that on the only ground that it is "impossible to recon- cile the past history of Anglo-Saxon progression—of which she has been the mover and sustainer—with sudden and complete destruction." Or, in other words, the self-importance and self-esteem of this race are to turn the vials of judgment upon other nations, while they promise themselves peace, though they add drunkenness to thirst. Scripture has not said in vain, "In the last days . . . men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud," &c. But the word of prophecy puts its veto upon the smooth deceit, when it says, "I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of demon: working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty." And then it is added by Him—the establishment of whose claims is the great subject of the prophecy of the book—"Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth."

What then can be hoped for on the part of one who has nothing but the simple dictates of God's word to present, and only the future and unseen results of obedience to God's word in order to encourage? Little, indeed, it is owned, if faith be not in exercise in the soul; but if the heart can rest on the eternal stability of that word, and can look on to the future accomplishment of God's counsels, there is enough to stimulate.

For the death of Christ and His coming again in glory; the presence of the Comforter; the possession of eternal life; the power of Christ's resurrection; the gathering of the saints, by Christ, to be for ever with Himself, and the eternal home of God's presence; together with the promise of the shaking of all things, that the eternal kingdom, which cannot be moved, may be established;—these are the elements of Christianity—the elements by which God delivers from the course of this world; and there needs not another power, but the power of faith, to set God's people in their true position of service in the world, and of waiting for His Son from heaven.

But the Christianity that one meets with in books and sermons, where there is nothing which is more objectionable, is too often of the poorest, and coldest,

and most unimportant kind. In living exhibitions, alas, the same Christianity is seen hand-in-hand with all the frivolities of life, or allied with all the graver and more seriously mundane features of the age. It is no bar to the reckless speculation, or to the discreditable tricks of trade, which conscience must wink at in the competition for rapid fortunes in this intense money-loving age. "I would ride all day backward to see a real Christian," was the dry remark of a young man who had been brought up in the bosom of a large and wealthy congregation of dissenters, and had formed his judgment on the intercourse afforded him at his father's table.

If Christianity itself, in the statement of its doctrines, has been reduced to its last and lowest elements, it is no mere recovery of orthodoxy that is needed, but the resuscitation of Christianity itself in its truth, and spirit, and living power.

It is a living Christ for the affections that is needed, and not the cold abstraction of a semi-reasoned creed. It is a God known—a God who is light and love—with whom the Spirit holds communion, and loves and trusts, that can alone raise the heart above the attractions and the frowns of this present evil world. What our hearts need is the simple and hearty faith that God has come down to us in love; that our justification in His sight rests on no doctrinal figment, but that God's Son has, in infinite grace, been under our sins in death, and has risen up without them; that heaven has been opened in His resurrection, where grace has put us in reality of life with our risen Head, so that we should be in spirit there, while passing through this world. The cross is the world's condemnation, while it is the sinner's hope; and the coming again of Christ will be its judgment, but withal deliverance to those who are looking for Him as their bright and daily expected hope.

The true termini of a Christian's course are the cross and the glory. His spirit should be that of utter separation from the world, because its works are evil, and because it cannot and will not bow to the claims of Him whom it has crucified.

That difficulties should mark the path, and opposition from every side arise to discourage those who would seek only the Lord's objects in a time of universal declension, is to be expected; and that feebleness should mark their outward condition is only in accordance with the entire of God's dealings and ways with a people in such circumstances.

God has "called us by glory and by virtue;" and has given to His servants, "not the Spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." What then? If faithfulness to Christ calls for the sacrifice of present ease and credit in the world, and the sundering of many a cherished tie, and the relinquishment of many an earthly scheme, and to have the heart set only on things above, is He not worthy? Is it asked that we should pursue a path which Scripture does not illuminate, and in which Christ does not take the lead? I have no value for any other path; and I have an utter distrust of any other guidance.

But is it a rare case to find even the children of God starting aside from the way of obedience through fear of the spectres with which their own imaginations have filled it; or which some "Worldly-wise-man," has conjured up to hinder their parting company with those "who mind earthly things?" Is light never possessed that is not acted up to? Have none ever shrunk from what their own consciences have told them was the light of God, because it began to interfere with their love of this present world?

What then is sought, on the part of Christians, in these pages, to which their

attention has been called? Is it any other thing than that they should give heed to the word of God, so as not to have it, as the sword of Christ's mouth, against them, either in their corporate or individual walk and ways? Has anything been urged, in spirit, beyond what is repeated at the close of the address of each epistle to the apocalyptic churches—"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches?" If the church disregard, let, at least, the individual *hear*. Is not this right? Is not this a necessary condition of faithfulness to Christ?

If, as the Scripture shows, the Church itself would go wrong, as far as a faithful witness for Christ in the world is concerned, and the general body of christian profession be at last disowned of Christ, nothing can exceed the futility of pleading the sanction of any part, or of the whole even, of christian profession for what I do.

For if, by the light of the divine word, I am made to see how, on the right hand and on the left, the body of general profession has failed to pursue God's objects—has made way for worldly influences—has turned aside from the Spirit's guidance—has not "held the head," in the sense at least of the union of the believer with Christ the risen head of the body, which is the meaning of "not holding the head"—is not waiting for God's Son from heaven—how vain a thing is it to turn aside from that light, to seek a sanction for my position, or principles, or walk, or association as a Christian, from that which the light has already condemned. If Scripture tells me that the Church, in its profession, will fail, and be the subject of universal corruption at last, of what possible value can its sanction be to me in opposition to the light of the divine word?

But let the Christian, who sees how all things are gone wrong in the mass of profession around him, and yet hesitates to commit himself to a path of obedience which would strip him of every alliance and of every source of strength but that which springs from the presence of the Lord, take up the book of Ezra in connexion with the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, and let him see if he will not find there a sample of the Lord's ways with a poor, despised remnant in Israel which will encourage his heart to go forward, trusting only in the Lord, and looking only for His approval.

Here he will find the Lord's recognition of a remnant among the Jews who were delivered from the Babylonish captivity, and were engaged in the rebuilding of the temple, a work to which they seemed utterly unequal, and which they pursued amidst every outward discouragement, of poverty, and weakness, and the neglect of the mass of the Jews, and the utter hostility of their enemies: but the Lord was with them.

The decree of Cyrus, the Persian conqueror, gave occasion for this movement, and inasmuch as it proposed God's objects and not man's, it became a test of the moral condition of the people.

Deliverance was proclaimed to these captives that they might build the house of God. But in the prosecution of this object they must leave their secure asylum in Babylon, and the houses and vineyards they had planted there. Accordingly the majority of the people preferred their present ease at a distance from Jerusalem, and in ignoble bondage, to the task of building the house of God and of rearing again the ruined walls of Jerusalem. This honour they were willing to leave to other hands. "But a wall in Judah and Jerusalem" is in the estimation of Ezra a greater proof of God's mercy to His people than a palace in Babylon.

The first movements of this remnant, as is always the case when the hand of God is working, were in weakness and indistinctness of apprehension as to the

purpose of the Lord in their deliverance. But when the light of prophecy, which brought in the thoughts of God, began to shed its beams upon their undertaking, it showed that this feeble and despised movement was connected with all God's future purposes relating to Israel's final blessing and glory. "Be strong, all ye people of the land," says the Lord, by the prophet, "and work; for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not."

His power had sustained them, and His Spirit had secretly guided them when, as captives in Babylon, "they hanged their harps on the willows," and refused to sing "the Lord's song in a strange land." And it was His hand that led them forth from their captivity, to build His house in Jerusalem, however weak their condition and contemptible their numbers.

Still, as their history proceeds, and the difficulties increase, and the freshness of their sense of deliverance and of the divine presence becomes dim, their faith for awhile gives way.

They refused, it is true, to be confederated with those (whatever their pretensions) who were "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin;" but their faith gave way under the storm which the spirit of separation had raised.

The same opposition was again roused when, fourteen years afterward, the work, which had ceased, was re-commenced; but then the sense of the Lord's presence rose far higher; and they answered with boldness to the challenge of their enemies, "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago."

Faith in God's presence will alone carry His people through the opposition that is always raised against the prosecution of His objects. But when faith fails, everything, as to the work of God, fails with it. Our own objects may be pursued without it; but farewell to all those with which God can connect His name and power.

The very end for which this remnant was delivered from Babylon and brought to Jerusalem was in abeyance when *the building of the house of God* ceased; and yet they could be found "running every man to his own house," and dwelling in their ceiled houses, while the house of the Lord was lying waste.

Satan and the world will have no controversy with us while seeking our own objects and our own glory. They are God's objects and Christ's glory that he is against. A few years can make this remnant forget the object which brought them from Babylon; or, at least, if they had other thoughts, to silence them with the ready answer of unbelief, "the time is not come, the time that the *Lord's house* should be built." But when, in the mercy of the Lord, the voice of the prophet is sent to rouse them from their lethargy, every excuse vanishes, and it is found that a lack of faith and the love of ease was the real cause of the cessation of their labour.

The history does not present this, but only their adversaries in the reign of Artaxerxes causing them to cease by force and power. (Ezra iv. 23.) But prophecy brings out the moral condition of the people, and lays open the springs of action, from which the events of history take their character in the sight of God.

Their enemies might conclude that the work could hardly be of God, since there were no manifested interpositions of His power; and their brethren in Babylon might conclude in favour of their own wisdom in not quitting Babylon, when they saw the work stopped by the adversaries; and the people discouraged as to its further prosecution. But God has a lesson to teach His people, which

can only be learned in a sense of their own insufficiency, that, "It is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

This is the great lesson which the prophet Zechariah brings out; and in doing it he takes up the work of this poor remnant in building the house, and shows that it is so in a line with God's counsels that He can connect it with all those bright pictures of hope which beam through the vista of prophecy, and point to the time when the enemies of Israel will all be destroyed, and the glory of Messiah's reign will fill the whole earth with joy and the gates of Jerusalem with praise. The temple had been once builded and the city had been once established, though both were now in ruins. It was in the counsels of the Lord to build the house again and to fill it with His glory; and also to establish Jerusalem again and make her a joy and praise in the whole earth. Between these two points, in the Lord's counsels, this remnant, by the voice of prophecy, is encouraged in its work.

The Church also has been once manifested on earth in grace—and it has failed to maintain its position and the witness of the grace in which it was set;—but is the final purpose of the Lord to exhibit it again gathered in glory.

Christians now, like this remnant, live in the middle history; and what, it may be asked, should be their aim? The counsel of the Lord is clear. The word of the Lord by Haggai, which encouraged the remnant of Israel to build the house, is incorporated with an epistle in the New Testament; and now it is said to believers, "But now hath he promised, saying, yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things which are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore, we, receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved," &c.

Hence the importance of looking well to it, whether our objects are God's objects, and our efforts and aims are so coincident with the counsels of the Lord, that whatever be the result on earth, we shall see them established in heaven. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

There was no cloud now, as in former days, to guide this remnant, nor outstretched rod of power to protect them; neither was there any ark of the covenant to precede their march, nor manna to fall around their tents. All these were gone, and their absence told of departure from the Lord; yet in divine mercy God's Spirit remained among them—remained among them as the source of all the power which led them forth from Egypt, and now to be counted on in all their need.

Outward tokens of strength there were none; but there was a secret, divine resource for faith, wherever there was a heart set on doing the present work of the Lord. Outward tokens of strength cannot be given when the purpose of the Lord is to witness against departure from Himself. In such case the people must be "stripped of their ornaments," and God's holiness must be vindicated, even when He acts in grace. Moreover, in His dealing with a remnant in the midst of apostacy, His purpose is to draw out their faith; and, consequently, He takes away all that the flesh can rest upon, which has been the occasion of the evils He would correct. "Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength and hast not denied my name . . . Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly! hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

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